



Operation Cleft started in September 2005 as a club project of the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central. It was initiated after a presentation by Colin Macfarlane AM prompted the club to sponsor 60 cleft repair operations in Bangladesh. Colin went to Lamb hospital to observe the program and returned to show club members photographs of the children before and after surgery. The incredible difference in children like Lija, one of our very first patients (pictured just 1 month after surgery), had such a profound effect on club members that they decided to develop the activity as an ongoing club project.



After ten years Operation Cleft is still going strong. Most of our eight surgeons have been with us from the beginning and between them have completed more than **10,000 cleft repair operations**. They are extremely proud of their achievements and of their association with Operation Cleft. They asked us to express their gratitude to all those who support this amazing project that enables them to utilise their professional skills to help underprivileged children in their country.



Whilst much economic progress has been made in Bangladesh over the past decade, it remains a low-income country with substantial deprivation and poverty. More than 45 million people, almost one-third of the population, live below the poverty line with the majority of these being in rural areas.

A child born with a cleft lip or palate in rural Bangladesh is very unlikely to have the surgery they need unless it is free and in a local hospital reasonably close to their village.

Our plastic surgeons travel extensively to offer their surgical skills at rural hospitals. This enables them to provide a service to local communities which, in the past, was only available to families who live in major cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, Jessore or Sylhet.

No child should have to suffer the humiliation and health issues associated with an untreated cleft regardless of where they live or their socio economic status.

### The changing faces of Operation Cleft



## From the chair

With daily reports of bad news, suffering and trouble across the globe, we often feel it is beyond us to make a difference in the world. Working with others through Rotary enables us to build a powerful force that can indeed make a difference.



Operation Cleft is a wonderful example of how working together has empowered us to significantly improve the lives of more than 10,000 children and their families. Providing the surgery they so desperately need has far reaching benefits with vast improvements in their health, education and social opportunities.

As we celebrate our tenth anniversary and the coinciding completion of ten thousand operations, it is gratifying to know that by pooling our efforts we can proudly say yes, we can and do make a difference.

I must take this opportunity to thank our surgical team who travel far and wide to take their healing skills to remote towns and villages across Bangladesh for, without them, there would be no Operation Cleft. I would also like to thank the many Rotary Clubs, Ambassadors, donors and volunteers who support the project. You should feel very proud that your generosity has contributed to the huge impact Operation Cleft has had on many thousands of underprivileged children and their families in Bangladesh.

There are still so many children needing our help. We must continue to combine our efforts to support this program which is one of the most cost effective and measurable of any of our Rotary projects. We are very proud of what we have achieved so far and with your continued support look optimistically forward to the next ten years and another 10,000 smiles.

Congratulations to everyone involved in helping Operation Cleft achieve this fantastic milestone. We urge you to continue your support and encourage others to get involved. Together we can make a difference.

**Vici Funnell**  
**Chair, Operation Cleft Australia**

## A stitch in time



To achieve the best results, our experts recommend that surgical repair of a cleft lip should ideally occur at around 3 months of age. If the patient also has a cleft palate, a second operation would be scheduled at around 9 months.

Completing the surgical repairs at this early age, allows the child's speech patterns to develop normally. They will also be spared many of the health issues that a cleft lip and palate can cause and will not be discouraged from attending school as they would have been if the condition remained untreated.

Whilst our surgeons operate on any person regardless of their age, over the years our focus has shifted to ensure that pre-natal education and cleft care information is widely available to promote the benefits of early intervention.

It is very encouraging to see that the majority of our patients are now under 2 years of age. Whilst many require more than one operation the repairs will be completed long before they reach school age. In a developing nation like Bangladesh, education is the catalyst to improved employment opportunities that ultimately will contribute to breaking the poverty cycle.

**Operation Cleft - not just a pretty face**

## Dispelling the myths

People frequently ask why so many of our young patients have the same black birth mark on their forehead. Well it is actually not a birth mark.

It is known as a bindi and is painted on by the parents.

Many cultures in South East Asian countries believe that people have a "third eye" which sees spiritual truths. This third eye is located on the forehead above and between the eyes. A bindi is drawn on with paint made from ash. Sometimes turmeric and lime are added to colour the ash red. Bindis are traditionally worn over the third eye by Hindu women to show their marital status. Young, unmarried women wear a black bindi and married women wear a bright red one.



Bindis are also believed to protect the wearer and make them strong. Many Bangladeshi mothers paint a black bindi on their child's forehead when they are sick or before they go into surgery. They believe that this will keep them safe and protect them from evil spirits.



## Across the sea to Ireland

After ten years and 10,000 smiles, Operation Cleft has become much more than a small club project. It has grown into a widely known and well respected Rotary project that is supported by many thousands of Rotarians, clubs, businesses and individuals from all parts of Australia and the world.



*Pictured above from left to right are members of the Rotary Club of Strabane Lifford, Ireland: John McCosker, Bill McCauley, Harry Friar, Maurice Simms and Paul Crawford and inset (right) President, Aodh McCay.*

Recently, our friends from the Rotary Club of Strabane Lifford in Ireland applied to their Rotary District, 1160 for a district grant to match funds that the club had raised to help children born with a cleft lip and/or palate in Bangladesh.

The grant, if approved, would contribute to funding the life changing cleft repair surgery that the children needed.

cont. on page 4



cont. from page 3

The Club's interest was piqued by member Bill McCauley who had seen stark images of young children with untreated clefts in a magazine. The difference that surgery could make to them and ultimately to their families motivated members to work hard to raise funds to help these children. Rotarian John McCosker took on the task of seeking a District grant which, if successful would double the amount of money the club had raised and subsequently the number of children that could be helped.



