

## AMERICAN PHILANTHROPISTS ORGANIZE RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY FOR CHILDREN IN VIET NAM

*Hanoi (Vietnam) and Bellevue, Washington (USA) - June 15, 2012*

Greig Craft, president of the 'Asia Injury Prevention Foundation' in Viet Nam, and Son Michael Pham, founder and director of the charity organization 'Kids Without Borders' in Seattle, Washington, have organized a pilot project in Viet Nam. This project will offer groundbreaking genital reconstructive surgery for young boys and girls victim to either traumatic injury or birth malformation; and in some cases related to the harmful health effects associated with Agent Orange.

With the participation of internationally renowned surgeons, the operation will begin next week at the National Hospital of Pediatrics in Hanoi, Viet Nam. *"Aside from the transformational life-changing nature of these surgeries, we also intend to transfer the technology and train Vietnamese surgeons, who can then expand the program—that so many children now have the chance for the semblance of a normal childhood is truly miraculous."*, says Craft.

Craft's original motivation to pilot this project stems back to an event in 2006, relating to his involvement in the rescue of an infant abandoned at birth in the central highlands of Viet Nam. Animals devoured the newborn's genitals and his right leg (clear to the hip). Against all odds, the infant survived 72 hours in the wild before being found by a group of passing monks who rushed him to hospital by motorbike. Despite losing a substantial portion of his total blood volume, he survived. The monks named him Thien Nhan or 'Special Person', and as this shocking event captured the attention of the nation he quickly became known as the 'Miracle Baby'. Since then Craft has served as a godparent to the boy, who is now age five

Craft, Pham, and Tran Mai Anh, Thien Nhan's adoptive mother, have invested the last six years seeking potential rehabilitative treatment for the boy in the United States, Singapore, Thailand and Europe. Unfortunately, *"The only available medical solution for missing genitals is typically gender reassignment for males – almost always with negative medical and psychological results"*, says Son Michael.

In 2011, Craft, Pham and the mother learned that one of the world's most preeminent pediatric surgeons, Dr. Roberto DeCastro, of Bologna, Italy had developed revolutionary surgical techniques, termed genital phalloplasties. These surgical operations utilize an infant or toddlers lower abdomen to create genitals, which further develop as the child grows. Over the past eight years, DeCastro has performed 31 genital phalloplasties internationally, in regions including Latin America, Saudi Arabia, Europe and Bangladesh. Craft and Mai Anh sought out Dr. DeCastro's services and arranged for the child to have a genital phalloplastic surgery in January 2011 in Italy. The cost of the surgery itself was US\$60,000; this was paid for through the fundraising efforts of Pham, and his Kids Without Borders organization, who also played a key role in supporting the family throughout the process.

News of the successful operation quickly spread within Viet Nam and many poor Vietnamese families reached out for help. Astounded by the large number of cases, they decided to develop a pilot program in Viet Nam which coordinated relevant surgical training of Vietnamese physicians.

In 2011, the project was able to assist less than 10 families, however support for this initiative quickly grew and in 2012 over 120 different cases were identified throughout Viet Nam. Potential candidates for the surgery were examined and evaluated in Hanoi in August 2011. Ultimately, 26 children were selected for surgery, and received funding and support by Craft, Pham, friends and family, and other generous donors (who contributed \$50,000 for the first round of operations). Through their combined efforts, they were able to reduce the cost of the surgery to US\$1,500 per child.

The first round of surgeries was conducted in November 2011, by Dr. DeCastro, Dr. Emilio Merlini of Turin, Italy, and well-known Vietnamese-American surgeon Dr. Tue Dinh from the Institute for Reconstructive Surgery based out of The Methodist Hospitals (Weill Medical College of Cornell University) in Houston, Texas.

Together, Craft and Pham have arranged a second round of surgeries for 16 children, which will begin Monday, June 18<sup>th</sup> in Hanoi. Victims include those afflicted by genital loss from traumatic injury, penile agenesis, disorders of sexual development (DSD), congenital acquired defects, rudimentary micropenis and failed circumcisions from surgical complications or infection. It should also be noted that in young females the problem usually pertains to trauma of the perineum involving the vagina and urethra, or congenital effects such as the total absence of the vagina.

Furthermore, the team of surgeons has identified an additional 80 children in Hanoi, who will require surgery this week. It is their hope that additional funding can be secured to support a third surgical mission commencing in November. A legal US entity, titled the "Genital Reconstruction Program for Children" has also now been established with offices in Hanoi, Viet Nam and Bologna, Italy. Son Michael Pham comments that, *"Each of these cases is heartbreaking and unsettling. As a parent, this is one of the most unimaginable horrors that can be inflicted upon a child. We were not only capable of finding a solution for one child, but were also fortunate enough to devise a sustainable program that has the potential to help many more."*

Donations can be made via **PAYPAL.COM** to [joey.ingegneri@aipf-vietnam.org](mailto:joey.ingegneri@aipf-vietnam.org)

For additional details please contact:

Son Michael Pham at [smp@kidswithnoborders.org](mailto:smp@kidswithnoborders.org)

Daytime phone: 425-836-5354

For information on the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, visit: [www.asiainjury.org](http://www.asiainjury.org) .

For information on Kids Without Borders, visit: [www.kidswithnoborders.org](http://www.kidswithnoborders.org) .