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Surgery gives baby chance of normal life

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WHEN her one-month-old baby was diagnosed with a congenital heart disorder, Akhona Nogogo was devastated.

And the next six months were hell for the 24-year-old single mother, after little Zingce Nogogo was diagnosed with a tetralogy of Fallot, a combination of four different heart defects.

But last week the baby underwent successful corrective surgery at Cape Town's Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital in an operation funded by a Gauteng-based charity, the Walter Sisulu Paediatric Centre for Africa.

"I'm so happy that my baby is going to live a normal life," Nogogo told the Cape Argus yesterday, cradling her little boy.

Zingce's condition included a hole between the heart chambers and the narrowing of the valve to the lungs, which seriously hinders the flow of blood to the lungs, keeping the oxygen levels in the blood so low that it causes cyanosis, or a blue tint to the skin.

After the diagnosis, Nogogo began months of sleepless nights as she waited for her son's chance to have corrective surgery at East London's Cecilia Makiwane Hospital.



MOTHERLY LOVE: Akhona Nogogo cradles her seven-month-old baby boy Zingce, whose heart defects were corrected through open-heart surgery at Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital. PICTURE: TRACEY ADAMS

That all ended when the charity, which has recently expanded its work to Cape Town, stepped in. Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital, highly regarded in the field of heart surgery, also agreed to perform Zingce's operation at a substantially discounted rate.

The charity, which operates from the Netcare Sunninghill Hospital in Joburg, raises funds to pay for lifesaving surgery for underprivileged children from across Africa who

have congenital heart disorders.

Its partnership with the Christiaan Barnard Hospital was set to be formally launched in the city this morning.

A beaming Nogogo said she was incredibly relieved that her son's life had been saved.

"Ever since he was diagnosed with the condition, I've been worried sick that something is going to happen to him ... that his heart would suddenly stop.

"Although he has not been very sickly in the past few months he always had problems, such as difficulty with breathing, and he hasn't been gaining weight. Sometimes his lips would go blue and that used to scare me a lot. I've been so worried about his heart condition that I thought the damage would spread throughout and make the condition irreversible," she said.

Lynda Bleazard, chief executive of the Walter Sisulu

Centre, said the organisation had decided to expand the project to the Western Cape to reach more needy children.

Dr Susan Vosloo, cardiothoracic surgeon at the hospital, said Zingce's condition was common among infants and dangerous if left untreated.

"Because of the lack of oxygen in their blood, most of these children die early," she said.

Zingce is expected to be discharged tomorrow.

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