

# CIVCO Supports Gift of Life Foundation's Efforts in Dominican Republic

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**Editor's Note: When the need arises, CIVCO is proud to donate ultrasound supplies to volunteer groups and disaster recovery efforts. Recently, we had the opportunity to support Gift of Life, a nonprofit organization providing patient care and clinician training to assist children with cardiac abnormalities in the developing world.**



Dr. Juan Ramirez with his young patients.

Rotary District 7980 Gift of Life Foundation has joined hands with numerous organizations to provide a safe, cost-effective, loving and sustainable solution for kids from the Dominican Republic and surrounding areas with congenital heart defects (CHD). These organizations include the Santiago Monumental Rotary Club, Rotary District 4060, Fundacion Corazones del Cibao, Dominican Republic Ministry of Health, Arturo Grullon Children's Hospital and many other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Rotary Clubs and Gift of Life Organizations.

According to the Dominican Minister of Health, CHDs are the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in Dominican children under the age of 5 years. One percent of all live births will have a CHD, and at present, 5,000 kids are awaiting heart surgery in the Dominican Republic. Sadly, an estimated 25% of these children die annually due to the lack of available pediatric cardiac care.

The Pediatric Cardiac Surgical Program was established during 2002 in Santiago at the Hospital Infantil Universitario Dr. Arturo Grullon, through the tireless efforts of Rotarian Dr. Juan Ramirez, a pediatric cardiologist. "When these children receive treatment on time, they become healthy kids and return to their families, to grow and develop normally," said Ramirez. They have the opportunity to become useful citizens to society. That's the reason this program is a true Gift of Life."

As a partnership, these organizations support multiple activities benefiting children with CHD.

Organize multi-national volunteer surgical mission teams comprised of pediatric cardiovascular surgeons, cardiologists, anesthesiologists, PICU physicians and nurses and biomedical engineering support. Teams provide cardiac care to between 20-25 kids on each two-week trip four times a year. Volunteer team members work with the local Dominican medical team, providing training, exchange of ideas, techniques, cultural exchange and creating friendships. Fundraise for the critical purpose of purchasing desperately needed medical supplies, medications and instrumentation.

Support the establishment of a new Pediatric Cardiac Care Institute through capital fundraising efforts. This public/private partnership is governed by the PCCI Board of Directors. The model has been used with the creation of children's burn and oncology centers. Once the institute is fully staffed and functional, about 1,000 kids per year can be given the Gift of Life. "The Pediatric Cardiac Surgical Program has provided the opportunity for me and my fellow team members to come together with incredible strength, commitment to our kids, their families and each other," said Lynda Hammond, President of the Rotary District 7980 Gift of Life Foundation. "We, as a team, operate on a very high emotional level enabling us to share our emotions, support, sincere friendship and love extending beyond the time spent on missions. Rotary doesn't get any better than this!"



Dr. July June

Presently, two facilities provide pediatric cardiac surgery in the Dominican Republic; Cedimate, a private hospital in Santo Domingo, and Arturo Grullon Children's Hospital, a public teaching facility located in Santiago. Neither site performs more than 100 surgeries per year; without an expanded facility the waiting list for kids needing surgery will continue to grow at approximately 400 kids a year. Gift of Life is helping to lessen that waiting list.



Lynda Hammond comforts a patient

“The Dominican pediatric cardiac surgical physicians sometimes feel frustrated when we want to do things for patients and our environment limits us,” said July June, MD, Santiago, Dominican Republic. “This program (Gift of Life’s Pediatric Cardiac Surgical Program) has broken these boundaries, given us and our children a thing that everybody deserves: opportunity. Because of this program, we have equipment, sponsors, volunteers and training for our team. We have met all these great, wonderful and loving people that teach us, share their experiences and are willing to help us reach the goal of being independent in the medical area, to grow as a multidisciplinary team.”

Hammond views Gift of Life’s Pediatric Cardiac Surgical Program as the epitome of being a Rotarian. “This is what Rotary is all about – coming together to form lasting partnerships and friendships with like-minded people committed to making this world just a bit better than we found it,” she said. “On behalf of our kids, please consider helping us fix their little broken hearts and the hearts of the kids to come in the future.”

To donate, please contact [lynda.hammond1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lynda.hammond1@sbcglobal.net).