



# Biannual Impact Report



# Statement from our CEO

A simple thank you from Smile Train is hardly enough to convey our gratitude for all you have done for children with clefts around the world. The stories in this Impact Report showcase not only resilience and hope, they are a **testament to the lifesaving work your generosity makes possible around the world every single day.** That means this report is a celebration of you, a shining spotlight on the impact of your philanthropy and the many, many lives it touches.

When setting out a vision for Smile Train, our founder, Charles B. Wang, took inspiration from the wisdom of Confucius: “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” This taught him that the **prevailing model of flying Western doctors into low- and middle-income countries to perform cleft surgeries was neither sustainable nor efficient** and did nothing to improve the overall state of healthcare in those regions. In fact, it often undermined it. Rather, he believed that by **investing in local doctors, entrusting them with the latest tools and techniques** — then having those trained go on to train others — he could sustainably bring world-class cleft care to everyone in need every day of the year. He called it the “teach a man to fish” model.

More than 20 years later, the numbers prove him right. Since 1999, Charles’s revelation has brought **lifesaving cleft care to more than 1.5 million patients in need — more than every other cleft charity on earth combined.** And we’re just getting started. We will keep moving, keep innovating, keep teaching, keep healing, until the day we will fully realize our vision: **“A world where every person has access to high-quality comprehensive cleft care and is able to live a full and healthy life.”**

If the past year has taught me anything, it’s that while I don’t know what the future holds, there is one thing I do know for certain: We will reach that day because compassionate, committed people like you continue to believe children’s smiles are worth the investment. On behalf of our patients, healthcare partners, and teams around the world, thank you. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for believing in us and our model. **And most importantly, thank you for helping us change the world one smile at a time.**

With gratitude,



**Susannah Schaefer**  
President & Chief  
Executive Officer,  
Smile Train



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# Comprehensive Cleft Care



Smile Train knows that truly healing from a cleft **requires a holistic process that is as unique as each patient, not a one-off surgery.** That's why our model is a promise we make to every patient: We will be there for you with nutritional support, speech therapy, orthodontics, and all the other care you need for as long as you need it, because our donors know that children with clefts deserve no less than to always smile their best.

## Surgery

Experts agree that cleft lips should be treated within the first six months of a child's life, while cleft palates can be operated on between eight and 12 months. Most children with clefts will undergo a series of surgeries as they grow; depending on the severity of the cleft and other factors, **a child could have more than a dozen surgeries over their first 20 years.** Your generosity is how children around the world receive the cleft treatments they need at the time their doctors know is best for them, not according to arbitrary mission schedules.

## Nutrition Services

Difficulty feeding may be one of the most critical problems for babies with clefts. Before surgery, clefts can cause milk to dribble out the nose, leading to **choking and severe malnutrition.** Since **cleft surgery cannot be safely performed on an underweight child,** these problems compound without intervention and sometimes lead to death. This is why Smile Train invests so heavily in training and equipping local specialists to provide the lifesaving care these vulnerable children need to reach a healthy weight.

## Hearing

Clefts can negatively affect the drainage systems in the ears and throat, increasing the likelihood of ear infections. If left untreated, the **effects of chronic ear infections intensify, putting a child at great risk for severe hearing impairments, even deafness.** Smile Train is working hard to ensure children with clefts receive early treatment for ear infections and periodic hearing evaluations by an audiologist trained in caring for people with clefts.





## Speech

Children with clefts may start speaking later than their peers and may also sound hypernasal, making it difficult for them to be understood. Without timely treatment, they may **develop speech patterns that overcompensate for pronunciation errors, which can persist even after cleft surgery.** These issues can make a lasting impact upon a child's health and quality of life. Providing our patients the ongoing care they need to overcome speech challenges is thus essential to ensuring they can thrive.

## Dental & Orthodontics

Children with clefts are more likely to have misshapen, missing, or duplicate teeth and suffer from **tooth decay and gum disease.** Without preventative and ongoing care, these issues can cause pain, stress, and serious health problems. Yet, many Smile Train patients cannot consistently travel to receive this vital care, so we're ramping up our efforts to provide early evaluation by professionals familiar with their unique needs.

## Psychosocial Counseling

Research indicates that children with clefts are at a higher risk of psychosocial challenges. Even having **cleft surgery at an early age is often not enough to heal the long-term impact of being mocked and ostracized as a child.** In fact, recent research has found that having multiple surgeries between ages eight and 10 — the recommended range for many standard cleft treatments — correlates with anxiety and depression later in life. It is therefore essential that children with clefts, and their families, receive psychosocial support throughout early childhood and into adulthood.



