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FIRST THINGS FIRST



First Teeth First

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Newsletter Volume 4

Coordinator's Corner – Berenise Bauer

Who are we? The *First Teeth First* Program is a grant funded program funded by First Things First, a voter-initiated, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to prepare young children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. *First Teeth First* provides basic dental screenings and fluoride varnish applications to children 0 – 5 years and basic dental screenings for expectant mothers. Our services also include referral and navigation services to help families establish a dental home.

We are made up of a robust and passionate group of individuals whose goal is to improve the health of our community! Our program includes an internal team that oversees the daily operations of the program and our field staff who provide direct services to our clients. Our internal team is made up of a Program Coordinator, Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH), two Social Workers, three Outreach Specialists, and one Field Staff Supervisor. Our field staff is made up of 10 Bilingual Site Assistants (BSAs) and 17 RDHs. The role of our BSAs includes interpreting, data entry, recruiting, and providing referral and navigation services. The role of our hygienist includes utilizing motivational interviewing for oral health education and goal setting, dental screenings, recruiting, and providing referral and navigation services.



Our Hope: To reduce the prevalence of tooth decay among children 0-5 years and that all children in Maricopa County have access to dental care.

Too many children in Arizona experience tooth decay. More than half of Arizona's kindergarten children (**52%**) have experienced decay, a level higher than the national average for 5-year-olds (36%). - First Things First

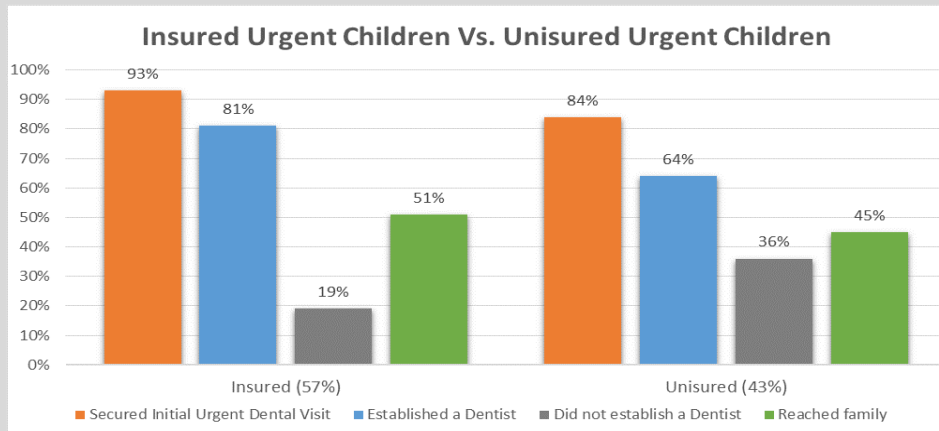


Meet Madaleine, an urgent expectant mother excited to be expecting her first child but experiencing tooth pain affecting at times her ability to eat and sleep adequately. Fortunately, Madaleine had dental benefits through AHCCCS. The social worker explained that she had a couple of months before she would no longer be eligible for dental benefits through AHCCCS. In fact, in the 2nd quarter, only one urgent expectant mother (Madaleine) out of 20 were eligible for full AHCCCS dental and medical coverage. This fact emphasizes the need for comprehensive dental coverage in Adult Medicaid Benefits, especially expectant mothers. Moreover, the social worker promptly referred her to Valleywise clinic for dental care for two reasons. First, the proximity to her home and second, the possibility that she could establish Valleywise clinic as her permanent dental home once her dental benefits expire using the center's discount program. The Valleywise dental team provided two treatment options at no cost; she could have a root canal or have her tooth extracted. However, like some expectant mothers, she expressed her concerns having dental treatment while pregnant and preferred to wait until the baby was born. The social worker respected her decision, encouraging her to reach out once she is ready to proceed with the dental treatment. The social worker plans to follow-up with Madaleine once her baby is born to encourage her to use her AHCCCS dental benefits before it is too late. Also, we will use this opportunity to educate and empower her to give her newborn a healthy start to end multigenerational poor oral health.

