



Photo credit: Alex Coppel

# GIVING SMALL LIVES BIG HOPE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Over the the last 20 years, Children First Foundation has enabled over 400 disadvantaged children from 34 developing countries to receive life-changing, and sometimes life-saving surgery in Australia.

OUR VISION

We picture a world where every child can access excellent care wherever they live.

OUR MISSION

Children First Foundation facilitates life-changing surgery in Australia for disadvantaged children from developing countries.

OUR VALUES

Compassionate

- We express kindness and sensitivity.
- We act with empathy and understanding.

Respectful

- We have due regard for the feelings, wishes or rights of others.
- We accept, share and celebrate cultures, individuals and diversity.

Ethical

- We are honest and accountable.
- We act with integrity and honour.

Equitable

- We believe in access and fairness.
- We give all those who reach out to us the same consideration, care and attention.

Courageous

- We encourage fearless thinking that reflects the courage of the children we help.
- We are prepared to ‘take a chance’ and embrace all possibilities to achieve a great outcome.

ABOUT US

Children First Foundation is an Australian based charity. We facilitate life-changing, and sometimes life-saving surgery in Australia for disadvantaged children from developing countries. These children are unable to access the medical care they desperately need, as the complex, and often

multiple surgical procedures required, are not possible in their own countries. By collaborating with exceptional Australian surgeons, health professionals and hospitals, we enable these children to access world-class medical care in Australia, and a chance to transform their lives.

Pre and post-surgery, the children are cared for at our Retreat in Kilmore, Victoria. 24/7 holistic care is provided by a team of skilled and dedicated staff and volunteers to maximise the result of the surgery. This unique model of community-based care offers a home-away-from-home for the

children as they prepare for and recover from life-changing surgery. Our goal is to have these children return home, happy and healthy, with a brighter future ahead of them.





“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness”.

Desmond Tutu



Our CEO, Elizabeth with Rachael

## FROM THE CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

### REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2019

**2019 was one of our biggest years yet. It was the year we celebrated our 20th anniversary and two decades of “Giving Small Lives Big Hope”. It was wonderful to reflect on all our achievements as we marked this milestone.**

Over the last 20 years, Children First Foundation has enabled over 400 disadvantaged children from 34 developing countries to receive life-changing, and sometimes life-saving surgery in Australia.

Often living in daily pain, unable to attend school and ostracised from their community due to their appearance or condition, for most of these children, life before surgery was difficult and disheartening.

Now back at home, following successful surgery and treatment, these children are attending school or further education, walking and running pain-free, and most importantly, they are more active and valued members of their communities. Their stories are those of reclaiming hope, much like Ali's story.

Ali came to us in 2016 from Palestine, with late-onset hereditary rickets. Without the surgery and treatment that he received in Australia, the quality of his life looked bleak. Ali is now on track to graduate with top marks from The Arab American University in Palestine with a Nursing degree, and a promising future ahead of him. We couldn't be prouder of him. You can read more of Ali's story on page 12.

2019 was also the year we said a bittersweet goodbye to some of our most famous and bravest little ones yet – formerly conjoined twins, Nima and Dawa from Bhutan, and little Jack from Vanuatu.

A team of 18 worked on the complex surgery to separate the twins, who were joined at the chest and abdomen. Jack's life-changing journey proved to be more complicated than expected. He ended up needing not one but two intricate surgeries to firstly expand his skull, then remove a large and life-threatening encephalocele on his small face. You can read about the twins' and Jack's journeys on page 8 and page 10.

On a monetary front, during the financial year ending June 2019, we achieved a positive budget for the first time in five years. This enabled us to embark on longer-term investment strategies and create sources of passive income to contribute to operational costs. We appointed investment firm JB Were to manage our share portfolio and saw a strong return on our investment. We also moved our administration operations out of our property at 66 Chapman Street in North Melbourne. The property is now on the rental market, giving us a solid rental yield.

In 2018 we were also very fortunate to be selected by an international philanthropic trust to be their 2019 – 2022 Australian partner, and the recipient of a multi-year grant.

While the grant allows us to enrich and expand our program, it comes with a conditional challenge component. To secure \$2 million over 4 years, we are required to obtain an additional \$3 million from other funders across 4 years. This amount must be over and above our annual fundraising activities. Staying true to our values, we took a bold and courageous approach as we reviewed and refocused our 4- year strategic plan to seize this incredible opportunity.

It truly takes an enormous and committed team of individuals and organisations to transform a child's life. We want to extend a profound thank you to our volunteers, who are the very heart of our organisation and provide an amazing family-style network of support for our children.

An incredible team of medical professionals and hospitals partner with us – and we sincerely thank them for their commitment. We'd also like to take this opportunity to specifically acknowledge St Vincent's Private, The Craniofacial Unit at the Women's and Children's Hospital Adelaide, Epworth HealthCare, Northpark Private Hospital and St John of God Berwick Hospital for their very generous ongoing pro bono support.

Our work is also only made possible by the generous financial and in-kind support of our wonderful donors and sponsors, many of whom have been part of the Children First Foundation family for a very long time. Children First Foundation does not receive any government funding, and is therefore wholly reliant on private, philanthropic and corporate support.

Finally, thank you to our staff and Board of Directors who have worked so hard to make everything you read in this report possible.

Creating a fairer world where every child, no matter where they live, can access excellent medical care is a huge collective effort. With your support, we look forward to a hope-filled future for hundreds of disadvantaged children in the decades to come.