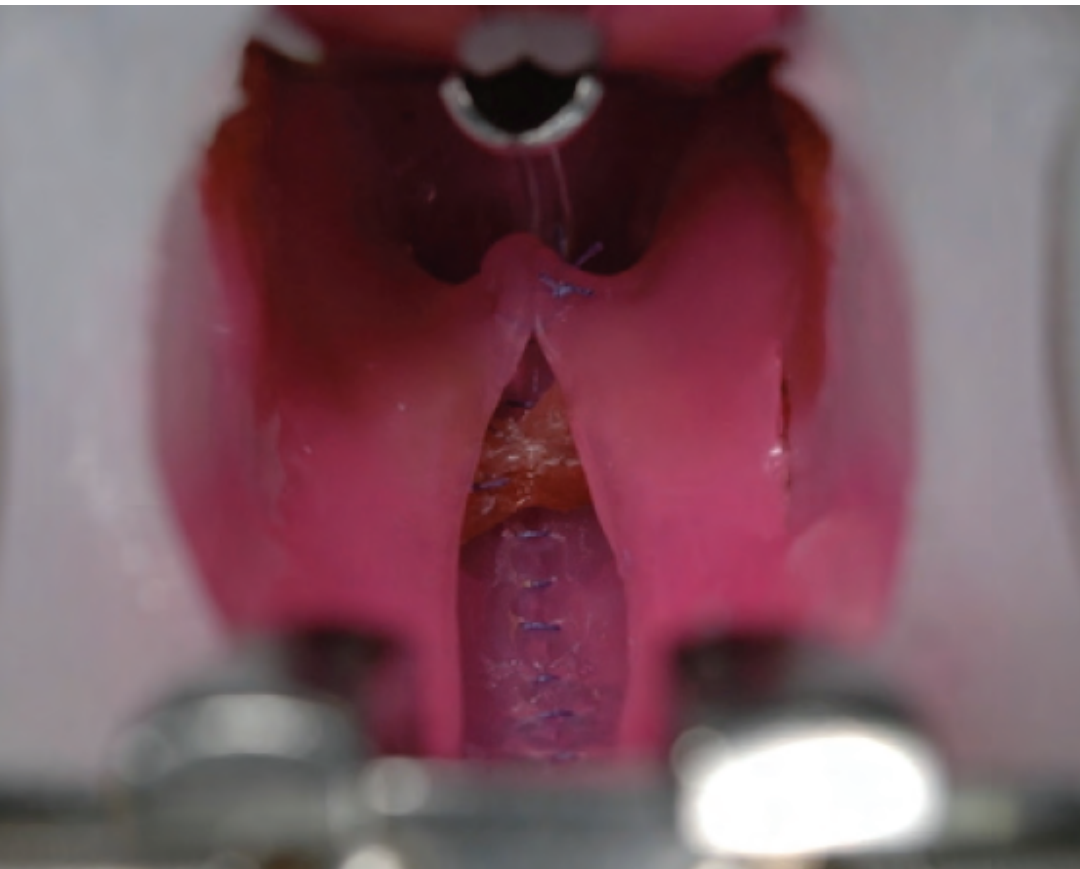
# Training and Education

Sustainability, innovation, and continuing education are at the heart of “teach a man to fish.” From virtual surgery simulators to nursing therapy, we empowered medical professionals around the world to provide year-round cleft care they would not otherwise be able to access.

Simulare Medical’s cleft simulators are the perfect example. In the medical community, **Simulare’s 3D-printed cleft simulators are renowned for providing hyper-realistic models that allow students to practice true-to-life surgical procedures outside of the operating room.** Surgeons who trained on these simulators have proven more prepared for the

challenges and nuances of real cleft surgery and achieve **demonstrably better outcomes for their patients.** That’s why, in November 2020, Smile Train acquired Simulare Medical. Surgeons and trainees around the globe will now always have access to the most effective cleft surgery training tools on earth at no cost to them.

And this represents just a tiny fraction of the more than **40,000 training opportunities you’ve made possible around the world since 1999.** Here’s to our next 80,000.





# COVID-19 Adaptation

At a time when other cleft organizations' operations were indefinitely suspended or severely cut back, Smile Train was able to keep moving thanks to our sustainable model, a worldwide network of experts, and the unwavering dedication of our donors.

