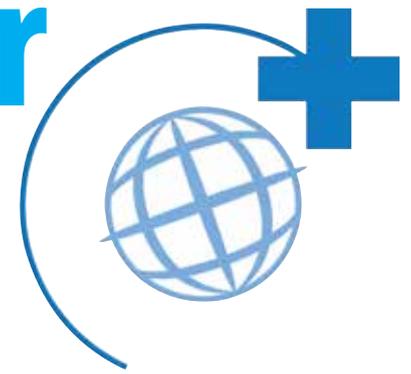


The Messenger

Medical Mission International

Health, Healing & Hope



Children Receive Sight-Restoring Surgery! *MMI's Gift of sight brings hope!*

"The morning after surgery, she was beaming," said Johan Claassen, MMI liaison and coordinator for remote African missions. Claassen was describing the brilliant smile on the face of four-year-old, Vernesio Ducio.

The little girl arrived with her grandmother at the recent medical outreach in Mozambique. She was completely blind in both eyes from cataracts. "One thing is for certain," said Claassen, "the trajectory of Vernesio's life has been changed dramatically."

The goal of the MMI missions is to deliver free medical aid to the neediest people in Africa. Medical teams recently travelled to Inhambane, Mozambique for a week-long campaign, where they performed sight-restoring cataract surgery on both eyes of Vernesio, as well as 177 other surgical operations. According to Claassen, the MMI eye surgery programme has grown over the last decade to become one of the most crucial medical services offered in the field.

The doctors treat blind and sight-impaired patients by providing cataract and trachoma surgeries. Many patients also receive free eye exams, eye glasses and dental care, including extractions and



Four-year-old, Vernesio Ducio

"In the past, the idea of enrolling Vernesio in school was unthinkable."

root procedures. During each mission, the team also examines and treats villagers who come to receive a variety of life-saving services. Patients often travel for days to the outreach location to receive treatment. Common ailments include malaria, tuberculosis, parasitic and diarrhoeal diseases as well as cuts and wounds, respiratory infection and burns. Many of the illnesses are caused from lack of clean water and living in impoverished conditions.

In a follow-up interview, about a week after the surgery, Vernesio's grandmother described the impacts and changes already unfolding in the little girl's life.



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MMI Teams Restore Vision

Grandmother, Naquerina Artur, said that Vernesio had changed from a blind, lonely child, to a playful and happy one.

According to her grandmother, Vernesio began losing her eyesight from cataracts when she was about nine months old. As the toddler began to walk, she would bump into things and fall. As a blind child, she was unable to function independently. She could not drink water by herself or eat without assistance. “She required help with everything,” said her grandmother. She also feared that Vernesio would stumble into the open fires used for cooking.

“When she was blind, she tried to play with other children, but they would take things away from her, or she would lose things. She was always stumbling, feeling her way around and searching for things,” said grandmother Artur. “She was often frustrated because she could not see.”

Her grandmother described how simple things are now joyful events, like holding up a packet of Nik Naks, a popular brand of South African snacks, and hearing Vernesio, shout, “Chips.”

“This gift of sight has now brought us all much hope,” said grandmother Artur, who said that in the past, the idea of enrolling her granddaughter in school was “unthinkable.” Now, she says, “Vernesio can attend school and receive an education.”

... Vernesio had changed from a blind, lonely child, to a playful and happy one.

According to Claassen, in Mozambique, a country of about 30 million people, “We know of only one school in the country for blind and disabled children.”

“Perhaps she can become a teacher one day,” her grandmother said, imagining new possibilities. “And maybe even take care of me when I am old. I hope that she can get a job when she is older and maybe she can bring home sugar that I can enjoy with my tea.” No small thing because sugar is a luxury that the family can’t currently afford.

Claassen asked Grandmother Artur if she had any final words for MMI supporters who made Vernesio’s sight-restoring surgery possible.

“Yes. I am overwhelmed with thankfulness and full of joy,” she said. “I did not think that Vernesio would ever see again because many people said, ah, this is just a blind girl. But, now she does see again. She is drastically changed. To those generous people who made it possible, I pray morning and evening, all the time, that God will help you, too!”



Nine-month-old, Graca Francisco, shown above, also received sight-restoring surgery after from becoming blind from congenital cataracts. She traveled 350 km with her parents who had heard about the MMI-sponsored clinic by word of mouth. After the team finished the mission in Inhambane and were on the road to Chimoyo they spotted Graca and her family walking along the road. “We realized how far they had come,” said Claassen, referring to the long journey they had made. Her mother excitedly described that Graca is improving daily and can now recognize things and take hold of objects. Saying this, her mother had tears in her eyes. +