Roger Langley,  
Chair



Elizabeth Lodge,  
Chief Executive Officer





2019 AT A GLANCE

Number of children that underwent life-changing or life-saving surgery, treatment and recovery:

16 children from 8 countries

Number of children under various stages of review and awaiting medical visas:

23

Number of hours of 24/7 holistic care delivered for the 16 children who stayed at The Retreat pre and post-surgery:

50,328 hours

Number of hours of specialised medical care provided at The Retreat (including wound management, physiotherapy and rehabilitation):

783 hours

Total number of hours of education delivered:

1,498 hours

Total number of hospital, doctors and other medical appointments attended:

90

SOME LIFE-CHANGING TRANSFORMATIONS OF 2019



Chien, Vietnam  
Orthopaedic surgery, St John of God, Berwick



Doris, Solomon Islands  
Plastic surgery, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.  
Doris will have further surgery in 2020



Ilona, PNG  
Orthopaedic surgery, St Vincent's Private, Melbourne  
Ilona will undergo rehabilitation and physiotherapy into 2020



Jack, Vanuatu  
Neuro/ maxillofacial surgery, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne



Kyziah, The Philippines  
Craniofacial surgery, Northpark Private Hospital, Melbourne



Madlen, Vanuatu  
Plastic and reconstructive surgery, St John of God, Geelong



Nima and Dawa, Bhutan  
General surgery (separation), The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne



Samnang, Cambodia  
General surgery (removal of rare and potentially fatal tumour), Monash Children's Hospital, Melbourne



Robinson, Papua New Guinea  
Craniofacial surgery, Northpark Private Hospital Melbourne & St Vincent's Private Melbourne





All grown up

# TWO LITTLE GIRLS

## THAT CAPTURED THE HEART OF THE NATION

“ Before they were separated, I had so many fears and zero hope for my babies – and look at them now! They can eat, sleep, play and do all the other things like any other healthy kid”.



Prior to surgery



With mum, Bhumchu after surgery

**Almost four months after their life-changing surgery, we bid a bittersweet farewell to 19-month-old, formerly conjoined twins, Nima and Dawa in March 2019.**

Wiping away her tears as she said goodbye, mum Bhumchu said, “Nima, Dawa and mum so happy, thank you. To the doctors and Children First Foundation .... I am so happy.”

When they arrived in Australia, the twins touched down to what can only be described as a media frenzy. As they waited for their life-changing operation, they captured the hearts of everyone in Australia. Though the girls were oblivious to the cameras, Bhumchu was incredibly moved by the huge outpouring of love and support from the Australian public for her little girls.

After a short delay to increase their pre-surgery weight, the girls were whisked off to The Royal Children’s Hospital for their life-changing surgery. A team of 18, including surgeons, anaesthetists, technicians and theatre nurses, were involved in the complicated operation to separate Nima and Dawa, who were joined at the chest and abdomen.

The surgery, which took almost 6 hours, was completed ahead of schedule. At first, the twins were very anxious after the operation as they became aware that they were no longer joined. However, over the next few days and weeks, they made excellent progress and recovery, and just 16 days after the complex procedure, they were given the all-clear and discharged from the hospital.

The twins spent the next four months at The Retreat where they were cared for by Bhumchu, staff and volunteers as they learnt to live life as two separate girls. They underwent extensive physiotherapy to strengthen muscles

they’d never used before, and to learn to do things they had never done before – like rolling, crawling, walking and standing up by themselves.

By the time the girls left Melbourne to head back home to Bhutan, Nima was walking and Dawa was not far behind.

Having lived with the constant fear of knowing that if one of her fragile daughters died, her sister would be lost too, for Bhumchu, the outcome was a dream come true.

“Before the separation, the girls were very weak, and our biggest fear was that if one of them died, so would the other. There was no option but separation, even if it meant we lost one of our daughters,” she said.

Back at home in Bhutan, the twins, now almost three years old, are thriving. Although the girls love their new-found freedom, Bhumchu laughs and says they are no longer joined at the abdomen, but are still very much joined at the hip!

“I don’t know that they can do anything without each other! For instance, they can’t sleep unless they are next to each other, or even go to the bathroom without the other. They also have to wear the same clothes - if not, they will cry until we change them so that they are wearing the same clothes! So... they really are incomplete without each other,” says Bhumchu.

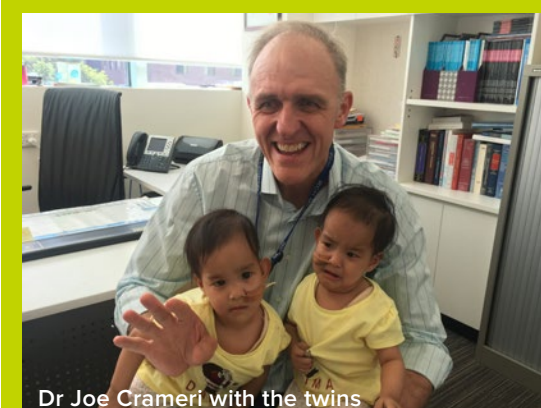
“Before they were separated, I had so many fears and zero hope for my babies – and look at them now! They can eat, sleep, play and do all the other things like any other healthy kid.

The help, support and generosity offered by Children First Foundation, the doctors and the Australian public during our dark times will never be forgotten. Thank you for giving my girls a better future. You will always have our deepest gratitude.”

**Some words from lead surgeon, Dr Joe Crameri, from The Royal Children’s Hospital, who reflects on the challenge and profound impact that the conjoined twins’ case presented to his highly skilled team.**

“We were excited when we were initially asked to be involved in the care of Nima and Dawa. The hospital’s previous experience with conjoined twins made us aware of the demands this type of procedure would put on our surgical, anaesthetic and nursing skills. It would also test our ability to carefully choreograph the steps needed to commence the surgery on one and complete the surgery safely on two. While many of us may never be involved in such a rare case again, the knowledge and skills acquired would serve to greatly enhance our expertise when encountering children in our own community with complex liver, chest and abdominal problems.

While the girls taught me how to be a better surgeon, they also taught me things I was not expecting. I learned about the great generosity and genuine affection of our own community, the beauty and warmth of the Bhutanese community, and the unwavering commitment of Children First Foundation to making a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children. At a time when our sense of community can seem fractured, I encountered no one who did not feel we live in a better place for having bestowed Nima and Dawa with a normal childhood.”



