



REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS FROM A FIRST-TIME SURGICAL TRIP TRAVELER

EMILY FOX, RN, BSN • CSI VOLUNTEER, ETHIOPIA, OCTOBER 2025

"Welcome back, Emily! Give me the CliffsNotes version of your travel experience [to Ethiopia]!"

I've been asked this many times since returning from my trip.



"Seeing CSI's mission in action was nothing short of extraordinary. CSI's commitment to sustainable care — through not only performing surgeries, but also educating local medical professionals — was evident in every interaction."

— EMILY FOX, RN

How do you summarize the life-changing experience of performing 66 surgeries in a week? Profound, innovative, and humbling — those are the "easy" words. The reality? Transformative. The energy, compassion, and dedication of the entire multidisciplinary team made this trip not only successful, but deeply meaningful.

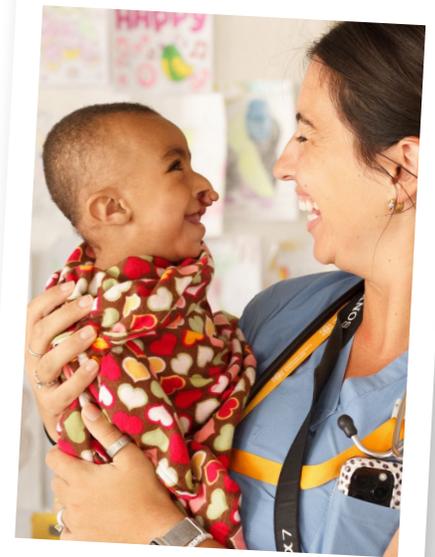
Traveling to a country with such different access to healthcare was challenging. I was confronted with the emotional weight of seeing families travel great distances and wait patiently,

full of hope, for their children to receive care. As a pre-op/recovery nurse on the trip, I provided care and education to patients and families, quickly adapting to a new environment with limited supply resources. Witnessing the resilience and gratitude of our patients, their families, and the Bahir Dar community reminded me of the privilege it was to serve.

Seeing CSI's mission in action was nothing short of extraordinary. CSI's commitment to sustainable care — through not only *performing* surgeries, but also *educating* local medical professionals — was evident in every interaction. The impact goes beyond surgeries — building capacity, fostering trust, and empowering communities.

This trip changed me. It broadened my understanding of global health disparities and strengthened my resolve to advance equity in healthcare. I will carry the lessons from this experience into my daily work, with renewed passion for service and a strengthened commitment to teams making a tangible difference.

It was a week of joy, challenge, and profound connection. During a closing dinner, a local surgeon noted that, although we came to provide patient care and improve quality of life, what we're really doing is providing *families* and *communities* the chance to heal. That sentiment really stuck with me as it summarized what living within the Ethiopian community felt like. There was no isolation, only warm embraces and welcoming hearts.



Emily Fox, RN, and a CSI patient.

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THE GAMBIA

Alasan Has a Bright Future, Thanks to You

When Alasan Bah was born, his mother had no idea something was wrong. But just a few days after bringing him home, she noticed his belly growing firm and swollen. Worried, she brought him to a local hospital.

Doctors soon realized that Alasan had been born with a severely narrow opening to pass stool, making it almost impossible for his body to function normally. Local medical teams did everything they could, inserting temporary tubes to relieve pressure.



Alasan's mother stayed by his side, juggling his complex care with raising her two other children. The family had almost nothing to spare, and medical costs were overwhelming.

Eventually, Alasan underwent a surgery at Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital (EFSTH) to create a stoma — a surgically created opening to divert his stool. However, when this stoma prolapsed and part of his intestine pushed through, Alasan was referred to the CSI team.

In November, at no cost to the family, CSI volunteers performed a specialized procedure to repair the damaged opening to his stomach and safely reposition his intestine — a life-changing step that prepares him for the final surgery he needs.

Alasan's mother says she finally feels hope.

Because of you, more than 350 children like Alasan received free, expert surgical care in 2025.

Thank you for changing the trajectory of a child's life.



CSI volunteer Lora Koppel trained a local nursing student so that he, in turn, could instruct Alasan's mother in how to apply his colostomy bag.

Ethiopia Fellowship Recap

BETTY WU, MD



Over the course of the [fellowship training] week in December, we screened more than 50 patients and performed surgery on 24. Our smaller team size allowed for more collaboration, communication, and bonding.

