

IMAHELPS

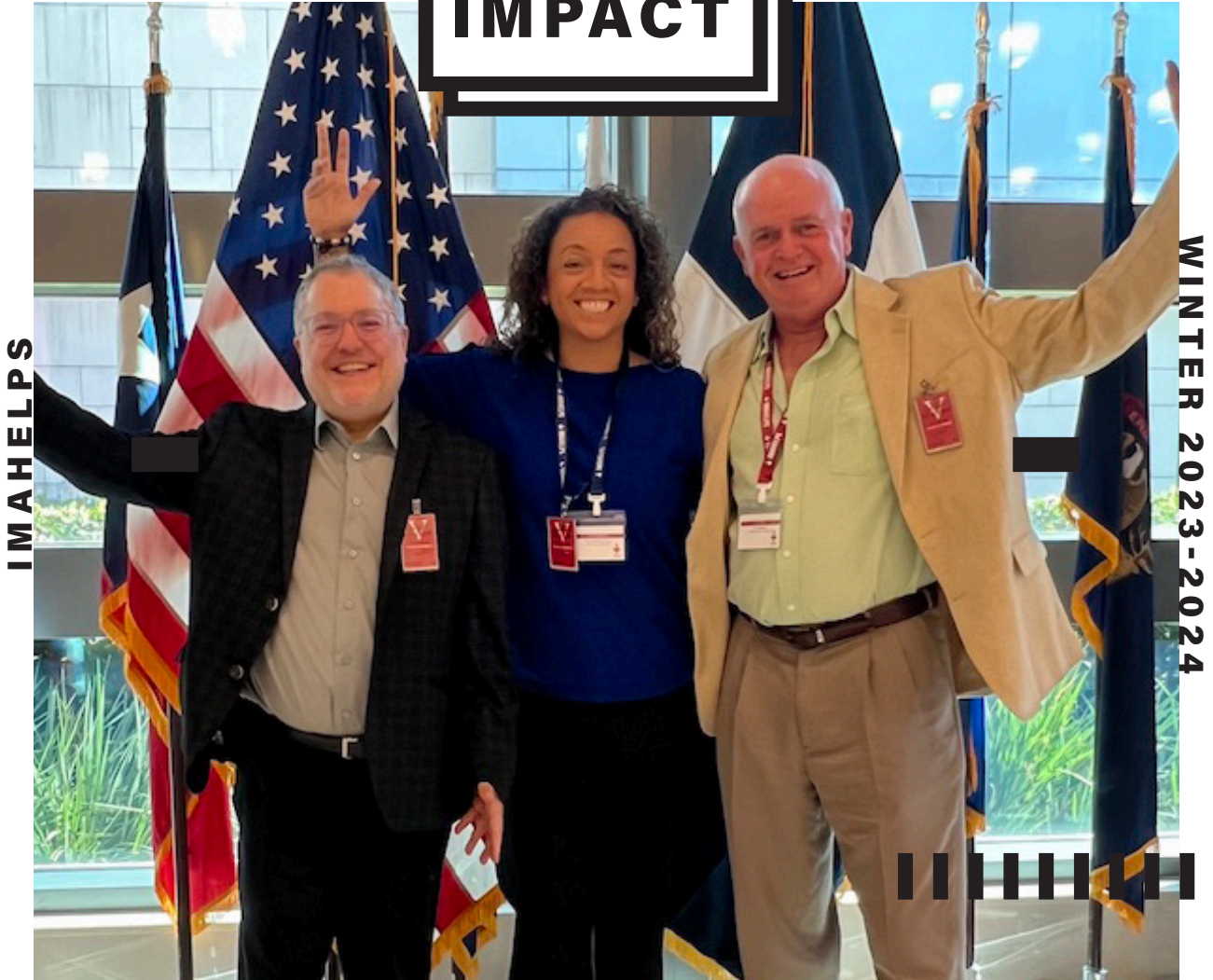
WINTER 2023-2024

Impact & Insight

Volunteer Voices, Prosthetic Progress, and
IMAHELPS in the Spotlight

By Jeff Crider

**MAKING
AN
IMPACT**



Welcome to the IMAHelps Newsletter

Join us as we journey through the heart of IMAHelps in our quarterly newsletter. Discover inspiring stories and the unwavering dedication of our volunteers, all echoing the essence of IMAHelps.

