

Orthodontist from Zurzibiet supports children in Kyrgyzstan – how it all began with a VW bus

By Daniel Weissenbrunner | May 15, 2026



*Marcel Frei has been committed for more than ten years to treating children with cleft lip and palate in Central Asia.
Photo: zvg*

Recognise – decide – execute. For Marcel Frei these are not empty phrases. They are part of his vocation and at the same time the slogan of his latest project.

The Endingen-based specialist offers coaching for orthodontists around the world and uses his expertise to help them simplify complex treatment cases. “I have noticed that many understand the craft, but often there is a gap in planning,” says Frei.



Marcel Frei (left) on duty in the Kyrgyz city of Osh. "A functioning hospital is a shining star for every affected child and their parents." Photo: zvg

The 59-year-old is a Specialist Orthodontist and has been in practice for more than 30 years. He sold his own practice in Bad Zurzach in 2024 after 20 years and has since devoted himself intensively to the further development of dental projects and to education.

For more than a decade and now over 30 missions, his humanitarian work has focused on building up the "Orthodontic Center of Osh" in Kyrgyzstan, which he has established as the leading treatment centre for children with cleft lip and palate in the region.



During his most recent visit to Kyrgyzstan, Marcel Frei was able to further improve the technological equipment of the hospital. Photo: zvg

During his most recent mission in the Kyrgyz city of Osh, Frei inaugurated a new treatment chair and a state-of-the-art intraoral scanner, decisively improving the technological equipment of the local cleft centre.

The ten-day stay marks another milestone in his more than ten-year-old aid project for the treatment of children with cleft lip and palate in Central Asia, says Marcel Frei, who has lived with his wife Yvonne in the Surbtal municipality for almost 30 years.

The inauguration of the new equipment in Osh was the emotional highlight of the mission. "Funded by the Stiftung Zuversicht für Kinder of Swiss Life Select, the treatment chair and the scanner now enable more precise diagnoses and treatment planning together with the local surgeons and the speech therapist."

Under Frei's leadership, the "Orthodontic Center of Osh" has developed into one of the most important centres for children with cleft conditions in Kyrgyzstan and possibly in all of Central Asia.

The project has grown out of personal commitment: "In an early phase, my wife drove the route from Switzerland to Kyrgyzstan alone in a VW bus to deliver sponsored material such as crates of toothbrushes," Frei recalls.



Marcel Frei (right) during a treatment. Photo: zvg

Out of this, the idea for a book has emerged. The result of this adventurous journey with intense encounters between cultures, including in Iran, is to be presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October and will then go on sale.

For the many patients and their families, the centre in Osh means direct access to medical care at a modern level – a decisive contribution to the development of the healthcare infrastructure in the region.

The immediate impact was reflected in the parents' reactions. "We feel gratitude through special gifts from the parents, for example apples from their own garden. Or a patient drew my wife and me as a double portrait," Frei reports.



The gratitude for Marcel Frei's commitment is great. Photo: zvg

With their tireless commitment, the Freis have created a sustainable structure that today helps hundreds of children each year.

“Especially in these geopolitically difficult times, the continuation of such development projects is particularly important. A functioning hospital is a shining star for every affected child and their parents,” says Marcel Frei.

Source: Aargauer Zeitung (cleaned print version without advertising). English translation provided for press use.