

Open wide: Dental care offered to students

By Amy Kent Assistant Editor | Posted: Tuesday, October 13, 2015 6:00 am

CLINTON — A handful of Clinton High School students received a little more than an education Monday as the Bethany for Children and Families dental bus rolled into town.

As part of the Give Kids a Smile Program, Bethany Homes out of the Quad-Cities, provides free dental care to uninsured and under insured pre-kindergarten to 12th grade students all across Iowa and Illinois. For the last four of the program's five years, the Clinton School District has been on the receiving end of the charitable medical care, something Dar Fox, Clinton High School nurse, said is invaluable to all Clinton students.

"It's unbelievable for them to provide this to students," Fox said. "It's really an amazing program for our kids."

Throughout the Give Kids a Smile program's five years, Program Supervisor Jeff Cornilsen said more than 15,000 students in 26 school districts have benefited from the free dental care.

In just this year alone, Cornilsen is projecting more than 4,000 students will be served. That's a long way from the inception of Give Kids a Smile, which only averaged about 500 to 600 students a year.

The difference since then, Cornilsen said, is the addition of the dental bus.

"Give Kids a Smile started in the QC with United Way and it was one day out of the year. They would contact the schools to find out what kids were in need of dental care and then coordinate with doctor's offices," Cornilsen said. "When Bethany took over we wanted to start a mobile dental program that would come to the schools. It was a good program before, able to serve about 600 kids, but this year we're projecting we'll see about 4,000 kids with the bus."

The children who are served with the dental bus receive an exam, cleaning, oral hygiene education, fluoride treatments, dental sealants and hygienic care tools all free of charge. Students who are approved for the free care are either under insured, uninsured or have gone without a dental cleaning



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Dental hygienists Caitlin Jones (left) and Connie Dixon (right) assist dentist Katie Pins (center) on Monday as the Dental Bus, a free dental clinic through Bethany Homes, offers free dental care to eligible students at Clinton High School.

for more than six months.

Prior to Monday's dental bus arrival, parents at all of the district's schools were informed of the program and tasked with filing eligibility paper work. While Cornilsen and dental providers who assist with the dental care are pleased with the growth the program has experienced in its five years, they know there are still students who are missed.

However, this year, and in years past, the Clinton School District has responded to the call.

"In the last four years we've been coming up to Clinton the response has been phenomenal," Cornilsen said. "But, this year at the elementary school, we have one of the highest response rates of any school. We actually have to come back a second time because of all the students that responded."

The good news, Cornilsen added, is the dental bus will return during the spring, allowing for any students who missed this chance another opportunity for free dental care.

Fox is hoping to see a larger response from her high school students and their parents.

"At Clinton High School, we're only seeing 17 kids (Monday) and there were only 11 students who brought back forms that were not eligible," Fox said. "That's out of more than 1,000 letters I sent out to parents. It's such a great program and they just want to see students, so we need to get more involved."

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