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Reason to smile

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WARD B1 West at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital was abuzz with children and their mothers. The children are a group of 12 who are currently undergoing cleft lip and cleft palate reconstructive surgeries.

The initiative is in its second leg at the hospital, hosted by Smile Foundation in partnership with Adcock Ingram. At the heart of the initiative, specialists will be transferring skills to local surgeons, registrars, and theatre teams.

Plastic Surgeon, Dr Manti Makakole.

For the children undergoing surgery, however, the impact is deeply personal, a second chance at confidence, connection, and a life filled with possibility.

Priya Naidoo is one of the mothers at the ward, strung with nerves, she holds her baby, 4-month-old Mohammed. "When Mohammed was born at Addington Hospital, I had no prior knowledge that he was gonna have this defect. I felt defeated. I thought I had done something wrong during pregnancy until the doctors and social workers explained everything, and we were later booked for surgery," said Naidoo.

"Feeding him has been a challenge for the last four months. Although he is a happy and healthy child, I am relieved that he is finally on his way to complete normality."

Another candidate is Awande Sibiya, 8, from Inanda. According to his mother, Fezile Mkhize, the boy has been struggling with his speech and schoolwork.

"We are both excited about the surgery. It is a relief for both of us because he has been getting worried and curious about his deformity, which broke my heart," said Mkhize. Sibiya is undergoing his second surgery, after he had the first one when he was 3 years old.

Tshidi Chabane-Xaba, COO of Smile Foundation, shared, "While we change lives through surgery, it is the skills that are left behind that extend our reach. Working closely with the team at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital, we ensure that every procedure becomes a learning opportunity that strengthens care for future patients."

For the children undergoing surgery, the impact is deeply personal, a second chance at confidence and a life filled with happiness.

Left: Priya Naidoo and little Mohammed from Verulam, who was one of 12 children receiving life-altering clesp surgery.

Below: Awande Sibiya is sharing a warm hug with a mascot before he goes into surgery for the second time. *Photos: Wendy Sithole*

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