The grant was approved on the condition that implementation of the project was administered by a Rotary Club. John set about finding a club which met this criteria and after seeing Operation Cleft on the internet, contacted the General Manager. Club members were excited by the prospect of an Australian/Irish partnership and delighted when they discovered that the President of the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central (at the time), Don Sweeney, was formally from Glenties in County Donegal.

Is it the luck of the Irish that these passionate Rotarians found Operation Cleft or a testament to the incredible capacity of Rotary to make a real difference in the world? We believe it is both.



*Pictured above are children operated on at the first of two grant funded camps at Thakurgaon Bangladesh. While some mothers were relieved and overjoyed that the operation was over, others waited anxiously for staff to call their baby in for surgery.*

Thirty children had their cleft repaired at Prime Hospital, Thakurgaon and another twenty are scheduled to have surgery at Rangpur at the end of November. The President and members of the Rotary Club of Strabane Lifford are all very proud to see the results of their hard work. They are optimistic that news about the project will spread and encourage others in their local community to join them in changing the lives of underprivileged children born with a cleft lip and/or palate in Bangladesh. This partnership between two Rotary clubs on opposite sides of the world is a wonderful achievement and we would like to say a big thank you to all those involved in making it happen.

## Fact

A cleft lip and/or cleft palate is the most common birth defect in the world. On average, 1 in every 500-750 babies will be born with this condition. In developed countries, the surgical repair is done soon after birth with the cost covered under a public health scheme. 5,000 - 6,000 babies are born with a cleft each year in Bangladesh. Because the condition is not considered life threatening, surgical repair is not covered under their overburdened public health system.





# Shuvo Boro Din

Greetings for the festive season - (in Bangladeshi)  
Literally translated - Greetings of the Great Day.

Are you looking for a special gift for someone? You could make a donation that would give an underprivileged child in Bangladesh a "smile for life". That would be a very special gift.

If you send a donation to Operation Cleft of \$100 or more in lieu of a gift for family, friends or staff members, we will send you a tax deductible receipt (in your name) and a gift certificate of appreciation (in the nominated person's name).

1 year old Ismal (pictured left) is one of the lucky ones. Operation Cleft provided the surgery that repaired his unilateral cleft lip. The photo (right) was taken just 1 month after the operation and shows what an amazing difference your donation can make.



The aesthetic improvement, whilst wonderful, is nothing compared to the real difference that Operation Cleft makes to his life. Thanks to our supporters, he will never know the poor health, social stigma and illiteracy that plagues those who grow up with an untreated cleft.

*Your Christmas gift to a child like Ismal is priceless.*



## How can you help?

Would you like to help us give underprivileged children in Bangladesh a smile of their very own; one that they can keep forever and share generously with others?

- ◆ **Donations** may be made by completing the form on the back page or via our website using PayPal.
- ◆ **Schools** - Run a fundraising event. For some great ideas go to our web site at <http://operationcleft.org.au/want-to-help/schools/>
- ◆ **Rotary, Rotaract, Interact Clubs** - as part of your commitment to international service, consider making a club contribution to Operation Cleft.
- ◆ **Businesses** - Make a donation and/or encourage your staff to give a donation and match their contribution. All donations of \$2.00 or more are fully tax deductible in Australia.
- ◆ **District Governors** - Suggest your spouse nominate Operation Cleft as their project of choice in your year or consider nominating an Ambassador in your district if you don't already have one.
- ◆ **Accountants/Solicitors** - Suggest Operation Cleft to your clients as a worthy and reputable charity who have DGR (item 2) status.
- ◆ **Private Family Foundations (DGR item 1)** may contribute to Operation Cleft via the RAWCS website at [www.rawcs.com.au](http://www.rawcs.com.au) - project #64/2007-08



*No-one can do everything but everyone can do something*

A project of the  
**Rotary**  
Club of Box Hill Central 



## Your gift

You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you

*John Bunyan circa 1660*



## The cost

Operation Cleft keeps costs to a minimum.

**\$300** will give an underprivileged child in Bangladesh a

**"a smile for life"**

*(All figures quoted in Australian dollars).*

To make a donation, complete the form below

For more details go to [www.operationcleft.org.au](http://www.operationcleft.org.au)

I/we would like to make a donation  \*monthly  \*quarterly  \*Please tick your preferred donation method

*\* If ticked, the amount indicated below will be charged to your credit card each month or quarter until you terminate the request.*

Credit card donations may also be made via PayPal, (our secure online payment facility) - visit [www.operationcleft.org.au](http://www.operationcleft.org.au)

\$300 for cleft repair surgery for one child *or*  \$..... for ..... operations

I would like to make a donation of \$ .....

My cheque is enclosed *(Cheques should be made payable to Operation Cleft)*

Please charge my credit card - MasterCard  Visa  .....  
Please print name above (as it appears on your credit card)

Number on card \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of cardholder

Name .....  
First name Last name Please print the name of your club, business, school or group if applicable

Address ..... State ..... P/code .....

Telephone H: .../..... B: .../..... Mob: ..... Email:.....

♦ Donations in lieu of a Christmas gift - Please enter the name you would like on the certificate

♦ I would like a certificate in the name of .....

Please send this completed form with your donation to: **Operation Cleft, PO Box 631, Box Hill Vic. 3128**

For further information - Tel: 0414 246 851 Email: [info@operationcleft.org.au](mailto:info@operationcleft.org.au) Web: [www.operationcleft.org.au](http://www.operationcleft.org.au)

Operation Cleft Australia is a Public Ancillary Fund with DGR (item 2) status. ABN - 36 063 471 446

Donations of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible in Australia