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Our vision is to extend lifesaving cardiac care to children born in our neighbouring countries of the Pacific.

Mission Report for Hearts4Kids Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Mission
11-22 October 2025
at Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Children's Hospital, Suva, Fiji.

This is the first year that Hearts4Kids Trust has undertaken two missions within the one year. Please refer to the July Mission Report for information about the preparation required to achieve this and regarding our collaboration with Pasifika Medical Association.

Patient Referrals

From early 2025, cardiologists from the Starship Hospital doing visiting clinics to Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu created lists of children requiring surgery and presented the data to Kirsten Finucane. Appropriate cases were selected and then referred to the PMA group to manage the logistics of getting them to Fiji. Children in Fiji, Kiribati and Solomon Islands were also detected by local surveillance nurses and doctors and referred through Sanjeevani Hospital at a Zoom meeting on 8th October 2025.

Medical Personnel

For the October mission we reduced the team to 30: 2 surgeons, 2 Anaesthetists, 2 Intensivists, 2 Perfusionists, 2 Anaesthetic Technicians, with 2 Theatre, 10 PICU and 6 Ward nurses, 1 cardiologist and a Senior Adviser. Team made up of 18 from New Zealand and 12 from Australia.

Hearts4Kids Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Team

Designation	Numbers
Paediatric Cardiac Surgeons	2
Anaesthetists	2
Intensivists	2
Perfusionists	2
Anaesthetic Technicians	2
Theatre Nurses	2
PICU Team Leader and Nurses	10
Ward Team Leader and Nurses	6
Cardiologist	1
Senior Adviser	1
Total	30

Pre-operative Phase

Patients from other Pacific Islands arrived one week early and were reviewed by Paediatrician Dr Maryanne Kora'ai, so that skin infections and dental caries could be resolved before surgery.

Triage Clinic - Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th October 2025

Dr Kirsten Finucane, Paediatric Cardiac Surgeon and Dr Jascha Kehr, Cardiologist, reviewed data on 16 patients with Dr Kora'ai. The three Pacific Island Paediatricians from Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu attended the Triage Clinic and presented their patients, as well as being involved in the discussions. 13 patients were selected for surgery: 8 males and 5 females, aged from 4 months to 14 years, with weights between 5.9 to 67 kg.

Set-up Day - Sunday, 12th October 2025

Supplies for the October mission had been set aside following the previous mission so these needed to be set up and organised. PICU Nurses also provided some training.

Operating days and Early Post-operative Phase – Monday 13th – Friday 17th October 2025

There were five operating days working from 0700hrs to 2200hrs.

Summary of Procedures

Bypass Procedures	Number	M/F	Age	Kg
Tetralogy of Fallot repairs	2	F, M	4, 8	9.8, 20
VSD closures	2	M, M	10, 7	36, 33
Endocarditis on PDA (inpatient in CWM Hospital)	1	M	8	17
1° ASD with valve regurgitation repaired	1	M	8	17
Complex transposition with cyanosis – Rostelli repair	1	M	14	45
Rheumatic Heart Disease: Mitral regurgitation repairs	5	3F, 2M	9-13	29-67
Non-bypass Procedure				
PDA division, left thoracotomy	1	F	4/12	5.9
Catheter Intervention				
Balloon atrial septostomy (at CWM Hospital)	1	F	2/52	2.8
Total	14	5F, 8M	4mth-14yr	5.9-67kg

Early outcomes

Early extubation <6hrs	11/13	<12 hrs 13/13
PICU Length of stay	1-2 days	1 patient = 3
Ward Length of stay	3-6 days	2 patients = 7
Major complications	0	

Domiciles of Patients

Country	Number
Fiji	6
Kiribati	1
Solomon Islands	2
Tonga	4
Vanuatu	1
Total	14

Post-operative Phase

The stepdown ward opened early on Wednesday, 15th October and ran until Tuesday, 21st October, with Fijian staff from Sanjeevani Hospital rostered both days and nights alongside the Hearts4Kids team. All patients were discharged by 21st October 2025.

