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Global Flight Relief and the World Pediatric Project: Help at a Moment's Notice to Change Kids' Lives Forever

Hope and Opportunity for a Normal Life

The children came from across the Caribbean island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and beyond, some families traveling for hours over steep, poorly paved roads to arrive at the region's main public children's hospital, Milton Cato Memorial, on Sunday at 8 a.m.

The families were determined to arrive on time, because they knew that this could be their children's only chance to live normal, productive lives. Their children were afflicted with scoliosis. And in an economy driven by physical labor, whether as a worker on a banana farm or in the service industry, children with untreated spine curvature would have limited mobility, diminished chances for future employment, and possibly face ridicule and social ostracism.

At Milton Cato Memorial, a volunteer medical team with the World Pediatric Project (WPP) would be waiting to provide free treatment and life-changing spinal fusion surgery. Without them, the families' only option would be traveling to another country—prohibitively expensive to residents of an area where tropical storms have devastated recent crops and the unemployment rate hovers around 15 percent.



"The countries we work in simply do not have the facilities, equipment, training, money and resources to respond to the needs of these children," says Dr. Mike Estes, a pediatric anesthesiologist with St. Mary's Hospital and a veteran WPP volunteer.

The WPP team couldn't let them down. But it almost didn't arrive.

A Sudden Crisis

The volunteer surgical team was ready to embark on the 25-hour trip from Richmond, VA when they learned that their flight had been cancelled. With few alternate flights available, it suddenly became uncertain if any of the volunteer medical team would make it to St. Vincent in time for the 8 a.m. Sunday morning clinic, where 60 children would be waiting for evaluation and care. Even if a few team

Global Flight Relief is dedicated to providing aviation services for humanitarian aid and emergency response throughout the world for those in need.

members were able to get there on time, it would severely limit the amount of families they would be able to see.

According to WPP president Susan Rickman, “The parents take time off to travel to St. Vincent from around the Eastern Caribbean region for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see their child's life transformed. It would have been heartbreaking for them if the team didn't arrive.”



A Life-Saving Flight

That's when WPP made an urgent call to Global Flight Relief (GFR). Just nine hours after GFR was asked if they had a plane and crew available to deliver the whole team to St. Vincent, WPP volunteers were boarding a GS3 aircraft from Global Flight Relief's stable of nearby aviation assets. Not only was every member of the WPP team delivered safely, they arrived with enough time to get much needed rest in order to be truly ready for their work.

Over the next five days, patients ranging from young children to teenagers were evaluated and treated for scoliosis, with eight receiving spinal fusion surgery to correct curvatures—care that would have been impossible for all of them to receive without the efforts of Global Flight Relief.

For GFR, making miracles happen is all in a day's work. As the philanthropic arm of Tempus Jets, the company has designed, integrated and certified more than 70 aircraft to conduct special mission operations in some of the most remote and harsh environments in the world. With 24-hour access to aircraft maintained and operated by highly experienced technicians and pilots, the organization is uniquely qualified to respond quickly when needed.

The wonder at being able to help others, however, never becomes routine. Perhaps photographer Tom Veazey, who documented the trip, said it best: “They truly enabled us to save and change lives today.”

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