ABOVE: GETTING CREATIVE DESPITE COVID-19

The pandemic may have cancelled their usual fundraising events, but that didn’t stop the club at the Frankfurt International School in Germany.

They just had to get a little creative, said club adviser Michelle Kaszuba.

They still found a way to celebrate their club’s annual “Smile Week,” when they share Operation Smile’s mission with the school community and hold their “Change for Change” fundraiser. Students and educators donated spare change to Operation Smile, rallying more than $3,000.

In response to the pandemic, the club made cards for local health care workers and joined our Sending Hope campaign, fundraising for potential patients in Nicaragua.

“One of the greatest aspects of our club is that it is really organized and run by the student leaders and club members,” Michelle said. “... They are gaining real-world experience as they work to support a great organization that is changing the lives of so many.”

WHY STUDENTS? BECAUSE THEY’RE UNSTOPPABLE.

When Student Programs sees a need, it challenges students to address that need.

And our student volunteers are so driven to serve, not even a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic could keep them from helping others.

You’ll see this and even more examples throughout these pages, as we highlight our activities of the year and the students who made them possible.

Operation Smile counts on the compassion of students, parents and educators to help us care for as many patients born with cleft in low- and middle-income countries. From the hundreds of sponsored clubs around the world, to the student volunteers selected to accompany us on Operation Smile medical missions, we depend on our young leaders to build awareness, raise funds and educate others on our mission and cleft conditions.

OUR VISION:
We believe in the power of youth to create a compassionate world.

OUR MISSION:
Operation Smile Student Programs empowers youth globally through advocacy, education, leadership and service. These are the Four Pillars of Student Programs.
ABOUT OUR THEME

YOUNG LEADERS ‘TAKING ACTION’

“Taking Action” is more than a feel-good title for an impact report. For us, it’s really just accurate.

In a year when many found themselves on the bench, our student volunteers got right to work. They did everything possible to help our patients, their families and our communities overcome the many challenges presented by COVID-19.

EXAMPLES OF ONLINE SUCCESS

$92,274 FUNDS RAISED FROM OUR SMILE FUND CAMPAIGN

6,070 SURGICAL MASKS RALLIED DURING VIRTUAL LAC U-LEAD

IMPACT OF SERVING SMILES

6,300 MEALS PROVIDED TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS IN 3 COUNTRIES

51 HOSPITALS SERVED, IN ADDITION TO 2 FIREHOUSES IN PARAGUAY

They got creative. Even as the world suffered from “Zoom fatigue,” our students across Latin America rallied almost 450 of their peers for an online leadership gathering over the weekend. The cost of admission was an item donation to Operation Smile in their country. Students rallied 6,070 surgical masks, 289 cans of powdered milk and more.

They got clever. Using the online Smile Fund platform, students across the U.S. notched almost $100,000 in virtual fundraisers alone.

And they took action. As part of our Serving Smiles campaign, students in Panama, Paraguay and 12 U.S. states provided more than 6,300 meals to health care workers on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic from April 2020 to February 2021.

And that’s just a start. Read on for more examples of their leadership, advocacy, service and education.

ABOVE:

TAKING ONBOARDING ONLINE IN THE UAE

When the world changed, the student team from the United Arab Emirates had to change, too.

They were in the middle of planning their second U-Lead – a small conference for students new to Operation Smile – when they had to suddenly switch to a virtual format.

Thanks to support from their peers from Latin America, the UAE team got the hang of it – and made the U-Lead model a success.

“I have learned so much about organizing a virtual event as a back-of-house member,” said student Naicy Thakki, referring to her role in supporting the U-Lead. “Be it building advertising plans, creating registration forms, or co-hosting Zoom meetings, a lot goes into the preparation for this three-day virtual event than one would expect.”

Despite all the challenges, and thanks to the inspiring nature of the U-Leads, the conference participants fundraised more than $7,000 through the year.
July 2020 through June 2021: 
BY THE NUMBERS

Operation Smile believes in the power of youth to create a more compassionate world. Instilling the value of volunteerism in students is not only an investment in the future of our organization, it’s also an investment in a better world.

Note: These figures were reported by student clubs via two surveys filled out by club leaders and their advisers – one in December 2020, and one in June 2021. Not every registered club responded to this survey and submitted their data.

For numbers representing our Latin American, Caribbean and international clubs, our associates submitted what data they had available.

Consequently, while we’re very proud to share these numbers, these figures ultimately do not capture the full picture – these numbers are almost certainly higher than reported here.

Whenever possible, this document will be updated with additional figures as collected from this reporting period.

