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First Teeth First

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Coordinator's Corner – Berenise Bauer



Overseeing an oral health program during a pandemic has proven to be challenging and rewarding. Impacted by the closure of our program for four months, the loss of staff, site closures, and the fear of COVID, has given us a choice, to either sink or swim and we choose to swim! We knew that oral health disparities were well in effect before the pandemic, fast forward six months, the pandemic has meant delays in services for families, closure of dental offices, an increase in unemployment, and the loss of insurance. All these factors combined will lead to decay in kids to be rampant. Children who are at a higher risk for developing cavities benefit from programs like First Teeth First to provide dental screenings and connect them to a dental provider. Unfortunately, we know that tooth decay does not get better on its own and early interventions are key to stop decay. Our resiliency to continue to serve those in need has continued during this pandemic. We are currently providing our services in nine pediatric clinics, one immunization clinic and outreach to childcare centers and preschools.

The passion to provide services to vulnerable populations pushes us to keep doing what we do in a safe and effective manner. We will continue to move forward and serve the families in our community. Stories such as Cynthia's prove the benefit of programs like First Teeth First.

Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud.

– Maya Angelou

In the U.S., over **84 million** school hours are lost each year due to dental problems. - AAPD

Children with poor oral health are **3X** more likely to miss school as a result of dental pain and more likely to have lower school performance



MMeet Cynthia, an expectant mother who received a dental screening at our Roosevelt Clinic. Amber Malone, RDH, provided the screening and did a fantastic job providing oral health education for Cynthia. Referral and navigation services were offered, and the Adelante Goodyear dental clinic was deemed an ideal location for Cynthia to receive her dental care as it was near her home. However, due to COVID, this location was booked until February 2021. Elizabeth Payan, First Teeth First Social Worker, intervened and reached out to her contact at Adelante and secured an appointment at the Buckeye location for Cynthia the same week. She attended her dental appointment and was provided with a treatment plan by Dr. Kristina Rodriguez. Cynthia is scheduled to start treatment next month and will need five cavities treated and her wisdom teeth extracted. Cynthia was referred to our program by Live & Learn, a local organization dedicated to helping women meet their financial education needs and career training. The mission of Live & Learn is to empower women to break the cycle of generational poverty. Before COVID, Elizabeth met with Stephanie Castillo, Program Manager at Live & Learn, and discussed a partnership. Our goal at First Teeth First is to continue building partnerships with organizations like Live & Learn and assist expectant mothers with their oral health.

Medical-Dental Integration

First Teeth First & Happy Kids Pediatrics collaboration by Jahaziel Linare, LMSW

As we know, the mouth and the body are inherently connected. Yet, the dental care delivery system often remains distanced from most medical care systems. In March 2020, Maricopa County, First Teeth First (FTF) program challenged the notion of a distanced medical-dental model of care by developing a partnership with Happy Kids Pediatrics at their central clinic in Phoenix, by reinforcing the partnership Dignity Health established in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has expanded new opportunities between First Teeth First and Happy Kids Pediatrics for innovative solutions to integrate and coordinate care between oral health and medical care. In August, First Teeth First strengthened the partnership with Happy Kids Pediatrics by providing services at three additional clinics. This expansion has shown that coordination and collaboration between medical providers and oral health providers are helping improve the care to produce better outcomes for children's oral health. From July to November FTF has screened approximately 1,271 children and 18 expectant mothers, as well as assisted in establishing 197 dental homes for children, including seven urgent cases. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way First Teeth First develops community partnerships to conduct dental screenings, recruiting, navigations services, etc. However, we are committed to safety and holistic care more than ever before. There are challenges, but Oral and Medical Health agencies need to explore the medical-dental integration model as an opportunity to improve the future of health care delivery.



Tracey Thompson, RDH & Nabor Rios, PA-C



Note From the Field Staff – Robin Berry, BSHD, RDH

As a dental hygienist who works in public health, I have overwhelming compassion when I connect with the clients that receive our services. It's a wonderful feeling to assist and listen to the success stories regarding their children's dental health. Many families are grateful for the resources and dental education that comes from interacting with FTF. As the FTF Program evolves, I have also watched the clients appreciate the help they receive concerning dental appointments for their children. My hope is that these families can take away the importance of dental health not only in that moment but throughout their whole life.

"The secret of being happy is accepting where you are in life and making the most of every day." - Unknown

Teledentistry

ZOOM in with a Registered Dental Hygienist by Laurie Clark, RDH, AP, BADH

In March 2020, when Arizona declared a public health emergency and closed down our state, the First Teeth First program could not provide oral health services out in the community. It became clear when a staff member of the 48th Street WIC (Women, Infant, and children) program called to ask for our assistance to guide families with dental health concerns and questions. She had received many requests during her ZOOM appointments with her clients for oral health expertise. It was apparent there was a need for oral health information, and such was the inception of our teledentistry project.

What is teledentistry? It is a change in the oral health care delivery system to our community, giving the ability to connect to our families during the COVID-19 crisis. The First Teeth First teledentistry services are available throughout Maricopa County. ZOOM in with a dental hygienist!

Through DocuSign and Zoom video conferencing, we communicate with families of children 0-5 years of age and expectant mothers. Our goal is to provide anticipatory guidance, screening, navigation, and referral services. Yes, there are challenges, such as getting a clear image of a moving child's tiny mouth. Still, by clarifying questions and patience, we as oral health professionals help families get to the dentist to address their needs. Using teledentistry, Karen Felty, RDH and Natalie Hernandez, *Promotora* helped a Mother who had a baby in one arm, and her 5-year-old son, she thought, had a cavity. It was discovered that the children needed a dentist, but the mother had an abscessed tooth. Karen provided screenings and oral health instruction while Natalie investigated the family's dental coverage, located dental offices, and helped the Mom set dental appointments for her and her children.



Karen Felty, RDH & Natalie Hernandez, Promotora

We Can All Help

The First Teeth First Fluoride Varnish Program is dedicated to helping **uninsured children and expectant mothers**, who are unable to afford care to keep their teeth healthy. If you would like to partner with us or reaffirm your pledge to increasing access to dental care for young children and expectant mothers, please contact FTF Social Worker at 602-372-1418 or via e-mail: Jahaziel.Linare@maricopa.gov

Together we all can help eliminate the nation's No. 1 chronic childhood illness: pediatric dental disease!