

Christmas gifts spread cheer among children at Rocky Hospital

Santa says hi to little Sophie

By **NIKITA WATTS**
nikita.watts@cupnews.com.au

JUST the sound of a snuffle and it's off to the hospital for Sophie Stephenson.

She is only six months old, but Sophie has spent most of her life in a pediatrics ward, with her brave mum Melita Nelson by her side.

Her immune system is low, so if Sophie has a runny nose, it means she has caught a virus or is low on oxygen and had to be taken to hospital straight away.

"Any virus affects her because of her heart problem," Melita said yesterday.

Sophie could put a smile on anyone's face, but yesterday it was Santa Claus who put a smile on hers.

Santa Claus, with his big red sack full of presents, visited the children's ward at Rockhampton Hospital to give each child a gift and put a smile on their faces - like 17-year-old Makhala Swinson and 13-year-old Belle Gay (pictured below).



BRAVE LITTLE SOPHIE: Sophie Stephenson with mum Melita Nelson receives a stuffed toy from Santa Claus yesterday at the Rockhampton Hospital's children's ward.
PHOTO: MELINDA SIEGMEIER, MS29/1109/1

The presents were left over from Saturday's Golden Casket Variety Special Children's Christmas Party, where about 1000 children with special needs had the chance to celebrate Christmas with

Neighbours stars James Sorensen and Ashleigh Brewer at the Rockhampton Showgrounds.

Yesterday Sophie was in a quarantined room at Rockhampton Hospital with Rotavirus, a highly conta-

gious virus that causes diarrhoea.

She was fascinated with the fluffy pink teddy bear she received from Santa, but seeing her smile was a far cry from seeing her after surgery.

Doctors discovered Sophie had a heart murmur when she was two days old, which was the beginning of her heart problems.

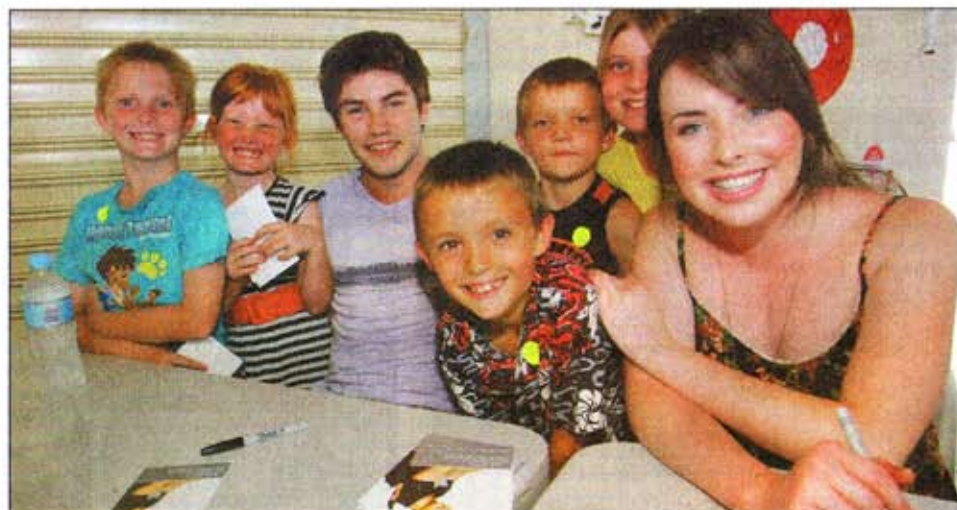
At eight days old, Sophie had open-heart surgery and extensive

work on her arteries to help the blood flow and in a few months' time she will have more surgery to fix the six holes in her heart.

Despite this, Melita said Sophie was a "perfect baby".



THANKS SANTA: Patients at the Rockhampton Hospital's children's ward, Makhala Swinson and Belle Gay, are thankful for their presents from Santa Claus.
PHOTO: MELINDA SIEGMEIER, MS29/1109/2



FOR THE KIDS: *Neighbours* stars James Sorensen and Ashleigh Brewer with AJ Walker, Phoebe Walker Woodrow, and Pacey, Daniel and Zenith Dumbleton.
PHOTO: MEGAN LEWIS, ML28/1109/25