Donor Spotlight: Nisonger Center Johnstown

Road Access to Care

The Nisonger Center Johnstown Road Access to Care Program is located within the Franklin County Early Childhood Education Center in Columbus, Ohio. Opening in 2003, this dental program represents a community partnership of the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Child Development Council Head Start, YMCA and Columbus Public Schools. Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children is proud to support this innovative initiative with a $20,000 Access to Care Grant award.

This program provides a complete range of diagnostic, preventive, comprehensive restorative and emergency services for patients under 21 years of age. It targets pediatric patients that have a difficult time finding a dental provider. This includes: preschool children, minority children with language barriers; children with special health care needs and low income uninsured and underserved patients without a dental home.

Current treatment staff includes one full-time board-certified pediatric dentist, Dr. Diego Solis, and two full-time dental assistants. The dental facility is open five days a week throughout the year and has two fully equipped dental operatories each with a nitrous oxide/oxygen portable system and X-ray machine. The Johnstown Dental Program now serves 3,544 active patients including children with and without special health care needs from the preschool education center and the surrounding community.

Through this dental program, Solis has seen children grow from difficult patients into children who look forward to coming into the office. One special child who now loves visiting the clinic is 9-year-old Joy-Noel. She had enamel hypoplasia in two of her upper front teeth, and was being bullied at school because of her yellow teeth. On her first visit, she told Solis that she wanted to be Miss America one day.

Solis was able to correct her enamel defect with anterior composite veneers under nitrous oxide sedation. At later appointments, Solis asked Joy-Noel if she was still being made fun at school. She said: “No way!” Joy-Noel still dreams of being Miss America someday.

Another success story is seen in Tyron, who has a rare combination of autism and achondroplasia. He was 5-years-old when he came to the clinic with his older sister. Every Friday afternoon, they drove one hour to Columbus to receive dental care. All of their restorative treatment was performed in the Nisonger clinic, and now they just stay in their hometown to receive preventive dental care. Nisonger serves many children with special needs like Joy-Noel and Tyron. These children have a difficult time finding a dental home that will take care of them, because their behavior or medical conditions present a challenge to many general dentists.

The dental program also serves a large number of Hispanic children, many of whom are uninsured. Because Solis is bilingual and comes from a Hispanic background, the program has become a preferred site for this population since the clinic’s opening. To date, 70 percent of the clinic’s active patients are Hispanic. These families receive the quality care that they otherwise could not afford in their countries. One of these children is Maria Guadalupe. When she first received treatment, Maria was 4-years-old. She had severe early childhood caries. She was not eating well and was well below her BMI.

Her mother said that Maria would wake up in the middle of the night with toothaches, and that Maria was getting in trouble at school. Her teacher noticed that Maria complained of pain in her mouth during school hours. Maria’s school performance and weight improved after treatment. Her mother brought enchiladas one day as a token of her gratitude and keeps Maria Guadalupe and her 3 sisters coming regularly for appointments. They are one of the many uninsured families seeking care in the safety net of the dental clinic.

Solis loves his job and work place. No family is denied dental care. Through the generous support of Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children Access to Care Grant, the Johnstown Dental Program will continue to adopt many children and their families into its dental home.