International Children's Surgical Foundation

"Everyone Was Born to Smile"

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ICSF Serves in Mexico, Vietnam, and the Philippines, April-July

Vietnam Mission Marks 16 Years of Volunteer Service by Dr. Williams

It was late March 1998 when Dr. Geoff Williams was invited by a team of his Taiwanese mentors to join them in a free cleft palate mission to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

"There was an incident during that 1998 mission that caused me to think about entering full-time volunteer service in the developing world," begins Dr. Williams. "Our team had only planned on three days of surgery and was overwhelmed by 200 Vietnamese mothers and their deformed children.

"There was an initial melee by the mothers to get a place in line. We were able to treat only about 20 patients and had to turn away roughly 180 mothers in that mission. The sadness of turning away these poor mothers inspired me to turn my career into a career of volunteer work in poor countries, which I have been doing full-time now for nearly 11 years."

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Jea (of the Philippines) before (far left) and with her mother eight days after surgery (left)

Jay-R (of the Philippines) before (far left) and two years after surgery (left)

The Fourth Time Is the Charm

Jonathan Almencion was four years old when his mother first brought him to have his cleft palate treated at ICSF's Cadiz, Philippines, cleft palate mission in 2011.

Unfortunately, on that occasion, Jonathan had pneumonia and had to have his surgery cancelled. The following year Jonathan's faithful mother again brought him to the mission but, again, he had an infection and could not receive his palate surgery.

When the same sequence of disappointing events happened again the third year, Jonathan's mother became determined. She communicated with Dr. Williams by email to make sure that the team was aware that Jonathan would be coming again.

Jonathan and his mother one week after his cleft palate surgery

When the July 2014 Cadiz mission started, now-seven-year-old Jonathan and his mother were again there. Jonathan received a battery of tests revealing that he was perfectly healthy for the surgery to proceed safely.

"It was among the widest cleft palates have operated upon," commented Dr. Geoff Williams after the surgery. "But I was gratified at how well everything went. I feel confident that the repair is adequate for Jonathan to develop normal speech". Jonathan's mother sent out many thanks to the ICSF team on Facebook and in person, including to ICSF's supporters back home. Sometimes the fourth time is the charm.

ICSF Serves in Mexico, Vietnam, and the Philippines

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April's cleft palate mission to Hai Phong Children's Hospital, Dr. Williams' eighteenth to that institution, saw ICSF treat 30 children ranging from four months to seven years of age. The medical team consisted of three doctors and two nurses from the United States and the Philippines. Consistent with one of ICSF's chief goals, roughly 60 hours of one-on-one intraoperative teaching to Vietnamese doctors was accomplished.

Nguyen (of Vietnam), before (left) and one year after surgery, at age four

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Why Not Professional Fundraisers?

Why does ICSF do all of its own fundraising and not use professional fundraisers? When I first initiated ICSF in 2005 and was looking for money to fund our cleft palate missions, someone suggested using professional fundraisers. I then did some research and discovered that most, if not all, full-time charities use professional fundraisers—so why not ICSF? I furthermore learned that professional fundraisers are free! We would not pay a dime to them for what they do. As I gained information, however, I found out what the catch is, and it's a big one.

First, professional fundraisers would use ICSF's name through the mail and over the phone, television, or Internet and solicit donations as if they were us. Here is the catch: When the funds come in, the fundraisers would hand over only a small portion (well under half) of the collected donations to ICSF. They would keep the majority, upwards of 70 percent or more, for their "professional fee."

ICSF's donors give to help children like Reigna (above), understanding that more than 96 percent of the money goes directly to fund her and other children's surgeries and not to high overhead costs.

But really what is so bad about this? All we would do is make a call to the fundraisers whereupon they would take over and we would pay nothing. We would receive periodic checks from the fundraisers with the understanding that they would keep most of the funds collected. It would be a good deal for everyone—wouldn't it? Yes, everyone—except the donors.

Imagine receiving a mailing or a call or seeing an Internet ad by a professional fundraiser in behalf of ICSF. The fundraiser would use our uniqueness—the time and effort we give to each patient, our belief in follow-up and aftercare, and our desire to teach local professionals—to convince good-hearted people to donate and support our cause. But these good-hearted donors would never be told that the vast majority of their dollars would not make it to the kids they wanted to help. This is when I decided that professional fundraising is *NOT* for ICSF. Our donors give to us because they feel that we are unique in the way we care for poor Third World kids. If our donors give to us because we are unique, that makes them unique. It would be unfair to let them give, thinking they are giving to a child in need, when actually they are giving primarily to a fundraising corporation for salaries and profit.

Imagine that you had donated to ICSF's cause, thinking that you had supported a surgery for a patient like Reigna (see page 3) when you had actually helped buy a new car for a professional fundraiser.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Reigna two years after surgery. Reigna's mother thinks she was blessed to find ICSF after seeing her daughter's surgical results—all thanks to ICSF's donors.

I think you will agree that ICSF does it the right way by making direct petitions to our donors and, in so doing, ensuring that our supporters' donations go directly to the children, like Reigna. She is worth it—and you, our supporters, are worth it. We will keep ICSF the way it is—a unique organization with unique goals and unique supporters.

"Everyone"—including our supporters—"was born to smile."

Dr. Geoff Williams

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