



Interplast[®]
Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives
in the Asia Pacific region



Funding Patient Surgeries in Tonga, 2021-2022

Changing Futures Together

District 9920 and Interplast have worked together to provide essential patient care, and help build vocational expertise, in developing nations in the Pacific for many years.

This year, Interplast has asked for our help to fund Plastic and Reconstructive surgeries for patients in Tonga.

The goal is to raise \$15,750 to fund 15 Plastic and Reconstructive surgeries for patients in Tonga, who otherwise would not be able to afford desperately needed surgical care.

Tonga is a constitutional monarchy in the South Pacific Islands and is also a part of District 9920.

- The Tonga archipelago's total surface area is about 750 square kilometres, scattered over 700,000 square kilometres of the southern Pacific Ocean.
- It comprises more than 170 islands, many uninhabited, most lined in white beaches and coral reefs and covered with tropical rainforest.
- The main island, Tongatapu, is home to the capital of Nuku'alofa, and is where 70% of the total population of 104,494 lives.
- The poverty rate in Tonga is approximately 22%; in other words, one out of every five Tongans lives below the poverty line. Among the eight nations in the Pacific region, Tonga has the third lowest poverty rate, preceded only by Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Many Tongans living with painful, disfiguring and disabling conditions – such as cleft lips and palates, severe burns contractures, and tumours – are unable to access the surgical care that would restore body function, ongoing good health, and personal dignity.

Every \$1,050.00 raised by District 9920 Rotarians will enable an adult or a child to receive reconstructive surgery for a cleft palate, a cleft lip, an advanced tumour, or a release of a burns contracture. These are all surgeries that we take for granted in New Zealand, but in Tonga, patients often have to live with these disabling, disfiguring and painful conditions because they cannot afford the surgical care that they desperately need.

A key feature of all Interplast programs is the commitment to building sustainable medical outcomes for the communities Interplast serves, as well as the individual patients who are treated. Surgeries performed by in-country surgeons with the remote mentoring and training support of Interplast volunteer surgeons help to build capacity so that the next generation of Tongan patients won't have to live in pain, and with disability, caused by treatable congenital and accident-related conditions.

With your support, during the 2021-2022 program, 5 adults and 10 children will be able to access life-changing surgery, like little Andrew did 4 years.

Andrew's Story

When the Interplast volunteer surgical team met baby Andrew in Tonga in 2017, his life was in the balance.

A severe cleft lip and palate meant that the seven-month-old could not feed properly. "The milk goes in and comes straight back out," said Anaesthetist Dr Lian Pfitzner.

Andrew was malnourished, and his immune system was terribly weak. He was dehydrated and had suffered repeated bouts of gastroenteritis, with multiple trips to intensive care fighting life-threatening infections.

Without immediate attention, Andrew may not have survived.



Baby Andrew before his cleft lip surgery.

But his poor health also meant that by the time the Interplast team saw him, he had contracted conjunctivitis. Andrew was sent home for the weekend with a round of antibiotics. It was an anxious wait to see if he would be well enough for surgery.

Thankfully, after the weekend Andrew returned well enough for a successful operation to repair his cleft lip.

Dr Pfitzner said the change was remarkable. Before the surgery, Andrew was a hungry, grizzly baby; afterwards he was content, sleepy, and starting to feed better.

The impact on his mum was profound too. Before surgery she looked exhausted and anxious. Afterwards she was a different person - smiling, weeping tears of joy, and looking more relaxed and well.

But this was only the start of Andrew's journey back to full health. He needed time to grow and gain enough health and weight to cope with the next operation, to repair his cleft palate.

I will be delighted to share more about Interplast's work as a guest speaker in your club.

Donations to this project can be made via RNZWCS, which will issue NZ tax receipts.

Donations can be sent to:

- RNZWCS Limited (Rotary New Zealand)
PO Box 20309
Christchurch 8543
- Or by internet banking: Westpac RNZWCS Limited
Acct: 03 1702 0192208 01
Reference 404

- **When you make your donation, please email your Bank Transfer Advice, or copy of the cheque to: Shefali.Mehta@npdlship.com** This will help us to record your donation accurately.

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