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Afghan boy ♥'s N.Y.

Sees sights after G.I. helped him get lifesaving surgery

BY RIVKA BUKOWSKY
DAILY NEWS WRITER

An Afghan boy brought to the U.S. last month for a heart operation after a soldier took up his cause came to New York yesterday to sightsee and show off the boundless energy of a typical 12-year-old.

"Before, I cannot walk so much," Assadullah Khan said during the whirlwind trip with his father and interpreter to meet the "nice people" who helped save his life.

"Now, I walk everywhere. I can walk and run."

Until last month's operation to patch a hole in his heart, Assadullah could barely walk across a room, much less go to school or play with other children in his tiny village of Jdellak. But something about the small boy with big brown eyes caught the attention of U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Layne Pace.

Pace, 50, mentioned the kid's plight in the Internet chatroom anysoldier.com, where Shelby Everett happened to see it, setting in motion a charitable chain of events.

Everett's husband is TV actor Chad Everett, the former "Medical Center" star and spokesman for Gift of Life, a Long Island-based program that sponsors heart surgery for sick children in poor countries.

With the organization's help, Pace's Army unit took Assadullah to the Afghan capital of Kabul, where doctors diagnosed, but could not fix, the boy's problem.

Pace and his fellow Utah National Guardsmen wrote to JetBlue Airways, and the airline worked with Pakistan Airlines to fly Assadullah from Kabul to the Loma Linda University Medical Center in California. Doctors operated on



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Beaming 12-year-old Assadullah Khan, recovering from surgery to fix a hole in his heart, and dad Sarbavz Khan Ibrahim meet press at Princeton Club on W. 43rd St.



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Assadullah on Feb. 4.

The surgery was a resounding success, said Assadullah's father, Sarbavz Khan Ibrahim.

"I'm thinking my son is now okay," Ibrahim said. "He can go to school; he can play soccer."

After Assadullah recuperated from the surgery, Gift of Life took him to Disneyland, where he met up with Mickey Mouse.

"I chased him up four stories," said Gift of Life Chairman Robbie Donno. "I looked more like the person who needed heart surgery!"

At the Empire State Building yesterday, Assadullah enjoyed the Skyride, which took him on a virtual tour over New York City. But he is excited to return to Afghanistan and finally lead a normal life.

"When I go back to the village, I want to go to school," he said.

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