

Five KZN kids' hearts are fixed!

Durban, Thursday 10th November 2011 – Five KwaZulu-Natal children are now living healthy new lives after they received lifesaving heart surgery that was funded by a R1million donation made to the Walter Sisulu Paediatric Cardiac Foundation (WSPCF) by the Anglo American Chairman's Fund.

The five children reunited this week at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital in Cato Manor, Durban to celebrate the success of their operations, which took place at the Netcare Sunninghill hospital in Johannesburg in July this year.

The five children were Deesha Roopnarayan (2) from Stanger, Asimbonge Mthethwa (2) from Vryheid, Minenthle Mlambo (2) from Harding, Asande Cele (6) from Pietermaritzburg, and Philisiwe Ndwandwe (6) from Zululand.

The Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital is KwaZulu-Natal's only public sector hospital that handles cardiothoracic surgery for adults and children, and it services the needs of the whole province, as well as providing care for Eastern Cape patients from as far away as Umtata. The hospital focuses on children who have complicated illnesses, or conditions that require surgery. Its state of the art facilities and dedicated professional and academic staff make the hospital one of the country's leading academic hospitals.

"We have capacity to perform lifesaving heart surgery on approximately 150 children each year," says Dr Sifiso Mtshali, the CEO of Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital. "But our waiting list over and above our capacity is a further 150 children, and it continues to grow. The WSPCF worked to raise the funds for these five surgeries to be undertaken at Netcare Sunninghill, giving us some relief as we work to expand our capacity to help as many children as possible."

One out of every 100 children born globally is born with a heart defect, according to Lynda Bleazard, the CEO of the WSPCF.

"Ninety-five percent of these defects can be easily corrected with surgery, but only 1% of African children have access to any form of medical funding to pay the approximate R170 000 it costs in the private healthcare sector to save each life," she says. "We work closely with public and private hospitals to spread the benefits of our funding and research work as widely as possible. In this case, the donation also made allowance for a registrar from Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital to travel with the five children to Netcare Sunninghill and observe the surgeries, adding to its long-term benefit through skills transfer."

The WSPCF was established in 2003 as a living legacy to the late Walter Sisulu, one of South African former President Nelson Mandela's closest friends, and a leading icon in South Africa's struggle for democracy. Mr. Mandela is a patron of the Foundation, as is Dubai's Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein.

"The Foundation has saved the lives of more than 500 children, and continues its wonderful work as part of its promise to Mama Albertina Sisulu," says Mary-Jane Morifi of The Anglo American Chairman's Fund. "We chose to support its work with the donation of R1million because the Foundation has a holistic approach to saving lives, both through surgeries for indigent children, and through skills development in government hospitals. We were proud to play a role in giving a second chance at a new life to five children from KwaZulu-Natal as part of our social development commitment to assisting government in the provision of quality healthcare."

The WSPCF was a cause particularly close to Albertina Sisulu's heart, as she worked as a nurse for many years, according to Bleazard, and the Sisulu family remains closely involved with the Foundation. "We celebrated 400 surgeries at Mama's birthday party last year, and we promised her that we would do everything we could to save 400 more lives. Even though Mama passed away

earlier this year, we are determined to keep our promise to her, and we call on companies and individuals in KwaZulu-Natal to help us.”

One of the children saved by the surgery is six-year-old Asanda Cele, who lives near Pietermaritzburg. Asanda was born with a ventricular septal defect (a hole in the heart) and a blocked valve. His condition was identified when he was just a few days old, but it wasn't until earlier this year that he could benefit from lifesaving surgery.

“Asanda could never walk with us, he was always blue around the mouth, and was sick with flu so often,” says his mother Zamakhosi. “Since his surgery, he runs around with the other children, and does everything that they do. He's such a big soccer fan that he wants to play for Orlando Pirates one day – and he would never have been able to have this dream if it wasn't for the surgery. I am so grateful to the doctors for fixing him.”

There are many more children like Asanda patiently waiting for lifesaving heart surgery at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital – but their time is running out. Even though the hospital's facilities are groundbreaking and world-class, it does not have the capacity to perform all the cardiac surgeries needed by children in KwaZulu Natal.

One of the KwaZulu-Natal children who is in desperate need of lifesaving surgery is 16-month-old Mohammed Backus from Durban, who suffers multiple heart defects.

“When he was three weeks old, Mohammed developed a terrible cough, and I took him to the doctor straight away,” says his mother Aziza. “We were referred to a paediatric cardiologist, who diagnosed a double outlet right ventricle, a narrowing of the aortic arch, and two holes in his heart. This combination has affected him terribly, and his development is so far behind what it should be. For example, he so desperately wants to run around after his brother, but he doesn't even have the strength to crawl.

“We simply cannot afford the operation,” says Aziza, who is a housewife. “Mohammed is unable to develop like a normal little boy without the surgery, and we can only hope and pray for his survival. We would be so grateful for any donations that will pay for Mohammed's heart to be fixed.

“I call on businesspeople and companies in KwaZulu-Natal to join the WSPCF as sponsorship partners,” says Bleazard. “Children like Mohammed are in your own cities, towns and villages, and they are running out of time to have the heart surgery needed to save their lives. Our government hospitals, like Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital, have outstanding facilities, but they simply don't have the capacity to meet the need. The WSPCF raises funds to perform the surgeries in time to give these children new lives. We need your help to do this work – we cannot do it without you.”

More information about the WSPCF can be found on its website, www.wspcf.org.za, or by contacting Lynda Bleazard on Lynda.Bleazard@netcare.co.za. Members of the public can donate R30 by SMSing the word “BELIEVE” to 42400.