



press clip

## New face and new life for boy abandoned at tip

By RACHEL BROWNE

RICALBERT BACALLA was abandoned by his parents on a rubbish tip in the Philippines six months ago. The two-year-old was born with a serious facial disfigurement - a cleft palate.

But he was rescued from the dump and taken in by an elderly couple from a nearby village.

Now, thanks to surgery by Australian medics, Ricalbert's life has been transformed again. He is one of 70 children who underwent surgery to fix cleft lips and palates in Cebu last month.

The Australasian charity Operation Restore Hope, which provides free surgical care for

children in developing countries, sent a team from Sydney's Prince of Wales Private Hospital.

Charity director Maureen Eddison, a clinical nurse specialist at the hospital, said the surgery only takes an hour or two but could make the difference of a lifetime for many children. Without it they face a bleak future of malnourishment. Many children do not attend school and are shunned by their families and communities.

"He was rejected by his mother because his condition was so disfiguring," Ms Eddison said.



Angelita and Mario Bacalla "took him in even though they are very poor", Ms Eddison said.

"They have formally adopted him. They absolutely dote on him and he loves them. Without them he would have died on the garbage dump."

The Bacallas heard about the surgical team's visit to Cebu and made the two-hour trip from their village in the hope of securing treatment for Ricalbert.

"The family often don't recognise them after the operation is done because they look so different," Ms Eddison said.

"The parents are in tears, it's all very emotional. It's unfortunate that we can't do them all."



Lifesavers ... Ricalbert with adoptive parents Angelita and Mario Bacalla and charity director Maureen Eddison; and (right) before the surgery.