Dr Joe Crameri with the twins



# MORE THAN A NEW FACE



Photo credit: Alex Coppel

Hanging out with mum after surgery

“While many people saw the lump on Jack’s face as a cosmetic issue, when we showed his photo to renowned craniofacial surgeon Professor Tony Holmes, he described it as a death sentence”



Pre-surgery

**In a remote island off Vanuatu, little Jack was born with a large lump on his tiny face.**

Fearful that he would hurt himself, and to keep him away from curious eyes, his mum Boufa was careful to shield her little son away from others.

It was by a sheer stroke of luck, holiday makers from Victoria came across Jack. Seeing the large bump on his face, they were eager to help. Back in Australia, they sought advice from a local nurse, who in turn spoke to a doctor, and eventually, Jack was brought to the attention of Children First Foundation.

“While many people saw the lump on Jack’s face as a cosmetic issue, when we showed his photo to renowned craniofacial surgeon Professor Tony Holmes, he described it as a death sentence,” explains Elizabeth Lodge, CEO, Children First Foundation.

The lump was a life-threatening encephalocele, resulting from a neural tube defect where the bones in Jack’s skull failed to close completely during pregnancy. This allowed cerebral fluid to leak and form a large sac in the centre of his face. Any bump to Jack’s head could be fatal.

Having secured The Royal Children’s Hospital to take on Jack’s case, we quickly pulled out all the stops to get Jack to Australia for surgery.

When Jack landed in Australia and doctors were finally able to see him, it became apparent that his condition was more complicated than originally thought.

Scans revealed that Jack had a second condition where his skull hadn’t formed correctly, and as a result, his skull was not big enough to fit his brain inside. An extra operation was required to expand his skull, before removal of the disfiguring and dangerous tissue could occur.

“With The Royal Children’s Hospital being a public hospital, we knew that Jack’s surgery and treatment would incur a cost. However, we had not anticipated or budgeted for the additional surgery, or extended post-surgical care at our Retreat,” says Elizabeth.

Luckily, for this bright, happy little

toddler, our generous donors came swiftly to the rescue. Team Jack was formed, and this life-saving group of donors made crucial contributions towards the costs.

The combination of the two complex surgeries was a world first, and utilised practices that were pioneered at The Royal Children’s Hospital.

To expand his skull, neurosurgeon, Dr Alison Wray and maxillofacial surgeon, Dr Jonathan Burge cut the back of Jack’s skull and attached two distractors, or expandable metal pins. These distractors were then turned twice a day for 25 days. With each turn, the distractors stretched 0.6mm with bone growing to replace the space made.

Five months later, Jack was back in the operating room. This time, Professor Tony Holmes and Dr Jonathon Burge removed the encephalocele and rebuilt his face to fit his newly enlarged skull.

Thankfully, both operations were successful. Now, a small neat scar across Jack’s nose is the only evidence that remains of the former protrusion, a condition which, if left untreated, could have ended his life.

Jack’s mum, Boufa, who accompanied Jack to Australia, was incredibly grateful for the love and support Jack received here, and very excited to see him receive his ‘new face’.

When we spoke to Boufa recently, she reported that Jack no longer has headaches. “Jack is fine. He is always playing and never sits down. When I speak to him in English, he understands but, he answers back in Bislama.”

The transformation in Jack is incredible. Thanks to the amazing surgeons, doctors, medical professionals, donors and everyone from Team Jack, little Jack not only has a new face, he has a new life in which he can thrive and grow.



# A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE RESTORED

**Soon to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Ali, 24, from Palestine is a shining example of how life-changing surgery restored a future filled with hope and promise.**

Ali was 14 when he first started developing signs of a condition called familial hypophosphatemic rickets, a hereditary disorder related to low levels of phosphate in the blood. His younger brother, Motaz also suffered from the same condition, but for Motaz, it presented at an earlier age than it did for Ali.

For both boys, the condition became progressively worse. In Ali's case, his lower legs began to position at an outward angle, with his knees together and his feet eventually a meter apart. With each passing day, Ali's mobility was dramatically compromised.

"Walking, running and even kneeling for prayer or to enjoy a meal was a huge struggle. Soon I couldn't even board the bus to school – and all my dreams and hopes came crashing all around me," says Ali.

A glimmer of hope surfaced when Motaz had surgery to help straighten his legs in Jerusalem.

"I was so excited for him, and for what it could also mean for me, but sadly the operation just made his legs worse," recalls Ali.

"We both felt so hopeless and afraid of what the future was to hold for us."

Motaz was eventually referred to Children First Foundation by the Palestinian Community in Melbourne. He was successfully operated on by leading orthopaedic surgeon, Associate Professor Leo Donnan, at St Vincent's Private Hospital in 2013. Two years later, Ali followed suit.

Ali's surgery took five hours, during which frames were attached to his thigh bones near his knees and the bone divided.

"Following surgery, the deformity in Ali's legs was corrected over several weeks using a computer program. During this time, bone was stimulated to form and realign his severely bent limbs," explains Associate Professor Donnan.

After the operation, Ali spent almost a year at The Retreat undergoing intensive rehabilitation. First, he had to learn to walk in the frames. Once the bone was solid enough, the frames were removed, and his recovery continued with extensive physiotherapy sessions, swimming, walking and weights, to help build flexibility in his knees and ankles.

When Ali returned home a year later, he was able to walk, run, swim, kneel, and even play the game of soccer that he was so desperate to get back to! Most importantly, Ali was able to board that bus and complete his education.

"Without surgery and rehabilitation, life would have been extremely difficult for me in Palestine. I wouldn't have been able to attend University or get a job to support my family. I can't thank the Foundation, the volunteers, the donors and of course, Professor Donnan and the other medical staff enough."

