

Smile Report

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A Lifetime of Caring

There was a time, not long ago, when Nicolle didn't like to smile when having her picture taken. That's not the case today, thanks to the long-term comprehensive care Nicolle's been receiving since she was 10 months old from Operation Smile in Guatemala.

Eleven years ago, Nicolle's parents, Maynor and Jessica, were worried about the health and wellbeing of their first child. Nicolle was born with a cleft lip and cleft palate, a condition that went undetected during Jessica's prenatal ultrasounds.

"It was a very difficult time as we watched other couples celebrating the birth of their babies while we felt lost and were inconsolable. Nobody explained to us why Nicolle had been born with a cleft condition. Feeding Nicolle became a daily challenge, but the most difficult was coping with the discrimination and rejection by others," said Jessica and Maynor.

"For several months we looked for solutions and we were constantly worried how we could afford surgery on our police salaries. We wondered what her life would be like as she grew. However, one day my mother-in-law saw an announcement for Operation Smile in the newspaper, so we called to ask for an appointment and were told to come to the medical screening day," Maynor explained.

"When we arrived for Nicolle's medical evaluation, we were received with love and understanding, but we were very surprised to see so many other families with children with the same condition as Nicolle. Everyone from the Operation Smile team took great care and made us feel comfortable and calm. There were lots of toys and games for Nicolle while we waited to see the doctors and nurses."

Our medical volunteers assessed Nicolle and provided the family with the necessary consultations about feeding and caring for her. Nicolle had her cleft lip surgery in 2011 when she was 10 months old. It would not be her last.

Another surgery in 2012 began to repair her cleft palate. Jessica recalls that prior to this surgery they received psychological support, nutritional evaluations and care from a pediatrician, all provided by Operation Smile Guatemala to help the family prepare for Nicolle's recovery. A fistula was repaired in 2013. Several bone grafts occurred in the years before Nicolle's final surgery in 2021.

Surgery and ongoing cleft care have helped Nicolle bloom into the beautiful 11-year-old young girl she is today. She is in the fourth grade at school, takes violin classes and is just like all the other girls in her community.

Nicolle still visits our care centre to receive speech therapy and dental care. Her parents are grateful that Operation Smile continues to support Nicolle with exceptional comprehensive cleft care. Jessica shared, "I don't think there is a better place than Operation Smile in Guatemala for children born with cleft lip and palate. Their attention is personalized, and my daughter continues to receive treatment after 10 years of being with the foundation. As a mother, I am deeply grateful for the work they have done."



Keymer and his mother Tatiana

Keymer's New Smile

Tatiana was six months pregnant when she and husband Rubén discovered their baby would be born with a cleft lip and a cleft palate. They spent the next couple of months worried for his future until a kind doctor told them about Operation Smile. Then the couple's fears began to subside.

Operation Smile Colombia provided Tatiana with psychosocial support throughout the rest of her pregnancy and following the birth of her son, Keymer. "Since I came to [Operation Smile], our lives changed," she shares. "Thanks to them, we understood that what my son had, had a solution."

You and other Operation Smile partners helped our medical volunteers in Riohacha perform Keymer's first surgery, which repaired his cleft lip when he was eight-

months-old. After more treatments and support, he recently received a second surgery to repair his cleft palate. Tatiana felt overwhelmed with relief when the surgeon told her Keymer's second surgery had gone well.

Today, Keymer is an energetic and happy two-year-old. He likes to dance *champeta* (a favoured dance of the Caribbean coast of Colombia), imitate animals and play with cars. His smile stretches broadly across his young face, and his joyful spirit is truly contagious.

Tatiana remains grateful for the many ways partners like you have helped Keymer. "I will never tire of thanking you for all that you do for my family and for so many children," she says. Best of all, Keymer will continue to benefit from ongoing comprehensive cleft care.



Virgilio,
before surgery



Virgilio and his
mother Senaida

Transformation, Inside and Out

After 27 years, Virgilio's smile now spreads joyfully across his face — all thanks to you. While most of our surgical programs serve children, Operation Smile also helps young adults like Virgilio who have lived their entire lives with unrepaired cleft conditions.

When he was born with a severe cleft lip and cleft palate, Virgilio's parents simply couldn't afford the cost of surgery to help him. His father decided not to enroll him in school, fearing his son would be the target of bullying because of his appearance.

Virgilio's world became very small as a result. He spent his days entirely at home, interacting almost exclusively with his family members. Virgilio had no friends and no education, but big dreams for his future. He longed to talk and laugh with his peers.

Local social workers told Operation Smile about Virgilio. Moved by his story, our volunteers made the two-hour trip

to Virgilio's family home in 2015 to share more about our work. Though he was afraid, having never left home or visited a hospital, he agreed to come to Operation Smile's surgical program in Puebla, Mexico. Volunteers brought him to the Hospital Betania, where he received his first life-changing surgery to repair his cleft lip.

