

New look, new journey as Smile Foundation celebrates 21 years

The Smile Foundation has announced that it is celebrating its coming of age with a brand new look, an expansion into new territories and further investments into specialised medical training for South African doctors.



The Smile Foundation's new logo. | Source: Supplied

According to the foundation, “it’s been 21 years since Nelson Mandela first had the vision to help one South African child access the specialist facial reanimation surgery she so desperately needed” - a move that birthed the Smile Foundation. Now, more than 4,000 families and 4,000 life-changing surgeries later, it is marking its 21st anniversary with a new look.

The Smile Foundation’s original red and black smile-shaped script logo has been given a makeover and now sports a modern sans serif font with a ‘smile’ emoji in the name “to bring it in line with current social trends”.

Kim Robertson Smith, CEO at Smile Foundation, says this reflects the growth of the organisation as it celebrates its milestone anniversary as well as its renewed focus and mission.

“While Smile Foundation still exclusively assists children with critical surgeries, we are changing our focus from being solely facial anomaly surgery to include burn reconstructive surgery, given the vast number of children affected by burns in South Africa every day.

“Practical and psychological parental support in both cases has become an imperative for which we are also deepening our commitment. These aspects are reflected in our new mission statement: to transform the lives of children affected by facial abnormalities and severe burns through the best possible surgical and psychological care,” Robertson Smith explains.



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The foundation has two projects in this regard – Cleft Friends and U Matter. Cleft Friends offers parent support from the perspective of lived experiences. Mothers speak from experience, helping other mothers overcome some of the challenges faced in the cleft journey with their babies.

U Matter is a parent and peer support group for burn survivors and their families. It strives to create positive experiences to build self-esteem, inspire dreams and ignite possibilities among burn survivors, using storytelling as a tool to help families heal.

WhatsApp groups in different languages enable the parents in both groups to easily communicate with each other. The two projects are active in both the public and private healthcare sectors, and supported by the Department of Health.

Expanding into new territories

In addition, Smile Foundation is expanding its collaborative efforts with like-minded organisations to further grow the medical skills base in South Africa, to partner with increased donors and NGOs, and to assist public paediatric patients, possibly in private hospitals.

On the skills front, the foundation currently helps fund local and international fellowships for qualified consultants in the specialist surgical areas of rhinoplasty (nasal reconstruction), cranio and hand surgeries. It will augment its support for the latter specifically to address the increase in hand burns as a result of children playing with illegal electricity connections.



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In KwaZulu-Natal, the incidence of paediatric burns has skyrocketed, prompting Smile Foundation to focus predominantly on these surgeries at Greys Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. It is also working towards establishing a burns unit at the hospital.

This collaboration with Grey's Hospital extends the foundation's working relationships with state hospitals, which to date tops 11 academic hospitals across South Africa.

With its fresh, new look and refined mission, Smile Foundation is poised to fulfil its vision of helping children overcome obstacles and live a life inspired by confidence and possibility.

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