



## Weekend Waiting List Initiative 2021

The Weekend Waiting List Initiative has been running as an annual project since 2011. The Initiative was established to reduce waiting lists for elective paediatric surgeries by adding an additional day of surgeries (Saturday) to the hospital's operating schedule. By reducing the large volumes of relatively minor cases, more scope and flexibility is provided for more complex cases to be attended to during the week. This initiative has become one of the most critical projects at the hospital as the backlog for elective surgeries has been further increased due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The eleventh annual Weekend Waiting List Initiative at the Red Cross Children's Hospital came to a successful end on Saturday 14 December 2021, after running for 25 weeks from 10 April 2021.



## Saturday Surgeries Are Making Dreams Come True

*When you're a child, any amount of waiting is too long. But when you're waiting for your child to receive medical care or undergo procedures that relieve their pain or discomfort, then waiting becomes anxiously unbearable. The Weekend Waiting List gives each child- and their caregivers- a better quality of life sooner rather than later.*

It's a beautiful Saturday morning at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, and a little boy has just been wheeled into the operating room. His mother smiles with relief as she waited 12 months for his surgery to finally take place.

Four-year-old Lusawana is truly his mother's pride and joy. However, at such a young age, little Lusawana has already overcome so much: At birth, it was discovered that he had an abnormal growth on his right foot. Doctors explained to his concerned mother that part of Lusawana's right foot did not have a normal bone structure, which caused his toes to grow out of proportion. This condition is called microdissectomy and with the help of surgical experts and medical guidance, Lusawana would need to have his foot restructured with specialised surgery to assist in his mobility, and to avoid inflammation and further complications in his foot.

This brave little boy has already undergone three surgeries since 2017, when doctors removed the excess skin and restructured his big toe. In 2019, he had another operation to further help curb the abnormal growth and this operation also served to prevent inflammation in his foot.

Lusawana was then scheduled for further surgery in late 2020 to help restructure his foot so that it may fit into shoes and help him adapt to a more comfortable life.



The surgery would improve his mobility, make wearing shoes comfortable, and reduce the health risk of inflammation and infection as he grows. Most importantly, it would build his confidence to grow into a thriving man and fulfill his dreams one day. Already he has tolerated the trauma of being singled out at his creche and in the community where they reside.

His mother says: *"Lusawana has never worn shoes and he adapted to living life without them, but now that he is growing, the school will ask him to wear shoes and he will become more conscious of his own body. I'm so happy that he is receiving the treatment."*

Despite having to wait a further 12 months due to additional delays caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, Lusawana finally had his surgery in November 2021- just in time for him to start the 2022 school year with confidence!

The 2021 Weekend Waiting List initiative officially kicked off in April- this is 2 months earlier than in previous years so that the Hospital could start to reduce the additional backlog in surgical cases caused by disruptions during the first 2 waves of the COVID pandemic. In 2020 alone, there was a 38% reduction in elective day case and main theatre lists due to COVID-19, extending the elective surgery backlog to up to 2 years.

**In total, 25 out of the planned 36 lists were completed between April and December 2021.** The reduced number of completed lists was due to the project needing to be put on hold during June and July due to several unavoidable interruptions, including service de-escalation during the 3<sup>rd</sup> COVID wave, lack of bed availability as a result of the diarrheal and pneumonia surge season, and taxi violence in Cape Town in July that prevented staff from getting to work.

## 150 patients received life-changing surgery in 2021

- **26 x General Paediatric Surgery**  
Minor operations such as Hernia operations or removal of cysts, usually non-life threatening
- **28 x Paediatric Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Surgery**  
A wide range of surgeries of the head and neck, including the ear, nose and throat regions
- **20 x Orthopaedic Surgery**  
Surgery concerned with conditions involving the musculoskeletal system
- **24 x Plastic Surgery**  
Reconstructive surgery which includes craniofacial surgery, hand surgery, microsurgery, and the treatment of burns.
- **24 x Urology**  
Surgery treating urinary tract and genital problems in children

**A total of 1,423 patients have been treated through the Weekend Waiting List Initiative between 2011 and 2021**



*“The WWLI is specifically designed to manage long waiting lists for minor procedures. It is a relief to us as medical staff to accommodate them and make sure they receive their life-changing surgeries. In addition, by moving these procedures from the main in-patient lists, we are able to shorten the waiting times for more complex cases.”* Dr Sharon Cox, Head of Clinic Unit, Paediatric Surgery, RCWMCH

Despite these interruptions, the project was a resounding success, **assisting 150 patients** whose appointment dates for surgery were initially scheduled for later dates due to emergency and more life-threatening surgeries taking preference. The paediatric surgical disciplines of: Ear- nose- and throat, Urology, Plastics/ Burns, Orthopaedics, and General Surgery all participated in this year’s Weekend Waiting List Initiative.

The Weekend Waiting List Initiative has become one of the most critical projects at the hospital. Minimum waiting times for elective paediatric surgeries are still between 4 and 7 months long depending on the type of surgery, and it is estimated that it will still take at least 2 years of additional Saturday surgeries to reduce the current backlog alone.

Our heartfelt and sincere appreciation extends to each and every one of our loyal donors for contributing to this special Weekend Waiting List Project.

*Thank You!*

