SMILE TRAIN AFRICA

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

July – September 2026

Smile Train provides free cleft surgeries and comprehensive cleft care across 42 countries in Africa, with 230+ active partners and 390+ treatment centres. Since 2002, Smile Train's local medical partners have provided more than 170,000 life-changing cleft surgeries across the continent.

Our Comprehensive Cleft Care (CCC) services include psychosocial support, nutrition, surgery, speech therapy, orthodontics, ENT and dental care.

We elevate local medical capacity, raising the safety and quality of surgical and anaesthesia care by offering curriculum-based educational scholarship programs.

Smile Train leverages strategic and innovative partnerships at the local and international levels to anchor advocacy, the capacity of our partners and programs to strengthen surgical systems, and research infrastructure on global health priorities and policy.

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SmileTrain

WORLD CLEFT AWARENESS DAY

Happy World Cleft Awareness Day

#CleftDay2026

Every Cleft. Every Journey. Every Smile.

WORLD CLEFT AWARENESS DAY: A MONTH OF ADVOCACY

Throughout July, Smile Train marked Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness and Prevention Month, inviting patients, families, partners, and advocates to share what they want the world to understand about cleft lips and palates.

The campaign built toward World Cleft Awareness Day on July 20, spotlighting a model that has now supported more than 200,000 life-changing cleft surgeries in nearly 40 African countries since 2002 — with an empowered local medical professional performing every single one.

From every message shared to every conversation started, the month became a truly global movement — and the conversation continues.

Read More: Post 1 | Post 2

NUTRITION FIRST: WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

From August 1–7, Smile Train marked World Breastfeeding Week with content on how nutrition support helps babies born with a cleft feed safely and grow strong enough for surgery.

A decade of expanded feeding and nutrition programs continues to help children with clefts thrive — a reminder that nutrition is often the first, and most essential, intervention in the cleft care journey. Read more on LinkedIn: Post 1 | Post 2 | YouTube

HONORING A LEGACY OF COMPASSION IN ACTION

On August 19, we celebrated two powerful reminders of what's possible when compassion inspires action: World Humanitarian Day and the birthday of Smile Train founder Charles B. Wang. Together, they honored a legacy built on the belief that every child deserves access to quality cleft care, no matter where they are born.

Long before this year's theme, "Strengthening Global Solidarity and Empowering Local Communities," Charles understood that the most lasting impact comes from empowering local medical professionals with the training, funding, and resources to care for children in their own communities. His vision lives on through our global network of partners, whose dedication is creating brighter futures one smile at a time. Read More

AMAC RETREAT SETS A FIVE-YEAR VISION IN KUMASI

On July 16–17, Smile Train's Africa Medical Advisory Council (AMAC) held its retreat in Kumasi, a platform for deliberations on South-South collaboration, anesthesia capacity, government partnerships, and bold goal-setting for the next five years — all in service of ensuring every child has access to safe, quality cleft care.
Dr. Larry Hollier, Chair of Smile Train's Medical Advisory Board, joined the retreat and shared reflections on strategic milestones, encouraging the council to strengthen Comprehensive Cleft Care (CCC) as it looks ahead. Read More

250+ PROFESSIONALS GATHER IN PORT HARCOURT FOR NACLP IN NIGERIA

On July 31, more than 250 cleft care professionals gathered in Port Harcourt for the 7th Scientific Conference of the Nigeria Association for Cleft Lip and Palate (NACLP).
Opening the conference, Smile Train Africa Vice President and Regional Director Mrs. Nkeiruka Obi celebrated the healthcare workers strengthening referral pathways for children with clefts, reminding attendees that awareness, early detection, and strong support systems change a family's story from the very first days after birth. Read More

AFRICA AND INDIA UNITE FOR CLEFT CARE AT THE INDO-AFRICA CLEFT CONFERENCE

Over two days in Goa, more than 170 surgeons, anesthesiologists, orthodontists, speech-language pathologists, nutritionists, pediatricians, nurses, and social workers from Africa and India came together for the Indo-Africa Cleft Conference 2026.
Conversations moved well beyond the operating room, covering non-surgical cleft care, knowledge exchange, and collaborative innovation — building a global cleft care community that learns from itself and keeps children at the center of every decision.

SMILE TRAIN JOINS THE KSPRAS ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE IN MOMBASA.

From August 26–29, Smile Train joined the KSPRAS (Kenya Society of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons) Annual Scientific Conference in Mombasa, bringing cleft care into key conversations on surgical excellence, training, and the future of reconstructive surgery.

The conference gave cleft surgeons a platform to share experience, strengthen clinical knowledge, and build lasting connections. A highlight: established specialists connected with the next generation, reinforcing how mentorship and locally led capacity building drive quality cleft care.