Stay connected with us as we share our mission of bringing hope and healing to those in need.

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*Designed by Annika Allen.
Photos courtesy of Jeff Crider & Angelo DiFusco.*



FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS

Voices of Change: How IMAHelps Missions Reshape Lives

As every IMAHelps volunteer knows, working on a medical mission can be as life-changing for our volunteers as it is for our patients.

But in the rush of taking care of patients, we don't always get a chance to learn how these missions have changed us, and continue to shape our lives, both personally and professionally.

With this in mind, we like to share first-person accounts from IMAHelps volunteers in each newsletter.

This newsletter features firsthand accounts from three of our volunteers, including David Bell, a medical student who joined us for the first time last summer in Quito, Ecuador; Dr. Miko Tuico, our pharmacist, who has been volunteering with us since our 2019 mission to Luque, Paraguay; and Jennifer Padilla, our Acting Chief Operating Officer, who has quickly risen through the ranks since her first mission with us in Matagalpa, Nicaragua in 2016.

Here are their stories:





**A PERSPECTIVE FROM
A PRE-MEDICAL
STUDENT
BY DAVID BELL**

In 2023 I had an opportunity to join my dad, an orthopedic surgeon, on the IMAHelps mission to Quito, Ecuador.

Upon our arrival in Quito, I was greeted by a mix of nerves and excitement. As a pre-medical student, the prospect of working alongside experienced healthcare professionals, current medical students, and fellow volunteers was thrilling, but I was a bit anxious as I didn't have any medical skills to offer. Yet, the friendly welcome from the IMAHelps team quickly dissolved any apprehension. Upon hearing that I wanted to apply to medical school, Dr. Barrios immediately introduced me to his

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medical students who had accompanied the team with the goal of carrying out research to identify ways to further improve future missions. They extended a warm welcome and openly shared valuable advice right from the start. Everyone was so kind and welcoming, I felt an immediate sense of camaraderie and belonging.

Throughout our time in Quito, every day unfolded as an incredible experience. I was so fortunate to be able to witness the profound impact of the collective efforts of the team. From medical consultations to surgeries, dental procedures, distributing medications and providing prosthetics, the dedication and compassion exhibited by each volunteer were awe-inspiring. The generosity of spirit was palpable, with everyone driven by a shared commitment to alleviating the healthcare challenges faced by the local community.

“ As a support member, I had the unique opportunity to navigate the bustling environment and observe the diverse array of medical services being provided. The tireless efforts of the team day in and day out was admirable. Each day presented a new set of challenges, which were met with resilience and a collective determination to make a difference. ”



The dental team had to work around poor electrical wiring and equipment issues. The prosthetics team used what they could to mold and fit prosthetics that weren't an exact match, and the surgical teams had to deal with limited equipment and supplies. Everyone worked incredibly hard to make the best of the limited resources that were at their disposal in order to provide the highest quality care that they could for the hundreds of people that showed up each day.

Another incredible aspect of the mission was the overwhelming kindness and friendliness of the local people. While waiting for their

turn to be seen by the medical professionals, many would converse with us, asking where we were from, how we spent our days at home, and what brought us to Quito. Many in the community who were simply passing by would also stop to chat with us and thanked us warmly for our efforts.

One of the best parts of the trip was befriending the local security guards who became invaluable in helping me overcome language barriers. One of the guards, Will, would help work with me each day and teach me the local idioms and word variations of their dialect. He not only helped with translations, but he also helped explain and deepen our understanding of the local culture. I am incredibly fortunate to have made that friendship.

The warmth of the IMAHelps team, the dedication of the volunteers, and the resilience of the local community left a lasting impression that I won't

soon forget. It was such a joy and honor to be able to work alongside so many wonderful people. As a pre-medical student, I aspire to follow these incredible role models by making a commitment to a future in healthcare characterized by compassion, resourcefulness, and a global perspective. The hardest part of this trip was saying goodbye to everyone at the end. But I look forward to be able to work with this amazing team again this summer in the Dominican Republic.





