On the Cover: Healing the Children’s Outbound Medical Teams bring immediate care to children abroad who would otherwise lack access to the medical expertise they need. Their work with local medical personnel helps to develop the medical skills and infrastructure that are missing, providing long-term sustainable development in the areas where they work.

Healing the Children
2017 Annual Report

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For nearly four decades, Healing the Children has been dedicated to the Medical Teams Abroad Program, offering life changing surgeries and procedures to children around the world who otherwise would never receive these much needed treatments. Coordinating these efforts are no easy task, as many months of planning are necessary for preparation and implementation in what can only be described as a herculean effort on the part of our medical teams and volunteers alike.

On most occasions, we are invited by a host hospital to perform various procedures and surgeries on children and on other occasions our teams will seek a host hospital and inquire if there

“I am blessed to be able to work with colleagues to provide life changing care to children that dramatically impacts their opportunities in so many ways.
“I am always in awe of the volunteers from the U.S. and Guatemala that say ‘yes!’ to help serve children.
“Providing a child the gift of hearing is an indescribable joy. However training a Guatemalan audio tech to provide that gift to other children is my greatest joy!”
-Dr. Mike Mallahan

Dr. Mike Mallahan led 30 audiology trips to Guatemala. The program is now self-sustaining, with local specialists trained by his team helping Guatemalan children to hear.
is a medical necessity in their country. Once we have been accepted by a host hospital, the assembly of team members, medical supplies—sometimes donated, often times not, airfares, sleeping accommodations for all members and all legal documentation are adhered to in order to enter the country of origin, the real work begins.

Our teams of professional medical personnel, including surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and team leaders coordinate these trips in order to provide free treatments and surgeries to some of the world’s neediest children. Most of our teams utilize their personal vacation time to travel and financially support their own expenditures. These funds are sometimes raised through fundraisers, which helps to offset some of the funding needed for medications and other important items that are essential in ensuring they have all the tools necessary to perform life altering procedures on children.

Although a tremendous amount of effort is involved in orchestrating our Medical Teams Abroad Program, the most satisfying aspect of this program is that of the young lives HTC impacts when our volunteers are able to change a life forever.

Many parents of these brave young children look forward to our HTC volunteer teams throughout the year, as they know without our help their children will not receive the treatments or surgeries they require due to the lack of their unfortunate financial circumstances. HTC is
humbly honored and extremely fortunate to be the catalyst through our Medical Teams Abroad Program and our host hospitals, as we continue to strive in our efforts of healing children around the world, one child at a time.

Oral surgeon Dr. Robert Bruce MacIntosh has been traveling with Healing the Children teams since 1995. He has led more than 50 teams bringing the gifts of healing to the children of the world. The lives of thousands of children and hundreds of volunteers have been touched by his tireless dedication.

“To observe my teammates filing out of the host hospital into the twilight at the end of a grueling day, faces drawn, scrub suits wrinkled, but gaits strong and steady, is to me reminiscent of a parade of victorious Olympians, and accentuates my gratitude in being an American, a member of the healing arts, and an individual privileged to bring care to children who would otherwise not be attended.”

- Dr. Robert “Mac” MacIntosh
Programs: How We Help

In order to accomplish our mission to serve children, Healing the Children has developed several programs to facilitate our work. Chapters may participate in any of the programs that they deem compatible with their resources and local interests.

• **International Inbound Program (IIB)** is where we assist a child with serious medical issues, who doesn’t have access to the needed pediatric specialty resources in their home country. We bring him/her to the United States for more advanced treatment within one of our pediatric hospital partners at no cost whatsoever to the child’s family. Prior to seeking a solution in the U.S., the IIB program first makes an effort to locate solutions in their own country or in another nearby country closer to where the child and the family lives. If that fails we then present the case to participating pediatric hospitals in the U.S. hoping one is able to support and accept this case.

• **Medical Teams Abroad Program (MTA)** At the invitation of the host country and working with our International Partner or another in-country contact, we assemble a medical team built around the specific pediatric surgical specialty requested. The MTA volunteers work in identified emerging country hospitals and clinics alongside of local healthcare providers to screen and provide surgical care in specialties or specific procedures otherwise not available there. Medical trips are usually 7-10 days long. All of our dedicated team members provide pro-bono care for the children, pay their own expenses and use their vacation time for the trip.

