

Commitment to Care





Vision

We seek a just, compassionate, and interdependent world, where the health needs of those most vulnerable are prioritized and medical professionals have the necessary resources to serve their communities.

Mission

In a spirit of solidarity, we partner with communities in Bolivia and Paraguay to increase access to safe, affordable surgery and other essential health care.



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on 2022, I'm struck by Solidarity Bridge's **unwavering and elevated commitment to care** for those in need of support, resources, and healing. The waning pandemic allowed us to return to a full year of international mission trips and national surgical campaigns while remaining steadfast in our virtual educational exchanges and medical supply equipping. We're determined to continue serving more impactfully, sustainably, and creatively than ever!

In addition to providing direct medical care in Bolivia and Paraguay, we remain committed to ensuring that our model of care is truly transformative—for individuals, communities and systems. In 2022, this focus resulted in the writing of a white paper on Intercultural Encounter with our sister organization, Puente de Solidaridad. Capturing the essence of our cross-cultural work, we codified the learnings and insights gained from decades of experience and created a framework to make these encounters even more fruitful, respectful, and transformative. This framework reinforces our dedication to the values of Catholic Social Teaching and formed the basis for our annual Board/Staff retreat at the end of 2022.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to responsible expansion of our medical programs through sustainable partnerships. Through a generous \$500,000 gift from the Sisters of the Resurrection last year, we formally established an endowment fund. I am immensely grateful to the Sisters for their deep trust in us and I look forward to working with other legacy-minded partners as we aspire to grow this account to \$10M+ in the coming years. Gifts like these will ensure the growth of our mission indefinitely!

We are grateful for the support and confidence placed in us by everyone who forms our community of solidarity, and we will continue to work tirelessly on your behalf to care for the communities we serve.

Yours in mission,

Ann Rhomberg
Executive Director



1,468
Patients



385 Program
Surgeries



Caring for Young Patients, Wherever They Are



Ivan's story

Six-year-old Ivan was born prematurely in the remote region of Pando, Bolivia. As a young child he needed ongoing checkups. But his family's lack of resources, the remoteness of their home, and the scarcity of specialists in their region made this difficult. A bout of pneumonia led to the discovery of multiple heart problems. Ivan was evaluated at our Cardiac Diagnostic Campaign in Cobija, a town located in the Amazon on the border with Brazil, and immediately scheduled for urgent treatment in Cochabamba. His surgery was remarkably successful, and he was released from the hospital in less than a week. Two weeks later, his father told our social worker: "Ivan is a different child now. His change is noticeable. He has gained weight and even looks like a different boy. Thank you very much for this opportunity, and for his life."

Every child deserves a healthy start in life. For those born with congenital heart disease, timely diagnosis and treatment are essential to make that possible. For almost 20 years, our heart surgery program has provided treatment to correct or manage congenital heart malformations among Bolivian children. Unfortunately, too many children live for years with undiagnosed or untreated conditions. They not only suffer unnecessarily, but the delays in their care make their conditions more complex than if they had been treated as infants. Those born outside of Bolivia's larger cities are at greatest risk for delayed care.

To address this, we are bringing specialized pediatric cardiac diagnostics to remote regions of Bolivia. These so-called "diagnostic campaigns" take the form of pop-up clinics organized by Puente de Solidaridad (PdS), together with the La Paz-based heart clinic Kardiozentrum and the German Foundation Herzverein e.V.

The complexities of pediatric cardiac surgery in a low-resource country are immense, but our commitment to this cause is unwavering. To date, **three campaigns have screened hundreds of infants and children in areas with no access to specialty cardiac care.** Before each campaign, public announcements are circulated via social media, radio, television, and other outlets to reach area families with children experiencing heart issues. Local pediatricians also refer patients.

Those identified as needing further care are then connected to treatment through our program. Pediatric heart surgery is only available in the cities of Cochabamba, Santa Cruz or La Paz, so PdS social workers accompany families throughout the process, helping to arrange transportation, housing and meals throughout their child's hospitalization far from home. Many of the children require pre-surgical hospitalization to strengthen or stabilize their condition before their operation. And, given the lack of available follow-up care in their home regions, many also remain in the hospital for extended periods after their surgery until fully recovered.

Our commitment to the care of these children and their families means we provide treatment, support and accompaniment—from the moment of diagnosis through full recovery and return to home.

