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Wings of Hope

Delivering help and hope around the world

STORY BY CHRISTINE KNAUER



Baby Griffin looks out an aircraft window. Wings of Hope transports Griffin from Ohio to St. Louis Children's Hospital for treatment of clubfeet.

A high school student works on the engine of a Cessna 182 in Lancaster, Texas, while in Tanzania, a group of Maasai people gather around a Cessna U206 to help unload much-needed medical supplies. In India, a woman assembles incense sticks, earning money to support and feed her family. They're all beneficiaries of Wings of Hope, an aviation nonprofit that delivers humanitarian programs in 12 countries around the world. The group currently operates in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

"We fly volunteer doctors and dentists into communities to provide preventive and maternal care, vaccinations for children, and dental care," said Carol Enright, Wings of Hope communications manager. "We also use our airplanes for emergency medical transportation from remote areas to hospitals in nearby cities."

Based in St. Louis, Missouri, the organization depends on a lean staff of 12 and some 250 volunteers worldwide to provide health care, education and basic resources – all in the hope of lifting people toward self-sufficiency.

"In Cambodia, we support an after-school English language outreach program to help children in poor areas get into college," Enright said. "In Nicaragua and Ecuador, we give villages the supplies and training they need to raise chickens as a sustainable source of protein. In India and Kenya, Wings of Hope provides microloans and training to help women start small businesses as a source of sustainable income."

WEBSITE: wingsofhope.ngo

FACILITIES: 30,000 square feet

FOUNDED: 1962 by Bill Edwards, Joseph Fabick, Paul Rodgers and George Haddaway

WHAT THEY DO:

Wings of Hope is an aviation nonprofit that delivers humanitarian programs around the globe to lift people in need toward health and self-sufficiency.

EMPLOYEES: 12 staff, about 250 volunteers worldwide

AEA MEMBER SINCE: 2009



In Belize, Wings of Hope pilot TJ Stewart takes a call to medevac a patient.

In 2003, Wings of Hope launched its U.S.-based Medical Relief & Air Transport Program. Until then, Wings of Hope had exclusively served communities in developing countries. Today, the program owns and operates three aircraft – one Cessna 206 and two Piper Senecas – to provide medical air transport services.

The aircraft are specially equipped to accommodate stretchers, wheelchairs and medical equipment. The majority of MAT patients are children, many of whom have rare diseases or birth defects, and require special, lifesaving treatments not available near where they live. The program is always offered free of charge.

At its 30,000-square-foot facility at Spirit of St. Louis Airport, Wings of Hope's licensed A&P mechanics volunteer their time to maintain the aircraft, and perform repairs and installations. In 2013, the organization completed an expansion of the facility, adding more office space and square footage to the hangar. The expansion was largely to

accommodate the growing MAT Program and provide space for additional staff focused on increasing funding for the organization's domestic and international programs.

The value of hope

In the United States, Wings of Hope's greatest challenge is keeping up with the demand for its MAT Program. In 2016, the organization flew 498 missions transporting 285 people to care.

"We had to decline 371 requests for service in 2016, largely because we didn't have the capacity to fly them," Enright said. "Even though the United States is home to the world's best medical facilities, many, many people – especially those living in rural areas – have no way to access the specialized care they or their children need when they get struck by serious illness."

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A woman assembles incense sticks at a work center in Balasore, Odisha, built by Wings of Hope. Women from this extremely poor part of India can earn \$50 per month doing this work.



WINGS OF HOPE

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Internationally, the challenge is similar – finding ongoing funding to serve those who need help and hope around the world. In addition to pursuing the usual channels such as grants, individual donations and corporate sponsorships, Wings of Hope accepts donated aircraft, which are used in the field or refurbished and sold to fund programming. In recent years, the organization has raffled donated aircraft to raise money for its MAT Program. The creative fundraising campaign has been highly successful. In April 2017, 4,000 raffle tickets for a 1979 Piper Archer II with a freshly overhauled engine were sold in less than six hours.

“In some ways, the people we serve in developing nations have very different needs from those we serve in the United States,” Enright said. “The Maasai in Tanzania,

for example, look to our flying medical clinics for basic vaccines for their children – something that people in the United States take for granted. At the same time, a child battling a rare disorder in Iowa has the same need for access to health care as a child fighting for a healthier life in the jungles of Nicaragua.

“When times are tough, all people have the same need for hope – hope for better health, hope for a way out of poverty, hope for a better future. No matter where we are in the world, Wings of Hope provides people access to the resources they need to build that brighter future for themselves.” □

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