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## UCFS offers families free dental screenings

NORWICH — Teeth took center stage on Saturday during a dental education and treatment event in Norwich.

Inside The Edward & Mary Lord Family Health Center on Town Street, a team of United Community and Family Services dentists, technicians and hygienists welcomed local families for a day of free dental screenings aimed at educating parents about the importance of aggressive teeth care.

The Give Kids a Smile event sought to provide parents with baseline information about their children's dental health.

"The idea is to be proactive," said Dr. Beth Goodwin, one of two dentists working the event. "It's a chance to reach out to the uninsured families and let them know their options. And at the end, we make recommendations for further treatment, either here or with another provider."

Norwich resident Jeanette Diaz brought her two children, Nicholas, 6, and Linda, 9, to the center on Saturday.

"We just moved to the town in the summer and we don't have a dentist yet," she said. "Nicholas may have a small cavity, so I wanted to get him checked out."

Nicholas sported a pair of sunglasses while his teeth were checked, smiling while his mother and sister sat nearby. At the end of his examination — he did have one cavity — he left with a new toothbrush and a balloon animal given to him by "Smiles," a clown who passed out treats to waiting patients.

In the waiting room, Norwich Technical High School student volunteers Schneidie Delmas, 17, and Kayla Davis, 17, entertained children with puppets and books while parents filled out paperwork.

In addition to the screenings, the staff also provided free treatment — including fillings, sealing work and cleanings — to several patients who had made appointments, a service enabled by a small grant.

Dinah Auger, a dental hygienist, said the Norwich region faces several unique challenges when it comes to dental health.

"Since the casinos came in, we're seeing several different nationalities moving in that don't always put the same value on dental health," she said. "That's why this type of early intervention is so crucial. And at the same time, this event lets us remind people that we're here."



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Linda Diaz, 9, of Uncasville, left, gets her teeth checked by dental hygienist Paula Sinko after her brother, Nicholas Diaz, 6, had his checked Saturday during the Give Kids a Smile event in Norwich.

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