

Valley man receives life-changing facial surgery

Banner Children's surgeon treats severe birth defects

MESA, Ariz. (Sept. 25, 2020) – All of his life, 20-year-old David Bufkin kept pushing forward, even as severe birth defects brought new setbacks. He stayed hopeful about finding an effective treatment for the growth deformities that made it hard for him to eat and talk naturally.

Bufkin's cleft lip and jaw disalignment, with his upper jaw more than an inch shorter than the lower, brought him quite a few burdens – a major speech impediment, difficulty chewing, troubled sleep – the list goes on and on. But now there's a happy ending.

A medical team at [Banner Children's at Desert](#) recently performed life-changing treatments for Bufkin. Dr. Robert Wood, a Banner Children's pediatric craniofacial and plastic surgeon, led a surgery that removed Bufkin's upper jaw from the base of his skull and attached it to a rigid, halo-like device around his head. This anchored his skull and facial bones in place for eight weeks, allowing his upper jaw to move forward over time as forces were applied to it.

Multimedia: [Interviews, b-roll, photos and transcripts of patient and surgery](#)

The treatment improved the flow of air behind Bufkin's soft palate, making it easier for him to breathe, exercise and sleep. Properly aligning his jaws also balanced the way his teeth meet, greatly improving his ability to chew food and speak. His smile and facial appearance also substantially changed, making it easier for Bufkin to smile and allowing more natural social interaction.

"I'm overly satisfied with the results, and thankful Dr. Wood has finished bringing this challenging feat to fruition," said Bufkin, of Sun City. "It was a long road worth walking!"

"It's almost like having a whole new son, but of course he's still the same kid I know. He looks like an entirely different person," said Bufkin's mother, Jessica Barnes. "I've been waiting for this for him for 20 years, and we are so grateful."

Some people may find it surprising to learn Bufkin never required a blood transfusion during surgery. Dr. Wood, a pioneer in blood conservation, was determined to honor the religious beliefs of Bufkin, who is a Jehovah's Witness. Dr. Wood developed a plan in which Bufkin took iron supplements in advance, along with medications designed to boost his blood count and prevent rapid loss of red blood cells during surgery.

Bufkin didn't speak until he was about 3 years old. Years of extensive speech therapy helped him learn to speak, but always with some difficulty. Since the surgery, speech is becoming easier and easier, but he will need more surgery to allow his palate to function even better during speech.

Additional maintenance and orthodontic treatments, primarily using elastic bands and braces, will be required to ensure his bones don't gradually return to their previous position.

Banner Children's at Desert, formerly known as Cardon Children's Medical Center, provides comprehensive pediatric care for children, from newborns to teens. Services include immediate access to Level I trauma services and emergency care, a Level III neonatal intensive care unit, general pediatrics, surgical and rehabilitation services, hematology/oncology, urology, gastroenterology, neurology and outpatient services. For more information, visit bannerhealth.com/bannerchildrensatdesert.

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