



Press Release

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Dientes Celebrates its 15th Annual “Give Kids A Smile Day” 48 Children Receive Free Dental Care

(Santa Cruz, CA) February 9th marked a day of smiles for many underserved kids in our community. Dientes Community Dental Care celebrated *Give Kids A Smile Day* by partnering with 6 volunteer hygienists from the Monterey Bay Dental Hygienists’ Association to provide 48 uninsured children with free dental care. Funding for this event was provided in part by donations through the 2018 Santa Cruz Gives campaign, 100 Women Who Care, as well as generous sponsorship from Kaiser Permanente. The value of services provided totaled nearly \$30,000 and included oral health exams, cleanings, fluoride treatments, sealants, extractions and restorative care. Dientes’ partners Santa Cruz Community Health Centers and Second Harvest Food Bank attended the event to provide patients with information on Medi-Cal enrollment and Cal Fresh.

Dientes’ local needs assessment found that 24% of Santa Cruz County pre-k children have untreated tooth decay. According to the Centers for Disease Control, tooth decay – cavities – is the most common chronic illness among children and is four times more common than asthma. This can lead to school absenteeism. Nationally the number one reason low-income children miss school is due to dental problems. Several patients seen at *Give Kids A Smile Day* were originally seen at Dientes’ Outreach Program, which runs at 26 schools throughout Santa Cruz County and provides on-site dental care.

“Our goal is to make prevention more common than treatment,” said Chief Executive Officer, Laura Marcus. “By providing essential dental care to children at *Give Kids A Smile Day*, we help educate families on the importance of dental hygiene and demonstrate preventative practices so that kids can avoid treatment down the line,” she added.

Nadine first heard great things about Dientes through her mother, who is a patient. After losing insurance just a few months ago she brought her 5-year-old, Miguel, to Dientes for the first time. At his appointment on *Give Kids A Smile Day* he received two fillings. Miguel was nervous as these were his first cavities. His mother, Nadine, commented, “The staff here really have helped him get over his nerves.” She continued, “We don’t have insurance and dental care is so

expensive. If it wasn't for Dientes we wouldn't be able to get this care.”

February is National Children's Dental Health Month. As a part of the month of recognition, the American Dental Association launched *Give Kids A Smile Day* in 2003. Now the event has grown to coordinate thousands of dentists benefiting approximately 350,000 kids each year. This is Dientes' 15th year of providing free care for kids.

“I am so happy to be a part of this annual event that gives back to the children in our community,” said Leslie Gonzales, RDH, BS of the Monterey Bay Dental Hygienists' Association, “bringing smiles to their faces and to ours!”

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Dientes Community Dental Care's mission is to create lasting oral health for the underserved children and adults in Santa Cruz County and neighboring communities. 96% of Dientes' patients live at or below the poverty level. Dientes accepts Medi-Cal and offers sliding scale fees for uninsured patients.

For more information about the Oral Health Strategic Plan 2017-2020 for Santa Cruz County, go to:
<http://oralhealthscc.org>

Photos: Miguel and RDA Eva Maria Anaya at GKASD