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hours waiting in the hospital, splashing in the kiddie-pool, the painful surgeries and the quick and sometimes not-so-quick recoveries, each child from ages seven months to 19 years, taught me compassion, love, strength and patience," says Pulver.

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Schachner says he receives unbelievable feedback from parents - especially from Palestinians, many who come with fear, hesitation, and little trust. "But the word is spreading about our qualifications," Schachner says with a big smile.

Schachner remembers in particular one mother from the Palestinian Territories. "She came with a lot of hate and prejudice, but now she knows our humanitarian mission and salutes to it and spreads the word," he says.

Kafif stresses that SACH is a non-governmental, non-political and non-religious organization. "In the end, however, it does help with conceptions of Israel - Iraqis are scared but when they come and see [Israel] is not the way they've been told, it helps to build bridges," Kafif says.

Most of the children treated by SACH are Palestinian. Schachner says that "when [the peace process] is in a disaster, SACH is the only thing moving forward - it is active all the time and paves the way to peace."

"It's a bridge-building activity; it does more than 1,000 diplomats working full time," Schachner said in a SACH special on Israeli TV. He explains that when a child from the PA is operated on, the whole village knows about it, and then questions are asked: can it not be better to have good relations and work to benefit humanity instead of destroying each other?

"Too often we ignore the humanity existing within and between our conflicting groups and focus exclusively on what divides us - checkpoints, sanctions, bombings and borders," Pulver remarks. "Thankfully, arbitrary struggles such as those are ignored for the health of children. As an Israeli organization, SACH representatively prioritizes life over seemingly immutable political tensions," Pulver says.

The SACH philosophy, according to Schachner, is "not just to operate on the children, because there are millions of children with congenital heart disease and you can't save them all, but also the second arm of SACH is to educate." SACH brings physicians from developing countries as fellows, nurses, and technicians, to educate them. "We give them tools so they can learn and be self contained and operate on people," Schachner says.

During medical missions to the developing countries, the doctors also follow up on children previously involved with SACH. Schachner describes the emotional response he receives from the parents. "The way they accept our delegation, the families are singing and dancing, waiting for us and greet us with 'Shalom,'" Schachner says.

Schachner believes that SACH helps bring hope to families in these developing nations. "We all know what it does to the families with children who have this heart disease - they're struggling for survival and they have to deal with the disease also," Schachner said. "When their child comes back from Israel safely, hope is growing for a better life."

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