

SAVE A CHILD'S HEART

Media Backgrounder

Founded in 1995, **Save a Child's Heart** is an Israel-based international humanitarian organization providing lifesaving pediatric cardiac care to children from countries where specialized treatment is limited or unavailable.

Save a Child's Heart treats children with congenital and rheumatic heart disease regardless of nationality, religion, gender, or economic status. Since its founding, the organization has treated more than **9,000 children from more than 75 countries** and evaluated more than **20,000 children worldwide**.

For many families, the journey to lifesaving treatment is also a journey of faith. Parents often arrive after months or years of uncertainty, praying for an answer and hoping their child will receive the care they cannot access at home. **Save a Child's Heart** works with patients, families, and medical professionals from many faith traditions, including **Christian parents and physicians whose faith shapes the way they experience medicine, service, hope, and healing**.

Save a Child's Heart's model combines direct medical treatment, international medical missions, and advanced training for healthcare professionals—saving children today while helping underserved countries build the expertise to treat future generations locally.

Key Facts at a Glance

Founded: 1995

Children Treated: More than 9,000

Children Examined and Evaluated: More than 20,000

Countries Reached: More than 75

Medical Professionals Trained: More than 170

International Surgical and Catheterization Missions: More than 130

Children Receiving Procedures Annually: More than 380

Primary Conditions Treated: Congenital and rheumatic heart disease

Age Range: Children under 18

Medical Operations: Israel

Guiding Principle: Lifesaving care without regard to nationality, religion, gender, or financial circumstances

The Global Need

Congenital heart disease is among the most common birth defects worldwide. Approximately **eight in every 1,000 children** are born with congenital heart disease each year.

In many low- and middle-income countries, treatable heart defects become life-threatening because pediatric cardiac specialists, surgical facilities, and affordable care are unavailable.

The need is especially acute in Africa, where approximately **500,000 babies are born with heart defects each year** and an estimated **90% lack access to the care they need**.

For parents, these statistics represent deeply personal crises. Families may spend years searching for treatment, living with the fear that their child's condition will worsen before help becomes available. **For many Christian families and families of other faiths, prayer becomes a source of strength, endurance, and hope while they wait for an answer.**

Common barriers include shortages of pediatric cardiac specialists, limited surgical infrastructure, high treatment costs, and a lack of advanced medical training.

How Save a Child's Heart Works

Pediatric Cardiac Treatment

Save a Child's Heart provides surgery, catheterization, and related cardiac care for children under 18.

More than **380 children annually** receive procedures through **Save a Child's Heart's** pediatric cardiac program in Israel. **Save a Child's Heart** coordinates medical care and provides support for children and accompanying caregivers throughout the treatment process.

Behind every procedure is a family hoping for another birthday, another school year, and another chance at life. Some parents describe their child's treatment as an **answer to prayer** after years of uncertainty.

Six-year-old **Victoria from Kenya**, for example, received lifesaving treatment after years of worry for her family. Her mother, Dorcus, described relying on her faith while

waiting for help: **“I always believed in God and held back tears, trusting that help would come. God answered my prayer.”**

Training Medical Professionals

Save a Child's Heart trains physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals from countries where pediatric cardiac expertise is limited.

More than **170 medical professionals** have participated in its training programs. **Save a Child's Heart** has helped train the first pediatric cardiac surgeons in **Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia**, along with members of their medical teams.

The physicians and medical professionals who participate come from diverse backgrounds and faith traditions, including **Christian doctors who see caring for children as both a medical calling and an expression of service to others.**

After completing their training, these medical professionals return home equipped to treat children locally, serve their communities, and strengthen their countries' healthcare systems.

Medical Missions Abroad

Save a Child's Heart sends volunteer medical teams to partner hospitals in underserved countries to screen patients, perform procedures, and train local medical professionals.

The organization has conducted more than **130 surgical and catheterization missions** internationally, including missions in Zambia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and South Sudan.