The Theatre and PICU teams (except Kirsten Finucane and Jascha Kehr) left Fiji on Sunday 19th. The remainder of the Hearts4Kids team departed from Fiji on Wednesday, 22nd October 2025.

There were no major post-operative complications. Ongoing clinics by Dr Maryanne Kora'ai continued over the following two weeks ensuring all the children made a full recovery before planning their transfer back to their Pacific home country. On Friday, 7th November, Dr Kora'ai held her last clinic, clearing the final children for discharge to Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu.



Just prior to our arrival in Suva a neonate was born with transposition of the great arteries, however, because of her size and 35-week prematurity she was unsuitable for repair by the visiting team. During the post-operative surgical phase of our mission, a balloon atrial septostomy was undertaken at CWM Hospital by Dr Jascha Kehr with the help of John Wright and Maryanne Kora'ai. This enabled the baby's stabilization and later transfer to Starship Hospital in Auckland where she underwent successful arterial switch. It was very fortunate that the team could provide this intervention as it allowed for her safe transfer to New Zealand which otherwise may not have been possible. Dr Matoto from PMA put significant effort into organizing the transfer.

Quality Initiatives

Formal Training: Lectures were given to Intensive Care and Ward nurses on Monday, 13th October, while the Theatres were getting underway, attended by approximately 10 of the local nurses from both the Sanjeevani and Fiji Public Hospitals. Later in the visit, Dr Jascha Kehr gave lectures to the local medical staff (juniors and seniors) about Cardiac Emergency Management and Rheumatic Heart Disease.

Informal training: Local Paediatricians from Vanuatu and Tonga were involved closely with the children from those islands as they went through the surgical pathway. In theatre we trained a local General Surgeon and Theatre Nurse who scrubbed in for several cases, and the two Echo Technicians were involved with every case. In Intensive Care and in the Wards, four Sanjeevani Nurses and a number of Fijian Nurses were rostered on a daily basis and directly involved in patient care with supervision from the Hearts4Kids Nurses. Specific tasks, such as the removal of chest drains, were allocated to them wherever possible, having given them formal teaching on these issues on the first day of the visit. For the first time, the Pre-operative Ward was run completely by the local nurses and in the Stepdown Post-operative Ward the number of Hearts4Kids Nurses on this visit had been reduced from 8 to 6 to give the local nurses more opportunity and responsibility.

Debrief and Feedback: Theatre debrief held Saturday 18th with representation from Sanjeevani staff, Heart4kids team leaders and Dr Maryanne Kora'ai. Minutes taken.

Feedback from Hearts4Kids team was notable for many aspects of improvement in the hospital support services such as Pharmacy, Stores, Sterile Supply Service, Laundry Service and the air conditioning area. All showed significant improvements this year in comparison to when we first started, and the team at Sanjeevani Hospital are to be congratulated for the progress they have made. For instance, in providing an operating table foot pedal which allows some of the more complicated intracardiac work to be done faster and with greater visibility and access. This makes an enormous amount of difference for operations such as tetralogy repairs, when within one operation the table needs to be moved a number of times.

The theatre team were 50/50 from Westmead and Starship Hospitals. Staffing worked really well and we enjoyed the collaboration between the teams.

We are trending towards doing a greater proportion of more complicated and longer operations, and at our Debrief we all agreed we need to shorten the operating days which had increased to 16 hours. This will only be possible by reducing the number of children we operate on each day, but some of these longer operations are some of the most worthwhile operations we do, so we believe that this is the right decision for the future. We could perhaps extend the number of days we operate, by one day, to allow for this.

Conclusion

This was our ninth visit to Fiji. The Hearts4Kids Paediatric Cardiac Surgical team has now performed successful heart surgery on 133 children with congenital or rheumatic heart disease, and one catheter intervention on a newborn. They have come from the islands of Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

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- P & C Wilkinson

**Our grateful thanks to ALL our sponsors, for donations large and small,
for supporting the 2025 Hearts4Kids Missions to Fiji
– we couldn't do this without you!**

Kirsten Finucane
Chair, Hearts4Kids Trust