

# Introducing Our 2016 – 2017 National Patient Ambassadors

Every year, Shriners Hospitals for Children® selects two national patient ambassadors to represent the patients who receive treatment at our health care system. The ambassadors are patients whose stories of perseverance in the face of adversity are particularly strong and can inspire others, and tangibly demonstrate the ability of Shriners Hospitals for Children to impact and change lives. The ambassadors will spend the year sharing their stories, and the story of the importance of Shriners Hospitals for Children.

The 2016-2017 national patient ambassadors were introduced at the 2016 Imperial Session of Shriners International, held in Tampa, Florida, in July. Here are just a few highlights of their amazing stories.

## Marius Woodward

Marius was born in a small village in Romania. In 2007, when he was only 8 years old, a family altercation resulted in a terrible house fire. Marius remembers escaping the flames through one of the windows and landing at the back of the house where a neighbor found him.

Marius had severe burns over 75 percent of his body, and had lost all of his fingers and his nose. The fire had also taken his parents; his siblings were spared, possibly only because they were not at home when the incident occurred.

Marius spent eight months at a hospital in Romania, where he met two students from Brigham Young University, Ashley Ludlow and Jessica Free, who were participating in a special program and visited the hospital. Realizing that the child would not receive all the care he needed in Romania, the girls enlisted their families' assistance to bring Marius to the U.S.

Eventually, Marius was adopted by Ashley's family, the Woodwards, and began treatment at Shriners Hospitals for Children — Los Angeles, where he underwent many surgeries, including a multiple toe-to-hand transfer, which would allow him to be much more independent. Marius is believed to be the first in the world to have a transfer of this type involving six toes.

Today, Marius is an active 17-year-old high school student who, despite having only two toes and six new fingers, is able to play football and soccer; his goal is to become a motivational speaker and a model, to demonstrate that his scars make him who he is and to encourage acceptance, despite outward appearance.



## Karolina Noguez

Karolina was born in May of 2000 with a significant limb-length discrepancy involving her left leg. For the first five years of her life, Karolina wore a shoe lift that helped compensate for the difference. Her family searched for a better solution, and ultimately Karolina became a patient of Shriners Hospitals for Children — Shreveport, where she began a lengthening treatment that would take nine years, and require both multiple surgeries and the use of an external fixator that, over time, would lengthen her leg incrementally. She began the painful, tedious treatment at age 7. When the process was complete, her leg length had been increased by 7 inches.

Now 16, Karolina practices horseback riding and enjoys surfing, two activities that require the use and strength of her left leg. After high school, she hopes to apply to a Disney program for animation.

Shriners Hospitals for Children is proud of our ambassadors, and of all our patients who strive to overcome tremendous physical challenges, and become as independent and able as possible. We are pleased to help them along the way.

The 2016 Success Story, *Marking our Paths to Strength and Survival*, can be viewed on YouTube at [youtube.com/shrinershospitals](https://youtube.com/shrinershospitals), and is available for download on [shrinersvillage.com](http://shrinersvillage.com).

[shrinershospitalsforchildren.org](http://shrinershospitalsforchildren.org)



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