



New eye for rape survivor

Girl smiling, ready for school

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THE eight-year-old Gingindlovu girl who was raped and assaulted is looking forward to starting at her new school after she was fitted with a prosthetic eye yesterday.

"Thank you," said the girl as she got off a chair and dashed to hug Peter Furber, a Durban University of Technology lecturer.

Three months ago, the girl was attacked, allegedly by a 15-year-old boy, as they were walking from school.

She was dragged into a cane field behind her house where she was raped and had her left eye gouged out, and was left for dead.

After the attack she was fitted with a "stock eye", which did not fit correctly, prompting reactions from people around her. It brought back bad memories.

"She has been brave after the rape ordeal. She still smiles like nothing ever happened," said her guardian, who cannot be named to protect the

girl's identity. "The only thing that makes her sad is when people make comments about her not having an eye or asking what happened to her. But now she cannot stop smiling, looking at herself in the mirror."

The fitting of the eye, worth R15 000, took four days to complete.

"She says she wants to be a nurse when she grows up because she wants to help others. She was registered at a new school after the incident, but other children made it unpleasant for her because she was teased for not having an eye.

"She wanted to go to school immediately after the artificial eye was fitted, but she will go on Monday," said the guardian.

It was not easy for the girl when the procedure began earlier this week because she did not understand what it entailed.

"Ever since the incident, it has been very hard for her to trust people she hardly knew. She cried during the fittings, but I had to make her understand that this was for her own

benefit and she would love the end product," said the guardian.

The girl had been fitted with the stock eye at a hospital in Empangeni.

"But it did not fit the eye socket properly, so it was easy for people to see that it was not her real eye and questions made her upset, forcing her to recall the incident," the guardian said.

University

Furber, who was heading the procedure at the university, received a call a month ago from an optometrist, who asked if he could help make a prosthesis for the girl.

"I agreed. It's a bitter-sweet reward for me because an incident like this was so unnecessary. Fortunately, rehabilitation is available," he said.

Furber explained that he had to gain the child's trust.

"At first it brought back bad memories of the ordeal as a male figure touching her eye," the guardian said.

Furber said an impression of the empty socket was taken. He said this

was necessary to create an exact replica.

"Once the eye impression was taken, the final model was made," he said.

Ensuring that the iris colour of the artificial eye matches that of the patient's right eye was of utmost importance.

"The eye was built in wax which was then transferred to acrylic. After that the white part of the eye and the veins were painted and a final layer of acrylic was put for the eye to be ready. This process takes three to four days to complete," Furber said.

The eye was made at the university's dental clinic as the same material is used to make dentures.

There is 85 percent movement with the prosthetic eye and the girl has been taught how to put it in and take it out, and to clean it once a day.

She will need to consult Furber annually for the prosthetic eye to be polished and every two years to change the eye as she grows.

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THANK YOU: Durban University of Technology Dental Clinic lecturer Peter Furber receives a warm hug from eight-year-old Gingindlovu rape and assault survivor, who received a prosthetic eye from the university yesterday. She was raped and had her eye gouged out while walking from school. PICTURE: NGOBILE MBONAMBI