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COVER: Mending 'Broken' Hearts

Photo exhibit chronicles children around the world whose lives have been saved by Israeli medical teams.

Ilene Wolff

Special to the Jewish News

A philanthropic program that mends children's hearts may be doing more to foster goodwill between Israel and other countries than any ambassador or peace talks ever could.

The program, Save a Child's Heart, is composed of volunteer Israeli doctors, nurses and support staff who have done heart surgery on children from 33 countries. Save a Child's Heart is documented in an international photo exhibit that will be on display 8 a.m.-8 p.m. March 13-31 near the entrance of the Suite 100 surgical area on the first floor of the South Tower at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Beaumont is the only Michigan stop for the show.

"The exhibition is designed to be displayed at Israeli embassies, consulates and cities around the world as part of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations and Save a Child's Heart's 13th year of operations," says Orli Gil, consul general of Israel to the Midwest United States. Stops on the tour include sites in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Brazil as well as Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.

Carla Schwartz, community affairs manager for Beaumont, says:

"These photos tell such a heartwarming, uplifting story. It is our hope that people in the community will visit our hospital to see the results of the work done by these dedicated Israeli men and women."

Sponsoring the exhibit in addition to Beaumont are the Israeli Consulate, Jewish Community Relations Council of Metropolitan Detroit and the Jewish National Fund. The Detroit Jewish News is the media sponsor.

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SACH's volunteer doctors, nurses and support staff have done heart surgery on children from 33 countries. Photos courtesy Save a Child's Heart

Most of the children travel to Israel for the surgery, while others undergo surgery in their home countries.

The Save a Child's Heart International Photography Exhibit will be on display 8 a.m.-8 p.m. March 13-31, at Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, first floor (near Suite 100), South Tower. For more information, call Carla Schwartz at

(248) 5... ; and for a sneak peek, go to

www.saveachildsheart.com/sach.htm.

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The exhibit consists of 45 photos that measure about 2 feet by 3 feet, mostly of the children whose hearts - and lives - have been saved.

"We really look on it as building bridges of peace," says David Litwack, U.S. executive director of Save a Child's Heart, who is based in Washington.

He cites a 2007 survey the organization conducted that showed Palestinians who had contact with Save a Child's Heart have a much more favorable attitude toward Israel.

Litwack says he hopes the exhibit will foster understanding of what Israeli citizens are doing to help children regardless of their nationality or ethnicity; highlight the need to support organizations like Save a Child's Heart; and increase the awareness of congenital heart disease in the developing world.

"Here in the United States, it's expensive but routinely treated," Litwack says. "In the developing world, it's a death sentence."

The exhibit will not only showcase a medical charity doing its finest work, it also may have the additional effect of countering negative publicity about Israel, says Ashley Israel of Farmington Hills.

"It lets people know that people from a hospital within the State of Israel are doing good deeds for children throughout the world," he says.

Ashley Israel, whose father oversees the London branch of Save a Child's Heart, held a local fundraiser for the organization several years ago and more recently flew to Israel to attend a fundraiser for the organization that was hosted by the British ambassador to Israel.

Allan Gale, associate director of the local Jewish Community Relations Council, made the photo exhibit available to Beaumont. Its reputation as a premier heart hospital, high visibility and central location make Beaumont an ideal location for the photo exhibit, he says.

More than 2,000 children from countries such as China, Moldova, Ethiopia, Jordan, Iraq, Haiti and Ecuador have been saved through Save a Child's Heart. Most of the children travel to Israel for the surgery, while others undergo surgery in their home countries by the Save a Child's Heart medical team who work with local medical personnel. Because of the varying conditions they find in infrastructure and staff, the medical team travels fully equipped for any possible situation.

In addition, medical staff conducts a weekly cardiology clinic for pre-screened Palestinian children, including ones from the West Bank and Gaza.

Photographers have joined the medical missions and photographed the children and their parents at the Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, Israel, where the children are treated, and the nearby Save a Child's Heart home in Azur, Israel, where the patients stay during treatment.

The organization was founded by Dr. Ami Cohen, formerly of the Wolfson Medical Center, in 1995. His first patients were two Ethiopian children who traveled to Israel for their surgeries. Even though the American-born Dr. Cohen died in 2001, his work continues.

Ilene Wolff is a member of the media relations staff at Beaumont Hospitals, Royal Oak.

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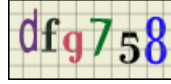
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