

ROTARY'S 30 PLUS YEAR FIGHT

As the charitable arm of Rotary, the Rotary Foundation empowers Rotarians to approach challenges to enhance our local and global impact in promoting peace, Fighting disease, Providing clean water, Saving mothers and children, Supporting education and Growing local economies. However one of the Foundation's major focuses worldwide is the End Polio campaign.

Most of us will have had little exposure (thankfully) to Polio in Australia. So what is Polio?

- Poliomyelitis (polio) is a paralyzing and potentially fatal disease that still threatens children in some parts of the world.
- The poliovirus invades the nervous system and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours
- Polio mainly affects children under the age of five
- There is no cure for Polio – but it is preventable with a vaccine
- Polio survivors make up the largest single physical disability group in Australia? Up to 40,000 Australians were diagnosed with the most severe form of the disease, paralytic polio, between 1930 and 1988. In Australia today there are an estimated 400,000 polio survivors

Rotary's involvement began in 1979 when Clem Renouf, (only the second Australian to be elected president of Rotary International), was leaving through Reader's Digest on a flight from the Philippines. In the pages of the magazine, he read that the World Health Organisation's had eradicated smallpox – the first disease to be halted through a concerted public health effort.

Sir Clem had been in Manila formalizing agreements to launch the first project under The Rotary Foundation's Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Grants program, and now Renouf was wondering if these new grants could enable Rotary to tackle another disease with similar success. Sir Clem decided it was time for the legion of Rotary clubs around the world to focus less on parochial projects and tackle a big-picture problem that would leave an indelible mark on society.

So what did he do.....he phoned a friend - John Sever.

Sever was a district governor in the Washington, D.C., area and head of the infectious diseases branch of the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Diseases and Stroke at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Sever was also friends with Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin, the men who had revolutionized public health with their development of the polio vaccines in the 1950s and '60s. The vaccines already were stopping polio in the developed world; the United States saw its last case of endemic polio later in 1979. Sever recognized that Sabin's oral vaccine, available for only 4 cents per dose, had the potential to save more than 350,000 children every year from the crippling disease all over the world, if only someone could organize the effort.

So in 1979 Rotary clubs took on a project through the 3-H program to buy and help deliver polio vaccine to more than six million children in the Philippines at a cost of just \$760,000.

Another offshoot of the project was providing free tetanus vaccines to 390,000 expectant mothers.

In 1985, Rotary launched its PolioPlus program, the first initiative to tackle global polio eradication through the mass vaccination of children.

In 2000 a record 550 million children – almost one-tenth of the world's population – received the oral polio vaccine. The Western Pacific region, spanning from Australia to China, was declared polio-free that year

With Sever's help, Rotary received a special designation as a nongovernmental organization affiliated with WHO and forged an official partnership with the agency. That partnership, now known as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, includes the spearheading partners WHO, Rotary International, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and UNICEF. Other important sources of support include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and national governments.

Since it began the fight Rotary has contributed more than \$1.6 billion and countless volunteer hours to immunize more than 2.5 billion children in 122 countries. In addition, Rotary's advocacy efforts have played a role in decisions by donor governments to contribute more than \$7.2 billion to the effort. In 2014 at the opening of Rotary International's annual convention in Sydney, Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced the Australian government's commitment to end the crippling disease once and for all by committing \$100 million over 5 years.

More than one million Rotary members have donated their time and personal resources to end polio. Every year, hundreds of Rotary members work side-by-side with health workers to vaccinate children in polio-affected countries

Today, there are only three countries that have never stopped transmission of the wild poliovirus: Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. Less than 75 polio cases were confirmed worldwide in 2015, and so far in 2016 there have only been 32 reported cases to date....a reduction of more than 99.9 percent since the 1980s, when the world saw about 1,000 cases per day

The polio cases represented by the remaining one percent are the most difficult to prevent, due to factors including geographical isolation, poor public infrastructure, armed conflict and cultural barriers. Until polio is eradicated, all countries remain at risk of outbreaks.

Whilst it has been a long fight...we are this close to eliminating the disease. For as little as \$0.60, a child can be protected against this crippling disease for life.