Ali is due to graduate as a nurse in July 2020 from The Arab American University in Palestine, and is on track to achieving top marks. He says he hopes to continue with further studies, and eventually secure a position that will allow him to improve and shape the future of the healthcare system in Palestine.

Ali's brother, Motaz, is also doing well and currently completing Year 12.

“When Ali returned home a year later, he was able to walk, run, swim, kneel, and even play the game of soccer that he was so desperate to get back to! Most importantly, Ali was able to board that bus and complete his education”.



Ali's legs close up prior to surgery



Giving a presentation at University



Ali with his brother Motaz, prior to Ali's surgery



# THE RETREAT

“It’s always been so wonderful being here at The Retreat. I always missed home, but sometimes it’s like I have a second family and lots of friends here”.

Serah, Papua New Guinea



Serah is welcomed back to The Retreat after being discharged from hospital

**Our Retreat in Kilmore, Victoria, is the warm and loving heart of what we do at Children First Foundation. It is a home-away-from-home for our children. It is where the kids eat, sleep, play, and most importantly, where they prepare for and heal from surgery.**

“On average most of our children spend about six months in Australia. Of that, about a week is usually spent in hospital following surgery. The rest of the time is spent at The Retreat, where critical care takes place pre and post-surgery,” explains Deb Pickering, Children First Foundation Retreat Manager.

Run by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers, including nurses and other allied health professionals, our ethos at The Retreat is to provide 24/7 holistic care, recognising and responding to each child’s emotional, physical and cultural needs.

Many of the children we help have never been away from home. Sometimes a parent or carer accompanies younger children; however, older children usually come on their own. Some of the children are unable to speak English. Others are undernourished. While many of the kids have been ostracised from their community due to their condition, others have previously undergone poorly managed surgical interventions – so they are understandably fearful of what’s ahead of them.



Doris, Ilona and Kyziah enjoy the playground at The Retreat

Before surgery, the focus at The Retreat is to help the children and their carers settle in and prepare them for what lies ahead. We work on gaining their confidence and trust, improving their nutrition and general health, providing emotional support and helping develop their English language skills.

The post-surgical care and healing is another major focus at The Retreat – and is critical to the overall outcome of the surgery. Fortunately, The Retreat benefits from a purpose-built and fully equipped physiotherapy room and a rehabilitation pool that can be used year-round.

“Many of our children return to homes where medical follow up is scarce, so it is vital that we ensure they return home in the best possible condition,” explains Deb.

Our staff and volunteers work around the clock with the kids to ensure that rehabilitation and physiotherapy programmes are followed, dressings and wounds’ sites are

cleaned and managed, medications are taken, all while of course keeping everyone’s spirits high.

“It is such a privilege to be a part of each child’s life-changing journey. When a child first arrives at The Retreat, they are often anxious and unsure. Slowly, they settle in, and you start getting to know that little person. As you hold their hand through the challenging times, you realise just how much comfort it gives, not only to them, but to you too,” reflects Deb.

“There is nothing more heartwarming than seeing the pure joy in a child’s face as they recover and do things they couldn’t before. When the time comes to saying goodbye, it is always bittersweet. Sad because you are saying goodbye to a little person you’ve come to care so much for, and happy because they are going back home to their families and a brighter and more hopeful future ahead of them.”

## EDUCATION MATTERS

Ensuring that the children continue their education while they are with us has always been a strong focus for Children First Foundation. Our volunteer teachers run weekly education sessions tailored for each child. “Homework” continues with the staff and other volunteers at other times.

In late June, we upgraded our English as an Alternative Language (EAL) program. We are continuously looking for ways to enhance our program and to increase future opportunities for our children. The ability to speak, write and comprehend English is a valuable asset, opening up avenues for employment and further education when the children return home.

As our kids come from diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs, we also engage with their communities in Australia to ensure they remain connected to their language and cultural customs.



Doris with volunteer teacher Carol



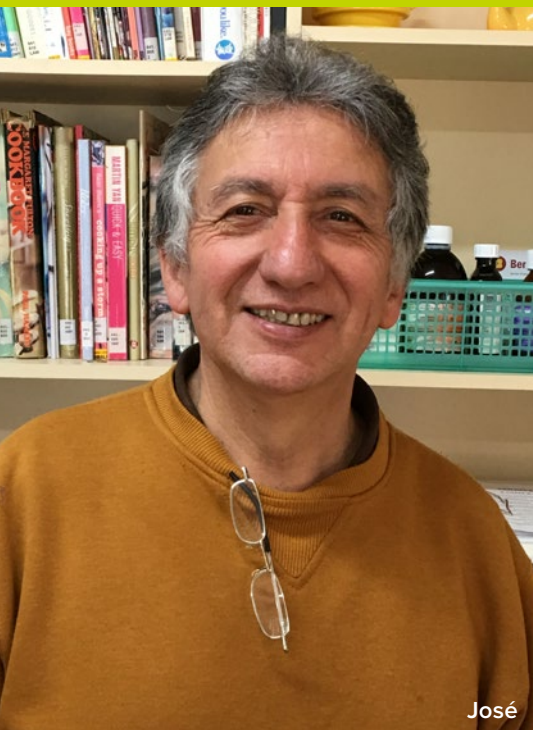
The Retreat



# THE CHILDREN FIRST FOUNDATION FAMILY

It takes a village to transform a child's life, and we at Children First Foundation are very fortunate to have a community of superstars – amazing volunteers, surgeons, hospitals, supporters and donors who continue to give their time, expertise and support. Thank you for being part of our family. Below we highlight just a few of our very many superstars.

## JOSÉ AND SIMONETTA VOLUNTEERS



José

**Simonetta and her partner, José, have been volunteering with Children First Foundation for almost five years. They first heard about the Foundation from two friends who were volunteers at the time. Their stories and experiences made a strong impression on the couple. When they heard that there was an Open Day at The Retreat (then known as 'The Farm'), they jumped at the chance to attend and find out more.**

"After speaking to the staff and meeting the children at the Open Day, we decided, there and then, that we would give volunteering with Children First Foundation a go," explains Simonetta.