• **Non-Surgical Teams and Special Programs (International and Domestic)** This includes dental and non-surgical (medical, dermatology, audiology, etc.) teams in addition to programs that provide medical/surgical equipment, medical supplies, medicines and training for local healthcare providers. Some examples are the provision of hearing devices, eye exams, eyeglasses, immunizations, medical evaluations, support programs for special needs children, and special events to benefit children.

• **Our Domestic Program** assists children here in the United States to acquire medical care, medicines, equipment, and other related needs that fall through the cracks of our existing insurance and social services programs. Since needs vary so greatly between the states, each chapter creates its own unique Domestic Program.

• **International Medical Assistance Program (IMAP)** is a relatively new program where HTC uses collaborative contacts to help find medical care for an international child in a country closer to where he or she lives. Through IMAP, certified facilities and staff have been identified. This program supports the twin objectives of helping to develop medical resources internationally, and providing urgently needed medical help for the children. We believe this program will become increasingly important in the near future.
# 2017 Program Results

**Total Number of Children Helped:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>1979-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Inbound</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Teams Abroad</td>
<td>2,430</td>
<td>186,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>18,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Surgical and Special Programs</td>
<td>5,920</td>
<td>64,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Medical Assistance Program</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>277,844</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 22 Outbound Medical Teams to 11 Countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Visits in 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11 Countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 trips</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 9 Non-Surgical Medical Trips to 7 Countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Visits in 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 trips</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22 children came to the United States through our inbound program in 2017 from:

- Belarus (1)
- Burkina Faso (1)
- Colombia (1)
- Dominican Republic (3)
- El Salvador (6)
- Guatemala (3)
- Honduras (4)
- Peru (1)
- Philippines (1)
- Togo (1)

10 Countries

### Financial Highlights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Assets</td>
<td>$2,027,318</td>
<td>$2,239,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Liabilities</td>
<td>$205,772</td>
<td>$254,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Assets</td>
<td>$1,821,546</td>
<td>$1,985,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenues</td>
<td>$13,963,579</td>
<td>$15,656,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenses</td>
<td>$13,850,261</td>
<td>$15,442,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase/(Decrease) in Net Assets</td>
<td>$231,368</td>
<td>$163,458</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Non-Program Overhead    | 1.73%     | 0.98%     |

In 2017, HTC provided urgently needed medical assistance to a total of 8,500 children, and delivered $13.5 million of medical services and supplies.

*Over the past 38 years,* HTC has now provided medical assistance to 277,844 children and delivered over $753 million of medical services and supplies for children from over 100 countries.
2017 Geographic Impact
8,500 Children Treated

North America
United States 122
Mexico 109

Central America
El Salvador 6
Guatemala 1,841
Honduras 332
Nicaragua 50

Caribbean
Dominican Republic 73
Puerto Rico 10

South America
Bolivia 894
Colombia 1,803
Ecuador 211
Peru 596

Europe
Belarus 1

Middle East/Africa
Burkina Faso 1
Iraq 100
Liberia 3
Ethiopia 125
Nigeria 2
Tanzania 1,347
Togo 1

Asia
India 802
Nepal 30
Philippines 1
Thailand 40
2017 Highlights

Each chapter of Healing the Children operates autonomously and plans its programs to reflect the volunteer resources available in their chapter’s region and the interests of its volunteers, both medical and non-medical. Healing the Children is also fortunate to have a global network of International Partners located in many of the countries we are able to work in. These International Partners offer invaluable assistance. They help us to identify the needs of children and the pediatric resources in their countries, and they help to navigate the unique local logistics and regulatory issues that must be broached to make our programs successful.

But more than anything else our programs, our outcomes in helping children around the world, are driven by our collective passion and ingenuity. Every year we share examples of this passion, this ingenuity, with readers of our Annual Report. We hope you enjoy these samples of what we accomplished, what makes us continue on to help more and more children, and that perhaps this may inspire others to join in our efforts.

Julian and Alejandro from Florida

Healing the Children Florida-Georgia will be celebrating 20 years of healing children in 2018, children like Julian, suffering from a condition called Retinoblastoma. Retinoblastoma is a rare form of cancer that rapidly develops from the immature cells of a retina, the light-detecting tissue of the eye.

