



Pa. Hospital Helps Indonesian Amputees

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PHILADELPHIA —

Their giggling and smiles belie the horror that **Tara Aulia** and Hamdani have experienced at their tender ages. Tara, 7, and Hamdani, 11, saw the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunami rip through their villages in Indonesia's Aceh province and take their homes and family members. They each lost limbs, as well.

On a visit Wednesday to **Shriners Hospital for Children**, they received something to help them in their new lives: Tara was outfitted with a prosthetic leg; Hamdani, an independent boy who loves sports and writing, received an artificial arm.

"Can I pinch somebody?" Hamdani said through an interpreter. Within seconds after **Jeff Eichhorn**, the hospital's director of orthotics and prosthetics, adjusted the straps across his back and shoulders that hold the arm in place, Hamdani was laughing, waving, picking up pieces of paper and shaking hands with everyone in the room.

Disabled rights activists say amputees across Indonesia face prejudice, with children often barred from schools because they are seen as a burden. Many are left at home or sent to poorly funded facilities for the handicapped.

The only rehabilitation hospital in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, was badly damaged by the tsunami and the doctor qualified to provide artificial limbs was killed.

"These children are so resilient after everything they've been through," said Elissa Montanti, founder of Global Medical Relief Fund, a New York-based charitable organization that is taking care of the children during their six-week stay in the U.S.

Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia provided the prostheses at no charge. The children will return to Indonesia on Aug. 31, following a final fitting.

Hamdani was playing soccer when the tsunami crashed over his village, sweeping up him and everything in its path. He grabbed onto a boat that the waves had pushed ashore; as he clung for his life with his left arm, an uprooted tree surged past — severing his right arm above the elbow.

Two of his siblings, including a 1-month-old sister, perished in the disaster, which claimed more than 130,000 lives in Aceh and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

"I feel so overwhelmed. I'm so very happy for him," said Hamdani's mother, Syarifah, who like her son goes by only one name.

Tara, a petite girl with piercing brown eyes, was also playing with friends when the tsunami hit. She was missing for three days before family members found her in a shelter. She still will not talk to anyone about what happened to her.

Her injured right leg became infected, so doctors on the U.S. military hospital ship Mercy amputated below the knee.

She traded in her crutches and her single pink sparkled flip-flop for a new leg and pair of pink sneakers Wednesday, taking to the prosthesis immediately.

"It's wonderful to see a child adapt as well as she has so quickly," Eichhorn said. "There will be nothing that she won't be able to do."

Since the children will not return for checkups for about 18 months, their prostheses were made so they can grow into them, Eichhorn said. Hamdani's prosthetic arm is a little longer than his own arm, and Tara's leg can easily be lengthened as she grows, he said.

Tara's father, Sulaiman Aulia, who accompanied her to the United States, said their home was destroyed and three of Tara's siblings have not been found.

"Without this help, I don't know what she would do, how she would live," he said.