

Focus on Plan Ahead Smiles: Hygienist uses theater, education to help kids get excited about brushing

Feb 25th, 2018

In partnership with the Horizon Community of Funds, the **NikyTribune** is offering a continuing series on the region's nonprofits.

By Tess Brown Horizon Community of Funds-- Plan Ahead Smiles Program

As children, many of us remember being instructed to march into the bathroom twice a day to brush our teeth. How many of us were told what exactly was happening? Sure, we sat still and frigid, staring into the bright light over the dentist's chair as she or he educated us as much as possible, realizing that our young brains were trying to just keep calm. How many of us really took in the message? Tracy Laughner, public dental health hygienist, firmly believes that these conversations around oral health education are an enormously important way to prevent the many cases of dental caries and decay that affect our young neighbors. With a background in education, theater, and dental hygiene, Tracy knew it would take more than assemblies with speeches, or workbooks and videos. She knew the best way to really engage and educate young children, she would need a new strategy. Tracy began to build. And build, and build, and craft, and spray, and glue, and cut, and shape, until she had an entire cast of characters that help her tell the story of oral health. Mr. Tooth, Mr. Plaque, the Big Brusher- a lively cast soon lined the floor of classrooms and gymnasiums across Northern Kentucky. As a team of one, Tracy has been able to reach nearly 4,400 students in 27 schools in the last school year alone. While she is happy with her work, she is not willing to stop until she has reached as many children as possible. Each school appearance requires hours of preparation, and she does not currently charge a fee for her educational program, or for the dental supplies bags she puts together for each child. The most common feedback she hears from adults? "I wish there was something like this when I was young," and "I learned a lot, too!" These adults have seen what happens to a child's school attendance and health when they are suffering from oral health issues. These adults know that education makes an enormous difference. Take a look at some of the fun photos and videos of the Plan Ahead Smiles program, and consider Tracy's work, as a staff of one, giving her time and talent to ensure healthy smiles for all. Tracy leaves us with a final thought: *Let your smile affect the world, don't let the world affect your smile!*

Mrs. Kim Best Principal Ockerman E.S. says "I have heard nothing but positive responses from the classroom teachers who attended the program. This speaks volumes as the teachers are very quick to identify those programs and speakers who they feel are worth giving up their instructional time for and those that they feel were not beneficial."

Teachers-Bedford Elementary/ Trimble County....BES enjoyed the dental presentation! The students were active/ engaged throughout the program. The children were able to identify healthy foods for proper dental health. The children also learned that movement kills bacteria. Children enjoy taking part in the program through active participation. The presenter was very well prepared and related well with the grade level. We feel that the children will remember this presentation and impact their dental care. The kids loved it.

Kelly Hahlbeck Collins Elementary...STEAM Teacher.....Tracy Laughner did a great job. The presentation was grade level appropriate and all of the materials and displays really helped the students understand how to take care of their teeth. The students really involved getting involved in the presentation and the goody bag at the end.



What is Plan Ahead Smiles Program?



Plan Ahead Smiles Program is an interactive Oral Health Science Course in the school setting that makes learning The biology of the mouth fun!



Requests for this fully-funded program have made it double in size yearly over the last 3 years. In 2016 PASP became a nonprofit 401-c 3 corporation. It now reaches into more than 18 counties. This is made possible by many sponsors, especially Delta Dental Of Kentucky. As part of the Kentucky Oral Health Coalition, our goal is to reach as many as possible with a clear, understandable message of how Oral Health for a lifetime can

be achieved, thus "Plan Ahead Smiles". We connect families to our tutorials and teachings through the website planaheadsmilesprogram.org Each child gets a dental care supply bag and a connection postcard for their parents. PASP inspires children in Kentucky through visualization of scientific principles that govern oral health that many would only learn in dental school. What if every Kentucky child could go to dental school....at least for one hour?

What is Taught?



Gum Disease

With lipstick playing the blood of gingivitis, the process of inflammation dissolving the jaw bones gradually becomes very simple. The process and prevention of this very common oral health issue are well explained. Living bacteria make acid that dissolves bone. Simple.

Cavity Prevention This same process of how acid dissolves bone now transitions to the tooth, which is a bone. The challenge to protect their new grandma/grandpa teeth is made. In the future how will they protect their own new teeth? Kids meet plaque monster and learn how to kill him!



Sealants How do these protective covers placed on their teeth prevent a cavity? What can we do to keep them for a long time? Sealants Protection!

Fluoride- How does it help our teeth? What are the ways we can use fluoride to harden our teeth?

Nutrition How can what we eat and drink create the acid that gets on our teeth, causing cavities. Good food keep us healthier, gums, teeth and body!



Smoking Prevention- How can we play on keeping our smiles healthy without the explanation of how smoking impact oral health?



Dental Visits We teach why going to the dentist twice a year is important, what to expect and how going to the dentist can be fun. We encourage fun dental careers.

