HOW HEALING THE CHILDREN NEW JERSEY IS CHANGING CHILDREN'S LIVES HERE AND ABROAD

By Jamie Grill-Goodman

Healing the Children New Jersey (HTCNJ), headquartered in Passaic County, was founded in 1981 with the vision to create a world where every child has access to quality medical care. Since its inception, HTCNJ has provided care to more than 40,000 children, helping nearly 1,000 children each year, and allocates 91% of all funds to programs and services.

To support this mission, The Commerce & Industry Association of NJ (CIANJ) donated $1,000 from the proceeds of its 58th Annual Spring Golf Outing on Monday, May 18. As an official CIANJ charity partner, HTCNJ also had a table at the reception at the Upper Montclair Country Club in Clifton, New Jersey.

> **THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE ABLE TO MEET CIANJ MEMBERS AT THE EVENT AND SHARE ABOUT OUR SERVICES AND THE CHILDREN WE SERVE WAS AN HONOR, HTCNJ SAYS. IT WAS A MEMORABLE EVENT, AND WE CAME AWAY WITH A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CIANJ'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING ITS MEMBERS AND NEW JERSEY.**

To learn more about HTCNJ's important mission, *Commerce* caught up with HTCNJ's Executive Director Tricia McNamara.

Jamie Grill-Goodman: ***HTCNJ has provided medical care since 1981 through its Medical Teams Abroad, International Inbound, and Brighter Futures NJ programs, helping nearly 1,000 children each year. How do these programs complement one another, and why is it important for HTCNJ to maintain both a global and local New Jersey focus?***

Tricia McNamara: As a volunteer-led humanitarian organization, HTCNJ envisions a world where every child has access to quality medical care and the opportunity for a brighter future. With a goal of helping all children, our mission has evolved to meet needs both locally and globally.

In 1981, our international inbound program was founded. Children in need of complex surgeries not available in their home countries were brought to New Jersey to receive donated medical care from doctors and hospitals throughout New Jersey. HTCNJ arranged a host family, the child's travel arrangements and documents, medical treatment, and care. This is where our commitment to treating each child's individual needs was born and remains the cornerstone of our programs.

In 1988, our founding members realized that by assembling medical teams and supplies to support week-long surgical mission trips abroad, we could not only help more children but also screen children with even greater needs that could benefit from our inbound program. HTCNJ committed to five surgical specialties: plastic & reconstructive, orthopedic, ENT, ophthalmology and urology, with the goal of providing life-changing procedures that were not dependent on receiving extensive follow-up care or therapy, as the children did not have access to these services in their home countries.

In 1992 we expanded our efforts to help children in our local New Jersey communities who lacked access to the specialized support and care needed to reach their full potential. Our Brighter Futures NJ program helps children in all 21 counties by providing specialized equipment, supplies, therapeutic services, adapted activities, and camperships.

Grill-Goodman: ***Can you share a recent example of the impact HTCNJ has on the children it serves?***

McNamara: With a 45-year history of helping families, there are times that we have the privilege of helping the children of our prior patients. On our most recent orthopedic mission trip to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, we met a young girl who had been born with deformed feet. She had been fitted for

orthotics by local doctors, but the family did not feel comfortable proceeding with surgery. She arrived at our clinic wearing a very pretty pink dress and a huge smile, accompanied by her father.

Her father told our team that when he had seen the local publicity for our clinic day, he had recognized the HTCNJ logo from his childhood. As a child, he had benefited from three trips to the United States through the inbound program, receiving corrective surgeries on both hands and one of his feet. He explained that knowing he could trust the care and expertise of our team helped him make the decision to proceed with the surgery his daughter needed.

Grill-Goodman: ***What are some of the greatest unmet health-care needs you are seeing among New Jersey children today?***

McNamara: Our programs support low-income families with children with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and complex medical diagnoses. These children are the most vulnerable among us and have unique needs and challenges. They will likely require access to specialized care, services, and therapies throughout their lifetime. Accessing and affording the required level of specialized care and services can be difficult for these families.

Grill-Goodman: ***How can New Jersey businesses and individuals help HTCNJ?***

McNamara: Help us share our story! We find that engaging with corporate partners and local businesses helps raise awareness for both our local and global programs and it is rewarding. Just about everyone has a special place in their hearts for children in need. We have great success collaborating with local partners to share about our work and engage with staff. We love to come up with unique opportunities for employee engagement through volunteer opportunities or attending annual meetings and corporate celebrations. And for those members who work in the medical field, having one of our surgical mission volunteers visit to share their experiences can be very impactful. When our medical volunteers share their experience with like-minded professionals, our volunteer list grows!

Grill-Goodman: ***What's next for HTCNJ?***

McNamara: A big goal for us is to reach more kids throughout New Jersey who could benefit from our services. In addition to providing specialized equipment, therapy toys and supplies, we help kids who lack access to therapeutic activities and adapted programs. Individualized programs that support a child's specific needs are often the key to unlocking a child's potential and helping them work toward their goals. An added benefit is that many of these programs provide the opportunity for the child to get out into the community and engage with their peers.



Photo Credit: HTCNJ