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Organisations unite to restore a young life

Sydney Local Health District, Interplast Australia and New Zealand (Interplast) and Children First Foundation have united to help a young burns patient from the Philippines reclaim her life.

Sixteen year old Theresa Rosales arrived in Australia on 17 June to receive a series of surgeries that will transform her life. Burns sustained from a kerosene spill when she was eight years old have left Theresa with dreadful scars and contractures to her face and chest that severely restrict movement.



R-L: Professor Peter Haertsch and Professor Peter Maitz

At the time of her injury, Theresa was rushed to the burns unit in a Manila hospital where burnt skin was removed and creams and gauze squares were applied. She was unconscious for six days and ongoing treatment involved daily general anaesthetics during the changing of gauze bandages. Her hospital expenses were paid by the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO).

Theresa remained in hospital for nine months before being discharged into the care of her mother, with contractures and open wounds. She then attended an outpatient facility for the next 12 months. Over the years, efforts were made to operate to release the contractures, but Theresa could not be intubated so each attempt was abandoned.

Theresa has not attended school since her injury but speaks English very well thanks to a neighbour who provided lessons three days each week.

Hope arrived on Theresa's horizon in June 2013. Having been in hospital for two weeks waiting for a surgery that was abandoned, Theresa met Val Smith-Orr, a locally based Australian charity worker. Val said this was the worst case of contracture she had ever seen and referred Theresa to Interplast for their assessment.

An Interplast volunteer team visited Baguio in the Philippines in November 2013 on their annual program visit, and the surgeons reviewed her case.

Sydney Local Health District's Director of Burns Services at Concord Hospital, Associate Professor Peter Haertsch, was with the Interplast team and secured the support of the District, which agreed to provide 42 days of hospital care including at least six surgeries over a period of six months.

Children First Foundation made the arrangements to get Theresa to Australia including visas, passports and travel, with a Children First supporter escorting Theresa and her mother on their flight. While recovering between surgeries, Theresa will be cared for at Children First's Rehabilitation Farm near Melbourne.