

ROTARY'S FIGHT AGAINST POLIO COMES FULL CIRCLE

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An exhibition of thought provoking photographs that depict the worldwide fight against polio will be displayed at the Menier Chocolate Factory in London next month.



The Full Circle exhibition, showing at the ground floor gallery in Southwark Street from Tuesday 14 to Saturday 18 October, is hosted by Rotary International, the humanitarian organisation that has made stamping out polio its number one goal for more than 20 years. London-based BrandRevelation.com serves as the event organiser.

The fight against polio is told through the photographs of London polio survivor and advocate Gautam Lewis who, thanks to Rotary, recently returned to his birthplace of Kolkata, India, to immunize children

against the disease.

Born in Kolkata in 1977, Gautam was abandoned by his mother at the age of three after he contracted polio. Gautam was taken to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity where he stayed for three years before having another two years of operations at the Rehabilitation Centre for Children (RCFC). There Gautam met Dr. Patricia Lewis, a dual national (UK/Ireland) nuclear physicist, who adopted him in 1985.

Still dependent on crutches from his battle with polio, Gautam is in a strong position to sympathize and fight the disease. Gautam hopes to inspire those who have been battling polio for years by highlighting with dignity achievements that are possible in the face of adversity. "It is vital that everyone remain committed to ending this disease. I hope to show, through my example, that anything is possible – the sky is the limit."

The massive global undertaking of polio eradication led by Rotary and its partners is further illustrated by the images of photographer Jean-Marc Giboux who has documented the battle against polio in its remaining strongholds of India, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan throughout the past decade.

Ian Thomson, President of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland, said: "Because polio has been wiped out in Great Britain and Ireland, many people believe that it no longer exists but this unfortunately is not the case. Our hope is that through this exhibition we can raise awareness about the devastating effects of the disease and encourage people to support us as we endeavour to eradicate it for good."

Polio mainly affects children under the age of five, invading the nervous system and often causing total paralysis in a matter of hours. There is no cure for polio, but it can be prevented through immunization. Since Rotary began its PolioPlus program in 1985, polio cases have fallen by 99 percent from 350,000 a year to 1,313 in 2007. To date, Rotary has contributed more than US\$700 million and countless volunteer hours to the protection of more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.

Rotary and its spearheading partners in Global Polio Eradication Initiative – the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – have vowed to end this crippling and potentially fatal disease once and for all.