

## Fundraising aids life-saving operations for Palestinian children

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Sodexo has reported that its team at Nuffield Health Leicester Hospital raised £6,000 to fund a life-saving mission organised by Leicester charity Healing Little Hearts. This funded a team of medical professionals travel to the An-Najah University Hospital in Nablus to perform free heart surgery on five seriously ill children.

Over the course of 2022 the team, led by catering manager Belinda Smith, organised a series of fundraising activities for the Healing Little Hearts charity. Founded by Dr Sanjiv Nichani OBE, a consultant paediatrician at Leicester Children's Hospital for 26 years, the charity began its work in India and has expanded its reach year on year and is now the busiest children's heart charity in the UK

On 10 December Dr Nichani and a team including surgeon Professor Massimo Caputo from Bristol Royal Hospital for Children travelled to An-Najah University Hospital in Nablus to carry out life-saving heart surgery on five Palestinian children aged between 19 months and 10 years over five days. Three of the operations had never been performed in the region before. The local surgical and medical team were able to support the operations proving them with valuable training and experience.

Dr Nichani said: "There are an estimated one million babies and children dying every year from untreated heart disease – more than double the number dying from malaria. It is completely treatable, and it is simply the lack of training and facilities available. By comparison, in the UK there are 6,000 babies and children who require heart surgery every year, and all successfully have surgery, with a survival rate of 98 to 99%."

"It costs around £700 per child to fund a life-saving heart procedure," continues Dr Nichani. "For some

people that is a weekend away in London. Yet this amount can give a child a new lease of life. We rely solely on public awareness, donations and fundraising. Support from organisations like Sodexo and passionate individuals like Belinda is so important, and we're incredibly grateful for this."

Ms Smith, who organised the fundraising events commented: "It is hard not to be overwhelmed by the level of determination of Dr Nichani and his team, and the impact the charity has had. It is wonderful to know we are making a contribution. I want to help be a voice for Healing Little Hearts and raise awareness. It's something I love to do."

Sodexo states that it encourages its people to volunteer and fundraise for causes aligned to the company's own charity, [Stop Hunger Foundation](#) as well as those that are close to the hearts of individual employees.