Julian’s struggle was hard. However, he did not let it define him. He enjoys everything all children his age do. He is a competitive swimmer with the Para Olympics in Colombia and plays trumpet in school band.

“Julian would not be with us or he would not be the child he is today if it was not for Healing the Children. The word limitation does not exist for Julian, since he is capable of doing everything a child his age can do,” says Julian's mother.

Alejandro's family immigrated from Venezuela escaping threats of violence. They came to the US seeking political asylum. Alejandro has a severe hearing loss that was never treated until his family brought him to Healing the Children. Healing the Children was able to enlist an ENT specialist for Alejandro, and we provided him with hearing aids.

Alejandro responds to hearing the sound of his mom's voice for the first time.
Luis from Nicaragua

This is Luis Wilfredo from Nicaragua, who was born without the lower part of his right leg. In 1997, as an escort for the Wisconsin chapter, Illinois/Indiana chapter director Jeff Degner brought him to the US as a seven year old. Luis was fitted with a prosthetic. Later, in 2007, he desperately needed a new prosthetic - having long outgrown his original one. So, in 2007 he came to Illinois, arranged by the Illinois/Indiana chapter, and was fitted with a brand new, state-of-the-art prosthetic.

Jeff has seen Luis in Nicaragua several times since then but you might enjoy the progression of just these three pictures taken over the course of some 20 years. His beaming smile says it all!

Leyan from Palestine

Leyan was born with Aspert syndrome, a rare genetic defect in which the skull and facial bones are under developed. A Louisville doctor was providing free neurological care to kids in Palestine. That's when he met Leyan at a clinic.

Leyan needed surgery when she was one year old, but the medical attention she needed wasn't available in the West Bank. The lack of treatment put immense pressure on her brain, causing developmental delays and pain. If Leyan didn't get help soon, the condition would eventually kill her.

“Leyan was in a tough spot,” Dr. Mutchnick said. "Her brain was growing but her skull wasn’t.”

With the support of Healing the Children Kentucky and Norton Children’s Hospital in Louisville, Leyan is getting the treatment she needs to alleviate her desperate condition.
Aydin from Guatemala

Aydin Lorenzo Cumatzil Tun, an active five-year-old boy from Guatemala arrived in the United States in October, 2017 to undergo treatment for frontal encephalocele. Dr. Richard Anderson, a neurosurgeon, performed the first surgery in January and a second surgery is scheduled in June by Dr. Sylvio Podda, a cranial facial and plastic surgeon. During his stay, Aydin is having a wonderful time with the Alectoridis family, a long-time Volunteer Host Family.

Daniel from Dominican Republic

In June, 2017 Daniel, a three-and-a-half-year-old boy, from the Dominican Republic received surgery for a congenital lymphatic malformation. Dr. Stephen Palder, a pediatric surgeon and his team, performed the successful surgery at St. Peter’s University Hospital. During his time in New Jersey, Daniel stayed with Nick and Jackie Alectoridis, a loving family that has hosted numerous children in the last twenty years.

Mariana from Peru

Marianna Yupanqui Lira - a two-year-old girl from Peru - came to the U.S. to undergo treatment for a severe facial deformity. Mariana was born with hairy nevus, a condition that covered the entire left side of her face. HTCNJ arranged for Marianna to travel back and forth to the U.S. three times for treatment. Dr. Hakan Kutlu performed a second surgery in January 2017 at Morristown Medical Center, and a third surgery is scheduled for 2019. “It has been a privilege to take care of this beautiful child with her challenging issues. I am confident that she will continue to thrive as she grows older and I look forward to helping her further in the future,” said Kutlu.

Help for Local Kids in New Jersey

In 2017, HTCNJ provided aid to 78 NJ children with complex medical diagnoses and developmental delays. We purchase specialized equipment, special-needs therapy, care and programs, hearing aids, orthotics, prescription eyeglasses, and over-the-counter items.

HTCNJ provided financial assistance for a stroller and car seat for Jiya, a two-year-old girl diagnosed with hypotonia and chronic lung disease.

