

Jacksonville Helps Provide Ugandan Kids Second Chance at Life

This week, 4-year-old Joshua and 12-year-old Manjeri flew thousands of miles to Jacksonville, Fla., from their homes in Uganda to receive life-saving heart surgery. Although it's a long, difficult trip for these sick kids, it may be the only way to save their lives.

Joshua and Manjeri have congenital heart defects that were identified by Dr. Stephanie Lacey, a pediatric cardiologist at Wolfson Children's Hospital, during one of her trips to screen children in Kampala, Uganda, through Samaritan's Purse's Children's Heart Project. Lacey found that both children suffer from a life-threatening condition known as Tetralogy of Fallot (TOF), which is a hole between the two ventricles.

This serious condition can cause a chronic lack of circulation, causing the child to be cyanotic, or blue in color, due to lack of oxygen. If left untreated, many TOF patients die before their 20th birthday.

Through a collaborative effort with Samaritan's Purse, Jacksonville-based Patrons of the Hearts and Wolfson Children's Hospital in Jacksonville, Manjeri and Joshua will soon be on the road to recovery with fixed hearts.

"These are families who have almost given up hope because they know it is only a matter of time before their kids will die from their heart conditions," said Cindy Bonsall, director of Children's Heart Project at Samaritan's Purse. "We know that Joshua and Manjeri will soon receive the treatment they need from the expert team at Wolfson Children's Hospital."

Jose Ettegui, M.D., founder of Patrons of the Hearts and

medical director of the University of Florida Pediatric Cardiovascular Center affiliated with Wolfson, said: "Our mission at Patrons of the Hearts is to bring children with congenital heart disease from developing countries to Jacksonville for life-saving heart care. We are honored to have served nearly 50 children from around the world and to take care of Joshua and Manjeri so that they may have a much better quality of life."

Joshua and Manjeri had cardiac catheterization procedures on June 1. They both will require open-heart surgery, which is scheduled June 2 for Joshua and June 6 for Manjeri. The procedures will be performed by Eric Ceithaml, M.D., chief of cardiovascular surgery at Wolfson Children's Hospital. The children and their mothers are staying with a family in the Jacksonville area.