Dear Friends,

We are pleased to present the 2016-2017 Annual Report of the Children’s Friend Dental Program. Now in its fourth year, the dental program is an innovative partnership that has impacted over 2,000 children and their families in our program.

This past year, nearly 700 children received dental screenings and close to 600 children received a cleaning and fluoride treatment. While fewer children saw the dentist this past year compared to 2015-2016, we attribute this to having made great strides in the number of children with a dental home, or primary dental caregiver. Ninety-four percent (94%) of Children’s Friend students had a dental home, either as patients of Samuels Sinclair Dental Center at Rhode Island Hospital or through a private dentist, at the end of the 2016-2017 school year, an increase of 13% since 2015. The expansion of the sealant project meant nearly twice the number of children received sealants this past year from the previous year and we are looking forward to seeing this project continue to grow. Our teachers and staff have wholly embraced the integration of oral health education and practices into classroom daily routines, culminating in another successful “Tooth Fairy Day” (formerly called the “Day of Smiles”) focused on oral health activities and education.

Once again, we must acknowledge the incredible partners that have contributed to the success of this project, including Samuels. The support, leadership, and expertise of the team at Samuels has been key to the program’s effective implementation and ongoing accomplishments. We feel very lucky to have them as our partner in this important endeavor to impact children’s health.

We also want to recognize our Child Care Partners who enthusiastically welcomed on-site services from Samuels, participating in all dental exams and hygiene visits. Finally, we would like to thank our Board Members for their continued support of this program.

In the coming year, we intend to expand access to the dental program to our infant and toddler population, a big step towards improving the healthy development of children in our program.

We look forward to sharing the highlights of the past year in this report – and to sharing many more successes in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Aimee Mitchell, MSW, LICSW      Mary Cram
Senior Vice President of Programs and Operations   Board Member
Director of Head Start       Children’s Friend

On a given weekday during the school year, you can find Jennifer Mitchell busy ensuring that Children’s Friend students receive high quality dental services that will set them on a path to strong oral hygiene and health. Jennifer is a dental hygienist with Samuels Sinclair Dental Center at Rhode Island Hospital.

“I visit the centers once a week, October through May,” Jennifer explains. “This past year, I completed close to 600 cleanings.” In addition to cleaning the children’s teeth, Jennifer applies a fluoride varnish, which helps to strengthen the enamel and can reverse early decay. “It’s a really great benefit the children are receiving,” says Jennifer of the dental program partnership.

Jennifer has practiced as a dental hygienist since 2003. In 2012 she joined the team at Samuels, and for the past two years has served as the lead hygienist for the Children’s Friend and Samuels partnership. “Jennifer has done outstanding work this year, and we really want to recognize her for that,” said Maria Chionchio, Nurse/Family Partnership Manager at Children’s Friend.

“The kids are just all so cute,” Jennifer stated. She elaborated that for many children, the dental screening and follow-up cleaning they receive through the partnership is their first interaction with a dental provider. It really helps, she said, that the children receive this care in a familiar environment with their teachers and nurses close by. “It’s a good first interaction for a dental appointment,” she said.

Jennifer also acknowledged that the inclusion of oral health practices as part of the classroom routine helps children to understand the importance of oral health. “The kids know that they have to clean their teeth to keep them healthy,” Jennifer says. “[My job] is to reinforce that.”

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Partner Spotlight: Jennifer Mitchell, RDH

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Innovation in Practice: Dental Sealant Pilot Project

During the 2015-2016 year, Children’s Friend and Samuels developed and implemented an innovative pilot project to apply dental sealants to primary teeth. Sealants are coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of back teeth and act as a barrier to keep out plaque and food, aiding in the prevention of cavities. Although sealants are recommended for school-age children1, they are less commonly applied to baby teeth.

During the 2015-2016 school year, 11 children received sealants. This past year the project was expanded to include screening all students within the Children’s Friend five Pre-K classrooms. Children were screened at the beginning of the school year as candidates to receive sealants. Out of 90 children screened, 20 children were found to be eligible and all 20 received sealants. The sealants were applied to the children’s teeth early in the year, and checked by the dentists in May 2017. All sealants were found to be intact. These results are very positive.

Children’s Friend and Samuels plan to continue the project, with the goal of eventually screening all Children’s Friend Head Start students for sealants. In the coming year, Children’s Friend plans to add permission to apply sealants to the new electronic consent form, streamlining the consent process for parents and providers. Children’s Friend and Samuels look forward to the continued expansion of this project and its impact on research of pediatric dental practices.

Expanding Opportunities: Oral Health

Oral health is important at all ages. For young children, it is critical – good oral health practices starting from infancy reduce the risk of tooth decay and oral health issues later in life. Pregnant moms and mothers of young children also benefit from access to oral health services.2 Good nutrition, healthy feeding practices and breastfeeding promote healthy teeth for moms and young children.3 The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supports these activities through its programming and is a natural fit for reaching mothers and children who may benefit from dental screenings.

