Looking Back on 21 Years of Working in Cuba

“One of the things that really defined Global Links’ relationship with Cuba was when Ministry of Health officials said how much they appreciated that we wanted to help and then asked, ‘How can we help you?’

This is a wonderful example of how Cubans see themselves… they are very confident and they know that their professional skills give them something of value to offer in return. That moment set the stage for the collaborative partnership we have shared for 21 years.”

Kathleen Hower  C.E.O. & CO-FOUNDER

Global Links’ work in Cuba started at the request of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) in the early 1990s. It was a critical time in Cuba. Losing their
largest trading partner as the Soviet Union dissolved, Cuba’s economy was in a free-fall. The US then tightened the embargo, creating a double-burden which greatly impacted the general population.

The largest and most immediate impact was the loss of nearly all petroleum imports from the USSR. Cuba’s infrastructure was suffering. There were rolling blackouts all over the country and rationing of water in many areas. The country lost approximately 80% of its imports, 80% of its exports and its Gross Domestic Product dropped by 34%. Imports of food and medicine stopped or were severely slowed.

Officials at PAHO were concerned that Cuba’s health system, and their impressive advancements in public health, would suffer. One of the biggest problems the system faced was a lack of medical materials. It was at that point PAHO officials reached out to Global Links to explore the possibilities of aiding Cuba, and a partnership began.

On November 14, 2014, more than 70 children traveled with their parents to the Miraj Heart Institute at the Wanless Hospital in Miraj, India, to celebrate Universal Children’s Day. The children represent just a portion of the young patients who have undergone open heart surgery at the Miraj Heart Institute within the past two years. This facility is committed to providing comprehensive cardiac care to vulnerable communities at free or significantly reduced cost, allowing both children and adults to receive life-saving surgeries that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive.

Since 2006, Global Links has supported the Miraj Heart Institute in its mission by providing the hospital with more than 15,000 sutures, enabling surgeons to heal the hearts of patients ranging in age from 6 months to 75 years. All of the children pictured here received life-saving cardiac treatment at the Miraj Heart Institute with sutures provided by Global Links.

Children’s Day at Miraj Heart Institute

SUTURE DONATION PROGRAM

If your company or facility has surplus sutures to share, please contact Medical Outreach Manager, Hayley Brugos at 412.361.3424 x213 or hbrugos@globallinks.org.

Every single packet can help save or improve a life!

Support for our Suture Donation Program comes from our donors and GSK.

All of the children pictured here received life-saving cardiac treatment at the Miraj Heart Institute.
Global Links becomes the first nonprofit issuing an export license to provide large-scale humanitarian medical aid to public hospitals in Cuba by the US Commerce Department.

Global Links 1st shipment to Cuba arrives in the port of Mariel consisting of several pallets of medicines and supplies valued at $240,476.

Mammography Project: Provision of mammography equipment to support the National Breast Cancer Program.

Pediatric Transplant Exchanges Cuba and Pittsburgh: Visits by the Cuban Pediatric Transplant Team from William Soler Hospital to Pittsburgh’s Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute.

US-Cuba Collaborative Project: Supporting through mini-grants the development of new collaborative partnership activities between US and Cuban health institutions and medical professionals.

Bibliography Project: Providing bibliographic research material on oncology, hospital management and public health to augment information in the Cuban Medical Libraries.

Hurricane Sandy Disaster Recovery Project: Medical aid to hospitals in Santiago affected by Hurricane Sandy.

Hurricane Katrina/Bahia Recovery Project: Medical aid to hospitals in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, due to hurricane Katrina and termites affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Global Links had provided 48 sea containers of medical materials solicited by 309 different public health institutions in 5 provinces of Cuba, including Pittsburgh’s Sister City of Matanzas. The materials helped to close key gaps in critical supplies and medicines, such as the provision of 1.2 million tablets of Doxycycline, enabling Cuban health authorities to successfully combat an outbreak of leptospirosis.

Global Links meets with Ministry of Health officials and the administrators from Hospital Calixto García in 1999.

Dr. Ramón Villamil, Head of Pediatric Liver Transplant at Hospital William Soler in Havana (left) and Kathleen Hower (right) pose for a photo with Dr. Thomas Starzl, pioneer organ transplant surgeon.

APRIL 1ST 1994
PAHO delivers the first Global Links’ donation to the recipient hospitals: • Instituto de Nefrología • Hospital Pediátrico Centro-Habana • Hospital Ortopédico Fructoso Rodriguez • Hospital América Arias • Hospital Calixto García

MARCH 15TH 1994
Global Links becomes the first nonprofit issued an export license to provide large-scale humanitarian medical aid to public hospitals in Cuba by the US Commerce Department.

