



SMILE EXPRESS: Bringing

By Renee Page

Imagine sitting in your school desk with a nagging toothache. It feels like your whole face hurts, making it difficult to concentrate on the teacher's words. Chewing is painful so you haven't eaten; your stomach hurts with hunger pains. All you can focus on is the pain rolling through your body. You want to make it go away, but your parents can't afford to take you to the dentist.

The U.S. Public Health Service estimates that children lose nearly 51 million school hours because of dental-related illnesses. In Rochelle, Smile Express is working to bring dental care to our school children who are uninsured or rely on Medicaid for their health care issues.

Smile Express is a group of local dental hygienists and school nurses who are partnering with Onsite Dental to bring dental care into Rochelle schools. They are passionate about their mission.

Lincoln School Nurse Joelle Builtta brought the problem of untreated dental issues to the attention of a group of interested parties including the former Community Action Network and Rochelle Community Hospital. Kathy Olson, one of the dental hygienists that works with Smile Express, said the two groups were investigating ways to get a mobile dental service here a couple of times a year.

But Joelle and Kathy, along with nurse's aide Michelle Rogers-Gittleson,

hygienists Jeanie Jandak, Tracy Haan, Betsy Chandler, Jen Kissack, and Danielle Worley believed that Rochelle needed a program to provide more regular care. "Most mobile programs offer preventive care but not restorative care," Kathy said. Restorative care includes filling cavities, pulling teeth, and baby root canals.

Earlier this year, Dr. Jason Grinter started Onsite Dental, a mobile dentist service that can offer diagnostic and restorative dental services on location. Known as Dr. Jay, he had met Kathy during his association with the Milestone Dental Clinic and the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile in Rockford.

Together, they realized that Dr. Jay had the ability to meet the needs of the



children in Rochelle and they partnered together to hold a one-day clinic at Lincoln School in May. They view it as a pilot program for a long-term association with the Rochelle school districts.

Dr. Jay and his assistant, Beth Krominga, brought his mobile dentist office to the school where Joelle and Michelle arranged for more than 30 children to see Dr. Jay for exams, x-rays, and dental care. Dr. Jay performed more than 184 procedures from extractions to fillings.

Dental health is left untreated for a variety of reasons. The chief reason is economic. Either parents don't have dental insurance or are on Medicaid. There is no Medicaid dental provider in Rochelle so parents have to travel to Rockford or Dixon for treatment. This causes additional hardship because it may require a parent to take time off work.

"The reality is, unless you are in significant pain, people avoid dental care. They aren't going to take time off,

Smile Express

Helping Rochelle's children one smile at a time

spend money on gas, and go to Rockford or Dixon for dental care," Dr. Jay said.

What makes Smile Express a perfect solution is that Dr. Jay comes to the school, so children don't lose much time from their studies and parents don't have to take time off work.

"The new buzz word in the dental industry is the concept of the 'dental home.' It's outside the box to have a mobile dental home," Kathy said.

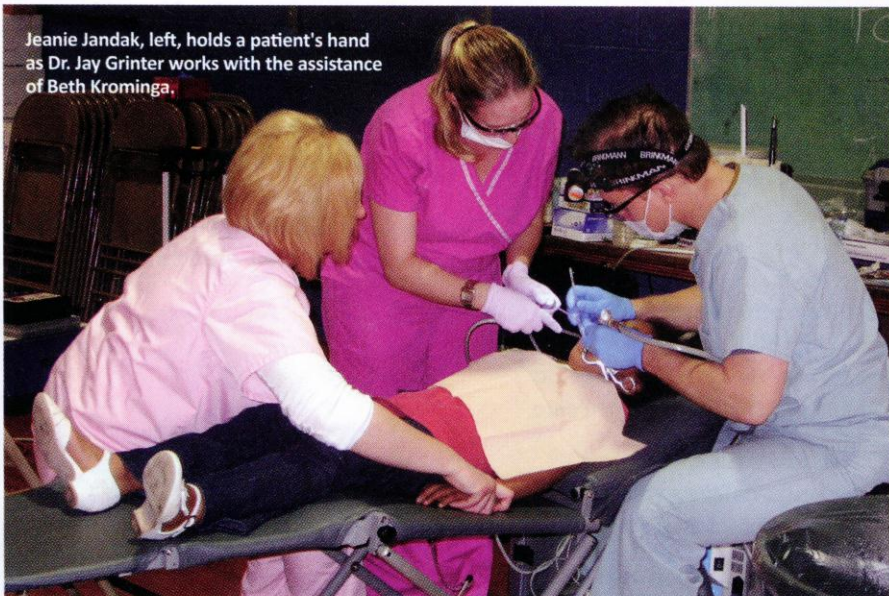
One reason bringing dental care to the school works is because children are comfortable at school, Kathy said. "They feel safe there. They perceive it as a safe setting so they feel comfortable and cared for."

