

## **Volunteer helps kids with facial deformities**

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The memory of a 16-year-old boy gazing into a mirror is still fresh in Dana Hindson's memory.

"When he looked at himself in the mirror, he started crying," she said.

Gone was a tumor on his mouth, the deformity that made him an outcast in town.

In that moment, Hindson was reminded why she made the 50-hour journey from Palm Desert to Zimbabwe.

From April 11 to 25, Hindson volunteered with Operation of Hope, a family-run medical foundation started in 1989 to provide facial surgeries for poor children born with deformities. The group sends all-volunteer medical teams to perform surgeries in developing countries.

Hindson, a retired businesswoman, traveled to Africa as one of the few support staff members.

"I basically go as (their) assistant," she said. "I help schedule the surgeries. I did whatever they needed me to do, take before and after photos, anything. And I loved doing it."

Volunteers are essential to the organization's mission, said Jennifer Trubenbach, executive director.

"They make a big sacrifice," Trubenbach said. "They are away from home and family for days. They work the long hours. We are doing surgeries really in the middle of the night because of the time difference."

The teams comprise 15 people. Four are usually nonmedical, like Hindson.

The experience can be life-changing, the women said.

Hindson, who has traveled to Ecuador with the group before, said she was touched by the warmth of the people in Africa.

Families whose children are selected for the surgery often dance with joy and hug the volunteers.

"The most exciting part is after the babies come out of their surgeries and the mother and father see them for the first time," Hindson said. "Checkups are done

every six months. These little teeny babies who were undersized come back chubby and smiling."