While many IMAHelps volunteers have roots in Latin America, mine stretch back to Asia. My life, deeply rooted in the vibrant cultures of both California and the Philippines, has always been a blend of two worlds. I was born in LA, but was raised in the Philippines, where I finished my studies. My parents had sacrificed being away from us, working in the U.S., so that my sisters and I could live more comfortably and have more opportunities to pursue our academic development overseas.

Of course, a price came with that, too. I often joke that I was a mother of three at the age of 15. I was the guardian of my younger sisters, but our wonderful nanny helped take care of us, too. We also had our aunt who would serve as our guardian.

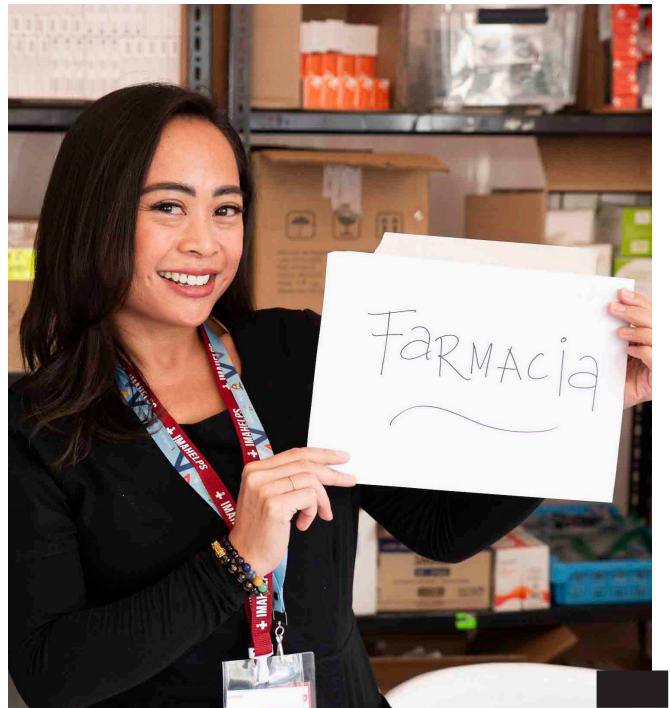
But I was the one who was kind of a mom for the longest time. Hence, I'm a late bloomer and just beginning to enjoy life now. I am also beginning to recognize the full scope of who I am and what what I am really meant to do.



“ After years of hard work, I finally achieved my dream of becoming a clinical pharmacist at Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs. Yet, something was missing. Amidst the routine of my professional life, and being with friends and family, I yearned for something more, something that would reignite the spark within me, something to bring back the same zest for life that I had before. I guess when you get to the place you’ve been trying to reach for so long, the question becomes, “What comes next?” I reached a plateau and, honestly, felt kind of stuck. The worst feeling is to have everything to feel grateful for, but still feel empty inside. ”

I had to snap out of it and find purpose. If I couldn't find it within myself, the answer was to look outwards, so I thought maybe helping others and volunteering my time would be a good way to do this.

The opportunity came in the most unexpected way. A casual



conversation at the hospital led me to Dr. Todd Swenning, who introduced me to IMAHelps. Browsing through their website, I was surprised to see a familiar face — Jeff, from my Salsa class! I know him! “Ooh,” I thought to myself. “This is going to be fun!” This coincidence felt like a sign, and with a mixture of excitement and anticipation, I decided to pack my bags, hop on a plane, and join the IMAHelps on their 2019 mission to Luque, Paraguay, a part of the world I had never visited before.

Embarking on this journey was like stepping into a new chapter of my life. Paraguay was nothing like the clinical settings I was used to. In the U.S., my work day mostly consisted of talking to doctors and nurses in the hospital with limited interaction with patients.

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As “the” pharmacist for the IMAHelps team in Paraguay, I was now in the heart of a community, directly engaging with hundreds of patients each day, navigating through language barriers, and experiencing the rich local culture. It was absolutely a different ballgame now! Challenging, yet exhilarating. Thank goodness for “Duolingo,” and especially our wonderful interpreters who were an integral part of my journey. The days were long and demanding, but my sense of fulfillment at the end of each day was like nothing I had felt before. Being able to make a small difference meant the world to me. I was finding purpose through my compassion.

