



Synthesizing As you read this article and interview, look for how an organization called Smile Train changes kids' lives.

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The Boy Who Couldn't Smile

Osawa was born looking different from most kids. Some people were cruel to him. He was sad and lonely. But then one day, his whole life changed.

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

In a small school in Tanzania (a country in Africa), a group of kids sang with their teacher. Their faces were bright and smiling. But one boy sat **glumly**, his mouth barely moving. He stared at the floor.

This was Osawa Owiti. He was 6 years old.

Osawa [oh-SOW-uh] had few friends.

Neighbors viewed him with **suspicion** and even fear. Some said he was cursed.

What did Osawa do to deserve such a lonely life? Why were people mean to him?

In fact, he had done nothing. He was just born looking different from most people. He had a condition called **cleft lip**. That means his mouth and lip were **misshapen**. His upper lip rose up toward his nose. His



Osawa's father, Owiti, always kept his son close. Often Osawa helped his father tend to the family's cornfield.

front tooth poked out through his lip. The condition made it hard for him to eat and speak.

High Costs

Each year, one out of every 700 babies are born with clefts. Doctors are not sure what causes the clefts. But they know that the problem begins while the baby is still inside its mother's belly.

Here in America, most babies born with clefts have surgery. Their mouths are fixed, their scars fade, and they live normal lives. But around the world, millions of kids with clefts never have them fixed. Almost all of these kids live in areas of great **poverty**, where trained doctors and hospitals are **scarce**. In Osawa's village, people can go their whole lives without ever seeing a doctor.

Osawa's parents are farmers. They grow corn and raise cattle on a small plot of land. Their one-room house is made of mud bricks and has a grass roof. Even if they worked for

years and sold almost everything they owned, they could never save enough money to pay for surgery to fix Osawa's cleft.

Instead, they watched helplessly as their



STEFANO LEVI/COURTESY OF SMILE TRAIN (OSAWA'S FATHER); JIM MCMAHON/MAPMAN® (MAP)

son suffered. Like most kids with clefts, Osawa struggled to chew, to swallow, and to pronounce certain sounds. Even worse: Many of Osawa's neighbors were cruel. They said his cleft was a punishment from the heavens, a curse on his parents.

Sadly, such **superstitions** are common in many parts of the world. Kids born with clefts and other differences are bullied. Many families are so ashamed that they **abandon** their kids with clefts.

What Would Happen?

Osawa's parents did not abandon him. They showered him with love and tried to protect him. They ignored their neighbors' stares and whispers. But their hearts broke. "Sometimes I couldn't eat," says his mother, Ada. His father kept Osawa close. His grandfather cried when he spoke of his grandson. "Will he get married?" he wondered. "Will he get a job?"

Osawa's family was right to be worried. In many parts of the world, kids with clefts die young or end up begging on the streets. It was hard for Osawa's family to imagine a happy future for him.

But that was about to change.

About 700 miles from Osawa's village is the city of Dar es Salaam. There is a hospital there called Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania (CCBRT). It works with a charity named Smile Train.

Smile Train has trained thousands of doctors around the world to do cleft surgeries. Working with partner hospitals, Smile Train has given free surgeries to more than 1 million kids worldwide.

Kids like Osawa.

Osawa's parents found out about Smile Train's program through an ad on the radio. Soon they learned more. The whole surgery would be paid for. The hospital would even send a van and a driver to take Osawa and his mom to Dar es Salaam—for free.

A Life Transformed

The ride to Dar es Salaam took many hours. Osawa had never been to a big city before. The crowds. The skyscrapers. The beeping horns and screeching tires and rumbling motors. All of this was new.

Osawa gazed in wonder at the big-city sights. At the hospital, he was brave. He barely



Osawa and his mother, Ada, wait together at the hospital in Dar es Salaam.



Osawa (in front) four years after his surgery. The surgery changed his life. Today he has many friends and he loves to go to school.

flinched during his blood test. He shook the hand of the doctor who would operate on him: Dr. Edward Wayi. When it was time for his surgery, he fought back his tears.

Osawa was given a medicine that put him into a deep sleep so he couldn't move or feel pain. And then Dr. Wayi went to work. He pulled together skin and muscles, reshaping Osawa's mouth. He closed the wound with tiny, invisible stitches.

Within an hour, the surgery was done. And Osawa's life was changed.

When Osawa saw himself in the mirror after the surgery, he stared in joyful shock.

"My mouth looks so good!" he said. "I look like my friends!"

It's been four years since Osawa's surgery. Today, he is 11. Watching him laugh and play

soccer with his friends, it's hard to picture him as the sad little boy he once was. He has many friends now. When his teacher needs help, he is the first to leap up.

Osawa and his family have a lot to smile about. ■



Donations from people around the world help kids like Osawa—and their families—thrive.

COURTESY OF SMILE TRAIN (OSAWA'S FRIENDS); STEFANO LEVI/COURTESY OF SMILE TRAIN (OSAWA'S FAMILY)

INTERVIEW

1,000 Reasons to Smile

Helping other kids makes Ella grin

By Allison Friedman

Ella Pastorelli of Greenlawn, New York, knows she is lucky. She's 10. She was born with a cleft lip but had surgery to fix it when she was just 4 months old. Yet many families outside the U.S. can't afford the surgery. It costs about \$250.

So each year on her birthday, Ella and her family set up a lemonade stand to raise money for Smile Train. In 10 years, Ella's Lemonade Stand has raised \$250,000 for the charity. Here's what she says about it.

Your parents started this fundraiser for Smile Train when you were just a baby. Why do you choose to keep doing it on your birthday every year?

We want to help more people. Our family had enough money for cleft surgery. But some families don't, so we want to raise money for them.

What has been the most rewarding part of raising money for Smile Train?

I get to help other people. And I feel more thankful every year for what I went through and how it wasn't that bad.

How does it feel to have helped change so many lives?

I feel needed and important. And that makes me very joyful and glad.

What are your goals for the future of Ella's Lemonade Stand?

I hope to continue the lemonade stand when I'm older. And I want to go to other countries to help other kids with clefts in person.

What advice would you give to kids who want to make a big difference in the world?

If you do a little thing like a lemonade stand, that can make a huge difference as the years go on. People will start learning about it. You can make a difference in the world so easily sometimes.



WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

Write an imaginary conversation between Osawa and Ella in which they talk about the different ways their cleft surgeries have affected their lives and, in turn, the lives of other people.

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