

24 August 2023

Taking a stand to help a brave little girl walk

Seven year old Gerisha travelled from Vanuatu to undergo life-changing surgery on January 21st, 2023 at St John of God Berwick Hospital.

Like most little girls, Gerisha loves colouring, dolls, and playing with her friends. Yet what she dreamt of is something most 7 year olds take for granted.

Gerisha was desperate to wear shoes. Her first pair of shoes. Ever.

Born in Vanuatu with bilateral talipes, commonly known as club feet, Gerisha spent her early years attempting to move with extreme difficulty. Talipes is a birth defect which sees the feet twisted and bent out of shape. In Australia, Talipes is normally corrected with splints prior to the child walking so that it never impacts on their ability to walk.

Gerisha's case was more complicated as she no longer had a left foot. When Gerisha was 4, a doctor visiting Vanuatu agreed to operate to correct her feet. There was much hope that this would be the start of her new life. Instead, it was the start of a nightmare.

Although the surgery initially went well, the hospital in Port Vila simply did not have the resources to deal with the follow-up care. Gerisha became extremely unwell and in order to save her life, her foot was amputated. With her left foot gone and the right foot dysfunctional as a result of talipes, Gerisha's quality of life was severely impacted.

Dr Samuel Kemuel, General Surgeon at Port Vila Hospital in Vanuatu alerted Children First Foundation to Gerisha's story, "When I saw Gerisha, I knew she needed help immediately. That's why I reached out to Children First Foundation for help.

There are many other children we see here at Port Vila hospital who need help too, but we simply don't have the resources."

Children First Foundation, together with St John of God Berwick Hospital and orthopaedic surgeon Professor Ton Tran, facilitated Gerisha's travel and surgery with an aim of helping the young lady walk and lead an independent life.

Professor Tran explains, "Not only did Gerisha undergo surgical correction of her right foot, but we conducted revision of her amputation stump, which allowed for the better fitting of a lower limb prosthesis. Gerisha then learnt to walk with the help of the Children First rehabilitation team and OAPL who have fitted and donated Gerisha's new prosthetic leg. She is now truly independent and walking on her own."

We are proud that the collaboration between Children First Foundation, St John of God Berwick Hospital and Professor Ton Tran has enabled Gerisha to fulfil her dream of wearing her first pair of shoes. *"I am excited that one day I will be able to stand up, and not always be sitting down on the ground,"* Gerisha said prior to her surgery.

“I can't wait to get my first pair of shoes so I can be just like my sisters and my friends at school. Pink is my favourite colour, and I wish for some pink sandals.”

After recovering from surgery, being fitted with a prosthesis, completing rehabilitation, and learning to walk, Gerisha is now ready to head home as an independent little girl with her whole future ahead of her.

On Tuesday, 29th August at 12 noon the St John of God Berwick Hospital will host a party to farewell Gerisha as she heads home to Vanuatu. Media are invited to attend the event.

For more information:

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