These missions often bring together medical professionals, families, and communities across national, cultural, and religious lines around a shared purpose: **giving critically ill children the chance to live.**

Building Sustainable Cardiac Care

A defining feature of **Save a Child's Heart's** model is its emphasis on long-term medical capacity.

Rather than relying solely on bringing children abroad for treatment, **Save a Child's Heart** trains doctors and medical teams who can return home, treat patients locally, and eventually train others.

For example, **Dr. Yayu Mekonnen** became Ethiopia's first pediatric cardiac surgeon after training with **Save a Child's Heart** and returned home to provide specialized care to Ethiopian children.

This approach creates a multiplier effect: One trained physician can potentially treat thousands of children over a career while helping develop the next generation of cardiac specialists.

For Christian physicians and other medical professionals motivated by faith, this model can also reflect a deeply held belief in **using one's gifts, training, and vocation in service to others**.

International Reach

Save a Child's Heart has worked with children and medical teams from more than **75 countries** across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and other regions.

Countries and territories where **Save a Child's Heart** has had significant involvement include Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Zanzibar, Gabon, Moldova, Myanmar, the Palestinian Authority, and Gaza.

Children are accepted based on medical need without regard to nationality, religion, gender, or financial circumstances.

Prior to October 7, **Save a Child's Heart** operated a weekly clinic for Palestinian children, screening approximately **20 to 25 children each week**. The organization continues to treat children from the West Bank and hopes to resume the weekly clinic when circumstances allow.

Faith, Compassion, and Humanitarian Service

Save a Child's Heart operates on the belief that a child's access to lifesaving medical care should not depend on birthplace, religion, or a family's ability to pay.

Its work reflects the Jewish principle of **tikkun olam**, commonly understood as a responsibility to help repair the world.

That commitment to compassionate service resonates across faith traditions. For Christian physicians, families, and supporters, **Save a Child's Heart's** work can also reflect familiar biblical values: **caring for children, serving neighbors, showing mercy, and using one's gifts to help those in need.**

For many families, medicine and faith are not opposing forces. Prayer may accompany the search for treatment. Faith may sustain parents during surgery. And gratitude to God may become part of how families understand a child's recovery.

Save a Child's Heart's work brings together people of different religions and nationalities around a common conviction: **Every child's life has value, and compassion can cross even the most difficult boundaries.**

Recognition and Credibility

In **2018**, **Save a Child's Heart** became the first Israeli organization to receive the **United Nations Population Award**.

Its humanitarian and global health work has also received recognition from the United States government, the European Union, and other international institutions.

Save a Child's Heart has been featured by major news organizations including **CNN** and **The New York Times**.

Media Resources and Story Angles

Save a Child's Heart can connect journalists with medical experts, organizational leaders and, when appropriate, patients and families for stories involving:

- **Faith under pressure:** How Christian parents rely on prayer while seeking lifesaving treatment for a critically ill child

- **“God answered my prayer”:** Families whose long search for medical help ended with lifesaving heart treatment
- **Christian physicians as healers and servants:** Doctors whose faith informs their commitment to caring for vulnerable children
- **Medicine as a calling:** Physicians using their expertise to serve children and families in countries with little or no access to specialized cardiac care
- The global shortage of pediatric cardiac care
- Children traveling internationally for lifesaving surgery
- Healthcare disparities in low- and middle-income countries
- Training Africa’s next generation of pediatric cardiac specialists
- **Faith across borders:** Christian, Muslim, and atheist families receiving care through the same humanitarian mission
- Palestinian children receiving pediatric cardiac treatment in Israel
- International medical missions combining surgery, training, and compassionate service
- Building sustainable healthcare infrastructure rather than long-term dependence
- Human stories involving children with congenital heart disease and the parents who fight for them
- **Prayer, hope, and medicine:** How faith can sustain families through diagnosis, surgery, and recovery
- **Compassion that transcends conflict:** Medicine as a bridge across national, political, and religious divides

For more information, visit healachildsheart.org.