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Restoring smiles

Smile Week restores hope and movement

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Smile Foundation helped widen children's smiles through its Smile Week initiative, from May 11–15, at the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital.

Children received life-changing cleft repairs and advanced burns treatment, alongside moments of joy, from live ballet to creative art sessions, made possible with the support of Jacaranda FM's Good Morning Angels.

In honour of celebrating mobility, Smile Week highlighted the physical mobility restored through reconstructive surgery and burn rehabilitation, and the confidence and emotional healing children rediscover throughout their journeys.

Throughout the week, 19 children underwent cleft lip and palate repairs led by Professor Chrysis Sofianos and Professor Tim Christofides, improving eating, speech, development, breathing and overall quality of life.

A further seven children received specialised treatment for burn injuries.

This included advanced CO2 laser treatment for burn scarring, led by Dr Ronel Parkhurst. Burn scarring can severely restrict movement, limiting mobility and significantly reducing a child's quality of life. This treatment is specifically aimed at softening scar tissue, releasing these restrictions, and restoring mobility, flexibility, and comfort, helping children move more freely again.

Trinity Matsotso (7) is one of Smile Foundation's beneficiaries who received her first laser treatment for burn scarring after sustaining severe burn injuries when a pot of hot water fell from the stove onto her legs, arms and buttocks.

Her father, Bheki Sithole, who has been by his daughter's side since day one of her procedures, thanked Smile Foundation for their assistance.

"I am seeing a difference in my daughter's skin ever since she began her laser treatment. The foundation also takes care of us as a family, and they give us support during this journey."

As May marks Burns Awareness Month in South Africa, Smile Week also highlighted the critical importance of burns prevention and long-term rehabilitation. In addition to treatment, Smile Foundation, through its Umatter Programme, continues to drive burns prevention education within schools and communities, alongside the Avela Foundation, equipping families with practical safety knowledge aimed at reducing preventable childhood burn injuries.

"Burn injuries do not only affect the skin, but they impact mobility, confidence, mental health, family dynamics and childhood itself. Through prevention education, psychosocial support and access to specialised care, we aim to walk alongside children and families throughout every stage of healing, helping communities create safer environments for children," said Moira Gerszt, Smile Foundation director.

The week ended with a performance by the Johannesburg Ballet Company as a powerful celebration of movement. For many of the children receiving burns treatment, where scarring has restricted mobility, this moment symbolises the freedom of movement they are working to regain.

Bheki Sithole and his daughter, Trinity Matsotso, before her laser treatment.

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