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**New radicals 2018**

Atlantic Pacific: 'We're providing lifeboats where there are none'

Using intelligent design and training to give coastal communities much needed search and rescue capacity

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**Tim Lewis**

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A not-for-profit, entirely volunteer-staffed NGO was prompted by a question: "Where's your lifeboat service?" Robin Jenkins, then a senior lecturer of interior and spatial design at Chelsea College of Arts, was in Kamaishi, on the north-east coast of Japan. The city had been one of the first places hit by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011 and was still devastated. Jenkins, a guest of a local charity, had been invited to suggest how the areamight regenerate.

"One woman told me how, when the tsunami happened, she and her friends could hear the screams out at sea, but it was dark and they couldn't do anything," says Jenkins, now full-time CEO of Atlantic Pacific. "So they just stood on the beach listening to these cries get quieter and quieter until these people eventually perished. When I asked about the lifeboat service, she didn't know what I was talking about."

Jenkins, 45, has been a volunteer for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution since he was a student at Atlantic College in south Wales. He knew the RNLI's power, not only to save lives but as a focal point for coastal communities. Japan has a

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national coastguard, but no equivalent to its local, rapid response. Jenkins returned home and, with the help of students from Atlantic College and Chelsea College of Arts, set about changing that.

Their solution was the Lifeboat in a Box – a 12 metre (40ft) shipping container kitted out with a 4 metre, rigid-hulled inflatable boat, a maintenance workshop and changing room – which could be delivered to coastlines where no adequate lifeboat service existed. Atlantic Pacific was officially inaugurated in early 2016 and the first Lifeboat in a Box was delivered to Kamaishi that August. Jenkins and students from Atlantic College spent two weeks training locals to use their new equipment.

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The original Lifeboat in a Box cost around £120,000, but Jenkins is sure that can be significantly reduced when the project is scaled up. For the past three years, Atlantic Pacific has also organised a summer school in south Wales teaching boat handling and basic search and

rescue. The programme has trained 118 crew and more than a third have gone on to work with NGOs in the Mediterranean tackling the refugee crisis. "We're not a political organisation, we're not standing on a soapbox, preaching about whether we think a situation is right or wrong," says Jenkins. "Our strapline is 'providing lifeboats where there are none'. Where we put lifeboats and crew is based on statistics of drowning and in the world currently the highest drowning rates are in the Mediterranean."

The charity aims to ship its second Lifeboat in a Box to Mozambique by 2020. The African nation has a huge coastline and almost half of its population earns a living on, in or beside the water. "Based on Japan, we'll face lots of issues," predicts Jenkins, "but we are hellbent on speeding this process up."

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