The world has opened up to Virgilio, and he in turn has opened up to the world.

After years of being the only person with a cleft condition in his family and community, Virgilio was shocked to see so many others who looked like him. He was even more shocked when he saw himself in the mirror after his surgery, sitting in the recovery room smiling and staring at himself in wonder.

Virgilio's new smile gave him a new sense of confidence, and helped him make friends in his community. He

eagerly received a second surgery to repair his cleft palate in 2016, and recently had a third cleft surgery in October 2021.

Today, Virgilio is a happy and confident young man with a joyful smile. He has learned to read and write, and is even taking online classes to finish elementary school. The world has opened up to Virgilio, and he in turn has opened up to the world. Virgilio now loves to chat with others, and works as a farmer and a cleaner at the local city hall.

His mother, Senaida, has seen a remarkable change in her son's self-confidence. "I suffered so many years because I couldn't help my son," she says through tears. "I wanted Virgilio to have a better life. I want to thank Operation Smile for all their help and support." Your partnership has directly impacted Virgilio's life and the lives of so many other young people with cleft conditions, giving them all hope for a brighter future.



Canadian Volunteer Dr. Kevin Calder examines a patient in Honduras

Back to Healing: Canadian Medical Volunteers Head Back into the Field

It was a trip he had made before, flying from his home to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. But for Dr. Kevin Calder, this was no ordinary trip.

In the fall of 2021, Dr. Calder was one of the first Canadian-based medical volunteers to participate in an international short-term surgical program (previously called an “international mission”) since the pandemic began.

“I was very excited to go,” he said enthusiastically. “It was a relief to get back into the field and be helping our patients and their families.”

As the surgical team lead for the week-long program, safety was top of mind. “Even before this trip, we’d been planning how Operation Smile would safely resume surgeries in light of COVID,” he said. As Co-Chair of Operation Smile’s Surgical Advisory Council, Dr. Calder helped draft the new COVID-specific guidelines and protocols to restart surgeries and ensure everyone’s safety during a surgical program.

“Safety is paramount – for the families of patients, the patients, local and international medical volunteers like myself, and the staff at local partner hospitals. The new protocols meant our medical team was smaller and we were treating fewer patients. How we prioritize patients for surgery has changed, and a lot of the familiar processes before, during and after surgery have also changed,” Dr. Calder explained.



“I wanted to help these people. They had been waiting for a long time.”



A young patient from Morocco



Nurse Volunteer Lynda Vanvliet

“For example, during this program, patients recovering from cleft lip surgery were recovering in a different location than those patients with repaired palates. We also had a new post-operative area in the local hospital, which changed the physical flow of our patients.”

“Part of my responsibilities was to ensure everyone was vigilant and rigorous in implementing the new processes. I’ve worked with the local team at Operation Smile Honduras for many years, so any worry I might have had about restarting a surgical program was lessened by my trust in that local team,” said Dr. Calder.

Registered Nurse Lynda Vanvliet echoes Dr. Calder’s appreciation for the local team involved in her short-term surgical program. Another Canadian-based medical volunteer, she participated in her third surgical program in November 2021 – this time, in Marrakesh, Morocco.

“Everyone was so helpful,” she shares. Lynda worked alongside a local nurse during overnights providing pre- and post-operative care to patients.

Her work as a Clinical Support Nurse in a large pediatric hospital’s emergency department helped prepare her for the program. “I felt like I was ready to go; I didn’t feel fearful,” she says.

Dr. Calder and RN Vanvliet agree that while COVID-19 has shifted safety protocols, more significant aspects of volunteering for Operation Smile remain unchanged.

“Our collective dedication to our patients and their families is the same,” says Kevin. “There is a warm spirit of family that surrounds the medical volunteer team knowing that we’re working as one team with one goal and a shared passion.”

For Lynda, the gratitude of the families is what stays with her most. She says the feeling you get from volunteering for Operation Smile is unlike any other. “You know you’re really making a difference.”

Just like our medical volunteers, you are making an important difference too. Your partnership is allowing more smiles to be delivered in countries where it’s safe.

“Our partners have stuck with us throughout the past two years and we’ve endured the pandemic together,” says Dr. Calder. “It’s a huge relief for our patients, their families and our medical volunteers that surgeries have started to resume where it’s safe.”

More New Smiles!

The fall was a busy time for surgical programs in many of the countries where we work.

We've delivered hundreds of new smiles and ongoing care to patients in 23 countries. There were 65 short-term surgical programs and 13 non-surgical programs globally between July and November 2021. This demonstrated our resolve to work with local medical volunteers and staff to safely deliver surgeries to our patients, who are resilient in the face of adversity and hardship during the pandemic.

Our investments in local country programs and operations enabled Operation Smile China to conduct surgical programs in Mengzi in September 2021, and Shenzhen and Liuyang in early December, with more planned this year.

