



Baby gets new lease on life – thanks to charity

LITTLE Omelela Tshukuza has been given a second lease on life thanks to the generosity of a children’s heart centre.

Omelela, who is just eight months old, now has a scar on his chest after undergoing open-heart surgery in December in Johannesburg but it’s a reminder of how close he was to dying.

His mother Kholeka Tshukuza said she was thrilled her baby had pulled through the operation.

When the Dispatch visited Tshukuza’s Mdantsane home yesterday, Omelela looked happy and was learning to crawl. “He is doing well, and he is starting to interact more now.”

Tshukuza said she was worried because of his age when she heard that her baby had to undergo an operation. “I had to trust God ... I had already told myself that everything was in His hands,” she said.

Tshukuza said she had spent most of her days crying, especially when the little boy went into the operating theatre and when he was in ICU.

The surgery, which would have cost about R250 000, was carried out for free through funds raised by the Walter Sisulu Paediatric Cardiac Centre for Africa (WSPCCA).

The WSPCCA is a charity organisation based in Johannesburg. It was the first time they branched out and lent a helping hand to kids in the Eastern Cape.

To date, they have ensured 330 needy children – all from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo – received heart surgery.

Omelela and two other Eastern Cape children, seven-year-old Sino Vuyo Sibidla and Zingce Nogogo, just seven months old, were the first "lucky" youngsters from East London to receive the surgery.

Dr Felicity Goosen, a paediatrician at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, referred the kids to Red Cross, who then worked in conjunction with WSPCCA to make it happen.

Goosen said she had been working with the children "basically from birth" and discussed all complicated cases with a cardiologist in Cape Town.

The three kids, who she felt needed to be operated on urgently, were then reviewed by the cardiologist.

"The problem is waiting," Goosen said. "Many families are not on medical aid and therefore have to rely on the government. The waiting list for children needing surgery is just too long and so we are so glad the WSPCCA could assist us."

She said before the surgery, Sino, Omelela and Zingce's skin had been a navy blue colour because of a lack of oxygen. They were also short of breath and had high blood pressure.

Goosen said the youngsters would still have to go for regular check-ups and that Sino's case was "more complicated and she would probably need more surgery".

Zingce was operated on earlier this week and is recovering in the Netcare Christiaan Barnard Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town.

Goosen said the children would not have survived more than a few years had they not had the surgery.

WSPCCA CEO Lynda Bleazard said she was "delighted" to be involved in such a worthy cause.

She said the society now aimed to make arrangements for the operation on at least one child a month from the Eastern Cape. - By KATHRYN PARKES and XOLISA MGWATYU