$340,000 (and counting!)  
Funds raised just in the U.S. & Canada from quarters 1-4 of the fiscal year, plus our signature campaign “Sending Hope”

$92,274  
Funds raised from our online Smile Fund campaign

154,131  
Service hours tallied in the U.S. & LAC, compiled from surveys & associates

19,000+  
Global leaders created during international conferences & U-Leads

43  
Countries involved, including 13 LAC countries & 29 international

13,278  
Students registered in clubs per club registration forms & associates

489  
Global clubs registered through our online form
MEET SOPHIA OF THE USA

‘I was inspired by a family member’ born with a cleft

Most students try to spend their summers away from books and classwork before returning to their desks and studying hard for another year.

But Sophia Liu isn’t your average student.

When Sophia found herself with lots of free time this summer due to the pandemic, the junior at Ladue Horton Watkins High School in Missouri decided to enter a contest that would challenge her skills and contribute something positive.

And this wasn’t any ordinary contest, either. Hosted by Yellow, a nonprofit founded by megawatt celebrity Pharrell Williams, The Summer of Innovation challenge rallied young people to prepare business pitches in hopes of receiving funding for their ideas.

With Sophia’s decorated history of debating and pitching, this challenge was just another outlet for her creativity. But this was about much more than just a business pitch. It was personal.

“I was inspired by a family member who was born with a cleft lip, and I wanted to pursue an opportunity that could raise general awareness for cleft conditions, with the hope of funding cleft-repair surgeries,” Sophia said, describing her inspiration for her winning pitch.

She touted her Spreading Smiles campaign: Sophia and her friend, Nicole Gorrell, will design and sell T-shirts that promote awareness and acceptance for people born with cleft conditions.

“With the Spreading Smiles campaign, I wanted to ensure that first and foremost, the prevalence of cleft conditions was highlighted,” Sophia said.

And her pitch obviously resonated with Yellow’s judges: Sophia’s Spreading Smiles campaign was picked as Yellow’s winner in the high school category, and she’ll receive $5,000 to start making her T-shirts. She even plans on donating profits from her new business to Operation Smile.
GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Two-year-old Chester of Nicaragua is what our “Sending Hope” campaign was all about.

Our student volunteers delivered a meal kit to his family’s home about 300 kilometers from Managua - a meal kit that was made possible by our students’ fundraisers in Italy. And on June 5, Chester was finally able to receive the surgery he needed for his cleft lip.

The COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on surgical care delivery in the countries where we work, and our patients and their families had to wait for care to resume. But knowing that proper nutrition and lack of illness are key in making sure a patient is healthy enough to receive surgery, our student volunteers were determined to make sure that patients in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama and Paraguay don't have to wait any longer for care. Students on three continents banded together to provide meal kits and essential care items that would help ensure our potential patients will be healthy enough for surgery when their opportunity comes.

“The pandemic has struck really tough on the patients, since most were ready to get their smiles last April and have now been waiting for over a year,” said student volunteer Ana Isabel de la Guardia of Panama, after helping to prepare and deliver meal kits. “... To know that even one of them will be getting ready for their surgery with the items we donated puts a smile in a smile on my face – one that they will be getting soon, too.”

Student volunteers took part from the following countries: Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, Paraguay, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Ireland, the United States – the latter with 28 clubs supporting from 12 states.

*Not all of our teams have reported their numbers; the stats here are not final.
‘SENDING HOPE’

CYCLERS GEAR UP TO PROVIDE CARE

They biked 52 miles in the February chill for four very important reasons — and their names are Esperanza, Melanie, Genesis and Jeremías.

After reading the stories of these children in Guatemala — and how their cleft surgeries had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic — a squad of high schoolers cycled the Virginia Capital Trail to rally materials that will help the children and others receive surgery as soon as it’s possible.

As malnutrition and illness can further delay surgical care, donations inspired by their ride covered health care items and nutritious meals for potential patients in Guatemala, all to ensure they’re healthy enough to qualify for surgery when their time comes.

$31K+
U.S. DOLLARS RAISED IN THIS EFFORT

250+
POTENTIAL PATIENTS HELPED IN GUATEMALA

52
MILES BIKE BY THE TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS

60+
SPONSORS SUPPORTED THE EFFORT

Above: A member of Team Hope placed a photo of a patient on their bookbag as a reminder of why they all biked 52 miles from Williamsburg to Richmond. The riders were from Virginia Beach, the hometown of Operation Smile. (Courtesy photo)
MEET YANIK OF PARAGUAY

‘Ever since that moment, I went all in’ for the cause

It’s not every week you find yourself surrounded by more than 350 international student volunteers who want to change the world.

Yet that’s where Yanik Sitta found himself when he attended Operation Smile’s International Student Leadership Conference in 2019, which took place at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

He had never felt so empowered and so comfortable once the conference started. He was happy to be surrounded by people who, like him, are working to make a difference.