HTCNJ purchased a helmet for Andy, a two-year-old boy diagnosed with autism.
Isaac from Honduras

Dr. John Huntington, a Grand Rapids anesthesiologist, was in Honduras on a mission trip when he encountered a very malnourished little boy with a cleft lip and palate. *That was the moment hope arrived for Isaac Cabrera*, just two months old at that time.

Dr. Huntington and HTC consulted a team of doctors back in Grand Rapids, who agreed that surgery couldn’t be done until Isaac was a year old and better nourished. So, since his mom isn’t able to care for him, Isaac spent the next year at Hope of Honduras Children’s Home. When he was at last able to make the trip to Grand Rapids, Bryan and Carol Nyeholt of Hudsonville said yes once again and opened loving arms to Isaac.

Things moved very quickly after his arrival. First a checkup with pediatrician Joan Downs, then a pre-op appointment with his pediatric plastic surgeon, Dr. John Girotto. Surgery was the very next day!

At Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital, it took about seven hours for Dr. Girotto to repair Isaac’s lip and palate. While he was under anesthesia, Dr. Patrick Droste, pediatric ophthalmologist, examined his eyes, and ear, nose, and throat specialist Dr. Joseph Taylor put tubes in his ears. The surgery was successful, and Isaac’s appearance - and, more practically, his ability to eat - are much improved.

*Doctors Girotto and Droste were among the volunteers who provided care for Isaac.*
The downside of this sort of surgery is its aftermath, which generally includes limitations on diet. For Isaac that meant a liquid diet for three weeks - just imagine! In addition, he had to wear splints on his arms for two weeks so that he couldn’t stick his fingers in his mouth and undo Dr. Girotto’s handiwork. Carol says, “Let’s just say we were counting the days until the two weeks were up.” Then came some relief as the three weeks of liquid ended and Isaac moved on to pureed and then soft food.

Isaac still needed care from Dr. Droste. There was some cloudiness in his right eye that afforded him only 20 percent vision. Several weeks of steroid drops helped, and then there were brand new, ever-so-cute glasses. Isaac also wore an eyepatch for an hour every day. The result of all this? Isaac now has 80 percent vision in that right eye.

Despite Isaac’s year of better nutrition in Honduras, when he arrived in Michigan his mobility skills were not well developed. Carol says, “He had just learned to sit and was still a bit unstable. But it was only a couple of weeks until he had completely mastered sitting. About two months later he was on his hands and knees crawling — and now if there were a baby crawling race, I’m sure he’d win. It wasn't long before he took his first step!

“We are so proud of him! He has grown and learned so much since he came to us. He is a sweet kid who always has a smile ready, and we adore him! Many thanks to the hospital and all the docs involved in Isaac’s care. His life is forever changed because of your generosity!”

Gael from Peru

11-month old Gael Salazar Montenegro was born with a bilateral cleft lip and cleft palate. Living in a remote village in the Amazon region of Peru, he was unable to get the medical attention he needed. With the help of Healing the Children’s outreach team, Gael and his family learned about Healing the Children’s Northeast and San Francisco Bay Area chapter's annual facial plastic surgery mission to Ica, Peru. Healing the Children facilitated the 22-hour journey by bus and airplane for Gael and his family and 40 others from the Amazon region to reach the hospital for "screening Sunday". It was clear that Gael needed help and it was agreed that, though he was only 9.3 kilos, he would be strong enough to withstand surgery and his speech, ability to eat solids and appearance would all benefit greatly.

The surgery was performed, and Gael returned to his home in “Amazonas” the day after. The team received word and pictures a few weeks later confirming that Gael is doing great!
Surgical Trip to Lima, Peru

Healing the Children Rocky Mountains returned to the government hospital Dos de Mayo in Lima, Peru for the 6th time. The reach of our team continues to grow each year.

This year during our one week mission, we were able to perform 130 surgical procedures on 99 patients. 97 of the patients have cleft lip or palate. Many are babies, and it is truly miraculous how a 90 minute surgery can offer a child a hope at a normal life as these children are often bullied and not allowed to attend school in Peru. We also provided over 50 speech therapy sessions.

