



BY DR DAVID DIGGES

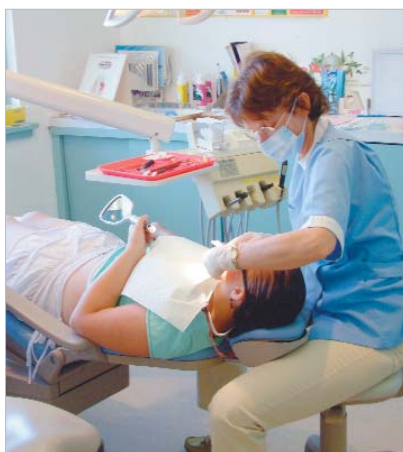
From on the streets to in the chair

On Saturday, December 3, 2005, Dr Heather Mueller and I donated our skills and equipment to work on the teeth of people referred by the St Vincent de Paul Society's *Matthew Talbot Hostel* and Father Chris Riley's *Youth Off The Streets*.

I came up with the idea because I was frustrated that there were people out there who were not able to access dental care. There are long waiting lists at public facilities and it concerned me these people were slipping through the net. I know there are other dentists who feel the same way and you can feel helpless about where to start and how to make a difference. While the federal and state governments argue about who funds what, the problem of getting dental care to those in need is not solved. So we decided to donate our services for a day and my staff offered their time.

The aim of the day was to provide where we knew there was an unaddressed need and to make up for the short fall; there are long waiting lists and people cannot access dental care. We tend to think we can throw money at things, but what is really needed is people on the ground with skills.

It was a pretty exhausting day and we saw 30 people, mostly teens. Some had never seen a dentist before in their life. Most of the treatment was reactive caries; however, a few were maintenance and preventive dentistry. There was a lot of nervousness, as some people had not been to the dentist for a long time. At the end of the day, I know they really did appreciate the effort. The kids left with home care instructions and samples of the products we recommended. One young man beamed as he left the office, telling us he was going to brush and floss every day from then on.



The Dental Day Program takes effort, organization, scheduling, transportation, communication and staff members who are very willing to help. The rewards are happy people and knowing that we have improved self esteem, presentation, health and increased their chances of employment. At our practice, Nick Ley, the

Practice Coordinator, volunteered his time on Christmas Day to help serve meals to around 100 people at Youth Off The Streets' outreach program at Macquarie Fields, which provides positive activities for disadvantaged young people aged 13 to 21. One patient offered to cater for our next dental day programs and another volunteered their time, so the circle enlarges.

My greater aim is to encourage and motivate other dentists around the country to donate one or two days per year in an organized way to give back to the community; after all dentists are pretty good at helping out and their efforts go largely unused.

This planning process is underway to get critical mass so that we can achieve something worthwhile.

For more information, please contact Dr David Digges on (02) 9389-4748 or Emily Gray at Youth Off The Streets on emilyg@youthoffthestreets.com.au



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