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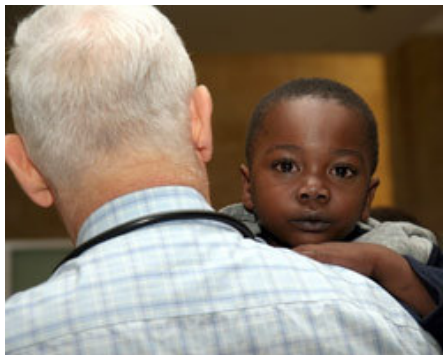
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Dalton Antonio Domingos, the first child from Angola to be operated on in Israel through the Save a Child's Heart charity, in the arms of an Israeli heart specialist at the Wolfson Medical Center in Holon (SACH)

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An Angolan - Israeli tale to warm hearts

By Esther Solomon

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Until this week, Dalton Antonio Domingos, a three year-old boy from Angola, had no future. Born with a congenital heart condition, his own country does not have the medical facilities to treat him. Fortunately for him, an Israel charity, Save a Child's Heart, stepped in to rescue him. The story of saving hearts, from Angola to Israel.

Until this week, Dalton Antonio Domingos was a three year-old boy with no future. Living in a poor district in the Kilamba Kiayi district of Angola, he suffers from a severe heart disease for which there are no treatment or operative facilities in his country. His parents - his father is a truck driver and his mother is a housekeeper - did not have the financial capability to see medical help elsewhere. Fortunately for him, this week he became the first Angolan child - and the 2000th child in total - to undergo life-saving heart surgery at the Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, as part of the unique work of the charity [Save a Child's Heart \(SACH\)](#).

SACH is an Israeli-based international humanitarian project providing heart surgery and follow-up care for children with life-threatening congenital cardiac conditions from developing countries. SACH's team of doctors, who work in a largely voluntarily capacity for the charity, usually go to developing countries themselves to find and examine candidates for surgery in Israel. So far, children from every part of the globe have been operated on at the Wolfson Medical Center (WMC), SACH's center of activities: from the Caribbean, Ecuador, China, Vietnam, Russia, the Ukraine, Ethiopia, Zanzibar, Congo and the Middle East.

Dalton's story was a bit different, as SACH had no on-the-ground team to examine candidates and no previous contact with Angola or the Angolan authorities. The Israeli business concern LR, which is active in Angola in various commercial fields including agriculture, and which also makes a point of assisting projects that aim at rehabilitating the country's society after its long drawn-out civil war, made contact with the charity. LR initiated and paid for the flights and

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for the treatment of three Angolan Children, of whom the most severely ill was Dalton.

The Israeli cardiologists - and the Angolan ambassador to Israel - waiting for the flight from Angola at Ben-Gurion Airport a week ago did not know exactly what to expect and in what condition the children would arrive. When Dalton arrived, accompanied by his mother, he couldn't stand on his own and his mother had to carry him. The doctors recognized that he would have to be taken straight to hospital. Surprisingly enough, after a few hours of treatment with a specific drug therapy, Dalton had already recovered his composure. Indeed the medical staff noted that he was a very playful, energetic, even cheeky little boy.

At the hospital the Angolan children and their parents have been helped by a translator fluent in Portuguese. The culture shock for the families has been mitigated by the fact that most of their time has been spent within the specific environment of the hospital. The children will stay in Israel for a month after their operations to recuperate and then go back to Angola. The follow-up care for these operations is generally minimal.

At the beginning of this year, two of Save a Child's Heart's young patients, this time from Gaza, hit the headlines when the Israeli authorities denied entry to family members to accompany them over the border to Israel and their life-saving surgery.

Television cameras [broadcast round the world](#) disturbing images of two-and-a-half-year-old Ahmed Samut, from Khan Yunis, and nine-and-a-half-year-old Sausan Jaafari, of Rafah, entering the Erez crossing alone, having been forced to separate from their weeping parents. Only one of the children's elderly uncles was allowed to accompany them.

This incident was especially galling as SACH has a strong focus on assisting children from the Palestinian Authority areas. One notable operation, towards the end of 2007, offered a more welcome portrait of cross-border cooperation for the sake of young lives. A team of Israeli and Palestinian doctors performed open-heart surgery on a 2 1/2 year-old girl from the West Bank village of Bidya. The operating team included Israeli and American surgeons, Palestinian anesthesiologists and a Moldovan and Chinese doctor.

Since 1996, the organisation has held a weekly cardiology clinic for Palestinian children from Gaza and the West Bank at the Wolfson Medical Center. Indeed, 45% of all of SACH's operations have been conducted on children from the PA, together with Jordan and Iraq.

In Dalton's case, SACH's efforts have certainly had the effect of burnishing Israel's image in southern Africa. His mother had never even heard of a place called Israel before the whole saga of her son's operation began. The charity now hopes to organise a proper expedition to Angola to host a clinic for children ill with cardiac disease, to offer treatment there and to recommend children for operations in Israel.

SACH's work shows that although the Jewish ethical saying that "saving a single

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life is like saving an entire world" is often over-used and abused, in this case, it is clearly justified.

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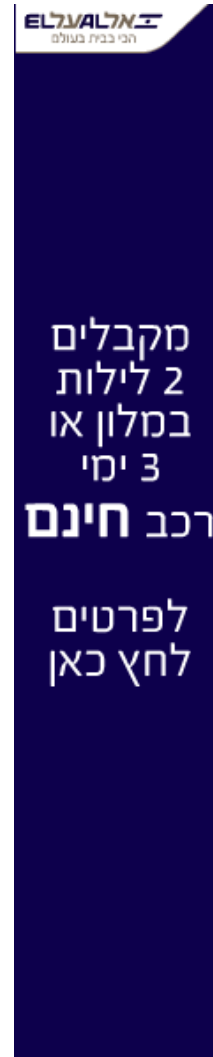
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