

It takes a village

World Clubfoot Day highlights the importance of public and private sector support.

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'Approximately 54% of children in South Africa under the age of five are deprived in the area of health.' (Stats SA 2020 – Child Poverty in South Africa: A Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis). During the month of June, [Steps Charity NPC](#) – the only non-profit in South Africa focused on clubfoot treatment, call for an increase in the reach of clubfoot treatment programmes across more areas, to more children, with the help of the public and private sectors.

“The month of June is an important one for clubfoot,” says Karen Moss, founder of Steps. “World Clubfoot Day, held annually on 3 June, commemorates the birthday of Ignácio Ponseti, the pioneer of the Ponseti technique for clubfoot – a ground-breaking and non-surgical method for treating clubfoot. [Less than 20%](#) of patients in South Africa have access to health insurance or the means to pay for treatment, but the Ponseti method has enabled multiple clubfoot clinics in South Africa to provide this non-invasive treatment method via the state health sector. Early detection, treatment and care is critical in order to reduce long term disability as a result of clubfoot and since clubfoot is a treatable condition, with the help of NPOs such as Steps, we can all play our part in helping children avoid a life of disability.

“This requires a two-pronged approach. We need to extend the accessibility of clubfoot treatment programmes offering the Ponseti method, particularly in under-resourced and serviced areas. And, to do so we need to leverage all available resources including affiliated health professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists. To achieve these goals, we need support from both the public and private sector.”

Dr Greg Firth, former head of South Africa’s busiest clubfoot treatment programme at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital and now paediatric orthopaedic surgeon at Royal London Hospital has

personally experienced both the success of the Ponseti Method and the value of including affiliated health professionals in clubfoot treatment programmes. □

Arnold Christianson, retired South African professor and geneticist and former head of the department of human genetics at the University of Witwatersrand recently spoke in a webinar and shared three key principles involved in caring for birth defects.

He believes that for people with birth defects, including clubfoot, care saves lives and comprises diagnosis, treatment and counselling. However, that care must take place as close to home as possible especially in developing areas where, for many, it can be very difficult to access medical services. He also states that the care should be as simple as possible – hence the importance of using the Ponseti method. Not only can it be offered in rural and distanced settings but, as importantly, it does not necessarily need to be offered by a doctor. And thirdly, that the Ponseti method can be offered by other health professionals such as nurses and physiotherapists, thus making it an ideal form of treatment in the developing world and locally here in South Africa. □ □ Members of the public are urged to consider the huge impact that can be made through donations to Steps. No donation is too small and monthly giving can make a sustainable impact. R2,500 supports one child through clubfoot treatment, R1,000 gives one child a clubfoot brace and R250 pays one child's transport costs to the clinic for treatment.

Concludes Moss: “A recurring donation of R60 per month supports the treatment of one child over four years and prevents disability. This shows how significant a difference anyone can make to ensuring that a child is able to live a productive, mobile life.”

For more information, go to <https://steps.org.za>.

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