Another reason that school is a good venue for dental care is that the parents don't have to be present.

Dental Care to Rochelle's Children

“Parents sometimes bring their own fears to the dental care situation. Kids pick up on those fears and it adds to the hysteria of dental care,” Dr. Jay said. “The school setting eases that.”

Jeanie Jandak, left, holds a patient's hand as Dr. Jay Grinter works with the assistance of Beth Krominga.



The families that wanted to participate in the clinic signed permission slips for the children to be seen and treated by Dr. Jay. Joelle and Michelle coordinated the day with the school, setting up space in the school for exams and treatment. "During the clinics we are providing the children with oral hygiene instruction. We are teaching them the importance of dental hygiene, how to brush and floss, nutrition, and preventing tooth decay and gum disease," Jen said.



Left to right: Michelle Rogers-Gittleson, Jen Kissack, Kathy Olson, Jeanie Jandak, Dr. Jason Grinter, Tracy Haan, and Betsy Chandler

As children were treated, they shared their treatment as a badge of honor. One child put his two pulled teeth in a little necklace around his neck. Siblings argued over who had the most impressive dental work done.

One family with four children needed to turn in their paperwork. But the parents left for work early, before the children left for school, and the children had forgotten the paperwork at home. Knowing that the family needed dental care, one of the boys ran home as soon as school was out and got the paperwork, then ran back to school before the nurses left. "He knew how important it was that they get care," Michelle said.

"The parents were just so grateful for the opportunity to get dental care," Jeanie Jandak said. She held students' hands as the dentist went about his work, keeping them calm and offering support.

"The kids were excited when they got back to their classrooms," Tracy said. "School is the best way to do this. Parents don't have to take time off work. Kids don't lose much school time," she continued.

Dr. Jay pointed out, "Collaboration is the key. The school administrators were very supportive of the program and without that, we wouldn't be here."

With the cooperation of the school district, Smile Express would like to expand to serve all the schools in Rochelle. They hope to raise funds to purchase some of their own equipment. By law, if the dentist writes the order for preventive care, hygienists provide that care while the dentist focuses on the restorative care.

They could also use money to offer free care to children whose parents can't afford dental care.

Dr. Jay has long been interested in public health and has worked with the

Ronald McDonald Care Mobile for several years. With Onsite Dental, he has taken his mission to the next level. "We have a goal that three-quarters of the kids we see will ultimately have a dental care plan," he said.

Dr. Jay said the reason he agreed to partner with Smile Express was "that there was a group of people here that really wanted to make this happen." The Care Mobile visited the Rochelle Head Start program and Dr. Jay saw the need within the city.



"I'm willing to come here because I know it's going to be worthwhile," he added.

Dr. Jay said the Rochelle program is unique. "This is not really going on anywhere else. This is a community-driven program for restorative care," he said.

The hygienists stressed that the program is not designed to take business away

from the local dentists. Smile Express is trying to reach the people who aren't getting dental care anywhere else. "These are people who aren't getting dental care in the first place," Jeanie said. In fact, the group would like to

develop relationships with area dentists for assistance with emergency care.

Smile Express expects to run another clinic at Lincoln School in October and would like to add at least one other clinic at a Rochelle school this year. ■

More information is available from the school health office or by contacting the group at rochelle.smile.express@gmail.com or by contacting Dr. Jay at www.onsite-dental-services.com.



1

Early tooth loss caused by dental decay can result in failure to thrive, impaired speech development, absence from and inability to concentrate in school, and reduced self-esteem.

2

Children who take a test while they have a toothache are unlikely to score as well as children who are undistracted by pain.

3

Poor oral health has been related to decreased school performance, poor social relationships, and less success later in life. Children experiencing pain are distracted and unable to concentrate on schoolwork.

4

People who are missing teeth have to limit their food choices because of chewing problems, which may result in nutritionally inadequate diets.

5

Children are often unable to verbalize their dental pain.

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