

UNC School of Dentistry hosts children from low-income families, teaches about health care

By Lynsay Williams

Staff Writer

While going to the dentist might usually be associated with the sound of the mechanical whine of a drill, the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Dentistry is attempting to replace that noise with laughter.

The school opened its doors for National Children's Dental Health Month, with the goal of putting smiles on the faces of nearly 120 children — in a number of ways.

On Feb. 7, 119 children from Durham Early Head Start, a free child development and support program for low-income families, took a field trip to UNC-CH for a Give Kids a Smile event.

Give Kids a Smile is a national organization started by the American Dental Association in 2003 that encourages dentists across the nation to help children with oral care, according to the ADA's website.

The UNC-CH School of Dentistry provided dental cleanings for the children and collaborated with the nursing and medical schools and the Gillings School of Global Public Health to provide an interactive health fair for the kids.

"At UNC, we're in a unique position for interdisciplinary collaboration between health professions schools," Ben Anders, one of the co-chairs for the event, said in an email. "Our committee wanted to use those vast resources to positively impact oral and overall health for a group of children right here in the Triangle."

The health fair aimed not only to teach children about oral care, but



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also about health and wellness in general.

"We don't always get to interact with kids, so it's fun," said Leilah Langston, a dental student and volunteer at the event. "The kids are excited, and they're enjoying it."

The fair included six stations with activities for the children. The activities consisted of doing a physical activity, practicing brushing and flossing skills on stuffed animals and dressing up like a dentist, complete with a medical gown, mask and a dentist's mirror.

Gentry Lasater, another co-chair of the event, said the purpose was to create positive associations so the children won't be afraid of dentists or doctors in the future.

Another goal of the event was to make the kids good dental and health patients, said Mackenzie Hatfield, a dental student and event co-chair.

"We wanted to reach out to this group and get kids excited about the dentist and health care," she said.

Danzel Kenan, a Durham Early Head Start teacher, said he appreciated the opportunities the event offered the kids.

"It's great for our kids," he said. "They're learning so much."

Terry David, director of Durham Early Head Start agreed with Kenan and said, "Early intervention and prevention is important for Head Start."

David said the event was also helpful because it got parents, staff and members of the UNC-CH community involved, and the



UNC School of Denistry student Jill Wilson shows Princess Lorenzo how to use proper brushing techniques.

(Staff photo by Lynsay Williams)

lessons learned could be incorporated into the Head Start curriculum.

"They might not have had this opportunity without this event," he said.

The fair helped plant seeds of achievement by showcasing several professions, David said. The children worked with nursing, medical and dental students, as well as UNC student-athletes.

The UNC School of Dentistry is just one of the organizations in the community that has recognized the need to bridge the dental care gap in Durham County. Durham's Partnership for Children will be participating in the Great Human Race on March 29. The money raised from the event will be used to purchase 300 dental kits for children in Durham, which will include tools children need for good oral hygiene.

To get involved with Durham's Partnership for Children effort to help children receive better dental care, visit bit.ly/LIH5XF.

HOW TO GIVE KIDS A SMILE

Donate to Durham's Partnership for Children effort at: bit.ly/LIH5XF