Our program to provide glasses and hearing aids also continues to grow. The local school districts in Lima started screening children for hearing loss and vision loss during the year. They then bussed the children in to the hospital. Our team of optometrists and audiologists would then do a detailed exam and fit them. We had hundreds of custom glasses frames donated and the children could pick out a pair they wanted and they would be able to go home seeing better than they ever have. I was able to sit in on a fitting for hearing aids for a child with severe hearing loss and it was very emotional when his dad spoke to him and he turned around and said, "Papa, papa" because he could actually hear his dad. Our team ended up fitting 80 children for glasses and 42 for hearing aids.

Even though Hospital Dos de Mayo is the oldest medical school in South America, they have never had a hearing aid program because of lack of training and technology. Our team has been able to provide them the computer software and training and equipment, so now they can start to treat their own people with hearing aids!

One memorable boy that we operated on was Jeremias. He is 17 years old. He was born with a cleft palate, but has never had an opportunity to have it fixed and didn't know it was possible. He is intelligent and handsome. But given his complete cleft palate, he is unable to speak well. This has severely impaired him in school and socially. When I met Jeremias and told him we were happy to fix his cleft palate, he couldn't stop smiling and gave a little fist pump for excitement. I have attached a photo of Jeremias with me before his surgery. You can see his excitement to have life-changing surgery.
Medical Trip Spotlights

HTCNJ’S ENT Medical Team helps 70 children in the Dominican Republic

Healing the Children New Jersey has sent medical teams annually to La Romana in the Dominican Republic since 1993, forging a special partnership with the Centro Medico Central Romana.

In November 2017 an ENT medical team screened 243 children and performed surgeries on seventy patients. A team of eighteen professionals was led by Dr. Lee Eisenberg of ENT & Allergy Associates in Hackensack, New Jersey. “The team was exceptional! We did the most procedures we have ever done in less time. As always, the people in La Romana are very appreciative of what we do for their children,” said Dr. Eisenberg.

HTCNJ sends Pediatric Urology Medical Mission to Ecuador

In November 2017, HTCNJ sent a pediatric urology medical mission to Ecuador to help children born with congenital abnormalities. The team led by Dr. Steven Friedman and Dr. Ronnie Fine screened sixty children and performed twenty-four surgeries.

“Our trip to Guayaquil, Ecuador was very successful! With the with help of the staff at Dr. Roberto Gilbert Elizalde Children’s Hospital we were able to perform complicated surgeries that will make a very positive impact on these children's lives. There is so much more to do, and we plan to go back year-after-year to continue our work,” said Dr. Rich Colavita, the anesthesiologist on the team.
José from El Salvador

José was referred to Healing the Children Wisconsin by the Gift of Life El Salvador. The 16-year-old had been through a lot in his life. Born with multiple heart issues including a ventricular septal defect, José had heart surgery to repair his fragile heart when he was 4 years old. It was then that he was also diagnosed with severe scoliosis. This type of surgery was not available in his country and he needed to come to the United States for treatment. José arrived in Milwaukee in August of 2017 to have surgery at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin.

José’s scoliosis case was further complicated by the fact that he had malformations in the bones surrounding his spine. As a result, his surgeons had to remove the two transverse processes from a vertebra before rods and screws could be placed and a fusion could be performed. Due to this complication his is surgery took over eleven hours. In the end the surgery was a great success, with José immediately noticing a big improvement in his breathing.

José stayed with host parents Ellen and Tom Frens, who volunteer through the nonprofit Safe Families for Children, during his stay in Wisconsin. José was welcomed into their home and into their hearts. Ellen and Tom provided many fun new experiences for José, including the Wisconsin State Fair, a Brewers baseball game, a Marquette University soccer match, and a high school homecoming dance.

Ellen said, "He was a real trooper. We had some special times together, even under some pretty tough situations. We drew on the support and practical help from other Safe Family families when we needed to, and it was awesome to share this young man with others. We were all blessed to have José in our lives. Sometimes you accept a stranger into your lives because you want to 'be the hands and feet of Jesus.' But on more than one occasion I was reminded of Jesus telling me 'I was a stranger, and you welcomed me in.' In other words, the child was being Jesus to me.”