They even got a chance to do just that at the conference: For their annual service project, ISLC participants made candy bags for the nurses and doctors serving the craniofacial center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“It was amazing to see how so many people from so different countries were excited to be in one project helping other people that they don’t even know,” Yanik said. “I felt it (was) really powerful.”

Yanik got involved with Operation Smile by chance. When his best friend couldn’t make a meeting with Operation Smile club presidents in 2018, he insisted that Yanik go instead.

“At the moment I arrived I already knew that it was something special. I knew that I was going to like it,” he said about his first time being around Operation Smile volunteers. “The people I met in that meeting was just amazing. ... Ever since that moment, I went all in.”

Yanik has been part of the local volunteer team for three international missions in Asunción. He has also served as the representative for Paraguay on Operation Smile’s Latin American student board, where he was in charge of all university volunteers locally and regionally. He’s now in university, studying in the Netherlands.
VIRTUALLY POSSIBLE
REMOTE PROGRAMS
MAKE DIRECT IMPACT

The Operation Smile student volunteers gathered with the patient and their family in the same room – the same Zoom room, that is.

While they were unable to travel or support medical programs in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Operation Smile student volunteers stepped up as programs pivoted to serve patients in a digital fashion.

As part of the team for the new Hermano Major program, Katherine Lee of Pennsylvania and Sol Sanchez of Peru said they could feel the energy of their session with patient Fabiano, despite the virtual divide.

“As soon as the session started, we all connected really well and had lots of fun,” Sol said.

Each session teamed up four students - two from the U.S. and two from Peru - who set up fun games to play with patients receiving speech pathology care from Operacion Sonrisa Peru. Operation Smile Student Programs alumni and supporters raised $4,500 to cover the kits to support this program.

While Hermano Major kicked off its first program this spring, our U-Voice student storyteller program spun off its sister program: We-Voice. This new program trains local students to cover stories for the Operation Smile foundation in their country, instead of reporting from an international program.

“I personally feel that We-Voice is a great way to strengthen our local Operation Smile foundation,” said Maryam Saleel, a volunteer with Operation Smile in the United Arab Emirates. “After all, who knows the culture and ethics of a country better than volunteers who live there themselves.”
MEET ALICIA OF CANADA

‘I feel like I have a friend in every country’ after ISLC

As crowds of people arrived at the hospital in hopes of receiving surgery, Alicia Richardson was overcome by the joy she saw on the families’ faces. It was at this medical mission in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, that Alicia finally understood the impact of Operation Smile.

From fundraising with her dad to starting a club at her high school, Alicia’s heart has long been invested in the cause. It’s what spurred Alicia to get even more involved with Operation Smile and attend its 2018 International Student Leadership Conference (ISLC) in Seattle, Washington. She left her home of Toronto, Canada to go to a leadership conference far away with no one she knew.

Reflecting on her ISLC experience, Alicia said she remembers every moment. For her, the best part of the experience is meeting people from around the world and learning what their lives are like back home.

“Right now I feel like I have a friend in every country,” Alicia said with a laugh.

Volunteering on a medical mission had already been a longtime dream for Alicia. Her family first became involved with Operation Smile through Johnson & Johnson Medical Devices Companies, where her father, Jim Richardson, works. He said he learned about a program there to raise money for Operation Smile with “the prospect of going on a mission and seeing it first hand.”

In about six years, the Richardson family rallied about 65,000 Canadian dollars for the organization. And as each surgery can cost as little as $240 U.S., they’ve helped to make almost 200 surgeries possible.

But this is no short process, Jim said. “It wasn’t just, ‘Let’s just do a fundraiser this weekend’ – it was like six months of Operation Smile stuff on our dining room table,” Jim said, with Alicia joking that it takes up their entire house.
Leaders Click at Virtual Gatherings

While the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from gathering in Peru for our International Student Leadership Conference (ISLC), it didn't stop our hosts from sharing inspiration with our global audience in July 2020.

In our first ever digital conference – what we called our Mini Digi ISLC – our Peruvian student leaders worked to “Bring Peru to You” via Operation Smile Student Programs' Instagram platform, @osstudpro.

Followers from about 20 countries took part in the mini conference’s activities, including hearing from speakers, taking part in a cooking class, and even submitting an entry for our first-ever TikTok talent show.

The Mini Digi ISLC charted the course for the rest of our conferences this year, as our other hallmark gatherings also went online.

And even though our Latinoamérica en Acción (LEA) conference went online in February, 450-plus participants from 14 countries said it certainly didn’t feel like it. Just like at an in-person conference, they even had “roommates,” an evening breakout session when a cluster of students from different countries would return to their “room” and discuss the day.

Students attending our Step UP Symposium for undergraduate volunteers in January were also as engaged, working together in small groups to tackle the challenge of the year: How can they help even more patients despite the challenges presented by the pandemic? After listening to keynote speakers share their wisdom on topics such as global health, nutrition and more, the student teams retreated to their groups, and at the end of the conference, presented their ideas for patient impact.