Oral Health Study

Summary: The establishing of a dental home among urgent children by Jahaziel Linare, LMSW

First Teeth First (FTF) program conducted a study to examine the establishment of a dental home among urgent children cases after receiving our services. In the fiscal year 2018/2019, FTF recorded assisting 64 out of 72 (88%) children with securing the initial urgent dental appointment to take care of the pain, infection, or swelling. The FTF social work team worked strategically to level the playing field among children without insurance to obtain an initial urgent dental appointment, and at times securing pro bono dental work. Nonetheless, FTF documented a strong correlation between poor oral health and social work needs, regardless of insurance coverage. The study demonstrated that there was an overall 73% success rate of urgent children establishing a dental home six months after the screening and education by the hygienist and the intervention of the social worker. Moreover, there was an 81% success rate for establishing a dental home among urgent children with insurance compared to a 64% success rate for children without insurance. This emphasizes the critical importance of insurance coverage for dental care to establish a dental home. The study further demonstrated the lack of re-engagement among urgent cases regardless of insurance coverage. Approximately 51% of urgent children's parents were not successfully reached six months after their initial FTF screening despite the several outreach attempts. With respect to the demographic characteristics, the study found that many Latino/Hispanic children in the USA are at a disadvantage in accessing health care due to their immigration status, especially oral health. While some programs may provide medical care to under-represented children, dental care is limited, thus making these children very vulnerable to future social and health issues. Finally, the study confirmed that it is essential for oral health agencies and professionals to understand and be aware of the association between children's poor oral health and social work needs for a successful and long-lasting public health intervention.



Full report available upon request



Note from the Outreach Specialist

Fernando A. Careaga, BPH

Mindset is a self-perception or self-theory that people hold about themselves. The type of Mindset we have affects how we make decisions that impact our lives. As Public Health professionals, it is vital to develop a growth mindset which is, the belief that essential qualities, like ability and character, are continually developed through learning and hard work. With every challenge we face in the public health field, we must use that as an opportunity to collaborate with others thinking outside the box trying to find solutions to the challenges we face. Success doesn't happen individually; it happens with the support of a whole community focused on a common goal. The moment you step out of your comfort zone, embrace the unknown, embrace failure, and embrace being uncomfortable is when you will finally be able to reach your fullest potential. What's stopping you?

"Be the person you needed when you were younger" – Unknown

Impact on the Community

Outreach Specialist Role in Dental Public Health Programs by Jahaziel Linare, LMSW

Not everyone understands the importance of outreach specialists or the role they play in improving the lives of underrepresented communities. Our outreach specialists within the Office of Oral Health, have the responsibility to support and promote oral health initiatives across Maricopa County. Our outreach specialists work closely with the program coordinator to overcome existing obstacles to reach as many young children and expectant mothers in our community as possible.

As outreach specialists, they are expected to make themselves available to support a team of public health hygienists and site assistants to understand and address oral health concerns. As such, they need to know where to find accurate information, how to assess the appropriateness of that information, and how to communicate that information successfully to the field staff. Also, they conduct extensive outreach to collect data and discuss oral health concerns with community stakeholders.

First Teeth First outreach specialists are consistently striving to develop and implement new strategies to improve the oral health of the community!



(L-R) Fernando C., Violeta B., Maryola B.

We Can All Help

The First Teeth First Fluoride Varnish Program is dedicated to helping **uninsured children and expectant mothers**, who are unable to afford care to keep their teeth healthy. If you would like to partner with us or reaffirm your pledge to increase access to dental care for young children and expectant mothers, please contact FTF Social Worker at 602-372-1418 or via e-mail: Jahaziel.Linare@maricopa.gov.

Together we all can help eliminate the nation's No. 1 chronic childhood illness: pediatric dental disease!

Visit us at: www.FirstTeethFirst.org