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COUNTDOWN TO SMILE DAY

Dentists volunteer their skills

So far, 543 metro Detroit kids signed up for free care day

January 29, 2008

BY CECIL ANGEL
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Cody Clark can't wait to go to the dentist on Friday.

"Every time you get done they give you a sucker or something or toothpaste or a toothbrush," said the 8-year-old, who attends the City Mission school in Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood.

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Cody is one of 50 children from that school and neighborhood who will travel Friday to the office of Dr. Maria Manzor, a Warren dentist. She is one of the scores of dentists in metro Detroit who will volunteer their services to children without dental insurance as part of the nationwide Give Kids A Smile Day on Friday.

Other dentists will offer free care on Saturday.

About 80 dentists will gather at the University of Detroit Mercy Dental School to provide care.

Dr. Sheila Semler, who is with the oral health program at the state Department of Community Health, said 15.1% of the state's children have no dental insurance.

"Kids tend to fall through the cracks if they're not covered by insurance," said Dr. Lloyd Lariscy, chairman of the Give Kids A Smile effort that covers Macomb, Monroe, Oakland and Wayne counties.

Last year, more than 170 children were treated to \$80,838 in free care, Lariscy said.

"Some of these children don't sleep at night because they have dental abscesses," he said.

To qualify for the free care, children must be 4 to 18 years old, cannot have dental insurance, and must live in Macomb, Monroe, Oakland or Wayne county.

Appointments for treatment will be accepted through Friday and may be made by calling the 211 help line operated by the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

The agency began collecting names on Jan. 7 and helped to spread the word about the free care as families called the agency about other issues, said Susan Zanley, a United Way employee in charge of quality and training.

The agency collected the names and forwarded them to the Detroit District Dental Society.

So far, 543 children in 261 families were signed up for appointments, Zanley said. "We're pretty excited," she said.

PHOTOS

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(ROB WIDDIS/Special to the Free Press)

Dr. Lloyd Lariscy with patient Marv Allen of Milford on Monday. The Farmington Hills dentist is chairman of the Give Kids A Smile Day effort for Macomb, Monroe, Oakland and Wayne counties. Scores of dentists in metro Detroit have volunteered their services.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Who qualifies?

Free dental care is available for children who are ages 4 to 18, are not covered by dental insurance and live in Macomb, Monroe, Oakland and Wayne counties.

Appointments for treatment will be accepted through Friday. Call the 211 help line operated by the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

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Cleanings, X-rays, fillings and other procedures will be part of Give Kids A Smile Day at Manzor's office, but so will professional clowns.

"Really it's a fun day for the kids," Manzor said. "It's my way of giving back to the community. These kids are so appreciative that someone cares about their teeth."

Lariscy agreed: "It's an incredibly gratifying experience. Professional dentistry has been good to all of us, so we feel it's important to give back."

According to the American Dental Association, the Give Kids A Smile program was established in February 2002 by the Greater St. Louis Dental Society and a group of dentists who set up a temporary, full-service clinic that treated nearly 400 children over two days.

Lariscy said the Goodfellows will pay for the children who register for services on Saturday, but are not able to be treated at that time.

During their visit to her office, Manzor said the children will learn about dental care and nutrition.

"It's fun. You get to do cool things," said Nakya Herriotte, 8, of Detroit. "They give you a special surprise at the end."

Contact **CECIL ANGEL** at 313-223-4531 or angel@freepress.com.

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