

Smile Malawi



NEWSLETTER SPECIAL JUNE 2009 – ELIJAH

Smile Malawi was registered as a charity in England and Wales in 2004 and as an NGO in Malawi in June 2006. The main objective is to provide a home for vulnerable street children. The first Smile Malawi Children's Centre opened its doors in November 2006 and now gives a home to 22 children who were jointly identified by Malawi Social Services and Smile Malawi from the streets of Blantyre. The charity also helps the local community of Ndokota with a developing outreach programme, primarily targeting the village children and local school.

Elijah came to Smile Malawi in December 08 after he was orphaned, leaving him in the care of his 14 year old sister. His sister, Funny, also joined the other children and settled in immediately. But Elijah was not well and was thought to be suffering from asthma. By January he was very poorly and further tests revealed that he actually had a hole in the heart and his heart was failing. There are no facilities for heart operations in Malawi and the cost in South Africa was quoted as £30000. Smile Malawi founder Elspeth Baecke received the news while at work in London but immediately emailed a British organisation called Chain of Hope. She knew that they carry out free heart surgery in Africa and hoped that they may be able to help. After several months of emails she received the wonderful news that their surgeons would see Elijah in Mozambique in June. She arrived in Malawi in May to finalise arrangements and enjoyed a happy reunion with all the children and an emotional first meeting with Elijah.



It was a busy time as the Malawian General Elections were being held and Smile Malawi trustee Glad Munthali was standing as an MP for his home constituency of Karonga South. He won by a substantial majority which was good news for everyone but the celebrations were brief as plans had to be made to take Elijah to Mozambique. This turned out to be quite difficult as Elijah was too poorly to fly. He had to be rushed into the local private hospital in the middle of the night during Elspeth's first week and it was then that she realised how serious his condition was. So it was decided that Malawian Project Manager Charles would have to drive them all to Maputo in Mozambique! Miriam, the matron, was also to travel with them to stay on

with Elijah after his operation. After a week of organising money, obtaining permission from the Malawian authorities, servicing the car, and getting passports and visas, all was ready. On Saturday 30 May they set off for Maputo, a drive of 1750 km. Elijah was poorly at first but, by the second day, he had recovered enough to enjoy the trip. The sea air did him good when they stopped on the coast to paddle in the Indian Ocean, the first time he had ever seen the sea.



On Monday lunchtime, after a few break downs and many hours of driving, the party reached the Maputo Heart Institute and Elijah was admitted in preparation for surgery the following week. He just smiled all the time and was excited about the life saving surgery he was about to have.



He settled in with the other children and Elspeth started a maths club in the ward to keep them occupied while they waited for the surgeons to arrive.



On the following Sunday the British team, headed by Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub, arrived. Elijah was presented to the surgeons and Sir Magdi agreed that he was able to repair Elijah's heart. Surgery went ahead the next day and the operation was totally successful. Elijah was recovering in intensive care within a few hours!



The Heart Institute is run by Dr Beatriz Ferrara, a wonderful lady who has dedicated her life to helping children. She has formed partnerships with teams of heart surgeons from several countries and they each carry out one 'mission' to Maputo every year. Here she is with Elijah just 3 days later.



The British team were able to operate on 18 children this time, nearly all from Mozambique, and Elijah will be well enough to fly home by the end of the month. The great news is that Chain of Hope plan to help more Malawian children at Maputo through the contact they now have with Smile Malawi.