Above: Screengrabs from LEA form a mosaic, creating an image of a patient and mother. (Illustration by Carlos Rueda – Operation Smile)
MEET TIMMY OF THE USA

Wearing an Operation Smile T-shirt is like ‘wearing a hug’

Student Programs alumnus Timmy Zhu celebrated his 1,000th straight day of wearing an Operation Smile T-shirt on May 21, thus completing his almost-three-year-long #WearingASmile campaign.

Student volunteers around the world marked the occasion, posting selfies in their own favorite Operation Smile shirts and congratulating Timmy on his successful awareness campaign.

A longtime volunteer who’s become a mentor for Operation Smile clubs at universities across the U.S., Timmy said he wasn’t sure if he would actually stop wearing Operation Smile T-shirts — but his Instagram account, @timmyzhu100, has taken a well-deserved hiatus.

The idea for his “Wearing a Smile” campaign started after he wore Operation Smile shirts for one academic year while completing his undergraduate degree at Ohio State University.

As for his choice of 1,000 days being the ending goal, Timmy said, “one, it’s the smallest four-digit number and ... if you’re going to repeat something, you have to push the envelope.”

He said wearing Operation Smile shirts is “like I was wearing a big hug” and provided “not only an incredible opportunity for me to give back, but to communicate how much I love Operation Smile.”

Throughout his journey, Timmy received shirts from more than a dozen countries, including Canada, Vietnam, Italy, Ireland, Honduras, Paraguay, Bolivia and Mexico. He also received many shirts from clubs all over the United States.

He found Operation Smile in 2011, when he took part in the International Student Leadership Conference. He’s volunteered ever since.
JOINING FRIENDS ON THEIR JOURNEY

Their love of education—and each other—made it possible for Operation Smile Global Headquarters to serve as a “window to the world.”

Enlightened by his travels and inspired by the love of his life Hideko, Anthony L. “Tony” Burgess’ legacy of learning and hard work shines through his $1 million gift to Operation Smile. The Burgess family is empowering generations of young people to experience and embrace a global perspective through The Anthony L. and Hideko S. Burgess Interactive Learning Center (ILC), located in the lobby of Operation Smile’s headquarters in Virginia Beach.

As a U.S. military veteran who met his wife while serving in Japan as an English teacher, Operation Smile’s mission and vision resonated with Tony.

Students, community members and corporate partners who come through the ILC will be paired with a “friend,” a patient who has received care from Operation Smile. As they make their way through the exhibit, they’ll follow in their friends’ footsteps and learn what it can take for our patients to access the care they need.

As the ILC hosted its soft opening in May of 2021 and held its first field trip in July.
DIGITAL STATS & HIGHLIGHTS

CHIPPING IN FOR SMILES

This was a very special year for us: The longtime student volunteer and leader of our cleft community, Brady Hishmeh, was selected to represent Operation Smile on Lay’s Smile Bags.

Our social media drive around the “Smile with Lay’s” campaign saw the top engagement of the year, with 65,840 impressions and 3,000-plus likes in October alone.

We hosted a challenge called “Chip In Tuesday,” where every week we featured a student volunteer posing with their bag of Lay’s and gifted them a bag of Operation Smile swag.

INSTAGRAM | @osstudpro
- **Followers:** 5,191
- **Gender:** 71% female | 24% male
- **Age:** 40% 13-24 | 33% 25-34
- **Top countries:** U.S. | Paraguay | Ecuador | Bolivia | Colombia

TIKTOK | @osstudpro
- **Followers:** 213
- **Core audience:** high schoolers

FACEBOOK GROUP
- **Members:** 2,283
- **Gender:** 72% female | 28% male
- **Age:** 3213-24 | 40% 25-34
- **Top countries:** U.S. | Egypt | Vietnam | Philippines | India

YOUTUBE | OS Student Programs
- **Subscribers:** 455

HIGHLIGHTS
- Student Programs’ global newsletter, the Stud Pro Snapshot, saw its first sponsor this year: Stacked By Suzie, a Virginia Beach-based jewelry brand whose owners have ties to the Cape Henry Collegiate Operation Smile club. They created special “Stacked By Suzie Smile Studs” earrings to celebrate this partnership.
- We released our first YouTube miniseries, called “Around the World.” Each episode featured a student interviewing another from a different continent; student from nine countries were highlighted, including Canada, Italy, the UAE, Ghana, Egypt and more.
- Despite a quiet mini ISLC – the time period when we usually see the most growth in followers – we still saw our Instagram platform grow by more than 20 percent.
- We added a “Link in Bio” feature to our Instagram profile and saw a 73 percent increase in clicks from Instagram to our website.
studentprograms.operationsmile.org
@osstudpro | #osstudpro