“Back home, I had been struggling with a sense of stagnation, watching my peers move forward with their lives while I searched for what truly inspired me. This mission trip with IMAHelps was my answer. It taught me that true fulfillment comes from stepping out of your comfort zone and making a difference in the lives of others. ”

The camaraderie among the volunteers, the gratitude in the eyes of the patients we helped, and the shared commitment to a cause greater than ourselves transformed every challenge into a moment of growth. One of my favorite parts of the experience was the evenings where we would unwind, share stories, and dance.

As the mission came to a close, I realized that this experience was more than just a volunteer opportunity. It was a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Saying goodbye felt like leaving summer camp, with promises to stay in touch and hopes to reunite with friends on future missions.

“Reflecting on my time with IMAHelps, I understand now that the path to finding your purpose may not always be clear, but it’s filled with moments that challenge you, change you, and ultimately lead you to where you’re meant to be. ”

My first mission to Paraguay was just the beginning of my journey with IMAHelps. I look forward to our next trip in the land of bachata – the Dominican Republic.



**HOW IMAHELPS HELPED
ME FIND MY CALLING
BY JENNIFER PADILLA, EMT**



I started volunteering with IMAHelps in Matagalpa, Nicaragua in 2016. I had never even heard of Matagalpa, nor had I ever volunteered on a medical mission before. I didn't realize this experience was about to change my life.

The dirt road leading up to where we had set up for the week was full of masses of people. In fact, the line of people waiting to be treated was longer than I could see.

We were warned that we would be seeing approximately 650 to 800 patients a day. I couldn't imagine such numbers. Up until then, I had worked as an EMT in the Emergency Department at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, where we maybe treated around 200 patients in a 24-hour period. Being told we would see almost four times that many was just unimaginable. I had no concept of what I was about to encounter and how this would change my life.

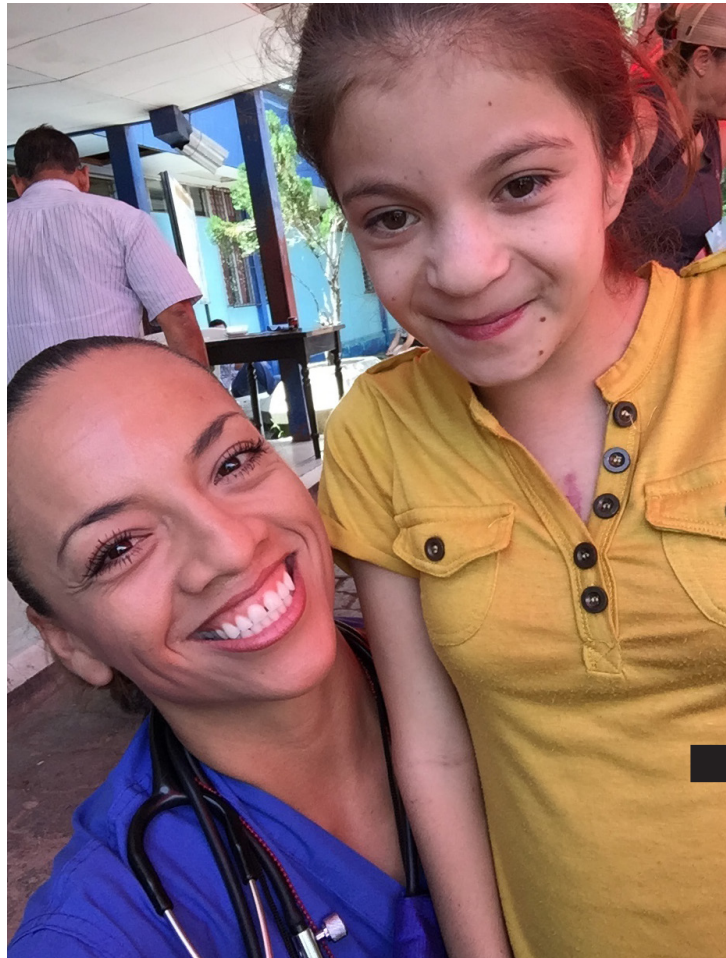
My assignment was to organize and run the front end or triage area, which is where we take patients' vitals, find out what they need and direct them to waiting areas where they could eventually receive examinations and treatment from our team. I quickly learned that if I was going to get

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anywhere with organizing all these patients, I had to walk the line of people who had traveled for days to see us and figure out who needed to see which physician. Day One was a blur. The sheer numbers of patients we had to get through was so overwhelming.

