

Kindersmile Midyear conversation 4.14.22

Nicole McGrath-Barnes, Tyler, Beth HK, Susan

Project: Dental care for low income seniors in Trenton

Nicole started off expressing appreciation for both the partnership and funding. The grant has increased access to care, a key social determinant of health. She added that the program was going exceptionally well. 50% of the seniors served are African American and 50% are Latinx.

The program goal was providing dental care to 50 seniors, and they have seen 27 participants. The discovery that 72% were indentalist (no teeth at all) and 28 partial (less than 28 teeth) changed the focus to providing dentures to those without access to ANY other dental care. Some have some coverage under Medicaid or family will pay. They had to be much more selective than initially planned. They also found that MOUs for referrals was unnecessary as the word got out quickly and continues to spread. Education and semi-annual check-ups follow the initial care. They do get discounted services from the labs who build the dentures.

A possible collaboration with the Trenton Housing Authority is being explored, with THA providing transportation to the Dental Home for senior residents. There are a good relationships with Henry Austin Health Clinic and Capital Health.

The greatest challenge is finding providers. The only dental school in the state is in Newark, which is too far for student placements. They do have a relationship with Middlesex Hygiene School with monthly student visits. They hope to establish a residency by 2024, and they do participate in a NJ State Loan forgiveness employment program.

There is a donated dental service program which is hindered by increased costs and decreased reimbursement. Volunteering is less common as more dental practices are owned by investment companies.

We also discussed other potential sources of support: PACF, NJM, Bloomberg. NJM is supporting their creating a documentary about oral health in Trenton.

The need is great, and the gratitude profuse.

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