

*"If we can
heal the
suffering
children of
a nation
we may
go some way towards healing
the sufferings of that nation
itself"*



The quote comes from Lion Phil Nathan, now a Past International Director, speaking 11 years ago in the early months of a most remarkable partnership between the Lions of the British Isles and Ireland, LCIF and Child Advocacy International, a charity devoted to helping children whose health has been blighted by war.

As war raged throughout Bosnia/Herzegovina in 1995 the Lions and Child Advocacy began working together on a project to medivac critically ill children to the British Isles and Ireland to receive care which they could not get at home, where the medical infrastructure had been effectively destroyed, both physically with hospitals damaged beyond repair, and in terms of personnel, with doctors and nurses being unable to train and work.

Over the first year of the partnership 41 critically ill small children were brought to hospitals in MD105, and specialised care saved the lives of 39 of these children, who otherwise would have had no hope of survival. During convalescence most of the children stayed with Lions' families until they were fit enough to return home, care which also extended in many cases to the family member who had accompanied them.

Much of this early funding was raised by the Lions of the British Isles and Ireland through their own dedicated charity, 'Lions Clubs International – A Gift for Living', of which Lion Phil is Chairman, and late in that first year LCIF



children were brought to hospitals in MD105, and specialised care saved the lives of 39 of these children, who otherwise would have had no hope of survival. During convalescence most of the children stayed with Lions' families until they

donated a grant of \$75,000 to assist with the costs of evacuation and treatment.

A year later the Lions of MD105 requested, and received, a major catastrophe grant of \$250,000 to develop the paediatric intensive care units at the hospitals in East and West Mostar. The units were rebuilt, incubators and other equipment purchased and installed and staff at both hospitals received specialised training, some of it in England. Doctors and nurses from England, Ireland, and other countries donated their own time to travel to Bosnia to help train doctors and nurses and to befriend and encourage a demoralised local medical workforce.

With the facilities in Mostar working smoothly, which they do to this day, the partnership set its sights on Sarajevo, where, until the war, there had been an excellent and modern hospital.

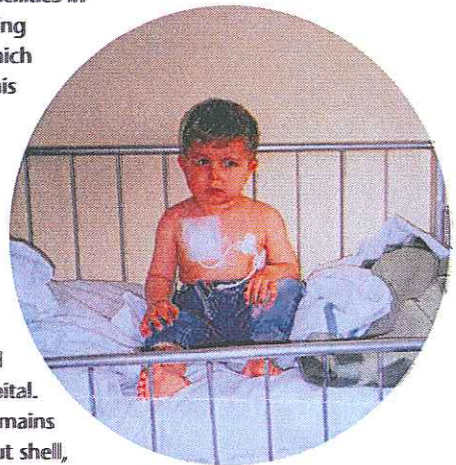
Today this remains a bombed out shell, overlooking the Olympic Park where the 1984 Winter Olympics were held. Near where the Olympic Ice rink stood are row upon row of graves of men, women and children who died in the 1400 day siege of Sarajevo.

Our mighty Foundation, LCIF, recognising the scale and value of the work of 'Gift for Living' in this war-damaged area, came into the picture once again in September 1997, approving a huge \$500,000 Major Catastrophe Grant to the Lions of MD105 to develop a Lions Intensive Care Unit for children at the Kosevo Hospital in Sarajevo. One year later a further grant of \$250,000 was approved, followed by another of nearly \$50,000 to complete the ICU and upgrade the nearby maternity unit where babies needing special, but not intensive, care are treated. On any single day almost all incubators and beds are full, with doctors and nurses treating sick infants, many of whom have made difficult journeys to Sarajevo for treatment.

Paediatrician Doctor Ismeta Beba of Sarajevo Hospital looks back to the bad old days, saying: "...you couldn't treat critically ill babies

...you couldn't incubate because we did not have a ventilator machine ...you could only

The Gift



of Lions

watch the patient dying and ask God to help them and you...’.

In the first five years after the ITU was opened, more than 1000 young lives were saved, says Doctor Beba. “You cannot imagine how all us working in the unit feel after we help a child to survive and go home”.

In addition to this work in Sarajevo Lions grants and fund-raising in MD105 provided training in Bosnia and abroad for medical staff. Doctors and nurses from MD105 spent long periods in the hospital and elsewhere training Bosnian doctors and nurses from other hospitals the simple – but hugely effective – Advanced Paediatric Life Support system.