“ It was the second day that changed me forever. As we arrived that morning, the line of people that had been standing outside waiting for us seemed to be longer and wider than the line we faced the first day. Word had spread that we would be there for the week, providing free medical care to anyone who asked for it. Some of the patients had no shoes. ”

They had traveled hours by bus or some sort of public transport and walked for hours to see us. They came from all sorts of remote villages. Some of them had never received any sort of medical care before. Our team included pediatricians, cardiologists, surgeons,



family medicine doctors, nurses, and interpreters.

I set my bag down and got to work. Making my way through the line, sifting through all the patients, trying to figure out what their needs were and who would be best to treat them.

All of a sudden, I hear a woman softly say “Necesito ayuda (I need help).” As I turn to figure out who this could be, I lock eyes with a young lady who couldn’t have been more than 24 herself. She looked lost, scared and desperate. She reached from underneath her sash and placed a tiny baby in my arms. His body was limp, taking fast, shallow breaths. His body seemed lifeless. I immediately



realized I was not in my normal environment. Back home, I would have known exactly what to do. In the hospital in Matagalpa, there were no oxygen outlets in the walls, no IV line setups, no oxygen tanks nearby. I couldn't just call the respiratory therapist for help. We didn't even have a gurney for me to lay him on.

Our pediatricians had set up in the long outdoor corridor that was lined with hundreds of patients. I walked fast, holding the baby's head to attempt to help him breathe a little better, while feeling for a pulse. I was simply trying to get him to one of the doctors. He was, in fact, a baby boy born prematurely and had down syndrome. He had been having trouble swallowing and handling his secretions. I suctioned him, gave him oxygen, positioned his head. He hadn't been eating because he wasn't able to handle his secretions.

The baby's young mother had traveled for two days and had walked for hours to reach us from the small village she lived in. This was her first child. She had no idea what down syndrome was or how to help her beautiful baby boy. The father had abandoned them after realizing his first-born son was not "normal."

I don't know whatever happened to this beautiful baby boy. I had done all I could do. I made sure he was breathing, positioned his head, suctioned his secretions, and handed him over to our pediatrician so

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that she could somehow help him. I had hundreds of patients waiting, hundreds more that needed our help.

We had set up outside of Matagalpa's small hospital, which could maybe handle 100 patients. The hospital was mostly outdoors, the paint peeled off the outdoor corridors, there were clothes lines hanging outside each patient room. Every patient had to bring and wash their own linens, if they had any linens to spare, since rural hospitals in Nicaragua do not typically provide fresh linens for their patients. Patients washed them by hand and hung them to dry. Patients also had to pay for all of the medications they would be given during their hospital stay as well as any other supplies that were needed.

There were anywhere from three to five patients in each hospital room. There was no central air or heat. I had never seen anything like this. Day in and day out, we saw hundreds of patients. We would arrive at the hospital a little earlier each day, hoping that would give us more time to work. But every day when we arrived, the lines of people were longer and longer.

" The volunteers that come on our missions are



the most dedicated health care professionals one could ever hope to meet. They get up early. They skip breaks. They often ask to stay longer, if only to see just one more patient, to do one more surgery, or to teach one more patient how to take their blood pressure or how to use their new prosthetic. "

The reason I go on

these medical missions and am a part of IMAhelps has NOT ONE THING to do with me. But it has everything to do with the people that travel hours and days by bus, by foot by any means possible to get to where we set up. It is about the barefoot 54-year-old man that had traveled hours using the only change he had for the next two weeks to see our team. He told us about how he had once been told he probably had diabetes, but he had no money or means to treat it and didn't really understand how diabetes could affect his life. We briefed him on the symptoms of diabetes, gave him a glucose meter, taught him how to take his sugars and told him why it was important to manage the disease. At the end of my day, when I got back on the bus that would take us back to our hotel, I saw the same man walking down a long dirt road, still barefoot. I asked the bus driver to stop. I took off my tennis shoes and lowered them down from the bus window I was sitting by. We looked to be about the same size. I gave him my shoes.