Everyone gets a dental supply bag and a take-home postcard linking the family to the lessons and tutorials on the website planaheadsmilesprogram.org



How Do I Set Up Our School?

Delta Dental has made it possible to invite this program to schools in Kentucky. In cooperation with the Northern Kentucky Health Department, we hope to reach as many schools as possible. The program is approximately 50 minutes long and is held in a Gymnasium, cafeteria or Large Library area. We now focus on 1st and 3rd grades so that the students get the scientific concepts twice- two years apart. 1st and 3rd grades have separate assemblies, except in some small schools.

The program can be coordinated by a school nurse, curriculum director, Principal or family recourse leader. By emailing Tracy Laughner RDH at planaheadsmilesprogram@gmail.com, a time and day can be scheduled. We need to know how many children will need dental supply bags. We let the teachers pick program participants and always are respectful to have permission for any pictures. Always put your school name on the subject line of the email correspondence.

Tracy Laughner PHRDH

Boone County Schools can contact stephanie.morris@boone.kyschools.us

Planaheadsmilesprogram.org

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What is Said about PASP?

Health Dentistry UK

Sharlee Burch, RDH, MPH, EdD Assistant Professor, Pu
Surdu S, Langelier M, Baker B, Wang S, Harun N, Krohl D. Oral Health in Kentucky. Rensselaer, NY: Center for Health Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, SUNY Albany: February 2016. Quote: "According to a 2016 PEW Report on the state of Oral Health in Kentucky, Despite statewide initiatives to improve oral health status in Kentucky's population, there remain populations with poor oral health outcomes attributed to a lack of oral health literacy, residence in rural areas, and limited resources to pay for care. Also, while the safety net for oral health services in Kentucky has grown rapidly in recent years it is not yet as robust as in some other states. Programs like the Plan Ahead Smiles seeks to address those still in the clutches of oral disease in this state, some of the most vulnerable, our Commonwealth's children."

LPN **Kenton County Schools** Thank You to Tracy Laughner for bringing her Plan Ahead Smiles Program to Pinor Elementary. She kept her audience of 1st and 2nd graders captivated with her props and inclusive teaching. I'm sure our students took her message with them and will have healthier teeth because of it. We are very happy to have had her come to our school!
Patsy Piercefield

Collins Elementary Boone County Stephanie Morris RN says

Very Awesome program! Very interactive. Kept the kid's interest and they paid very close attention to her. Love the big teeth and props and the energy level that Tracy had. AMAZING. Highly recommend for other schools. The kids also loved getting goody bags at the end of the presentation.

Linda Poynter PHRDH, BHS Oral Health Program Manager Northern Kentucky Health Department

"As the oral health manager for the Northern Kentucky Health Department, I recommend that any school that is interested in providing health education that will impact their students for a lifetime to look at the Plan Ahead Smiles program. We feel that it is a great educational adjunct to the in-school preventive services that our dental programs provide."

Bobbie Jo Pelfrey - Principal Dry Ridge Elementary School I was able to observe the Plan Ahead Smiles program when it came to our school, and it was FANTASTIC!

The presenter was highly knowledgeable and energetic, a must for keeping the attention of younger students! She involved our students by using age-appropriate vocabulary, offering real-life examples and by using the students to demonstrate the information she was teaching. The props were amazing and so much fun for the kids to use! This was another great strategy to use to instruct the students about their dental health. Overall, this was one of the best programs we have had in our school this year!

Kelly R. Buys, RN Thornwilde Elementary and Northpoint Elementary Schools says I've been a school nurse for 9yr. and have seen several dental programs come through the schools that I've worked in. Tracy does an incredible job getting the kids involved and excited to learn. All her models and tools are a real asset to the program to help her explain better to the kids on their level. She's also very reassuring to the kids about their own visit to the dentist and tries to make it feel less scary. All the detail and passion that Tracy puts into this program are just incredible. She's really trying to get it through to these kids at this age, how very important it is to take care of their adult teeth- w only get one shot at good Dental hygiene and only ONE set of Adult teeth. Thanks again Tracy- you do an incredible job and thank you in advance for hopefully saving these kiddos teeth through your teachings.

Myra Morgan Gallatin County Lower elementary

.....I appreciate the opportunity to bring my first-grade class to this presentation. Dental health is extremely important, and the presentation allowed kids the chance to learn just why. Ms. Laughner was prepared and had hands-on props to engage the students. They left with more knowledge about their teeth and how to take care of them. Also for some students, this program will greatly impact how they view their teeth

Valerie Barton 12/7/2017 Mt Zion Crittenden Elementary School Tracy is very engaging with the students! She is obviously very passionate about helping people have healthy teeth! Her oversized props are so exciting for the kids! She did an awesome job at teaching at the kids level without compromising the science of teeth health. I appreciate that she explained how BAD TOBACCO IS FOR YOUR TEETH as well. Many Of our students are growing up seeing tobacco used daily so I'm so glad she talked about that! Valerie Barton