MARCH 16TH 1994
Global Links 1st shipment to Cuba arrives in the port of Mariel consisting of several pallets of medicines and supplies valued at $240,476.
Partner Spotlight: Genesis House

Global Links is proud to support local nonprofits through our Community Partners Program. Genesis of Pittsburgh, a Community Partner since 2011, operates Genesis House in Bellevue, a maternity care facility for women 18 and older who are pregnant and in need of shelter. Their program provides women with a place to live, counseling services, prenatal and parenting classes, and assists them with finding permanent housing.

In 2014, Global Links provided Genesis House with more than $3,700 worth of materials, including baby clothing, breast feeding supplies, and more than 2,800 bottles of infant formula. Most of these items were captured for redistribution from facilities throughout Western Pennsylvania through our hospital surplus recovery program. Many are best-suited for use in the US and help meet the needs of other nonprofits that may otherwise have to purchase these materials for their clients. Maternal and infant care items play a valuable role in our mission to support people in need both internationally and in our own community. Visit globallinks.org to learn more about our Community Partners Program.

Support for our Community Partners Program comes from our donors and Highmark.

When a Bed is More Than Just a Bed

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN HEALTHCARE

There is always a celebration of sorts when a donation of hospital beds and mattresses is rolled onto the Global Links dock. A ubiquitous furnishing in every patient room in the US, a sturdy hospital-grade bed with a vinyl-covered, foam mattress is a luxury for many healthcare facilities in the resource-poor areas where we work.

More than just a piece of equipment, a hospital bed is a vital tool for patient recovery. Strong, adjustable, metal-framed beds will provide years of service in a busy facility. A mattress with an impermeable cover that can be disinfected is a line of defense against germs and the spread of infection.

Having enough beds helps to ensure that patients don’t have to share, and fosters an environment of dignity and recuperation.

A recent donation of 35 hospital beds that were “retired” from Allegheny Valley Hospital, will be paired with mattresses and are already earmarked for facilities in our next project with the Pan American Health Organization.

If your healthcare facility would like to work with Global Links to redirect your surplus materials, contact our Medical Outreach Manager, Hayley Brugos at 412.361.3424 x213 or hbrugos@globallinks.org.
Opportunities to Learn, Grow and Connect

VOLUNTEER SERVICE PROGRAM

As Global Links came into being more than 25 years ago, the three co-founders made a conscious decision to involve the community in the organization’s life-saving mission. The majority of our labor-intensive process of sorting, prepping and packing materials for our programs is done by a dedicated corps of nearly 2,000 volunteers each year.

The volunteer projects at Global Links vary, but all tasks require attention to detail and communication skills. As the program grows, local human service agencies see the Global Links Volunteer Service Center as a place where their clients can come to improve social and occupational skills or gain valuable work-training experience.

Our Service Center has truly become a place where volunteers of all abilities work side-by-side to support health initiatives in resource-poor communities. We are pleased to host individuals and groups from CLASS, Goodwill Workplace Training, PA Connecting Communities and Spectrum Charter School.

If you or your group would like to volunteer with Global Links, contact our Community Engagement Manager, Stacy Bodow at 412.361.3424 x205 or sbodow@globallinks.org.

Volunteers Mary and Paula sorting medical supplies.

TAKE NOTE!

TUESDAY TOURS @ GLOBAL LINKS
Pick a month and join us on the first Tuesday at 11 a.m. for a tour. Get an inside look at our facility, see our volunteers in action and learn about our programs. Sign up at globallinks.org.

SAVE THE DATE! 10.24.15
Dia de los Muertos: A Celebration of Life to Support Global Links

MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE WITH JUST $5 A MONTH!
Become a Global Giver with a recurring monthly gift of $5, $10, $20 or more and provide vital on-going support for our life-saving programs. Sign up at globallinks.org/donate.
As the US and Cuba begin to restore diplomatic ties, Global Links is looking back over our 21 years of collaborative work with the Cuban Ministry of Public Health and the Pan American Health Organization.

This April, Global Links will be an invited participant on several panels discussing international collaboration, quality improvements, and the impact of bibliographic information on cancer care at Cuba Salud 2015 in Havana. This international medical symposium convenes national and international organizations to discuss a variety of topics relating to public health in Cuba and around the world.

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