“ These trips aren't about what I do or or who I am. They are about every single person I have come in contact with that has changed me forever. ”



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I'm thinking of the 22-year-old young man that had been brought to us laying on a blanket on the bed of his neighbor's truck. He had been paralyzed from the neck down for a year after a horrific car accident. He hadn't left his home in almost a year because he didn't have the means for a wheelchair and because the foley catheter he was given had now become a part of him. He was too embarrassed to be seen with a catheter. We gave him a leg bag, taught him how he could hide it in his pant leg, and showed his family how to transfer him into the new wheelchair we gave them so that they could take him outside or wherever he needed to go.

I'll always remember the mother we met at the end of our 2017 mission to Itaiguá, Paraguay, pleading for our help to fix her five-year-old son's leg. Mauricio had club feet, which prevented him from being able to walk and play soccer with his friends, which was all he wanted to do. We felt the pain of having to tell her



“no” because we had simply run out of time. She had come too late for us to help her son.

Fortunately, Mauricio’s mother found us again two years later in Luque, Paraguay, only this time she showed up on the first day of our mission. This time I made sure Mauricio would be able to see Dr. Todd Swenning, our orthopedic surgeon from Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs, who repaired Mauricio’s leg, changing his life. On the last day of our mission, Mauricio’s mother found me among the crowd of hundreds of patients, looked at me and, without a word, gave me a huge hug and cried. I didn’t need to hear her words. I could feel them.

It is only by the grace of God that I was born on the northern side of U.S.-Mexico border. Countless times I have wondered why am I one of the lucky few. I am a first generation born Mexican-American. My father is one of 9 children and my mother one of 12. Both born into poverty in Mexico City, my father traveled up through Mexico during the 1970’s by bus and train and made it all the way to one of the border towns. There, he served his two years of military service and obtained a student visa to come to the United States. He worked in restaurants and car shops, anywhere he could find work. He went to a local community college where he started taking English and general education classes, one night class at a time.

My mother followed her family up through Mexico at the age of 16 where they worked the fields and picked crops during every season. Both of my parents are now legal American citizens. My father is now about to retire as a Registered Nurse in the OR and has spent his entire nursing career of over 30 years



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working side by side with the cardiac team doing open heart surgeries. My mother has worked her entire life as well.

I remember summers going back to visit my parents' family in Mexico City and seeing where and how they grew up. I witnessed first hand the one-room shack with dirt floors that my parents and all their siblings slept in and grew up in. I am beyond privileged and blessed to have the opportunity to be able to be a part of IMAhelps and our medical missions. It is in each and every one of the countries we go and the people we try to help that I see my very own family, people just like me.

I bet if we took a poll of each and every IMAhelps volunteer, everyone would say that the heartfelt "thank yous" and good feelings we receive from simply helping our patients far outweighs what we could ever do for them. It is through our medical mission work with IMAHelps that we see the value of our group isn't simply in our collective ability to help others. It's in our ability to break borders and walls so that our own humanity can break through. It is simply about what one human can do for another.

I am grateful to IMAHelps for allowing me to continue my passion to carry on what our founder, Ines Allen, started over 20 years ago. Thank you for allowing me to be your acting Chief Operating Officer and Mission Coordinator.

" Love is not a strong enough word to express how I feel about what I do with IMAhelps. I can't wait for our next mission in the Dominican Republic and to see how we can make a difference. "



An Update on Prosthetics in Ecuador



IMAHelps Delivers Mechanical Arms and Hands to Ecuadorian Amputees in Late January

IMAHelps delivered mechanical arms and hands to several patients in Ecuador in late January that were designed and produced by JonDarr V.T. Bradshaw and his high school robotics students at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio.

Prosthetics recipients included 29-year-old Jefferson Aguirre, who became a quadruple amputee last year after being electrocuted while cutting a pipe. Jefferson came to see the IMAHelps Team on the first day of our medical mission to Quito, Ecuador last August. Robert Openshaw, our longtime prosthetist, fitted Jefferson with legs and Gloria Soto-

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Reyes, our physical therapist, taught Jefferson how to walk on prosthetic limbs. Many of you will remember [the video](#) we took showing how happy Jefferson was on the last day of our mission when he was able to walk out of Calderón Hospital on his own with his wife by his side.

