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Making a Difference!

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Caring for homeless children in the slums of Kampala

us but we would find ourselves in the middle of the floor trying to love on as many as our hands could comfort.

On our second week, we spent time in remote villages with an organization called Healing Faith Uganda where we assisted with hanging mosquito nets in mud huts, malaria testing, and education. We also participated in feeding programs with an organization called African Hearts helping children in the slums. We fed hundreds of orphans who live on the streets, sniffing glue to numb the gnawing pain in their bellies from hunger, and their hearts due to the loss of loved ones to disease. African Hearts not only cares for the slum kids, but also attempts to rescue these children from the streets in an effort to give them a place to live and an education.

My favorite day was visiting the Gem Foundation, an orphanage dedicated to children with special needs. What an amazing place! Many Africans believe special needs children are a curse, leaving them in

huts to die. This organization takes in these beautiful children providing physical therapy, nursing care, and most importantly a loving home all while educating Africans on how to care for children with special needs.

As I reflected back on this experience and related it to my own life, I realized, in Uganda, I was just one person among desperate conditions. I felt helpless at times, knowing I was unable to really affect long term change. It saddened me to think after I was gone, the orphan and widow would continue to be without, the sick would continue to be uncared for, and the desperation would continue to grow. So what could I do? I chose to just make a difference for that one day. Show compassion and empathy in that moment. Lend a hand for that one project. Make a difference for the present even if it was just in one life. I realized that this should be my goal everyday. I brought Africa home with me as I share my life with others. As a nurse, I will continually strive to look past the patient's background, disease, economic, and social status to truly see the vulnerable person who needs me to invest in their care and to make a difference; even if only for one day.

Sanyu Babies Home - Orphanage



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House of Praise Orphanage, feeding program



MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

By: Vina Limson, BSN, RN, CNOR

It all started way back in 2003 when I attended the Association of Peri-Operative Registered Nurses (AORN) chapter meeting. There was a presentation at the meeting about volunteering with an organization called Fresh Start Surgical Gifts.

Fresh Start was seeking volunteers to help transform the lives of infants, children, and teens with physical deformities caused by birth, accidents, or disease. The organization was offering the gift of reconstructive surgery.

I was deeply touched by the presentation and was inspired to sign up as a volunteer OR Nurse. I started in April 2004 and have volunteered ever since. I started out going to the Health South Ambulatory Surgery Center in Encinitas every 6-8 weeks on a Saturday for 4 hours each time. It is a great way to give back to the community and to share my time and the talent that God has bestowed upon me. I enjoy volunteering and helping to transform these kids' lives. I love seeing them smile again.

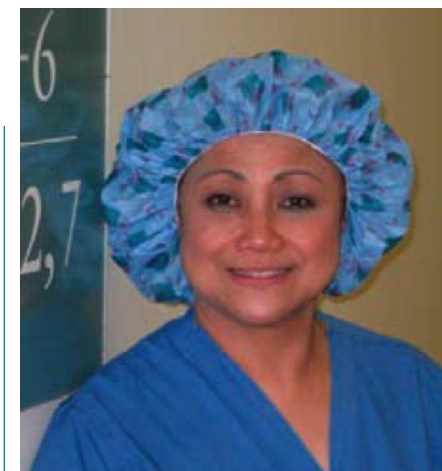
It is a very gratifying experience to see the outcomes of the surgeries when the kids come for their follow-up visits. We do mostly cleft lip/palate repairs, rhinoplasties, otoplasties for microtia, excisions of large hemangiomas, portwines, scar revisions and releases of contractures caused by burns. As the years went by, I started bringing my daughters to volunteer as well. They

played, read books and did artwork, with the children. They entertained them to ease the boredom of waiting to be seen. As we did more surgeries, including complex craniofacial surgeries, we moved to Rady Children's Hospital.

Fresh Start also offers dental work, a laser clinic and speech therapy. Laser clinics treat patients afflicted with deformities such as port wine stains and burns. Many of the children served by Fresh Start who have craniofacial disorders such as cleft lip and palate require speech therapy in order to regain their ability to speak audibly and correctly.

Fresh Start values their volunteers immensely and takes care of them by providing breakfasts and lunches which are all donated by different sponsors. In August each year, the organization recognizes its volunteers by hosting the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Day. A sit down luncheon/dinner is provided at different venues such as The Prado, the Handlery Hotel, Concha de Golf, Grand Pacific Palisades, and Petco Park. At Petco we also watched a Padres Game. This past year, there was a luncheon at the Del Mar Horse Races. In 2005 I was honored to be named "Outstanding Volunteer Nurse of the Year".

Since 1991, Fresh Start has provided over \$29.9 million worth of free medical services. In total,



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over 6,900 children have received fresh starts. On average, 60 patients receive medical treatment on each Surgery Weekend. Over 500 volunteers help Fresh Start run its medical programs each year. These include Surgeons, OR nurses, surgical techs, pre-op/PACU nurses, nurse practitioners, SPD and EVS staff, translators, photographers and speech therapists. Patients come from across the United States and around the world, but all surgeries and medical treatments are provided in San Diego, CA.

Come and volunteer for a Fresh Start Surgery Weekend and make a difference in the lives of these children!!!