Between March 2020 and April 2021, we distributed **more than \$2.5 million worth of personal protective equipment (PPE), handwashing facilities, masks for partners and patients, and essential medical equipment** such as pulse oximeters and non-contact thermometers. With many in-person medical services shut down, our model allowed us to still support our partners through the pandemic. Giving our partners what they needed to adapt on the fly, we helped them **deliver more than 27,000 telehealth appointments to more than 8,800 patients.**

Of course, not all cleft care can be delivered remotely. For this reason, we worked with the World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists and Lifebox to develop **the first COVID-19 Surgical Patient Checklist.** By outlining key infection prevention strategies, this tool made resuming surgeries safely possible, and has been translated into many languages.

Because you continued to believe in our model, our partners, and our patients, Smile Train was still able to deliver **84,000 safe cleft surgeries in more than 70 countries during this difficult year.**





# Impact Stories





Bhopal, India

# Rajesh: A Mother's Perspective

When Rajesh was born, that was the first time anyone in the family had ever seen a cleft. We worried that we couldn't afford the treatment he needed, so we immediately began researching solutions for families in our financial situation.

I have heard some heartbreaking stories of how other babies with clefts are rejected and worse, and I am very proud to say that did not happen in our family. Nearly everyone saw Rajesh as the perfect little baby he was, and we were especially relieved that his brothers and sister and friends played with him like any other child. A few neighbors did attribute his cleft to horrible superstitions, but my husband and I ignored them and focused on finding our son the care he needed.

We met Dr. Hari Singh Bisoniya at the District Hospital in Bhopal. He reassured us that, thanks to Smile Train, Rajesh would receive treatment for free. When we learned that the organization was run by gifts from strangers around the world, we could not believe it. **It is heartwarming to know that there are kind people out there who take care of others in need.**

I was still apprehensive about surgery — nothing can prepare a mother for the moment they take your baby out of your sight! That's why **I'll never forget how helpful and supportive the hospital staff was every step of the way.** You can't imagine the relief I felt when Rajesh's cleft was healed. That was more than six years ago. My baby is now a rambunctious fourth grader. We are confident he will live a good life, and we are **endlessly thankful for your bigheartedness.**











Limón Timote Camotan, Guatemala


## Mirian

In May of 2020, a rescue team from Smile Train partner Esperanza de Vida Rescue and Nutritional Center arrived in the village of Limón Timote Camotan, Guatemala. In a small adobe house, the team found Mirian. At one month old, she weighed just four pounds. **Like so many infants with clefts, Mirian's cleft lip and palate made it difficult for her to breastfeed despite her mother's best efforts.** "When I met Mirian, I was really alarmed. The little girl was in a severe state of malnutrition," said Alfredo, a social worker on the rescue team.

Mirian's mother, Modesta, was desperate, but the family's situation was precarious. Modesta was a single mother raising three kids, with no stable source of income. Even traveling far enough to find such specialized care was out of their reach — or so the family thought until Alfredo explained the services Esperanza de Vida offered: **Mirian would receive nutritional support until she was healthy enough for surgery, and it would all be 100% free, thanks to Smile Train's donors.**

Five months later, Mirian was ready to go home. The once-tiny infant had transformed into a happy, chubby baby whose laughter echoes through the hallways of Esperanza de Vida. Mirian's cleft journey will soon continue with surgery and on-going care — with you there to support her through it all.



 Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

# Mohammad

Mohammad was born with a cleft lip and palate in a small village in Myanmar in 1978. As a child, other children called him names and refused to play with him. He knew surgery was available in Yangon. However, as a member of the country's **Muslim Rohingya minority, the treatment was off-limits to him, along with all other healthcare.** So Mohammad learned to live with his cleft.

Then the attacks began. Mohammad's village was burned to the ground and many of his neighbors were arrested without cause, raped, and brutally massacred. The family fled in the middle of the night, cramming themselves into a tiny boat navigating a route along the rocky coast to neighboring Bangladesh. Countless Rohingya drowned during the harrowing journey, but, thankfully, he, his wife, eight children, and 85-year-old mother all reached the shores of Bangladesh in one piece. His family now shares **one cramped room in a refugee camp near Cox's Bazar, which is home to over 700,000 displaced Rohingya.**

Unfortunately, Mohammad and his family's struggles are far from over. Two things, however, give him hope. First, his children have a camp school to attend. Second, he was introduced to **local, Smile Train-supported nonprofits that connected him with the cleft surgery he waited more than 40 years for.** "I'm a little bit scared of surgery, but I am also very happy that I can finally receive treatment here," he said.







