

The Volunteer perspective

by David Lieberman, MD

“I am so grateful to be given the opportunity to make a difference.”

Dr. Quatela's passion for the HUGS foundation is infectious. I vividly remember the first time he spoke with me about his work abroad. His face lit up, he smiled and spoke about how meaningful it is to him to return year after year to treat children. That is what is important about HUGS. These trips mean something to each

person who participates – the volunteers, the patients, and the patients' families. Becoming a part of HUGS means joining something bigger than yourself and committing to a medical mission that is important on many levels. After that first conversation, I was hooked.

As Dr. Quatela's fellow, I had the opportunity to volunteer on all three of the missions in 2011: Antigua, Guatemala; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Quito, Ecuador. The overarching goal for each trip is the same: do the best work possible for each child we treat. However, each mission has its own nuances, challenges, and successes. For example, in November of 2011, HUGS made its inaugural trip to Vietnam. The team of world-renowned facial plastic surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and volunteers spent the week navigating a new hospital system, cultural differences, and a full range of congenital deformities.



That week was just the beginning of our commitment to the children in Vietnam. By the end of the week, the team was already coordinating a preliminary schedule for 2012. Each of the children and their families knew that they had become a part of HUGS and that Dr. Quatela's team was now committed to them and any others who are in need of help.

It is truly a second chance for the children to lead productive and happy lives.

Commitment is a key component of HUGS. During my year in Rochester, I've watched volunteers work tirelessly throughout the year preparing for each trip. By the time bags are unpacked, inventory is being gathered for the next trip and planning begins for the next mission. That dedication comes directly from each volunteer's passion for what HUGS stands for. Each surgery is not just a correction of a cosmetic deformity, but an opportunity for education and for acceptance. It is truly a second chance for the children to lead productive and happy lives. Working with HUGS has become one of the most meaningful components of my career. I am so grateful to be given the opportunity to make a difference.

DID YOU KNOW...

We have to transport every medical supply to each country we go to? On our last trip, we brought 1,100 pounds of equipment and supplies with us!

The *kid-to-kid* connection

HUGS wants to thank our special friends at the Cobblestone School! Students in Pia Cseri-Briones' Spanish class created unique get-well cards – written in Spanish – for our patients in Guatemala last spring.

The school also held a toy drive, collecting items like crayons, games, crafts, card games. They even made crafts, and card games for the children!

The cards were beautiful, the gifts were thoughtful, and our patients were very grateful to their new friends in the U.S.



Child reading his card from a Cobblestone student