"We arranged to have a trial session in a fortnight – and here we are, five years later – still enjoying our monthly volunteering weekend at The Retreat."

José and Simonetta do an overnighter at The Retreat every fourth weekend of the month. They prepare meals, wash clothes, clean up, and most importantly, have lots of fun playing, dancing and hanging out with the kids.

"There have been so many highlights and wonderful memories over the last five years," says Simonetta.

"One that sticks out for me is arriving at The Retreat for our weekend shift and being greeted at the door by a lovely tall young man, who I presumed was a new child. I said my usual hellos, and then this very tall young man said, 'Hello Sim'.

I stood back for a moment and thought, I know that voice, but I couldn't recognise his face. Then it hit me, like a lightning bolt, it was Kiko!

I was gobsmacked! In between our volunteering shifts, Kiko had facial surgery, and I honestly didn't recognise him. I couldn't believe the change in his appearance!"

Kiko had a pituitary gland disorder. The resulting excess growth hormones caused his lower jaw to grow rapidly ahead of his upper jaw. Thanks to Professor Andrew Heggie, Kiko underwent maxillofacial surgery which brought forward his cheeks and eye sockets, and his cheekbones in line with the upper jaw. As Simonetta says, his transformation was profound.

For José, an unforgettable memory was when he discovered that one of the kids, Teresa, enjoyed dancing! Simonetta laughs as she recalls what happened next.

"For anyone who knows José and his love for dancing, that was like holding a red flag to a bull! So, one Sunday, we pushed the furniture out of the way, put the music on, and José taught Teresa and the rest of the gang how to do the Cha Cha Cha. It was such a fun afternoon; I can still hear the laughter travelling up and down the hallway!

There are so many things that we enjoy about volunteering with Children First Foundation, but what stands out for us both, is that we love seeing the difference the surgeries and treatments make to each child. We both feel so happy knowing that when these children go back to their various home countries, they will have an improved and better chance at life. That is what gives us the most joy."



Simonetta with Foyok and Kylie

## SUSAN DONOR

**Long time donor and supporter, Susan can clearly remember when she first came across Children First Foundation.**

"I belonged to the VIEW Club, (a women's organisation which supports The Smith Family) many years ago, and they had someone from Children First Foundation who came and did a talk."

It was the first time Susan had heard of the Foundation. When she saw images of children from developing countries with life-threatening conditions before and after having life-changing surgery in Australian hospitals, she sprang into action immediately.

"I belted out to the car park after the speaker and gave her a cheque."

It was the beginning of a long-lasting relationship between Susan and Children First Foundation. At that time, Susan lived in Melbourne and worked in the travel industry.

After retiring, she and her husband moved to a property outside Broadford, about 75km north of Melbourne. Susan began to babysit for Noel\* and Janis Baker, who were, coincidentally, members of Rotary International and huge supporters of Children First Foundation. In fact, Noel and Janis went on to donate the 42 acres of land on which The Retreat is built.

When Susan started babysitting for them, the site of The Retreat was a paddock. Susan recalls the first time she saw the house that would eventually become The Retreat.

"I couldn't believe it. One day I arrived to babysit for Noel and Janis, and there was a house on this paddock! It was still in parts. It had been brought up on two trucks.

And now - it's just fabulous!" says Susan, who recently visited The Retreat at our annual Open Day in November.

In the decades since, Susan has followed Children First Foundation activities closely. In those early days, when we didn't have social media, or even regular newsletters, Susan kept a keen eye on newspapers and the news. She still recalls the media frenzy when conjoined twins, Trishna and Krishna were brought over from Bangladesh more than ten years ago. More recently, Susan was particularly moved by little Jack's and Nima and Dawa's stories (featured on pages 8-11).

When we ask Susan what stands out for her about Children First Foundation, she does not hesitate. "Oh, it's the children! Just the thought of those children, you know - they are crippled, or their faces are disfigured, and you think what on earth they must go through."

Before our little chat comes to an end, we ask Susan how it feels to be involved with Children First Foundation, and help these children directly with her regular support.

Once again, Susan doesn't hesitate. "Oh, I feel terrific!" she says enthusiastically, conveying the real joy she gets from seeing disadvantaged children given hope and a new chance at life, and knowing that she has contributed.

*\*Noel Baker is a Patron of Children First Foundation.*

**"Oh, I feel terrific!" she says enthusiastically, conveying the real joy she gets from seeing disadvantaged children given hope and a new chance at life, and knowing that she has contributed.**



Susan



## MR DAVID CHONG MBBS FRACS, PRO BONO SURGEON



Mr David Chong

**Children First Foundation is extremely fortunate to have the pro bono support of world-class hospitals, and exceptional surgeons, doctors and allied health professionals. One such brilliant and very generous surgeon is Mr David Chong, who has partnered with the Foundation for over 12 years.**

Mr Chong's passion is correcting facial and skull deformities in children, and he is particularly known for his work in cleft lip and palate. He holds a public appointment at The Royal Children's Hospital, and private appointments at Northpark Private Hospital and St Vincent's Private Hospital Kew.

Having moved from Malaysia to Perth when he was just five years old, even as a child, Mr Chong always knew that he wanted to make a difference. It is no surprise that medicine was the path he chose.

"I decided early on in my career that I wanted to look after children born with facial differences. After completing my training programme, I undertook further subspecialty training in Dallas and Toronto to learn how to look after these children in the best way possible."

Mr Chong is deeply rooted in humanitarian work. As well as working on Children First Foundation cases on a pro bono basis, he volunteers three to four times a year to operate and teach in developing countries with charity organisations, Operation Smile and Mercy Ships.

"I was first introduced to Children First Foundation in 2008, when I was part of the team that cared for the conjoined twins, Trishna and Krishna. The twins arrived at the hospital as I literally walked into work on my first day at The Royal

Children's Hospital. It was a privilege to be part of the incredible team that was assembled to care for two girls that faced a very challenging situation," recalls Mr Chong.