 Lima, Peru

## Gianna and Aurea

As the COVID-19 pandemic shut the world down in March of 2020, a new mother in Peru named Aurea was desperately trying to feed Gianna, her newborn with a cleft. Gianna's cleft made her choke on breast milk, and she was slowly wasting away. Despairing over her dying child but unable to leave quarantine, Aurea went online and discovered Mision Caritas Felices (MCF), a cleft center nearby.

When Aurea called, life at MCF was rapidly changing. With in-person medical services suspended, the center had to rebuild its cleft program overnight. **Fortunately, as a long-time Smile Train partner, they weren't alone.** With your support, MCF sent Aurea specialized feeding equipment and set up remote meetings so she could learn how to use it. Aurea also got connected with support groups and Gianna attended pre-surgical consultations. All remote — and all free.

And thanks to the **COVID-19 Surgical Patient Checklist Smile Train developed with the World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists and your support**, MCF was even able to safely give Gianna the cleft surgery she so needed while much of Latin America was still shut down.







Kaputungni, Kenya

## Maria

Maria was born with a cleft in rural Kenya in 1953. As a child, she was often ill and teased at every turn. She felt like the luckiest woman on earth when she met a man who loved her as she was, and luckier still when he asked her to marry him. Maria became a mother, then a grandmother, then a great-grandmother – all while living with an untreated cleft.

**Despite being surrounded by a loving family, Maria missed out on countless community events.** Other moms and grandmas didn't want her around because of her appearance. Maria accepted her fate, but never stopped dreaming of a life where she could play with her 16 great-grandchildren in public with no stares or whispers.

Then, at age 65, Maria met a health worker from Smile Train partner Icfem Dreamland Hospital, who offered her a cleft surgery at no cost to the family. Maria was skeptical. It seemed too good to be true, and her son David told her she was too old for surgery. But Maria knew she was strong. Full of resolve and dreams of a better life, she walked for two days to get to the hospital. Now, Maria smiles as she teaches her grandchildren and great-grandchildren that anything they dream can be possible. **“Thank you, Smile Train, for finally letting me smile at my beautiful family,”** she said.

# Smile Train Choirs

Even after surgery, children with clefts often need speech therapy to reach their full potential. **But what's even more healing than learning how to talk? Being encouraged to sing.**

In Smile Train Choirs run by our partners in Nigeria, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, patients sing, dance, laugh, and make friends with other cleft-affected children, all while also improving their speech, public speaking, and self-confidence. Though every choir is unique, each provides a place where children and parents alike are **welcomed and supported by peers who intimately understand their struggles.**

Besides supporting children through a long process of recovery, the choirs serve an additional purpose. Their concerts give the broader public an opportunity to see children with clefts thrive, thereby reducing social stigma.

**Smile Train Choirs began as part of our partners' standard speech therapy treatments, but in just a few years, they have already forged bonds between children and families and inspired smiles around the world.** In December 2020, in their biggest appearance yet, Smile Train UK showcased performances from Smile Train Choirs from across Latin America as part of its first virtual Christmas carol concert.





 Payson, Arizona, United States

# Knauss Family

Cindy Knauss-Konija and her brother, Bill Knauss, lead the Dalton and Elaine Knauss Foundation, created by their parents. **"Being a conduit for the Lord's work is important to our family,"** said Cindy. **"Through the foundation, we continue our family's legacy through our children and grandchildren, because that's what we are called to do."**

Though their foundation donates to many causes, giving to **Smile Train has been a particularly important — and personal — family tradition for the past 14 years.** "Our cousin was born with a cleft, and we knew we wanted to help others, especially those who could not afford care," Cindy explained.

In 2017, they found themselves with a unique opportunity to refer Smile Train services to another family halfway around the world. Cindy and Bill's aunt, Arlene, was in touch with a pastor in Kenya named David. **A family in his congregation had a child — Grace — who had been born with a cleft and her parents didn't know that free, high-quality cleft care was available.**

So the Knauss family took action, connecting Pastor David and Grace's family to Smile Train. Through our local partner, Grace's mother learned how to nurse her daughter so she could reach a healthy enough weight for surgery; months later, Grace was cleared for treatment. Although the Knauss family has never met Grace and her family in person, they were touched to have played a role in helping her. Said Cindy, "We're just happy we can just make a little bit of difference."