For Smile Train, the conference reaffirmed the power of partnering with societies like KSPRAS — by investing in local professionals, Smile Train together with the University of Nairobi keeps building a future where every child with a cleft can access safe, timely surgery close to home.
Read More

SMILE TRAIN SPONSORS THE 16TH ECSA-HC BEST PRACTICES FORUM

This August 3-7 in Eswatini, Smile Train stood with regional health leaders as a platinum sponsor of the ECSA-HC Best Practices Forum.

Joseph Kariuki, our Senior Manager for East Africa, took the stage on the forum's first technical panel to share how Smile Train trains and funds local medical teams — bringing free, comprehensive cleft care close to home, 365 days a year.

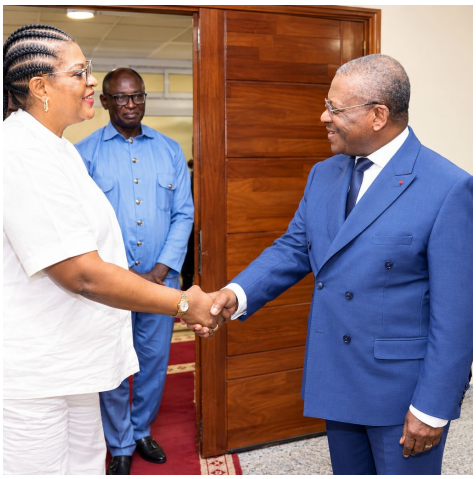
At our booth, Eswatini's Minister of Health, Hon. Mduduzi Matsebula, reaffirmed it best: no one should live with an untreated cleft.
Read more on X: Post 1 | Post 2

MEDEDAFRICA 2026: BUILDING THE WORKFORCE BEHIND AFRICA'S HEALTH FUTURE.

In Addis Ababa, Smile Train stood alongside Africa's health leaders as a Support Sponsor of MedEdAfrica 2026, organized by the Consortium of Medical Schools-Africa (COMS-A), where more than 800 voices gathered around one question: how do we prepare Africa's health workforce for an uncertain future?

Smile Train team, led by Mrs Nkeiruka Obi and the Ethiopia staff stood alongside partners including Ethiopia's Federal Ministry of Health and the University of Global Health Equity.

During a panel session, Ms. Stella Itungu, CEO of COSECSA (the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa), spoke to the organization's longstanding partnership with Smile Train to grow the region's surgical workforce. Read More



SMILE TRAIN MEETS CAMEROON'S PRIME MINISTER TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS.

On September 22, Smile Train Vice President and Regional Director for Africa Mrs. Nkeiruka Obi paid a courtesy visit to Cameroon's Prime Minister, Chief Dr. Joseph Dion Ngute, presenting Smile Train's work to improve the lives of people born with clefts.

The discussion centered on three priorities: training more Cameroonians as surgeons, anesthesia providers, nurses, and biomedical technicians; raising awareness of clefts, especially in rural areas; and securing customs waivers for medical equipment. "We're hoping that once they get trained, they will come home and help the patient population in Cameroon," Mrs. Obi said.

Mrs. Obi also visited Synergies Africaines, renewing a partnership dating to 2012. Read More

SMILE TRAIN CHAMPIONS EMERGENCY AND OPERATIVE CARE AT WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

In August, Smile Train co-hosted an official side event, Strengthening Emergency, Critical and Operative (ECO) Care Across Africa, at the 76th WHO Regional Committee for Africa, alongside Lifebox, WFSA, and Ethiopia's Ministry of Health.

Dr. Elizabeth Igaga and Dr. Getaneh Assefa Siyum made the case that expanding ECO Care depends as much on strengthening health systems as on expanding services — pointing to capnography as a tool that helps prevent avoidable harm, especially for children.

The panel also highlighted the Pediatric Anesthesia Training for Africa (PATA) fellowship, now running in five countries with 32 graduates. Read More

BUILDING AFRICA'S HEALTH WORKFORCE: A GLOBAL HEALTH NOW FEATURE

Africa has no shortage of healthcare talent — the challenge is building systems that let that talent stay, grow, and lead. In an August feature for Global Health NOW, Smile Train's Dr. Elizabeth Igaga and Dr. Getaneh Assefa Siyum explored what it will take to strengthen Africa's health workforce, from locally led training to sustainable retention strategies.

Drawing on initiatives like the Pediatric Anesthesia Training for Africa (PATA) fellowship, they made the case for training specialists in Africa, for Africa. Their message: Africa does not lack talent; it needs systems that let health workers thrive. Read the full article in Global Health NOW:

WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY: SAFETY FIRST, EVERY SURGERY

On September 17, World Patient Safety Day, Smile Train celebrated the protocols its partners follow at every surgery, every time — because a life-changing smile should never come with unnecessary risk.

Christelle, a nurse anesthetist from Madagascar, brings that system to life: at the Francophone Cleft Congress in Yaoundé, Cameroon, she completed her first nerve-block workshop and has since brought that safer anesthesia practice back to her own team.

