

people we admire

BY SANDRA PARMEE

# Karen Moss

When Karen's son Alex was born with clubfeet, she sought a solution that didn't involve surgery. Now she's an advocate for non-invasive and effective treatment for other children with the condition.

**M**y son Alex was born with two clubfeet –

both his feet were turned over and inwards, pointing towards each other. It was a shock. Back then, in 2003, they performed corrective surgery on the baby at just a few months old. I was against that, so I started researching online and found an article on the Ponseti method, which involves gentle manipulation of the foot and minimal, non-invasive surgery. A link led me to Dr Ponseti's website. I knew I'd found my answer.

**At the time, there were no doctors in South Africa trained in this method,** so we went to the US to meet Dr Ponseti. The casting method was so gentle that Alex fell asleep! The entire process took 16 days. We were the first South Africans Dr Ponseti had treated, so he gave me a book he'd written and lots of information and said, 'Go see what you can do'.

**I started STEPS in 2005 to raise money and organise training.** I'd never done anything like that before.

**Sixty-seven doctors came to our first training seminar.** We reached a consensus that the Ponseti method was the way forward. It is now the treatment of choice in SA, endorsed by the SA Paediatric Orthopaedic Society. There's no miraculous cure for clubfoot, but with the Ponseti method you can get a plantigrade, functional foot, with good mobility and strength.

**We have to let people know about this solution.** We've partnered with Miraclefeet, an American NGO, to reach patients in outlying clinics. The challenges are long distances, language barriers and children being brought in late as some mothers don't know that clubfoot can be treated. I travel with a team of volunteer doctors to train registrars and medical

students. I also designed an education programme, Ponseti for Parents, which is used in the clubfoot clinics, and wrote a bedtime story for children who sleep in a brace, called *My Clever Night-Night Shoes*.

**I want every child to go to a clinic early enough to be helped.** If you leave it too late, it becomes a disability. My son is proud to be the reason that STEPS exists. His feet will never be exactly like other children's feet, but they are very close. He plays sport and loves surfing. He sometimes comes to the clinics with me. It's important for young children to see that there are many ways to help others. ♣

World Clubfoot Day is 3 June 2015.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHELSEA MACLACHLAN