# Dr. Amanda Malungo

Working in a rural medical practice in Zambia, Dr. Amanda Malungo met patients — including babies with clefts — who required surgery but lacked access to specialist care. She refused to let these children suffer, so she went back to school to **specialize in plastic surgery even though there had never before been a female plastic surgeon in her country.**

At her training program, Dr. Malungo was inspired to apply for a Smile Train-sponsored fellowship at the University of Nairobi in Kenya after hearing about the organization from colleagues likewise interested in bringing specialist care to vulnerable communities.

Today, Dr. Malungo is a Smile Train partner and Zambia's first female plastic surgeon. However, her work is far from finished. Zambia needs more surgeons who have experience with complex cases. Healthcare workers face

shortages of essential equipment. More training in comprehensive cleft care is needed, including speech therapists and nutritionists. Dr. Malungo is aware of all these issues and is **working to establish her country's first center for comprehensive cleft care — yet another breakthrough for this trailblazer.**

When it opens, she wants to make sure **her staff includes plenty of other local female plastic surgeons.** “We need to reduce discrimination in workplaces and training programs by encouraging more female participation,” Dr. Malungo states. **“Only then can we make plastic surgery accessible to every patient who needs it.”**



# Global Reach





## SMILE TRAIN VISION

A world where everyone has access to safe, high-quality comprehensive cleft care and is able to live a full and healthy life.

**1,500,000+**

**cleft surgeries**


for people of all ages since our founding in 1999



**2,100+**

**trained medical professionals—**  
including surgeons, anesthesiologists,  
orthodontists, and nutritionists  
around the world



**540**   
**babies**

are born each day  
with a cleft

**1 Goal** 

to give every child with  
a cleft the opportunity for  
a full and healthy life

**1,100+**   
partner  
hospitals

**90+** **countries**  
where Smile Train has sponsored  
free cleft treatment

**Every 3 minutes** 

another baby is born with a cleft

**40,000+**  
training opportunities

**35**  
**countries**

where Smile Train  
offers essential  
non-surgical cleft  
care services





# Global Health Equity

Smile Train Cleft Leadership Centers (CLCs), launched in July 2021, represent one of our largest investments yet in building local medical capacity. CLCs will serve as regional hubs for cleft treatment, education, training, and research, presenting a **holistic, team-centered model of care that encompasses surgery, speech therapy, nutritional support, orthodontics, and more.** Equipped with the latest technology and staffed with some of the area's best-trained medical professionals, CLCs will serve as a resource for other cleft centers and ensure the highest standard of cleft care is available for all.

Currently, Smile Train CLCs are located in:

- Chile
- Brazil
- Mexico
- Ghana
- India
- Vietnam
- The Philippines

The impact of the CLCs will extend far beyond cleft care, strengthening health systems throughout their countries and regions. They are just one of the many ways that Smile Train, our global Medical Advisory Board, our local Medical Advisory Councils, and our partners are **strengthening health systems to make better care — and healthier, happier futures — possible everywhere we work.**

Over the next five years, Smile Train anticipates **establishing a total of 10 CLCs in low- and middle-income countries,** expanding our sustainable model of empowering local medical professionals to save the lives of individuals with clefts while supporting stronger, more resilient surgical systems throughout the globe.





# Thank You!

“There are few things more beautiful than a child’s smile; yet there are many children who are unable to smile because they are born with a cleft. **Today, Smile Train can support cleft treatment for hundreds of thousands of children all around Africa because of your generous donations.** Thank you so much for all you do to change the world one smile at a time. It is indeed a great honor to be of service to God and a blessing to humanity.

- **Mrs. Nk Obi**, Vice President & Regional Director, Africa

It is your generous donations that allow Smile Train’s staff and local partners to **engage and empower local healthcare workers to provide free and timely treatment for children with clefts.** You are the most deserving of our thanks and respect!

- **Dr. Shell Xue**, Senior Vice President and Regional Director, North Asia

From the bottom of my heart, and with love, I thank you for all you have done to make the world a better place. **You have changed the lives of so many babies and families forever, giving them back a future and dreams.** May the joy that you have given come back to bless you and your family.

- **Afaf Meky**, Executive Manager, United Arab Emirates



**49,000 children** are still waiting for their cleft surgeries because of the pandemic.

**Will you support them with a gift?**

Please scan to donate



[smiletrain.org/ir2021](https://smiletrain.org/ir2021)





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