

Operation  Smile

Changing Lives One Smile at a Time



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Case Studies



Arifase's Story



At 13 Arifase had never been to school, whenever she went outdoors her scarf was always pulled over her face, she stayed at home all day helping with the cooking and cleaning; A lonely life for any child. One day her family heard that Operation Smile were coming to Ethiopia. Her father had to borrow the money for the long 7 hour bus ride to the hospital in Addis Ababa. Arifase was one of the lucky children to be selected for surgery and her life was transformed when she received her new smile.

A year later, we travelled to follow-up with Arifase and her family. Her father's face lit up with recognition when he saw the team. Hiking the final few miles to a small compound of thatched huts, there, in the clearing was Arifase and her beautiful new smile. The signs of surgery had nearly faded and it seemed impossible that this girl was born with a cleft lip. Arifase was full of energy and joy. She is now in school and enjoys studying language the best. "I am very happy that I now can go to school without kids making fun of me. Nobody can even tell what my face was like before, They can't tell that I had surgery. I'm not shy any more. I have friends, it is so good".

Arnoldo's Story



At just five years old Arnoldo already knew about rejection, denial and disappointment. It's a hard lesson for a child whose only desire is to be normal. Through no fault of his own, Arnoldo was born with a disfiguring cleft lip. Outside of his home, his mother told us he would duck and cover his head as he hated to be stared at. Arnoldo loves to play baseball though, and it took a huge amount of courage for him to join the other village kids when they played because they teased him mercilessly.

Every night before going to bed, Arnoldo would pray for a miracle that would make him look just like any other child in his village, one day his prayers were answered. During the Operation Smile medical project to Barinas, Venezuela, he was one of more than 160 children selected for surgery. When his father first saw him in the recovery room, he said, "I feel joy, much joy. I thank all the doctors. May they keep performing this good work, not only for my child, but for all the children who need it."



Thanh's Story

Sut... means split lip and is a terrible name for a child. But for the first nine years of his life, that's what he was called by everyone in his village. Every day, the cleft lip he was born with caused him pain and humiliation. On his first day of school, the other children taunted him so mercilessly because of his disfigured mouth that he refused to go back. It seemed that his whole life would be ruined by this curse.

Then, Operation Smile came along. During the project to Vung Tau, Vietnam, he received a new smile. Since then he has lots of new friends and has reclaimed his birth name, Thanh, which means, "Blue Sky." Now, the sky's the limit for him. Thanh has returned to school and the future is filled with sunshine.





Divith's Story

Divith's mother was devastated when her son was born with a cleft lip and a cleft palate. She knew that his future would be painful but thought there was nothing she could do to change it. They simply had no money.

Then she learned about Operation Smile and that they might be able to repair her son's clefts with free reconstructive surgery. So she borrowed money and took little Divith on a long 8-hour journey in a crowded van to an Operation Smile Medical Project in Cambodia's capital city Phnom Penh.

Thankfully her efforts weren't in vain, Divith was screened and chosen for surgery and he left the hospital with a sweet, new smile.

Four months later, his elated mother said, "I don't know how to thank you enough ... Divith can now eat and speak and he's smiles all the time."



Jamila's Story

When Jamila was born in Morocco with a cleft lip her mother Nora was distraught. Although her appearance was initially a shock for her mother her overriding concern was how Jamila would be able to eat or drink? She was also worried that Jamila would have a hard life, finding it hard to make friends and even harder to find a husband.

Nora found out that her daughter could have her cleft fixed with a simple operation but just couldn't afford the surgery that Jamila so desperately needed.

A friend told Nora that Operation Smile were coming to Fez and that they could give Jamila the vital surgery that she needed for free. Nora and Jamila travelled for four hours by bus from their village to the project. Jamila was selected for surgery and emerged from the operating room and into Nora's arms with her new, sweet smile.



Ming's Story

Unable to be cared for by his immediate family, Ming has lived with his grandmother since he was 8 months old.

By chance, Ming's mother found an Operation Smile flyer advertising a project in Cambodia. Ming and his grandmother travelled five hours in an overcrowded taxi from Odong Mein Chey province to the Khmer-Soviet Hospital in Phnom Penh to be considered for surgery.

Before his operation, Ming didn't go to school because all of the neighbourhood children were scared of him and would not let him play with them.

Ming was lucky and got chosen for surgery and now that his mouth and nose have been corrected, 6-year-old Ming is the first at the school gate everyday. His grandmother said that his life has been completely changed, forever. He has lots of friends in his village and is a very happy little boy indeed!



A Family's Story

At one of our projects in Nakuru, Kenya, a mother and father from the Masai Community travelled from Narok (near the Masai Mara) with their three children who all suffered with cleft lips: daughters Sienoi 10 yrs, Seana 4 yrs and son Senjura 2yrs. Each child was assessed and selected for surgery and one after the other emerged from the operating room with beautiful new smiles.

The whole family were so happy and couldn't wait to go home to show off their smiles and start their new lives. The children said that they would no longer be teased about the way they looked and now the other children in their village would play with them. The children's father was so delighted that he promised to bring two more patients from his village to the next project in Nakuru for reconstructive surgery so Operation Smile can change their lives to.



Jhuma's Story

Jhuma was born with a cleft lip to poor rice farmers for whom reconstructive surgery was out of the question.

For 13 years, she lived with shame and humiliation as other children teased her cruelly. Every day she'd go home crying. She felt ugly, and dreamed of someday getting surgery to fix her torn lip. Then Operation Smile sent a medical team to the nearby town of Bolpur.

Jhuma went there with her grandmother Sonoka, also born with a cleft lip. But they were turned away as there were so many other patients to be treated.

The following year, however, both Jhuma and her grandmother got free surgeries and new smiles. In the same day, their lives were changed forever.



Nameyan & Asinyen's Story



Sisters Nameyan and Asinyen live near the border of Sudan. As members of the Turkana tribe they live in a village with no electricity or running water. The girls, both born with cleft lips, covered their faces and were very shy. Neither regularly attended school because they were teased so badly by other children. In November 2007, using money given to them by their uncle, the girls travelled by themselves for four days to an Operation Smile medical project.

While they awaited surgery, they told a heart wrenching story of ridicule and torment. "Before Operation Smile came to our rescue, we were beaten and treated badly" they said. "The Turkana community treats children with clefts as outcasts. In some extreme cases they are thrown away and women are blamed for giving birth to such children."