



**LOTS OF LOVE:** Seven-year-old Robert Steenkamp (foreground) and Kylie Kunneke (centre) are some of the children facing corrective cranial and facial surgery at Johannesburg Hospital. Yesterday, they had a rare visit from royalty in the person of Princess Caroline of Hanover, daughter of the late Princess Grace of Monaco. **PICTURE: LEBOHANG MASHILOANE**

## Royal visit brings a fairytale glow to young faces

BY TANYA FARBER

Kylie Kunneke (7) couldn't believe a real-life princess was sitting next to her. She was so overwhelmed, she could barely speak.

Then, after a few minutes, she leaned over to her mom and whispered in her ear:

HRH Princess Caroline of Hanover (nee Princess Caroline of Monaco) asked the mother what the girl had whispered.

"She wants to know if she can hug you," the mom said.

When the princess obliged, Kylie immediately snuggled up to the regal woman sitting on the bed with her. The two held each other in a mutual embrace for several minutes.

The fact that Kylie could smile through her moment of glory was the real reason the princess was at Johannesburg Hospital.

Amade Mondiale, an international children-focused NGO of which the princess is president, gave a large sum of money to the Smile Foundation, a local NGO.

Smile offers corrective facial and cranial surgery free of charge to children from South Africa and neighbouring countries.

Professor George Psaras, head of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Johannesburg Hospital, leads a team of professionals who ensure the children receive the highest level of care possible.



The NGO deals with a variety of different conditions - including facial burns, cranial abnormalities, and cleft lips and palates.

But it is the correction of Kylie's condition, Moebius syndrome, which provides the best symbol of what the Smile Foundation does: it literally brings a smile to a child who

couldn't smile before.

Like others with the same condition, Kylie was born without the facial nerve needed for facial expression.

As Kylie and the other children found, Princess Caroline had plenty of love to go around.

She showered affection on Severiano du Preez (13), who also underwent surgery to correct Moebius syndrome, and Robert Steenkamp (7), who has had several operations to correct the lack of a cleft.

But, while these children found themselves glowing just being in the presence of royalty, it was the oblivion of seven-month-old Sandra Chauke that was the most poignant.

Sandra was born with a craniofacial condition - known as Apert syndrome - in which the skull doesn't grow and therefore doesn't allow the brain to expand.

As she sat in her cot awaiting surgery last week, she was unflustered by the arrival of Caroline.

She curled her fingers around

the princess's fingers, placed her little mouth on gold bracelets around the royal wrist and looked at her nonchalantly.

Then again, Caroline is far from the traditional image of a precious creature but has certainly inherited her late mother

Princess Grace's innate elegance.

And, as she travels across Africa visiting organisations affiliated to her NGO, she is unlikely to look ruffled.

Other stops on her agenda include Burundi, the DRC and Niger.