My role focused on patient care and family support: checking on patients before and after surgery, answering questions, teaching families how to administer medications, and ensuring the surgical team had what they needed. I am always amazed by the resiliency of these families and children, and by the enormous amount of trust they place in strangers during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

This trip felt especially aligned with the CSI's mission and vision, emphasizing sustainability and capacity building. That impact came into focus through a five-month-old patient, Yabsiva, who had a lymphatic malformation and was scheduled for surgery. When he arrived to pre-op with a fever, I had to cancel his procedure. His mother was understandably disappointed. But I was able to share with her that not only would we be returning in February for another trip, but Dr. Kassaw and his team now had the experience to perform the procedure. In that moment, the purpose of this work was not just about the individual surgeries completed this week, but the ability to ensure care continues long after we leave.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS



surgical trips



life-changing surgeries

\$55,000

in donated medical supplies and equipment



of total donated services

Special Recognition for CSI Academic Director

Congratulations to Dr. Siva Chinnadurai, CSI Academic Director, board member, and long-time volunteer, on receiving the prestigious 2025 Blanton Bessinger Award for Child Advocacy from Children's Minnesota. This award is given to a member of staff who has gone above and beyond to advocate for the well-being of children.

Siva, a pediatric otolaryngologist and medical director of ENT, facial plastic surgery, and audiology, was recognized for his compassion and empathy in patient care, as well as for his international medical outreach work. His visionary leadership at CSI was instrumental in establishing the first Pediatric Otolaryngology and Facial Plastic Surgery Fellowship in Ethiopia, in collaboration with The College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Bahir Dar University.

Siva is quick to underscore that this work is a team effort, crediting partners including our first Pediatric Otolaryngology Fellow, Dr. Kassaw Ketemaw, whose dedication is helping to shape the future of care for children in Ethiopia.

We're grateful for Siva's leadership, proud of this recognition, and inspired

as we continue building global pediatric ENT capacity together.

Dr. Blanton Bessinger (left) poses with Dr. Siva Chinnadurai (right).



"His work continues to inspire and uplift pediatric healthcare in Ethiopia and beyond [and] we are honored to collaborate with him."

— COLLEGE OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES, BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

21ST ANNUAL

be the light



Saturday, May 2, 2026

Omni Viking Lakes Hotel

2611 Nordic Way, Eagan, MN

Join us for CSI's biggest night of the year and be the light that changes a child's life and makes a lasting impact for children and communities in need.

- Support CSI's mission through silent and live auctions, games and the Golden Ticket raffle.
- Connect with others who care deeply about making a difference in the world.
- Hear about our work this year and our plans for the year ahead.

GALA SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Sponsors are the backbone of the CSI Gala. Individuals and businesses interested in leading the success of our largest fundraiser of the year should **contact Megan Sparks at megan@childrenssurgeryintl.org to learn more.**

IN-KIND DONATIONS NEEDED

In-kind donations are essential to the gala's success. Ideal donation ideas include gift cards, event tickets, experiences, golf rounds, vacation rentals, and more. Please **contact us at info@childrenssurgeryintl.org** to contribute or **scan the QR code** to fill out the auction donation form.

Item
donation form



VOLUNTEER FOR THE GALA COMMITTEE

Help create a night to remember. We need volunteers to support event planning, logistics, donation solicitations, and more! Meetings are held virtually. **Email erika@ldseventsmn.com to get involved.**

Registration will be available in March. For more information, go to **childrenssurgeryintl.org/events**.



MEXICO OCTOBER 2025

24  trip
volunteers **1,845**
miles to
Hermosillo, Mexico

5  days
of surgery

61  life-
changing
surgeries

21  years of
partnership

St. Andrew's Children's Clinic
Voluntariado CIMA
Hospital CIMA Hermosillo



2026 TRIPS

Liberia: January 15 – 31

Ethiopia:

January 11 – February 5*

February 19 – March 1

May 15 – 23*

August 1 – 9*

October 15 – 25

December 4 – 12*

Mexico: October 3-7

The Gambia: TBD

*Small, targeted Pediatric ENT and Facial
Plastic Surgery Fellowship training trip

In memoriam: Lourdes Araiza de Montijo

BRIANNE ROBY, MD, MEXICO SURGICAL LEAD

We at CSI honor our friend and colleague, Lourdes Araiza de Montijo, who passed away on October 20, 2025. Lourdes was a founding member of the collaboration between St. Andrew's Children's Clinic, CIMA Hospital, and CSI in 2004. She served on the boards of CIMA Volunteers and St. Andrew's Children's Clinic, and was a key liaison in planning the cleft lip and palate mission in Hermosillo, Mexico.

Lourdes' guidance resulted in the expansion of the trip to include bone grafting, orthodontic care, speech therapy, and cleft rhinoplasty. She had an incredible knack for details, ensuring that the collaboration with CSI worked seamlessly. She never turned away a child with a cleft lip or palate or even a complex craniofacial problem, and she often reminded us that helping children brought her joy.

Lourdes passed away just 10 days after the 21st year of partnership between CIMA Hospital and Voluntariado, St. Andrew's Children's Clinic, and CSI took place. She was able to be present for part of that trip, and we remember hearing her say, "I'm just so happy," as she learned of all the children receiving care.

Lourdes leaves a deep legacy of selflessness, generosity, loyalty, and persistence. The partnership between CIMA, St. Andrew's Clinic, and CSI is strong because of the love and dedication that Lourdes poured into it. Her children, grandchildren, friends, and colleagues are fortunate to have witnessed the impact she had on us all.



Thank you,

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