

The Bulletin

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March 07, 2015 8:53PM

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Free dental day helps 'gives kids a smile'

NORWICH — Thirteen-year-old Norene Andrade, who came to Norwich with her family from Cape Verde about a year and a half ago, hadn't seen a dentist since she was 8.

On Saturday, the Kelly Middle School student got her teeth worked on by dentist Dr. Beth Goodin and assistant Randi Ryan at United Community and Family Services.

"She needs to have some cavities filled," Goodin said.

Visiting a dentist "is a lot of money in Cape Verde," Norene said.

"It's a lot of money here," Goodin said.

Norene's visit was part of "Give Kids a Smile Day," an annual event put on Saturday by the nonprofit health organization at its Edward & Mary Lord Family Health Center on Town Street.

Children from across the region were offered free dental screenings. A grant also allowed some children who made appointments to receive free sealants to protect their teeth against cavities and dental examinations and treatments.

"I think it's an excellent program for the children and families in the community who otherwise would not be able to receive these services," hygienist Dee Daboll said.

"We pretty much do it every year," hygienist Paula Sinko said.

In the center's lobby, AmeriCorps volunteers with UCFS Erin Good, Amanda Cordeiro and Whitney Allen provided activities for children to do while they waited to see the dentist: coloring, playing with tooth puppets, decorating mobiles with dental-related images and watching a demonstration of how sealant protects teeth against foods containing acid.

"This gives kids the opportunity to get their teeth cleaned and also free screenings," Good said. "If they haven't come as a patient here before, then we set them up."

UCFS has its own dental department at the center, offering the typical array of services and accepting patients with or without insurance. Because it's a nonprofit agency, it's also able to charge patients on a sliding scale based on their ability to pay, Daboll said.

The agency offers dental services at its centers in Plainfield and Griswold and uses a van to take its dental equipment into schools as well.

"I'm coordinating Smiles on the Move In-School Dental Program," said dental assistant Mary Rygielski. "We actually have mobil equipment, and we have a big dental van. It makes it very convenient for parents and kids."



Volunteers Whitney Allen, Allie Goodin, Amanda Cordeiro and Erin Good provide activities to make waiting for the dentist enjoyable on Saturday at United Community and Family Services' Give Kids a Smile Day in Norwich. John Barry/NorwichBulletin.com

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