"At this time, I was already volunteering internationally. However, I was also looking to work with a local organisation that helps disadvantaged children from overseas benefit from our wonderful health system here in Australia."

Mr Chong discovered that Children First Foundation was a perfect match, and it was the beginning of a long-standing partnership. "I find that Children First Foundation is always willing to help and advocate for children living with difficulties and challenges overseas that can't be solved in their own country", he explains.

"To me the Foundation epitomises the wonderful culture that I have come to love about Australia and what makes me proud to be Australian. The 'fair-go' attitude – the 'never say die' resilience. The simple heart and compassion to do the right thing. We have so much. We can give a bit back. I am so happy to be part of that."

In 2019, Mr Chong operated on Robinson and Kyziah, two of our children who are now both back at home with a brighter future ahead of them.

Mr Chong graduated from The University of Western Australia 1995. He is a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, American Cleft Lip and Palate Association (ACPA), American Society of Maxillofacial Surgery (ASMS) and Australasian Cleft Lip and Palate Society.

## PRICELINE SISTERHOOD FOUNDATION PLATINUM PARTNER

**The Priceline Sisterhood Foundation has partnered with Children First Foundation as a platinum supporter for over nine years.**

The Sisterhood Foundation was developed after Sir Bob Geldof spoke at a Priceline Pharmacy event about his two decades of charity work and challenged the brand to give back to the community.

In response to this, the Priceline Sisterhood Foundation was formed in 2011 to give back, and specifically, to provide support to women and their families.

"The Sisterhood is unique – it is aligned to a range of causes that women can relate to in some way, and this enables us to touch the lives of people from all walks of life," says Ita Buttrose, Patron, Priceline Sisterhood Foundation.

Children First Foundation was one of the first charities the Priceline Sisterhood Foundation selected to support.

Since then, they have donated over \$840,000 to us.

"As well as all the funds raised for us over the years, the additional support that the Priceline Sisterhood Foundation have provided has been nothing short of extraordinary. Like funding much needed capital works at The Retreat including enclosing our rehab pool and upgrading the driveway, purchasing our trusted Tarago (which we use to transport the children to hospital appointments), and helping us set up new IT and telecommunications infrastructure. Each year an enthusiastic team of Priceline volunteers also assist at our Gala Ball, helping us make the night a huge fundraising success", says Elizabeth Lodge, CEO, Children First Foundation.

"We are extremely grateful for the Priceline Sisterhood Foundation's long-term commitment to helping the disadvantaged children of our world. They share our passion and have become an intrinsic part of the Children First Foundation family."



CFF girls with the Priceline Sisterhood Foundation



A YEAR OF EVENTS TO REMEMBER

2019 was truly a year to celebrate as we proudly marked our 20th birthday and two decades of “Giving Small Lives Big Hope”. It was a time to reflect on our success stories and celebrate all that we’ve achieved in the last 20 years.

We were delighted to hold several events through the year to commemorate this incredible milestone.



Rachael and Madlen present the Governor with a gift

RECEPTION,  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
5 MARCH 2019

We launched our celebrations in early March with a morning reception at Government House, kindly hosted by our Patron-in-Chief, Her Excellency the Hon. Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria and Mr Anthony Howard AM QC.

Guests included our founding members, surgeons, donors, volunteers, staff and our children – with our littlest guests Jack, Nima and Dawa as the stars of the show as they ‘let loose’ in the grand Ballroom with a couple of balloons!



Mr Howard hands Jack some balloons

FACING THE FUTURE: A JOURNEY  
INTO CRANIOFACIAL SURGERY:  
MEDICAL ORATION, 4 JUNE 2019

As part of our celebrations, we were delighted to host an exclusive event for our supporters – our inaugural Medical Oration. Held at Melbourne Town Hall, the fascinating and heartfelt Oration was delivered by Professor Tony Holmes, internationally renowned craniofacial surgeon.

Professor Holmes has operated on a number of our children, and most recently he led the team that performed the ground-breaking surgery for Jack from Vanuatu.



Professor Tony Holmes

Photo credit: RCH Creative Studio

GALA BALL “GIVING SMALL LIVES BIG HOPE” FOR 20 YEARS,  
26 OCTOBER 2019

Held at the spectacular Park Hyatt Ballroom, our annual Gala Ball is always a glamorous night of entertainment and fundraising. This year it was particularly special as we celebrated our 20th birthday, but the icing on cake was that we raised over \$126,000 during the night – a staggering 50% increase from the previous year.

During the evening we also presented the Pat Weldon Humanitarian Award to Rotary International District 9790, acknowledging Rotary’s long-standing and extraordinary contribution to changing the lives of over 400 disadvantaged children during the past 20 years.



Left to right: Bernie Lamers (CFF Patron and Rotary Club of Preston), Geoff McIlvenna (CFF Patron and Rotary Club of Preston), Brian Peters (District Governor 9790, Rotary International), Roger Langley (Chairman, CFF) and Noel Baker (CFF Patron and Rotary Club of Southern Mitchell)



ROTARY REUNION, 10 NOVEMBER 2019

We wouldn't be celebrating our 20-year milestone without the vision, determination, generosity and compassion of Rotarians across District 9790 and beyond.

As we drew a close to our 20-year celebrations, we felt it was most fitting to bring together the very people that helped establish Children First Foundation. Over 120 Rotarians packed into The Retreat, as CEO, Elizabeth

Lodge announced our decision to formally acknowledge Rotary International as a 'Founding Partner' of Children First Foundation.