This is how Smile Train builds safety into cleft care — funding, training, and equipping local professionals so skilled hands treat every child, following protocols that protect them all year round. Safe care isn't a bonus; it's the standard. Read More

BUILDING SAFER SURGICAL TEAMS IN BENIN

From July 28–30, Smile Train and Lifebox delivered the Team Cleft: Safe Surgery & Anesthesia course in Cotonou, Benin, using a Training-of-Trainers model to build local capacity and strengthen safety, teamwork, and sustainability in resource-limited settings.

Surgeons, anesthetists, and nurses from Smile Train partner hospitals across Benin — Cotonou, Bohicon, Ndali, and Tanguiéta — learned from Lifebox trainers traveling from Cameroon, Madagascar, and the DRC.

A dedicated Training-of-Trainers session equipped six selected participants to carry the training forward within their own teams. Read More

PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE TAKES ROOT IN GOMA, DRC

On July 29, Smile Train partner C.H. Bethesda officially launched its Psychosocial Program in Goma with the first Cleft Psychosocial Camp. Over three days, 22 patients, caregivers, and health professionals built resilience and self-esteem together.

Though the camp lasted less than a week, its impact continues through psychologist-guided peer support and empowerment groups now active in Goma, Kalehe, and Bukavu — proof that cleft care doesn't end with surgery. Read More

TWENTY YEARS OF SPEECH THERAPY EXCELLENCE IN TOGO

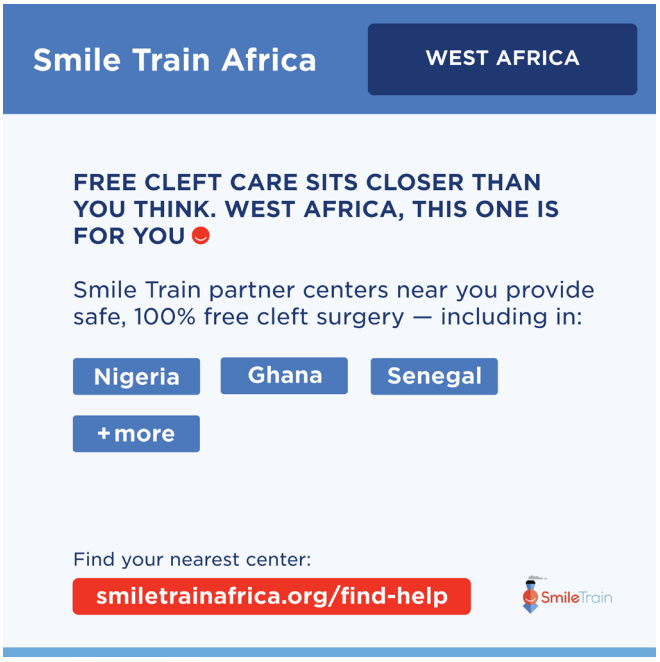
On August 28, Smile Train sponsored the historic ASPOT (Association des Professionnels Orthophonistes du Togo) Scientific Days in Lomé, marking twenty years of speech therapy excellence in Togo.

Patrick Zakka, Program Manager for Francophone West Africa, represented Smile Train and joined regional specialists and healthcare leaders to reinforce a core truth of comprehensive cleft care: speech therapy matters just as much as surgery. Read More

FIND HELP: 39+ COUNTRIES, ONE PROMISE

On August 14, Smile Train Africa launched Find Help, a new monthly series connecting families to the nearly 40 African countries where free, high-quality cleft care is available close to home. Each post shares the addresses and phone numbers of partner centers, so families never have to wonder where to turn.

On September 21, the series turned to West Africa: across 15 countries — including Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali — partner centers provide safe, 100% free cleft surgery, delivered by local surgeons trained to care for patients in their own communities, 365 days a year. Read More



PAINTING FOR SMILES IN KINSHASA

On 12 September 2025, Smile Train Africa organized the “Paint for Smile” event at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa, raising awareness about cleft lip and palate and using art to share stories of hope, resilience and transformation.

Students, beneficiaries and their families, healthcare professionals and partners came together, with patients at the heart of the day.

Smile Train remains committed to making free, comprehensive cleft care available to every child who needs it.

UNDERSTANDING CLEFTS

On September 7, we published a blog with a simple message: a cleft is no one's fault. Many myths and misconceptions still surround cleft lips and cleft palates, leaving families with unnecessary fear, guilt, and stigma.
Our latest blog answers some of the most common questions with trusted information — from what causes a cleft to how comprehensive care helps children thrive. Read the full blog and help spread facts, not myths.

The Smile Wall is here!
Share what makes you

Smile

and support cleft care globally this
World Smile Day®

Post what makes you

Smile

tag @smiletrain and use #smilewall2026