



Ameer got a new Smile!

Syed Ameer is a one year old baby boy, born to Afreen and Syed Momeen on Jan 10, 2015 in the city of Mysore. He is the youngest of the three children, and loves to play with his sister while his mother is busy with her household chores. "He is a bright and naughty little boy with sparkling eyes", says his mother.

Ameer in Urdu means Prince, but his parents were worried if he could really be a prince, born with a cleft lip. They were also worried that his facial disfigurement would hinder his social engagement and even involvement in school.

The story dates back to September 2015, when Afreen got her first ultrasonic scan after she had conceived. Until then, she was pretty sure that her baby was fine and had never gone for any tests and checkups. It was the sixth month scan which revealed that her baby would be born with cleft. It was a devastating moment for the duo. Afreen wept, and lay in bed all day, yelled and prayed that her baby wasn't a girl as it would face more problems than a boy. That one scan had changed their lives. They started experiencing trials of having a child with cleft.

Back then, she lived with her in-laws. While her mother-in-law was supportive, her father –in-law always taunted that her child had developed cleft because she always maintained friendship with her best friend who had cleft. They believed that the child's development is not only based on what the mother eats or does, but also on what she sees during pregnancy.

The duo really had a tough time, but with many, many reassurances from family and friends they slowly started to digest the fact that the child will be born cleft. And finally on January 10, 2015, Ameer was born. That very first moment she saw her boy, she wept in pain, as she never imagined her child in that way. Grief struck Afreen wept even more, when she realized she couldn't even feed her little one. Everyone around were in tears. Though her parents and in-laws supported them, she just couldn't

bear the pain. The baby was then shifted to K.R Hospital for checkup and initial care to ease out the process of feeding.

They happily welcomed the little one home, but the atmosphere was still gloomy. The duo and the little one's grandparents were always in fear and skeptical, as no one knew how to take care of the cleft baby, what to do, and most importantly how to feed. All the relatives who came to visit the baby, blamed Afreen for the cleft child. They were under the belief that the rays on moon during the eclipses was the reason for the child being born with a cleft lip. While the family blamed her, the society spoke behind her back, and the child was looked down upon by everyone, knowingly or unknowingly. But Afreen, braved them all, and decided to get Ameer operated as she then knew that cleft lip could be operated. Her little daughter wiped her tears and said, "Don't worry Ammi, Ameeru will be alright." This gave her a lot more courage to face her fear and stand strong against the foul sayings of the society.

Soon, Afreen and Syed Momeen consulted a doctor at K.R Hospital with respect to the treatment and expenses for the surgery. The doctor said it would cost Rs. 20,000 or more for one surgery. They were not economically stable to afford it and decided to get back later. They lived with their in-laws in a two bedroom house, shared by nine members. The duo were worried about the expenses and at the same time scared, for the child was too small to be operated. The duo had two other kids who were to be raised and admitted to school in the coming year. They couldn't really afford to get the surgery done.

One day, when Momeen was travelling back from work, near Kalyangiri, his sight turned towards a vehicle with pictures of cleft children on it. The banner on the vehicle read, "All the necessary surgery from 3 months of age to 18 years will be done For Free. For details, please contact Deutsche Cleft Kinderhilfe e.V (DCKH), St. Joseph's Hospital, Mysore." The father was more than elated. He took the contact details, and rushed back home to give this good news to his wife. Both Afreen and he decided to get the child operated as soon as possible. They immediately contacted the doctors, and got a free consultation and counselling. The doctors told them that the baby could be operated only after the baby was three months old.

The journey with DCKH, thus began with long appointments, where they met Dr. Manu Prasad and his team consisting of orthodontist, pediatrician, speech therapist and nursing staff. Prior to surgery, the process was tedious. But they put themselves and the little one into it, as they knew that they were giving the child the best possible future.

Finally, on April 11, 2015, Afreen and Momeen admitted Ameer to the hospital, and they were all set to bear the pain the little one would undergo then, to have a bright future tomorrow. That night was too long, for they waited with fear and excitement in the hospital ward, for the next morning to come. The feeling was just inexpressible. On 12th April 2015, Ameer was taken into the operation theater. Afreen and her mother waited out in tears, till the doctor came out and said that the operation was successful. Ameer was successfully operated by Dr. Manu and his team. Tears rolled down even more after hearing the words of the doctor. Was it because of happiness, fear or relief, they didn't know. All they knew was that Ameer was fine. The little one was then shifted to ICU, for observation; where only one person could attend at a time. Unable to face the baby in pain, Afreen asked her mother to go in first. Later she

was also permitted to attend him along with her mother. Tears kept rolling for a long time even after holding her little boy in her hand.

Seeing her little one for the first time after surgery was overwhelming. The cleft lip or the opening had disappeared. She breathed a sigh of relief, and the only word that she uttered looking at her little boy was 'perfect'. The surgeons had done a better job than what they ever expected. The next day when the entire family visited the hospital to see Ameer, they were more than delighted to see him with a bright smile, when he opened his eyes.

The recovery from the surgery took some time. The duo took turns to stay up all night to keep a watch on Ameer so that he doesn't scratch up the areas of the surgery. They are very happy that they could finally feed the baby and that he could grow healthier. The mother was happy, relaxed and relieved of the pain. They were able to settle down quickly into the new normal life.

Future treatments to fix his teeth and nose are yet due. But the good thing is that he doesn't have to face the problem of speech and hearing. However, the journey of follows ups for Ameer, shall continue till the age of 14.

Today, all Afreen has to say is, "The tears and the long trips to the hospital was all worth it. A mighty thanks to the team of cleft doctors at DCKH and especially to the donors, who made it possible by funding for my little Prince, and giving him a rebirth. Only from the support of the God-sent Supporters like you all, will my little Ameer recover completely and grow up to be a 'Prince' one day."