

ANNIVERSARY

Smile Foundation turns 21

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THE Smile Foundation is celebrating turning 21 by bringing more than just smiles to children as they venture into burn reconstructive surgeries.

The foundation, which performs lifesaving surgeries on its little patients, has also changed its look.

CEO at Smile Foundation Kim Robertson Smith said the foundation's aim has always been to perform magic and change children's lives.

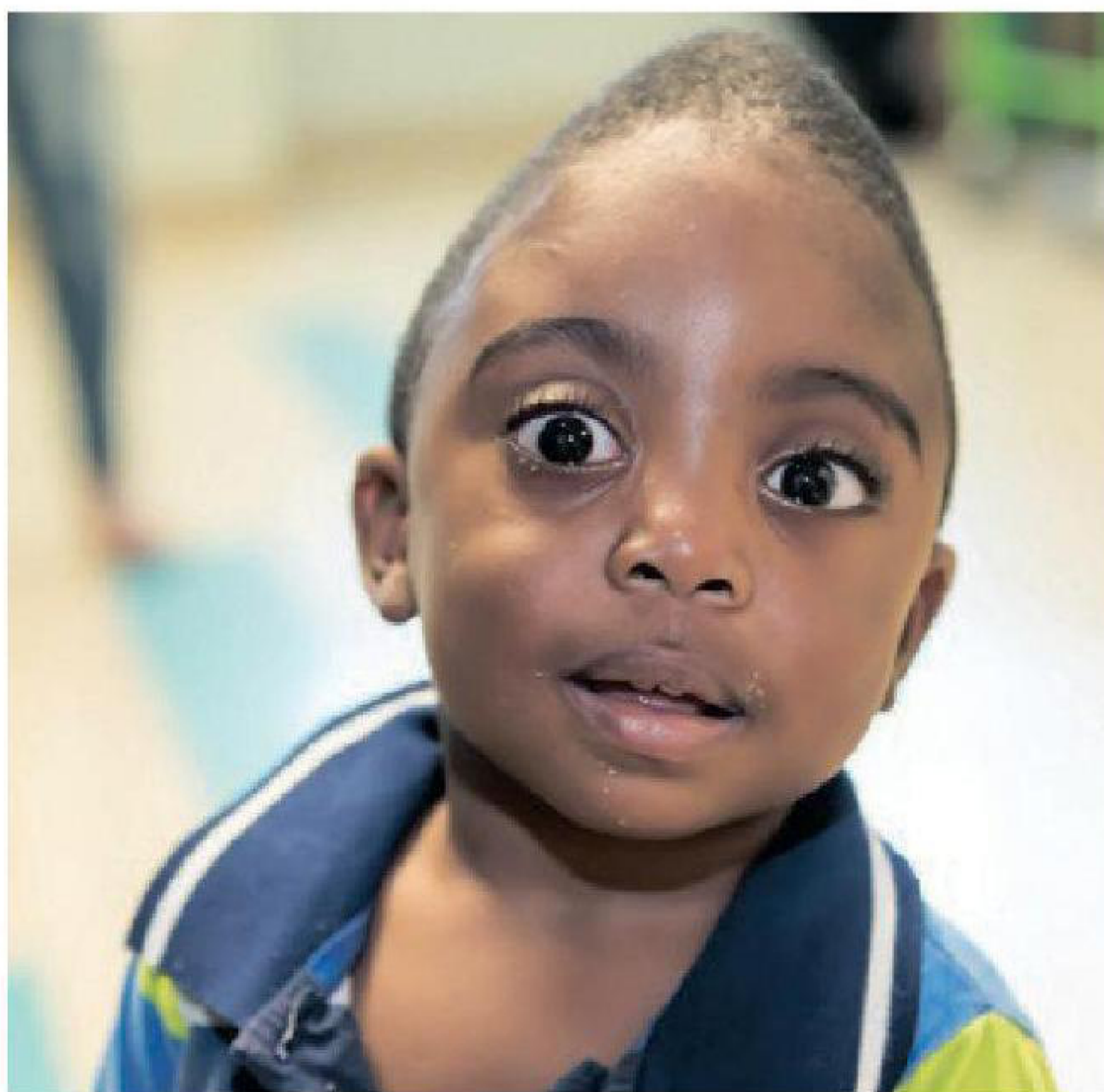
"The reason why we focus on young children is because before a child who is born with a facial deformity reaches the age of 5 or 6 they do not know they are different.

"And that's where Smile wants to position itself, where we come in as the magicians, assisting the kids to live their life as normal as possible because we all know the teasing usually happens when they reach school," she said.

Robertson said that is why they encourage parents to get their kids referred when they are young enough to get surgeries done.

"We love seeing them smile, we love seeing you smile because the truth is a whole family is affected with a child with a facial deformity."

Over the past 21 years, Smile has operated on more than 4 000 children and plans to reach even more in the coming years.



CAMERON Adam, born with craniosynostosis, is one of thousands of children who have benefited from the Smile Foundation. | SUPPLIED

"While Smile Foundation still exclusively assists children with critical surgeries, we are changing our focus from being solely facial anomaly surgery to include burn reconstructive surgery, given the vast number of children affected by burns due to illegal connections or hot water falling on them.

"Practical and psychological parental support in both cases has become an imperative for which we are also deepening our commitment.

"These aspects are reflected in our new mission statement: to transform the lives of children affected by facial abnormalities and severe



LITTLE Luna Capetta Buchanan, before and after her successful operation. | SUPPLIED

burns through the best possible surgical and psychological care," she said.

One of the patients whose life was changed by the foundation is Luna Capetta Buchanan.

Luna, 18 months, was born with Pfeiffer syndrome, a genetic disorder characterised by the premature fusion of certain skull bones which affects the shape of the head and face.

Luna's mother Maggie Capetta said:

"We used to get a lot of ugly looks, people asking questions if she's retarded or down syndrome, but to me she's perfect. They've impacted our lives since the first time we met them. They made us feel so comfortable."