

Emanating positivity and constant smiles, Brenda McFerrin could warm up a room on a cold day. Looking for a way to help children in need, she brings her cross-cultural brand of contribution back and forth between Jordan, Iraq and the United States

WHO SHE IS

Brenda McFerrin, founder of Children In Need International

WHAT SHE DOES

Brenda is more than a go-getter; her proactivity is the engine behind Children In Need International. Although she never planned on heading an international charity, she saw a gap in the care available to injured and sick children in Iraq and Jordan. Many charities exist to help children injured in combat or those with congenital heart problems, but costs are high, logistics are tough and not all children can be cared for. Brenda saw a need for aiding these charities in the work they were already doing and facilitating an environment in which they could accomplish even more, and that's when Children In Need came about. Where some charities cannot pay for transportation, Children In Need foots the bill. When hospital costs exceed original estimates, when doctors must be found, when accommodations must be made and when the medical needs of a child cannot be met by an existing charity, the umbrella of Children In Need stretches to help ensure they receive the required care. Children In Need International finds what needs to be done and makes it happen.

IT STARTED WITH ONE

Working with charities and aid organisations already operating in Jordan and Iraq, Brenda began Children In Need International after a chance experience with a single child. A young Iraqi girl named Shames nearly slipped through the cracks of the overwhelmed Baghdad hospital system. Brenda recalls, "There was an explosion inside her home in Baghdad. She was brought to the hospital near death." Shames was out of options, and there was no one left to help her. Through sheer luck, a friend of Brenda's husband was in Iraq and saw Shames as she was being carried into the hospital. "He called my husband, Dan, and basically asked if he would pay to fly this child and her mother to the States for medical care." Not missing a beat, Brenda and her husband quickly put the two on a plane. "I met them in Chicago because when they arrived, they didn't know anyone and didn't speak English." Brenda flew with them to Shriners Hospital in Sacramento, California,



which is part of a system of American hospitals that provide healthcare to children free of charge. "We arrived in the middle of the night, and the surgeons had waited for us to get there so they could begin helping her as soon as possible."

Shames has now been receiving care in Sacramento for nearly a year, and Brenda beams about her progress. "The doctors were able to save her arm, and she has been fit with a prosthetic leg. She and my granddaughter were playing and running around and carrying on such conversations; Shames has learnt to speak both English and Spanish!"

EXPANDING THEIR REACH

When Brenda met Shames and her mother, there was no Children In Need International; there was only Brenda. After working with the team of doctors in Sacramento and seeing what a huge difference could be made in the life and health of a child, Brenda came to Amman to continue her work.

She helped organise a trip for a team of doctors from the United States to spend two weeks in Amman performing heart surgery on 10 children. "The doctors used their vacation time to come here. We helped pay for both doctors' and patients' hotel stays and meals. That was my first hands-on experience with Iraqi children and their families. After that, I flew back to the States and officially started the charity."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"One of the doctors working with Médecins Sans Frontières asked if we only take Iraqi and Jordanian children, and I said 'It is Children In Need International, you know,'" Brenda smiles excitedly as she imagines helping more children in more places. This year alone, Children In Need has participated

in the transportation and medical care of 45 children.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

"A huge thing that people can do is just sit with the Iraqi children and their families when they're at the hospital. These families are in an unfamiliar country, and just the comfort of a hand to hold can go a long way. Clothes, toys and school supplies are also great things to give to these families."

To volunteer or make a donation, visit childreninneed-Intl.org or email Brenda at Brenda@childreninneed-Intl.org

BRENDA IN A NUTSHELL

BEST ASSET: "Not letting things get me down. Whatever tragedy happens in your life, there is always a little light up there."

MISSES MOST ABOUT AMERICA: "My family."

FAVOURITE FOOD: "French fries!"

LIFE MOTTO: "I think we all just need to love one another."

BEST JORDANIAN MEMORY: "Riding a camel in Petra."