



A Foundation response to the call for action

print to create the Miles of Smiles Dental Program and implement the very first program at Bryant Elementary on September 19, 2001.” After nearly ten years, Miles of

Smiles has expanded from 1 to 34 elementary schools across 3 school districts and has served 116,929 children.

Health disparities are commonly associated with populations whose access to health care services is compromised by poverty, limited education or language skills, geographic isolation, age, gender, and disability. Compounding health disparity problems is the lack of adequate reimbursement for oral health services on both public and private programs. Miles of Smiles seeks to assure that children receive a highly effective dental prevention service through a proven community-based approach. School-based sealant programs generally are designed to maximize effectiveness by targeting high risk children. High risk children include vulnerable populations less likely to receive private dental care, such as children eligible for free or reduced lunch programs.

During the Miles of Smiles visit to the school, students first participate in the

oral health education portion of the program, in which they learn the importance of taking care of their teeth, the proper way to brush and floss, and to limit sugary snacks and drinks. Students then proceed to the dental screening area where they are examined by a dentist. Within approximately two weeks, sealants are applied on the healthy molars of students in the 2nd, 5th, and 6th grades who qualify. If a student has severe dental problems, case managers notify parents that their child is in need of immediate dental attention; and if they do not have a family dentist or cannot afford dental care, they are referred to low cost clinics such as the Arlanza Family Health Center and Eastside Health Center.

In addition to the elementary program, Miles of Smiles also extends its services to reach pre-school age children. Since every child in Head Start and pre-school is required to undergo a dental screening before they enroll in class, RCHF realized there was a vital need to provide access to this service, especially for the uninsured. Studies have shown Head Start children experience more extensive tooth decay and more pain and suffering from tooth decay than children from families with higher incomes (*Journal of*

Public Health Dentistry). Therefore, in an effort to ensure all children in this age group receive quality dental screenings, we partnered with the Riverside County Office of Education, Jurupa Unified School District, and Riverside Unified School District, and in 2009, we were able to screen nearly 2,000 students.

Due to Miles of Smiles, many children are relieved of chronic dental pain and are able to thrive in school and at home. The dedication of the many partners in this program, the school nurses, teachers, and dentists, has contributed to the success of our program. This dedication is evident in the words of Miles of Smiles dentist, Dr. Yvette Felipe: “If we can get one family to acknowledge that we are in a dental crisis, and to take their child that is hurting to the dentist, then we know what we do is worth it.”

Since 2001:

116,929 students educated
74,955 students screened
15,603 students received sealants
47,942 teeth sealed

Information at
www.rchf.org
or
951-788-3471

