

Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame Archive Project

Inception to Induction

Gift of Life, Inc.

“A Crusade of the Heart”

Year of Founding: 1975

Issue(s) Addressed: Promoting world peace while providing free medical service to children with heart disease and other heart related illnesses

Induction Category & Year: Health, 2007

Founder: Robert Donno

History: In 1974, the Manhasset Rotary Club, located on Long Island, NY, responded to a request to bring a five year old Ugandan girl to the United States for open heart surgery. In Uganda, surgery of this kind was not available and without it, she would not survive. The little girl underwent a very successful four hour-long open heart surgical procedure to close a hole between the two chambers of her heart. The Rotary Club was so touched by the story that they decided to make this a world-wide effort. This act of kindness sparked a worldwide mission to reach out to children in need of live saving heart surgery. The five year old little girl is now an adult who is an active member and supporter of the organization. She's not the only person who returned the kindness and care to the organization; many other children are involved and support Gift of Life.

Officially founded by Rotary District 7250 in 1975 as The Gift of Life, Inc., this is a non-profit, tax -exempt corporation whose Board of Directors and members comprise the Rotarian District. It has now become an international service program. Its purpose is to further the cause of world peace and understanding by facilitating free medical services and life saving surgery to children in third world countries suffering from congenital heart defects, and other similar illnesses, regardless of race, creed, gender, religion, or national origin. However, they do not help children in the US because there are other medical services and help available. In the fall of 2008, the Gift of Life celebrated their 10,000th life saving surgery. While this has been a milestone for the Rotary Club, healthcare professionals, and volunteers of the organization, the need for more help remains a constant struggle. For the future of the organization they are committed to continue saving lives of children with heart illnesses while promoting world peace. Indeed, the need for their help and services has dramatically increased.

Agency Mission: The organization's mission and motivation has not changed since the beginning. The main goal is to not let a child die because of heart disease or illnesses. They believe that once they save a child, that child grows up to become a very productive member of the community and an honest citizen.

Population Served: Gift of Life is a global organization that helps children in need. They aim to help children in third world countries where heart surgery cannot be done because of poor medical supplies. The Organization also focuses on the families that cannot otherwise afford this medical procedure.

Scope of Activities: The main challenge Gift of Life faces is to bring the patient to the United States. The United States Homeland security is very selective when it comes to giving visas for medical services. Once the child is in the United States, they are provided with all the tools they need to recover from the surgery. Gift of Life has worked with 14,000 children and confirmed that 10,000 lives were saved because of their services. That is the biggest and most honorable achievement any organization can achieve.

Volunteer Involvement: The most effective way to help the Gift of Life is to make donations so that the children around the world get the medical attention they desperately need. While medical professionals donate their time and skills and greatly reduce the cost, money is still needed for medical supplies, recovery and travel. The donations help cover the cost of these expenses. The most helpful volunteer is one who speaks the language the child speaks and be able to translate. The generosity of the community and open hearted citizens will allow children from a third-world country experience the kindness of others, so that they may grow up to be a compassionate adults. The organizations work to help the youngest and most vulnerable citizens, becoming vocal ambassadors and an inspiration around the world for the program.

Affiliate Organizations: Gift of Life Inc., is affiliated with the Hispanic Women's Club and the Rotary District 7250 of (Brooklyn, Queens and Nassau County of New York). Their support and effort has helped save over 10,000 young lives. They also affiliate with ethnic-based organizations. When these organizations work together, they reach out to more children who are in desperate need for help.

Funding Sources: The organization depends on donations. It is non-profit and therefore is tax-exempt. The main source of donations comes from the Rotary clubs, and ethnic-based organizations. Individual donations are accepted as well. The only paid member of the Great Neck branch is the Executive Director. All other members volunteer their time and effort for the cause. Gift of Life echoes the spirit of humanity and the people willing to make a sacrifice required to save another human being.

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