A total of 83 infants and children, as well as 48 adults, received surgery through our heart program in 2022. And thanks to our diagnostic campaigns, this care is reaching patients who previously had no access to treatment. Together we are providing life-saving surgery, and giving children a chance at a full life.





Improving Safety Through Essential Equipment

For more than five years, Solidarity Bridge and Puente de Solidaridad (PdS) have worked together to support the expansion of healthcare services in Sucre, the capital of the southern Bolivian department of Chuquisaca. The Instituto Chuquisaqueño de Oncología (ICO) is a public hospital in Sucre founded in 2015 by a group of young doctors with ties to the region. From the beginning, they reached out to us for support. One of our donors provided the hospital's first anesthesia tower, and as soon as the operating room was completed in 2018, the ICO hosted a mission trip to provide specialized surgical training.

Increasing access to advanced surgery requires a dual investment: training of personnel and equipment upgrades. When we were invited to return to the ICO in 2022 to provide training in minimally invasive gynecologic surgery, we knew it would not be possible without key pieces of equipment, including surgical stirrups.

Specialized positioning tools, like lithotomy stirrups, are scarce in Bolivian hospitals but are imperative for safe surgery. Without proper positioning, patients risk serious complications and injuries, including disabling nerve damage. We have purchased and maintain two sets of these stirrups that reside in PdS warehouses in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. They are available on loan to allied doctors serving patients in our programs. In order to provide the training requested in Sucre, we had one set shipped to the ICO for use during the mission trip.

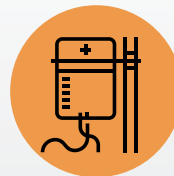
With all the right materials in place, the joint Bolivian/US team performed seven complex surgeries over four days, addressing issues ranging from endometrial hyperplasia to complex ovarian cysts in patients aged 30-58. Six of the seven patients benefited from minimally-invasive surgeries, with most returning home within 24 hours of their operation.

As the Bolivian surgeons progressively honed their laparoscopic techniques, they took the lead in more of the procedures, and ultimately performed the final surgery solo. In affirmation of the skills of these talented surgeons and their unwavering commitment to provide the region's marginalized population with the highest quality of care, we left the lithotomy stirrups at the ICO on permanent loan. Without this equipment, their ability to put these new skills to work would be limited. But thanks to those who made this donation of durable equipment possible, women in this region now have improved options for safe, effective, and high quality care.

The vision that began in 2015—with committed, passionate local doctors and nurses renovating and repurposing a vacant building—is now reality. The ICO has two first-rate operating rooms and a pathology lab nationally recognized for its excellence. We are pleased to report that all of our 2022 mission trip patients have recovered without complications. Plans for further training at the ICO continue; we look forward to returning later this year to again work shoulder-to-shoulder to increase access to surgery and restore health for more women in this region.

Luisa's story

Luisa, 56, is the matriarch of a family of subsistence farmers in a small settlement about three hours from Sucre. A routine pap smear revealed precancerous cells that proved resistant to treatment, and would require a total hysterectomy. The procedure was performed laparoscopically, allowing Luisa to recover quickly and return home to her family. Six weeks after the surgery, Luisa's daughter shared with Solidarity Bridge that her mother was doing very well: "As her children, we are relieved and grateful for the opportunity you gave our mom to get better!"



96 Hospitals and clinics received resources



3 Shipping Containers delivered



\$1.6M worth of supplies and equipment



164 mentored surgeries



14 Webinars and Lectures training 700+ participants

Bringing Training Home

Many trainees in developing countries don't have access to a practice space for advanced surgical techniques. This drives motivated doctors to move abroad for their educational advancement and contributes to a drain on the medical workforce in low-income countries. This reality is a motivating factor for the Hospital Nacional de Itauguá in Paraguay to partner with the Solidarity Bridge Neurosurgery & Neurology Institute (NNI).

In 2018, Dr. José Kuzli, director of neurosurgery at the hospital, initiated a partnership with the NNI, bringing resources and training from the US straight to his colleagues in Paraguay. The innovative and robust work of the NNI is a testament to the global nature of neurosurgical advancements, which have always been rooted in international exchange and mentorship. At Dr. Kuzli's request, the NNI made two visits to Paraguay in 2022. The initial trip celebrated **the inauguration of a microsurgical training lab. The first of its kind in the country**, the lab is essential for neurosurgical residents to hone their skills without needing to spend time abroad.