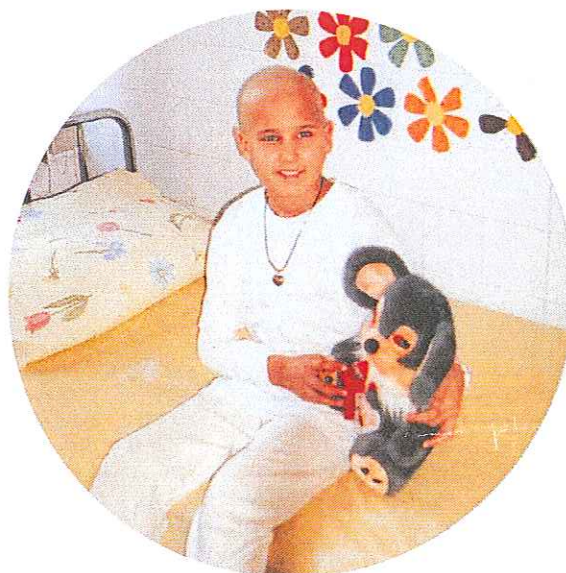
Yet another LCIF grant, this time for \$60,000, helped ‘Gift for Living’ to improve children’s hospital services in the city of Bihac and to create a mobile clinic in Gorazde, which monitored the health of children in the area. Simple literature on child health care was produced in the local languages and distributed and a small children’s unit was established in the Gorazde Hospital.

‘Gift for Living’ also provided support for the Sarajevo Blind School, which had been heavily damaged in the war and where a mass of land mines remained buried in the surroundings. This great danger to sight-impaired children was ameliorated by the provision of a strong fence to prevent the youngsters wandering into what had been their playground.

Much remains to be done. A culture of religious and ethnic divisions and mistrust does not evaporate overnight, but the support of Lions has lessened the effect of these divisions on children. An example is in Mostar, whose wonderful medieval bridge between East and West, sundered in the war, became a symbol of the troubles. A connecting bridge was hastily restored by military forces working in the area, and the beautiful ‘Stari Most’, the Old Bridge of Mostar, has been rebuilt and now stands proudly connecting the two parts of the city once again.

And a strong human bridge has been forged between the medical professionals on both sides of the river. The ‘invisible line’ where until recently few people crossed between the two sides and there were two separate school systems, police forces, postal systems and hospitals, has been breached. Says Doctor Tomica Bozic of the Intensive Care Unit in West Mostar, built and equipped with funds from the Lions: “Here we provide care for all children.”

The work never ends. At the present time the partnership is working to bring hope and health to children in the northern part of Bosnia, where there was little fighting and consequently little structural damage. But economic hardship brought its own problems to this area and in the Children’s Hospital in the city of Banja Luka conditions



are still very poor, with virtually no medical equipment bought in the last 15 years. Although the standards of medical training and expertise in Banja Luka remain high medical procedures which would be routine in other major Balkan centres are impossible.

The Lions of MD105 are currently fund-raising for basic equipment to remedy this situation, equipment to give oxygen, to keep very small babies warm, to resuscitate newborn babies and to help with neonatal life support which is either non-existent or seriously inadequate. LCIF has promised a matching grant of \$50,000 when funds are raised for this project.

Says Lion Phil Nathan, Chairman of ‘Lions Clubs International – a Gift for Living’: “Much remains to be done, but when we look back at completed projects we see that where there had been disorganisation and despair there are now modern medical units which are well staffed and providing effective care for seriously ill and injured children”.

Footnote: Editor Margaret gratefully acknowledges the contribution of writer Melitta J. Cutright of International Headquarters who saw the work of ‘Gift for Living’ on the ground. Some of this article is based on her story.

Medina’s story

This little girl, Medina, now a healthy 10-year-old, was brought to MD105 by ‘Lions Clubs International – A Gift for Living’ as a critically ill baby with little hope of survival. She travelled with her parents to Sarajevo to meet with International President Clem Kusiak when he was there at the time of World Sight Day. (Medina was presented with a bicycle as a gift as her mother had sold the girl’s bike in order to buy food for her family. International President Clem did the honours).

