



# Heart to Heart Global Cardiac Care

Measurably Expanding Access Since 1989

SITE: SAN JUAN DE DIOS HOSPITAL  
LOCATION: SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA  
COLLABORATION LAUNCHED: 2023

SEPTEMBER 16–24, 2023  
CARDIAC TRAINING MISSION 1  
PATIENT STORY



## HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

Thirty-seven-year-old Alana lives with her husband and three children in Alajuela, Costa Rica, next to the capital, San Jose. When she was a small child, doctors told her mother that she had a heart murmur, but she was never treated for any kind of heart disease.

A stay-at-home mother, Alana dedicates her time to keeping her home and raising her three children. They are five, seven, and 10 years old. Alana and Michael's youngest daughter is strong-willed and outspoken. When Alana told her children that it was time for her to be admitted to the hospital for her surgery, her daughter looked at her and said, "so... are you going to die?" Alana's eyes welled with tears as she recounted the experience.

## MEDICAL HISTORY

Alana was born with an ostium primum atrial septal defect (ASD), a hole in between the two upper chambers of her heart, and mitral valve insufficiency. When she became pregnant with her first child, Alana began to experience symptoms such as heart palpitations and shortness of breath with physical exertion. Her symptoms were exacerbated with each pregnancy. Eventually, she was diagnosed with heart disease and was told that the only way to save her life and improve her symptoms was by undergoing open heart surgery.

In the U.S. Alana would likely have undergone surgery 20 or more years ago, when she was in elementary or secondary school. However, this is not the case for children born in most other countries, like Costa Rica. Fortunately, in September 2023, Alana was selected to undergo a minimally invasive heart surgery, to be performed by a joint Heart to Heart-HSJD team.

## TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP CARE

As the date of Alana's surgery approached, she became increasingly nervous. San Juan de Dios hospital staff did their best to make sure that she was as calm and comfortable as possible—she even got to visit with therapy dogs! Alana was operated on by a joint Heart to Heart-San Juan de Dios team on September 21, 2023. Fortunately, everything went smoothly and Alana's heart defect was successfully repaired! After recovering in the ICU for three days, Alana was discharged, and one day later, she was back home with her family. Access to cardiac care not only saved Alana's life, it saved her future and her chance to be by her children's side watching and guiding them as they grow up.

## PATIENT PROFILE

Name	Alana G.
Age	37 years old
DOB	January 1, 1986
Home	Alajuela, Costa Rica
Diagnosis	Mitral valve cleft, ostium primum ASD
Open heart surgery	Mitral valve repair and ASD patch closure via right minithoracotomy
Date of procedure	September 21, 2023
Discharged from ICU	September 23, 2023

*Based on an interview conducted in Spanish by Lucie Everett, Heart to Heart staff.*