Similar support to Operation Smile Egypt allowed medical volunteers there to conduct six surgical programs around the country between July and November 2021. Cleft lip and palate surgeries were part of each program, but two focused on rhinoplasty (nose reconstruction) and one on bone grafts which are essential for some children with cleft palate.

Regularly scheduled surgical programs were active in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia and Colombia. Short-term international and local surgical programs, funded or supported by Canadian partners, took place in Panama and farther south in Ecuador and Paraguay. Brazil held its first surgical program since the start of the pandemic in Santarém in early November. That two-day program delivered 19 new smiles!



A Special Year Ahead

Operation Smile celebrates two milestone anniversaries this year: **40 years** since our founding and **10 years** as an operating charity here in Canada. We could not celebrate either without you.

We look back and remember the faces of our patients – each one precious and deserving of care. After each surgery, we shared the joy they felt seeing their new smile for the first time, knowing it would last a lifetime and change their lives forever. This is the lasting gift of surgery and the very real impact of your support.

Operation Smile's mission is more important than ever. With over five million people around the world living with an unrepaired cleft condition, fragile healthcare systems strained by the pandemic, and countless people facing serious obstacles getting the care they need, it's time to do more.

As the year unfolds, you will hear more about our plans for the decade ahead and our ambitious goal to increase access to care for one million patients who need cleft or other essential surgeries. That means having **more people caring for more patients in more places**, and we can't wait to share our plans with you.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your partnership with us. With you and our medical volunteers, more children will receive the surgery, care and support that will transform their lives forever.



Mark Climie-Elliott, CFRE
CEO & Chief Smile Officer
Operation Smile Canada

Forever Helping Children Smile

"A simple smile can be a ray of hope," explains Mary-Florence Bartley, a long-time and loyal Operation Smile partner. She knows a warm smile can only brighten someone's day... and has the potential to change a life.

Step inside the home Mary-Florence shares with Michael, her husband of 37 years, and you'll see evidence of just that. Her fridge is adorned with pictures of children, before and after their surgery, which she, and you, have helped through your generosity. "With Operation Smile, I really feel it's a 'we'," she says proudly, referring to the true sense of partnership she feels being part of the Operation Smile family.

"I want to keep helping beyond my own lifetime..."

Mary-Florence's passion for making people smile radiates through in all she does, from her job as a Customer Experience Ambassador at a local sporting goods store to the smiley face she signs next to her name. Supporting the children we help is a natural fit for this friendly crafter and musician. It's what led her to make the special decision to include Operation Smile Canada in her will.

As a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Mary-Florence hopes for every child to be treated with dignity and respect. "I want to keep helping beyond my own lifetime, and I know children with cleft conditions will continue to need help," she shares. "Every child should be able to smile and have their neighbours smile back at them."



Mary-Florence says it was an easy decision to join the Forever Smiles Club by remembering Operation Smile Canada in her will. She's seen the impact of her support over the years, and knows her legacy is in trusted and caring hands.

If you would like to learn more about including Operation Smile Canada in your will, please reach out to Paige Melvin, Philanthropy Associate at **(647) 952-8081** or by email to paige.melvin@operationssmile.org.

ForeverSmiles
Club

The Forever Smiles Club honours supporters who make a lasting gift to Operation Smile Canada through their estate plans. Members receive an exclusive lapel pin, along with a certificate recognizing their commitment to Operation Smile's global work. To become a member, please reach out to us! We look forward to thanking you.



It is never too early to be thinking about the Longest Day of SMILES®



From sun-up to sun-down, on one of the longest days of the year, Canadians from coast to coast to coast are dedicating June 19th, and the time leading up to it, to making someone SMILE. Using passion and creativity, Canadians are raising awareness and funds for new smiles and complete care for children born with cleft conditions in low- and middle- income countries.

To learn more or set up a free fundraising page, visit:
longestdayofsmiles.ca

MAKE

SOMEONE

SMILE

Always Be There For the Children

Every gift leads to a smile and means the world to a child who needs your help. A great way to help more children is to become a monthly **SMILE PARTNER**. Giving monthly is an easy, budget-friendly way for you to **deliver impact to the children every month**. You'll keep them healthy before and after their surgery, ensuring care every step of the way.

More surgical programs are resuming where it's safe for patients and local medical volunteers. Moving forward together, you can help deliver life-changing surgery and comprehensive cleft care to thousands of children who want nothing more than a new smile.

Call us at: **1.844.376.4530** or visit operationsmile.ca and become a **SMILE PARTNER** today. Thank you.



Britany, age 15,
from Honduras

We're Here to Serve You

From making a donation over the phone, updating your contact information, changing your monthly donor credit card or banking information, to discussing the impact of your gift or how to have lasting impact with a gift made through your will, we're always so pleased to hear from you.

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