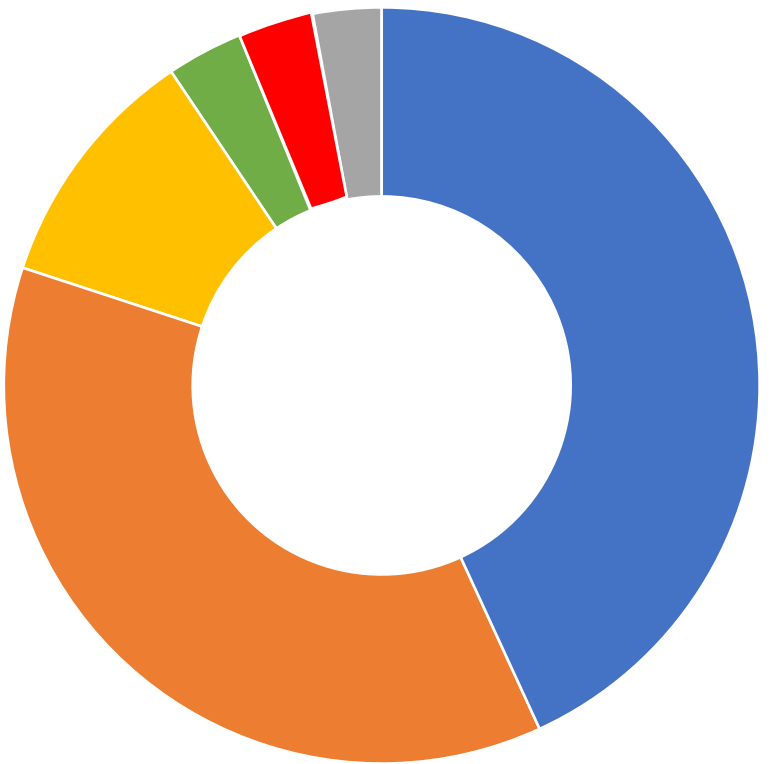
As part of the festivities, a tree was also planted alongside what was the very first tree at the then known "Farm". It was a joyous and heartwarming day as guests mingled and took a trip-down-memory lane.



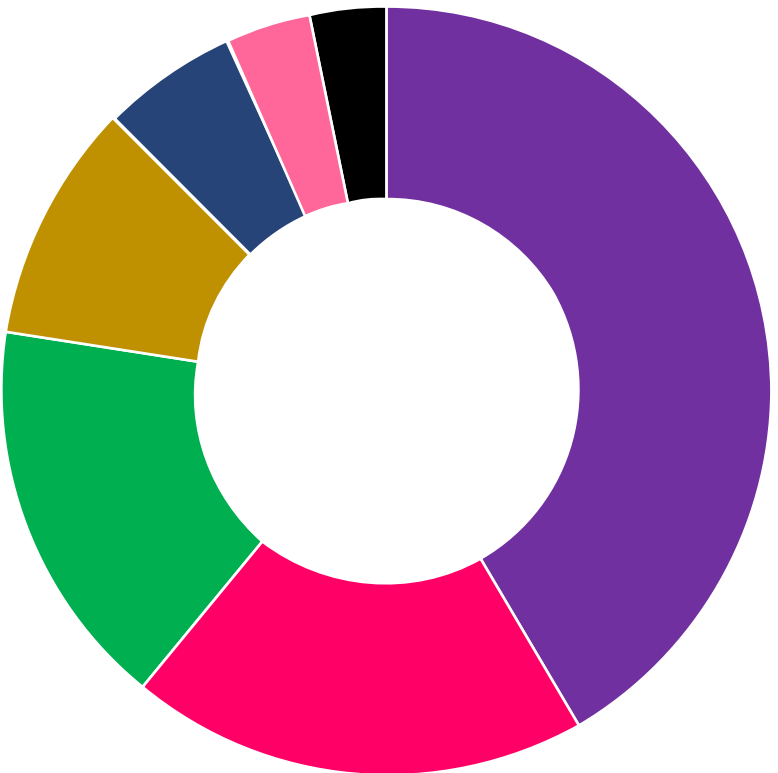
EXCLUSIVE MORNING TEA & OPEN DAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2019

In late November we threw open the doors of our Retreat. In the morning, we hosted an exclusive morning tea as a special thank you to our long-standing supporters. Our Patron and long-time supporter, Gerry Lamers welcomed the guests and shared the story of how she got involved with Foundation.

Celebrations continued in the afternoon, when we welcomed the local community for an afternoon of fun for the whole family at our Open Day. It was a wonderful way for the community to connect with our children, volunteers, supporters and staff.



INCOME			
Donations	\$992,123	43%	
Trusts and Foundations	\$848,662	37%	
Corporates	\$67,238	3%	
Event Income	\$242,639	11%	
Dividends and Interest	\$74,205	3%	
Other Income	\$74,966	3%	



EXPENSES			
24/7 Care	\$545,671	42%	
Medical Supplies	\$216,512	17%	
Retreat Facilities Costs	\$131,259	10%	
Education and Welfare	\$47,454	4%	
Program Expansion	\$74,020	6%	
Flights and Travel	\$41,721	3%	
Fundraising and Administration	\$250,854	18%	



Children First Foundation is very grateful to all the incredible individuals and organisations who support our work – it takes a compassionate and dedicated team to transform a child’s life.