José returned home to his very grateful family in El Salvador in October. He was very excited to return to school and the soccer field with his friends. The Frens Family has frequent contact with both José and his mom through social media and feel that they have an open invitation and home waiting for them in El Salvador.
Renita from Belize

Renita Pop was born in August of 2000 in a remote Mayan village in the Toledo District of Belize. Due to her spina bifida condition, however, she was incontinent and unable to walk. Caring for a child with such challenging conditions proved too much for her mother.

Renita came to the attention of Mary & Steve Tracy in 2005 while they were visiting another Belizean child who had been assisted by Healing the Children Northeast. The Tracy’s arranged for Renita to be cared for by Victor and Rosalia Cal, their longtime friends in Punta Gorda. Renita received medical attention and physical therapy at the nearby Hillside Clinic. She enrolled in school and learned to ride a bicycle. But, although she eventually learned to walk, doctors concluded that her labored gait could not be sustained into adulthood. Without medical intervention, she would eventually be wheelchair bound for the rest of her life.

During the summer of 2017, Renita was brought to the United States by HTCNE’s International Inbound Program and accepted for care by Dr. Robert Cristofaro and the Children’s Hospital at the Westchester Medical Center in New York.

Following extensive surgery on both of her legs, Renita’s lower extremities are now more normally positioned and she is able to walk with the assistance of leg braces.

Renita returned to Belize in February of 2018, where she resides once again with the Cal family. She has resumed her schooling and will be attending the 3rd Form at the local high school this fall. She remains profoundly grateful for the difference that Dr. Cristofaro and Healing the Children Northeast have made in her life.
Felix from Guatemala

Have you seen the new movie Wonder? Or read the book, by R.J. Palacio? If so, you already know a little about Felix Baltazar.

Felix, who came to HTC from Guatemala when he was 22 months old, is like Auggie, the hero of Wonder, in that he suffered from a serious facial deformity. In Wonder we see how Auggie, supported by his wise and loving parents, his insightful sister, and friends he makes in spite of themselves, creates his own livable space in the world. For Felix, the resources his family and community could draw on were less generous; without treatment his life was going to be very different from Auggie’s. Very likely, he would have been ostracized - perhaps even hidden away from his neighbors and others. There was also the possibility of a medical consequence; the growth on Felix’s face might have continued to grow, and a mishap could have caused it to burst. The deformity is called a nasofrontal encephalocele: a hole in the front of his skull that allowed brain fluid and tissue to leak out and form a large mass on his face which, in addition to everything else, blocked his vision. In Central America, it’s possible that this particular birth defect is caused by a lack of folic acid in a mother’s diet.

Felix’s future took a sharp turn toward happiness last fall, when a University of Michigan neurosurgical team traveled to Guatemala on their annual HTC medical trip. Felix’s mom, at their remote home in the mountains, heard about it on the radio. She knew this was perhaps Felix’s one chance to get the help he needed, and with this resolve she was somehow able to transport her little son to the team’s location. There, Dr. Hugh Garton saw how serious Felix’s condition was and recommended he be sent to Ann Arbor for surgery. His mom made the hard, loving decision to let him go.

American Airlines Ambassador Kathleen Haas escorted Felix on his journey to Michigan, and when he arrived he was met by his host family, Matt and Leigh Hook, who had welcomed seven other HTC kids in years past. When Felix stepped off the plane they saw a little boy who was “small for his age, with a head of dark hair that stands on end. He had a large mass on his face that partially covered his left eye and pushed his nose and mouth to the side,” says Leigh. Eventually they would discover that he’s “very active and always on the move, exploring all around him. He is curious and loves to read books and play with balls. . . . He is funny and loves to laugh and has the best belly laugh around.” Felix enjoyed being entertained by the four grown Hook kids when they stopped by to visit him.

On September 1, six weeks after he arrived, Felix underwent surgery at Mott Children’s Hospital at the University of Michigan. Dr. Garton was his neurosurgeon, Dr. Steve Buchman his plastic surgeon. Leigh describes the surgery this way: “Dr. Garton cut through his skull, peeling the skin down and moving the brain to get to the hole in the skull. He used bone from Felix’s skull to cover the hole as well as build up his compromised eye socket. Then Dr. Buchman removed the skin from the lump and repaired Felix’s face. Because of leaking brain fluid, Dr. Garton had to go back in and repeat the procedure. But the lump is gone and the hole repaired. Although Felix has a small scar on his face, the surgery was so well done that you can hardly tell it’s there
—most of it is covered by his glasses. He has a few scars on his skull, including one that goes from ear to ear in a zig-zag pattern, but that should become invisible when his hair grows back.