This past year the Children’s Friend WIC Program participated in a dental screening program conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Health. The program was designed to reach pregnant women, children ages six months to three years, and their mothers, and was offered to all eligible WIC participants as they attended appointments with their nutritionist. Each participant received free toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other oral health resources. The data collected from the dental screenings will be used to further develop programs to improve dental health for Rhode Island families.

In addition to this unique partnership, Children’s Friend received a $5,000 Oral Health Grant from Delta Dental of Rhode Island. The grant was used to purchase oral health educational materials and hygiene supplies, including toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss for all Early Head Start and Head Start children in Children’s Friend classrooms. Children’s Friend is grateful to Delta Dental for supporting the children and families of the program.

Oral Health in Practice: Engaging in the Classroom

At Children's Friend, practicing good oral hygiene and talking about oral health is part of the classroom daily routine. Julie Raponi, a veteran preschool teacher at the Berkshire Street Center, describes how educators both model healthy hygiene and engage kids by talking about oral health throughout the day.

“We model tooth-brushing right from the beginning. Many of the kids have never brushed their teeth before, so we teach them how to brush, and model for them,” shared Julie. Meal-times, an ideal time to reinforce oral health concepts, are taken advantage of. “A lot of conversation happens during meals. When we're eating, we're teaching the kids what our teeth do, exposing them to words like 'chomping' and 'chewing'. We help them understand the function of foods like milk, how they help our teeth, and how foods like candy can hurt our teeth and cause decay,” Julie said. Interactions like this not only get children engaged in talking about their oral health, but serve to strengthen the connection between healthy eating and healthy teeth.

“Dental health is part of our curriculum,” Julie continued, “and we are implementing these concepts every day.” Even when children are playing outdoors, Julie elaborated, conversation happens around different parts of the mouth.

The children love going to the dentist, Julie added, and explained how they are prepared for the visit. “We talk about [the dentist's visit] a good week before they come in. A lot of the kids have never been to a dentist, and don’t know what to expect. I get out a flashlight and show them how the dentist will look in their mouth with a light, and count their teeth. They are really excited about going once they understand what the dentist will be doing.”

The children’s education about oral health and their positive experience with the dentist impacts the whole family. “Children come in and say, ‘I brushed my teeth with my brother or sister’ – and I get a lot of feedback from parents who have not previously promoted tooth brushing feeling better that they are now doing it. In addition, the parents report that they are making their own dental appointments and keeping up with their own oral health.” This is part of the holistic intent of the program.

“I love how in many cases, we are starting with the child and impacting the adults in the household. I just think this is such a great program,” said Julie. Like Julie, we are excited about the positive impact this dental program has had on our children, their families, and our staff, aligning with our mission to improve the health of vulnerable children in Rhode Island.

Key Accomplishments & Progress

It continues to be a goal of Children's Friend and Samuels to complete dental screenings with all Children's Friend students who do not yet have a dental home. Enhancements to the scheduling process and day-of procedures that began in Year 3 continued to be employed this past year with success. In addition, an electronic consent form was utilized, streamlining the consent process for parents and providers. In total, 698 children saw the dentist this program year. For most of these children, it was their first time seeing a dental health provider.

The cleaning and fluoride treatment is an important follow-up for students after the initial dental screening. “It’s like a complete dental checkup,” explains Jennifer Mitchell, a dental hygienist from Samuels who works primarily with students from Children's Friend. “The children are getting everything [from the exam and follow-up cleaning] that they would receive in a dental office.” A total of 592 children saw the hygienist for a cleaning and fluoride treatment this year.

A goal of the dental program and partnership with Samuels has been to ensure that all children in need of treatment for more significant oral health issues, such as tooth decay, make an appointment and attend a follow-up visit with a dentist to receive care. In the 2015-2016 school year, eight children in need completed a follow-up appointment. This past year, we are pleased to report that no child was found to require a follow-up visit or additional treatment after the initial exam and cleaning.

After encouraging results from the sealant pilot project in 2016, Children's Friend and Samuels expanded the project to include students enrolled in Children's Friend Pre-K classrooms. This increased the number of children potentially eligible to receive sealants and resulted in an increase in the number of sealants applied. In total, 20 children received sealants on their teeth.

Children's Friend continues to emphasize the importance of dental homes to families and is making progress in this area, with Samuels Sinclair becoming the dental home for children who do not have a private dentist. Ninety-four percent of Children's Friend students had a dental home at the end of the 2017 program year, an increase from 92% in 2016 and 83% in 2015. The increase in the number of children with a dental home this past year meant that fewer children needed to be seen for a dental exam / cleaning on-site at Children's Friend.