In late January, IMAHelps volunteers in Quito helped Jefferson try on his new mechanical hands and arms, which he was overjoyed to use, as you can see in [this video](#). Jefferson immediately asked if we could make additional refinements to his prosthetics, equipping his mechanical hands with fittings that would enable him to hold silverware so that he could feed himself on his own. We immediately called JonDarr Bradshaw with Jefferson's request and will send him modified prosthetics that will hopefully enable Jefferson to eat on his own.

Our next patient was Anubis Parede, a 9-year-old girl who lost half of her right arm and hand in a car crash at age 3. Anubis looked at her new arm and hand with wonder and was so happy, like a child on Christmas morning who received the present she always wanted. Anubis is seen in this video as she tried out her mechanical hand for the first time. She alternated between smiling and joking with our team by making an angry face and clenching her new fist, as you can see in this video. Her parents were elated to see their daughter with her new arm and hand.

IMAHelps also provided a new mechanical arm and hand for 14-year-old girl named Samantha Chiluisa Chango, who lost her left arm and the ability to use her right arm in a bus crash several years ago. As some of you will recall, IMAHelps and the Cleveland robotics team have provided Samantha with a couple of mechanical arms and hands over the past couple of years, making refinements and changes in design with Samantha's input.

Unfortunately, the latest hand we delivered for Samantha had too narrow of a space inside the cavity that Samantha's hand is meant to slip into. IMAHelps has partnered with robotics technicians in Quito



who are updating the computer files used to design Samantha's hand so that JonDarr Bradshaw and the robotics team can produce a larger hand that they can send to Samantha in a couple of months.

The robotics team is continuing to design and manufacture mechanical arms and hands for several other patients, include Gabriel Alonso Arboleda Cabeza, who suffered amputations of both arms after an electrical accident.

Gabriel is from the Esmeraldas area, near Ecuador's northwest coast. It is the poorest region of



Ecuador. A small team of IMAHelps volunteers traveled to the Esmeraldas area during the fall of 2022 to see if we should consider organizing a medical mission there, but we found their hospitals to be poorly equipped and we determined that the area overall was too dangerous for our team. However, the doctor who toured us through Esmeraldas kept in touch with us and referred Gabriel to our August medical mission in Quito, where the robotics team met him for the first time. "I want to be productive and get back to work," Gabriel told us, adding that he doesn't want to be burden to his mother, who is 74.

IMAHelps is grateful to be collaborating with JonDarr Bradshaw and his talented robotics students and mentors at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland. We will have some of Cleveland's robotics students and mentors joining us again this year during our July 25 to August 4 mission to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, where they plan to fit several additional child amputees with mechanical arms and hands.





IMAHHELPS IN THE NEWS

Local Volunteers With IMA-Helps Serve Those in Need Overseas

In our ongoing mission to make a significant impact on global health, our efforts and the selfless dedication of our volunteers have caught the attention of the media. We are proud to highlight a recent feature that showcases the incredible work being done by the IMAHelps team.

Discover the remarkable efforts of Coachella Valley volunteers with IMAHelps, reaching across borders to serve those in need. Highlighted by Palm Springs Life, this story captures the essence of IMAHelps through compassion, resilience, and the transformative impact on volunteers and communities alike. From establishing clinics in underserved areas to delivering vital medical services, learn about the profound difference our team makes worldwide.

Celebrate the extraordinary impact of our missions and the stories that inspire us to keep pushing forward.

► For the full story on our mission and its impact, visit [Palm Springs Life](#).

Please Share Your Thoughts With Us

The leadership of IMAHelps wants to be as responsive as possible to our volunteers and donors, which is why we actively publish quarterly newsletter to keep everyone up to date on our activities.

If you have an idea of an article you would like to see in a future newsletter, please email **Jeff Crider** at criderpublicrelations@gmail.com

If you have ideas on ways we could improve mission planning, outreach and fundraising, we'd love to hear your thoughts and suggestions. Below are names and emails for each of our volunteer staff and board members with their respective titles and areas of responsibility:

- **Dr. Cristobal Barrios, Jr., President and CEO:**
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**THANK
YOU**