HOSPITALS

Thank you to the following world-class hospitals for their support and commitment during 2019:

- Monash Children’s Hospital
- Northpark Private Hospital
- St John of God Hospital Berwick
- St John of God Hospital Geelong
- St Vincent’s Private Hospital
- The Women’s and Children’s Hospital, Adelaide
- The Royal Children’s Hospital

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

We achieve extraordinary outcomes through collaboration with exceptional Australian surgeons and health professionals. Thank you to all the following medical professionals who partnered with us in 2019:

- Dr Anthony Burn
- Dr Jonathon Burge
- Dr Raman Bhinder
- Ms Sue Bowman
- Mr Patrick Chan
- Mr David Chong
- Professor Chris Coombs
- Dr Joe Crameri
- Dr Jonathon Darby
- Associate Professor Leo Donnan
- Dr Sian Fairbank
- Mr Scott Ferris
- Mr Walter Flapper
- Dr Ben Hallett
- Dr Gagan Hira
- Professor Tony Holmes
- Mr Ian Holten
- Dr Suresh Jain
- Dr Abhay Khot
- Mr Michael Johnson
- Dr Gail Littlejohn
- Mr David McCombe
- Dr Mark Moore
- Dr Laurence Poon
- Dr Joe Speakman
- Dr Thomas Tan
- Professor Ton Tran
- Dr Allison Wray



The twins with thier mum

Photo credit: Alex Coppel

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are at the very heart of our organisation, and we couldn’t do what we do without them. They cook, clean, drive to appointments, keep the children company, hold their hand when they are scared, and most important of all, give their time and love to make a difference to a child’s life. We thank and acknowledge the following volunteers for giving their time so generously during 2019:

- |                   |                     |                          |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Lorraine Aitken   | Maria Hall          | Margaret Smith OAM       |
| Roeun Bennetts    | Lesley Hills        | Lorraine Spencer         |
| Natalie Bennetts  | Judy Hoffard        | Shenae Stanley           |
| Glyza Bernado     | Sharyn Hood         | Zenaida Sturzaker        |
| Annie Bezemer     | Cheryl Humphrey     | Karli Van Den Driesschen |
| Paige Blackman    | Ally King           | Jenny Webster            |
| Sue Bowman        | Ingrid Koutsodontis | Suse Whitehead           |
| Derrick Butterick | Carrie Lau          | Sylvia Zhang             |
| Anne Cook         | Robin Longbottom    |                          |
| Sarah Curtis      | Carol McIntyre      | <b>Events committee:</b> |
| Nhung Dinh        | Gerry Milton        | Fiona Langley            |
| Jose Espinoza     | Simonetta Poletti   | Merryn Maher             |
| Melanie Eva       | Anna Quigley        | Kim Myers                |
| Anne Ford         | Lee Sando           | Lesley Rocchi            |
| Dianne Friels     | Maree Scale         | Wendy Yarnall            |
| Helen Frost       | Merilyn Selman      |                          |



Foyok with volunteer teacher Carol



WITH SPECIAL THANKS

DONORS

Our donors are the lifeblood of Children First Foundation. Children First Foundation does not receive any government funding, and we are therefore wholly reliant on private, philanthropic and corporate support. A huge thank you to all our donors; we couldn't do what we do without your support. Listed below are our major donors for 2019 (some generous donors prefer to remain anonymous):

- Alan Field, OAM and Christine Field
- Audrey Campbell
- Bill and Eileen Doyle
- CommBank Staff Foundation
- Don Maloney
- Estate of Kathleen and Richard Fleming
- Gerry and Bernie Lamers Foundation
- Harry Fraser
- John Ralph AC and Barbara Ralph
- Jost and Dorothee Kaiser
- Prescott Family Foundation
- Rhonda Cook
- Roger and Fiona Langley
- Rotary International District 9790
- St Macartan's Catholic Church
- Susan Clack
- The Pratt Foundation
- The Scobie and Claire Mackinnon Trust

FOUNDING PARTNER

We acknowledge our Founding Partner, Rotary International, and Rotary International District 9790 for their extraordinary commitment and support during 2019 and for the past 20 Years.

PLATINUM PARTNERS

We thank our Platinum Partners for their generous support, professional advice and expertise throughout the year.

- Ashurst
- Grant Day James
- Priceline

TRAVEL PARTNER

- Abercrombie & Kent

SUPPLIERS

Thank you to the following medical suppliers:

- Dorevitch Pathology
- I-MED Radiology
- LifeHealthcare
- Nexus Health
- ProMotion Prosthetics
- Stryker

Other organisations:

- Billanook College, Mooroolbark
- Casey Wealth
- Emmaus College, Vermont
- Eva Mattresses
- FareShare
- Hanson Quarries, Kilmore
- Kiwanis International Australia District Charitable Foundation
- Mr Rob Mitchell, MP
- Second Bite
- St Monica's College, Epping
- St Peter's Parish, Epping
- The Kilmore International School

PATRON-IN-CHIEF

- The Hon Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria

PATRONS

- Mr Noel Baker
- Mr Geoffrey W Hone
- Professor David de Kretser, AC
- Mrs Jan de Kretser
- Mr Bernie Lamers, AM
- Mrs Gerry Lamers, AM
- Mr Geoff McIlvenna
- Mrs Margaret Smith, OAM
- Lady Marigold Southey, AC

AMBASSADORS

- Diane (Dee Dee) Dunleavy
- Russell Osborne
- Peter (Grubby) Stubbs

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Mr Roger Langley, Chairman
- Mr Don Maloney, Deputy Chair
- Mr Peter Gilbert, Treasurer
- Ms Elizabeth Lodge, CEO and Director
- Dr Sue English, (MBBS (Monash) DipRANZCOG FRACGP), Director
- Mr Jeff Hudson, Director



HOW YOU CAN HELP GIVE SMALL LIVES BIG HOPE

If like us, you've been inspired by the hope and determination of the children and their families you've read about in this Annual Report, there are many ways you can get involved in changing a child's life.

Whether you volunteer your time, make a regular donation, encourage your employer to partner with us, or make a donation of goods or services – your support is vital.

Enabling a disadvantaged child from the developing world to have life-saving and life-changing surgery in Australia is

a lengthy and complex process. It requires perseverance, patience and an enormous team of like-minded and passionate people to make it happen. It also requires a significant financial investment.

Without exception, every person involved in transforming these children's lives feels the tremendous satisfaction of making a profound difference.

To find out more visit [www.childrenfirstfoundation.org.au](http://www.childrenfirstfoundation.org.au)





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Website: [childrenfirstfoundation.org.au](http://childrenfirstfoundation.org.au)

#### FOUNDING PARTNER



#### PLATINUM PARTNERS