“Felix’s surgery wasn’t without complications, because doctors don’t usually see this condition in older kids, and there were unexpected events. He developed a spinal fluid leak from his eye, and then meningitis, which put him back in the PICU for 20 days, on heavy antibiotics and with drains in his spine and in his brain.” Not surprisingly, after this ordeal Felix had to learn to walk all over again.

Kellogg Eye Center helped treat Felix’s eye problems, making sure both eyes were healthy. He was fitted with glasses that allowed him to see out of the eye that had been blocked by the bump and never actually used. The glasses—which he calls goo-goo goggles—are almost unbearably cute on his little face.

The most profound insight afforded by Felix and his condition came when Leigh considered the differences between him and the other HTC kids she and Matt have hosted. “Felix was our first child with a medical problem that was blatantly evident. Heart patients are sick, and we have had bladder extrophy children, but before him there was nothing that couldn’t be covered by a cute dress or shirt. There was no covering Felix’s medical problem. People stared—really stared—all the time. Everyone noticed, and children loudly let us know he was different. I can only imagine what his mother had to deal with for the 20 months before he came here! We could hardly go to a playground because of all the comments and stares we got from children and adults alike. I was happy to share his story, though, and when I did there was often more acceptance. Our church was one place Felix could go to experience love, because everyone knew who he was and why he was here. Teenagers lined up to talk with and entertain him, and little children led him all around the building and played with him.

“Here’s what amazed me: The moment we walked into Mott, I felt as if we belonged. His condition didn’t matter; he was just one of many. Dr. Steve Kasten, a friend who’s a pediatric plastic surgeon there, said that they think kids with faces like Felix’s are the most beautiful children around. A perfect face is okay, but they just love the ones that present challenges—and Felix’s certainly did.

“Felix is still being stared at, pointed at, and talked about, but now it’s different. People aren’t repelled by the growth on his face; instead, they can’t get over how cute he is. They love his little glasses. They love the way he runs around talking and laughing. He makes everyone smile and point—even in downtown Chicago. His life will be completely different when he goes home, and it’s because of what Healing the Children does in partnership with an amazing group of volunteers.”

We note that that amazing group includes the Hooks; Dr. Garton; Dr. Buchman, Dr. Michelle Rabideau, Felix’s pediatrician; all the nurses and staff at Mott; and Kathleen Haas, his escort. We’re smiling and pointing right at all of them.
How You Can Help

Thank you for reading the stories of many brave children and learning exactly why Healing the Children envisions a world where every child has access to medical care, regardless of circumstance. If you were touched by a story in any way and would like to get involved, Healing the Children would love to hear from you.

Here are a few ways you can help:

- **Donate.** Your donation provides children with the gift of health, so precious and priceless. Visit [healingthechildren.org/donate/](http://healingthechildren.org/donate/) to make a donation. Feel free to donate to a specific chapter or to HTC National, which benefits all chapters. As a volunteer-based organization, 98% of every dollar is spent directly to help our children!

- **Consider volunteering your services or time.** Visit [healingthechildren.org](http://healingthechildren.org) to find the chapter that is closest to you. Just contact that chapter to learn of specific needs and opportunities in your area. Whether you’re a doctor and want to participate on a medical trip or be a host family to a child, or help become an administrator for our programs, there are many volunteer opportunities for each chapter.

- **Be a national volunteer.** Committed individuals who may not live near our regional chapters and those without medical backgrounds can apply for a range of short-term and longer-term volunteer opportunities with our national office. Marketing, fund-raising, and other administrative roles are open within the national organization. Join us to help children from around the world who need our collective help with difficult medical needs.

- **Be a leader and establish a chapter in your area.** If you live in an area that is lacking a voice for children in need, we would love to work with and help you establish a new HTC chapter. You do not need a medical background, just the ability to attract medical resources in your city or state, some organizational or non-profit experiences and most importantly, a genuine desire to help heal children who are counting on you. Please contact us at [healingthechildren.org](http://healingthechildren.org) and we will discuss the process to establish a chapter in your area.
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