To establish the microsurgery skills lab, Dr. Abdullah Keleş (Baskaya Lab at the University of Wisconsin) procured operating microscopes, stereo microscopes, and microsurgical instruments and supplies to equip four training stations housed at the Itauguá Hospital. Once installed, Drs. Keleş and Kuzli quickly organized hands-on training in basic anastomosis and micro-suture techniques for more than 20 residents and new doctors.

Our second visit focused on the surgical treatment of cerebral arteriovenous malformations (AVMs). AVMs are a tangle of blood vessels that can rupture in the brain, causing headaches, seizures, and dangerous bleeding. Responding to Dr. Kuzli's well-articulated training vision, the NNI recruited preeminent AVM surgeon Dr. Nirav Patel (Brigham and Women's Hospital) to lead these training efforts.

While in Paraguay, Dr. Patel provided instruction in AVM surgeries benefitting three patients. Two adult women and an eight-year-old child were treated for high-grade AVMs. Each case was an important learning experience for Dr. Kuzli and his team, advancing their knowledge of planning and executing these intricate procedures. In the months after our visit, Dr. Kuzli shared that he had identified and successfully treated a number of other patients with similar cases. Today, AVM patients have improved access to timely, lifesaving surgery directly from Paraguayan neurosurgeons within their own borders.

Drawing partners together, like Dr. Patel, Dr. Keleş, and neuroanesthesiologist Dr. Deepak Sharma (University of Washington), Dr. Kuzli's dream of bringing advanced training home was brought to fruition.



Isidro's story

Children with AVMs are more likely to experience ruptures and risk of death, than adults. That's why the successful treatment of eight-year-old Isidro represents a true triumph of timely care delivered through mission-driven collaboration and partnership. In an update to Solidarity Bridge, Dr. Kuzli reported that the boy is 90% recovered, and will continue to be monitored with periodic scans.



10 international case discussions



Since 1999

\$46,639,484
Medical Supplies
Donated

70,114
Patients
Served

7,447
Surgeries
Provided

473
Missioners

112
Mission
Trips

2022 Financials

REVENUE

\$2,409,839

In-Kind - **\$1,350,385**

Cash - **\$1,059,454**

- In-Kind - **56%**
- Individuals - **30%**
- Organizations - **14%**

EXPENSES

\$2,625,724

In-Kind - **\$1,382,787**

Cash - **\$1,242,937**

- Direct Program - **87%**
- Fundraising - **7%**
- Administrative - **6%**

NET ASSETS

\$903,981

In-Kind - **\$47,925**

Cash - **\$856,056**



Global health missions like ours are complex—full of both promises and pitfalls. In response to this reality, thought leaders in the field have concluded, with consensus, that **in-depth preparation is an essential best practice** for global health work. Last year we launched a new Pre-Travel Preparation process that invites our teams to consider the cultural and ethical considerations surrounding global surgical engagement alongside the specifics of their trip, host community, and medical specialty. We are thrilled that this hybrid live/online program has helped us better prepare team members to enter into the work of solidarity even more genuinely, meaningfully, and purposefully.

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Surgery is an important treatment option for one third of all diseases. **Many of our programs focus on increasing access to minimally invasive procedures** such as laparoscopy and endoscopic skull-base surgery because they are safer for patients. Since these techniques offer quicker patient recovery times, they also increase the capacity of the healthcare system to treat more people.

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US Missioners are the bridge that connects us with our partners in South America, making our commitment to care truly personal. Solidarity Award winner and 10-time missioner, Dr. John Weaver, is someone who personifies solidarity, generosity, and commitment. His deep sense of obligation and commitment drives him to live deliberately, purposefully, and with impact. Sustaining his relationships with his Bolivian patients, medical students, residents, and fellow surgeons is at the heart of his commitment to care.

Hear more from Dr. Weaver himself in our recent video at solidaritybridge.org/video.

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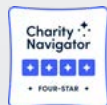


April 20, 2024 at the
Sheraton Grand Chicago



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Dedicated to the health and flourishing of our global family, we commit our care and attention to those who have been neglected, whether marginalized by society or excluded from the global market and scientific advances. We vow to be brothers and sisters to all. This year, our programs have made significant advances, resourcing dozens of hospitals, mentoring dedicated healthcare providers, and accompanying hundreds of patients on their journey to a healthier future. With the support of our US donors and volunteers, we rededicate ourselves to a model of care that transforms our world and brings health and flourishing to our global family.