

Teen puts a smile on people's dial

KAREN KOTZE

A Muizenberg teenager is giving people reason to smile.

William Stander, 15, is one of the members of a student chapter for Operation Smile.

The teen has been involved with the organisation since 2013 and has travelled twice due to his work with them.

Founded in 2006, Operation Smile South Africa (OSSA) joined Operation Smile, Inc as its 25th partner country. Based in Cape Town, OSSA medical volunteers provide free surgeries to children and adults throughout Southern and Central Africa, as well as educational and training opportunities that promote sustainability and self-sufficiency throughout the region. Their most common surgeries are to repair cleft lips.

"I found out about of Operation Smile through my dad – who told me about Braam Malherbe – who has done all these extreme feats for the benefit of Operation Smile," William says. "I just feel more young people should get involved with charities like this. They get broader opportunities within the charity," he said.

William says about one in every 1 000 babies in Africa is born with a cleft lip or cleft palate and that children with facial deformities who do not undergo reconstructive surgery often have difficulty

breathing, drinking, eating and speaking.

"As a result, many of these children suffer from malnutrition, or medical and and psychological problems," he says.

The Operation Smile website says that children with untreated cleft lips and cleft palates develop permanent and significant hearing loss.

"But a cleft lip or cleft palate operation can fix this and it only takes 45 minutes," William says. The operation and follow-up care costs about R5 500 and William points out that during 45 minutes, one cleft lip surgery can change a child's life forever.

William is a pupil at Fish Hoek High School, which, he says, has been very supportive of his activities with the organisation, which includes helping out at fundraisers.

One of the places he visited because of his involvement in the organisation, was the United States.

"I went on a course in America which was through Operation Smile. It's a leadership course that they hold every year. It was based at Chapman University in Orange County California. I spent seven days there and the best part was definitely all the guest speakers, who had all their motivational stories to share," William said.

This was his second trip.

"My first trip was to Madagascar in April, for Operation Smile. America was different to South Africa in so many ways, it's a lot more organised... also a lot more people. The most challenging part of the travel was probably getting there," he laughed.

William says Mr Malherbe is his role model "because of all the things he does for the benefit of the planet, and Operation Smile".

The youngster is taking all the skills he is learning seriously, and is applying them to his world and home.

"My hope for South Africa is that the people will get more involved with things, and take the initiative with every-day life," he said.

"The message I want to give your readers is that you can easily become part of the solution, instead of being part of the problem."

William is not sure yet what he wants to do when he finishes school, and he has time yet, to decide. He says at the moment he thinks he may take a gap year to help make a more considered choice.

William is known by friends and family as Bonsai Billy. "Both my Grandad and I are called Billy, so because I am the youngest, my grandmother called me Bonsai Billy, and it sort of stuck," he grinned.

Mr Malherbe is an interna-



■ William Stander

tional motivational speaker, extreme adventurer, conservationist, youth developer, TV presenter and author of the best seller, *The Great Run*.

In 2006 Mr Malherbe, together with David Grier, accomplished a world-first by running the entire length of the Great Wall of China – a distance of 4 200km – at a pace of a marathon a day, for 98 days.

This expedition funded the inau-

palates are congenital defects that occur early in embryonic development.

Children who are born this way, often suffer from ear disease, dental and speech development problems.

A paediatrician and a plastic surgeon work with a child's parents to choose the best timing for surgery. Most surgeons agree that a cleft lip should be repaired by the time a