

Model Courts Participate in Children's Dental Health Month 2008

Dental health is a vital component of a child's development. Poor dental health can have physical, psychological, and social consequences, such as immune deficiencies, poor self esteem, or poor peer relationships. To increase awareness of dental health for foster children, NCJFCJ's Permanency Planning for Children Department, through the efforts of the Mental Health/Medical-Legal Issues Committee, and in collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and Procter & Gamble, supported Model Court participation in Children's Dental Health Month in February 2008.

During Children's Dental Health Month 2008, volunteer Model Courts participated in key activities including: judicial officers asking questions from the bench regarding dental health; the incorporation of dental health information and issues into collaborative meetings; inclusion of dental health service providers in proceedings; and the distribution of toothbrushes and toothpaste, generously donated by Procter & Gamble, to children before the court. Reactions regarding the implementation and utility of the initiative were ascertained through an online survey and written anecdotes from participating Model Courts.

Information regarding the importance of dental health and the goals of the initiative was discussed with participating stakeholders at Model Court Team collaborative meetings, or meetings held specific to the initiative. These discussions were used to encourage buy-in from participating parties, as well as emphasize the importance of enacting the initiative. One aspect which proved beneficial was the inclusion of dental health service providers in the process. Many courts indicated that the incorporation of dental health service providers increased their awareness as to the availability in their jurisdictions of dental health services, and a number of dental providers were willing to volunteer their services to children *pro bono*. Other collaborations with dental service providers resulted in long-term relationships. For instance, in the Miami Model Court, led by Administrative Judge Cindy S. Lederman and Model Court Lead Judge Jeri B. Cohen, the "Brushes from the Bench" campaign was launched, which included free dental check-ups provided by the Miami Children's Hospital Dental Mobile Clinic. The Dental Mobile Clinic has also now begun to perform oral surgeries for some of the children in need, and resulted in an ongoing partnership between the Miami Model

Court and the Miami Children's Hospital.

Highlighting dental health in the Model Courts was also a fun activity for the children and families involved. Lead Judge Patricia Martin of the Chicago Model Court reported that the children in her courts were very excited to receive toothbrushes and toothpaste, and considered them to be special treats. Respondents to the online survey estimated that dental health brochures, toothbrushes, and toothpaste were distributed to over 80% of the children who appeared in courtrooms during Children's Dental Health Month, with the majority of parents and children reacting "positively" or "very positively" upon receiving these items.

Stakeholders believed the initiative was educational and very useful. Participation in the initiative not only increased awareness regarding the importance of dental health, but led stakeholders to be more proactive in addressing the dental health needs of children in dependency hearings. The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that the initiative was worth the time invested in implementing it, and believe the dental well-being of foster children is an important issue to continue inquiring about in their courtrooms.

Overall, the Model Courts indicated that participating in Children's Dental Health Month was a success. The initiative provided Model Court stakeholders the opportunity to learn more about the importance of dental health for children in foster care, as well as increasing their understanding about how to tap dental health resources in their community for abused and neglected children.

An online summary of all the participating Model Court narratives and survey results is posted on NCJFCJ's website at www.ncjfcj.org (click on Child Abuse and Neglect, then What's New at PPCD). The Technical Assistance Brief, *Children's Dental Health: The Next Frontier in Well-Being* is also free to download at: <http://www.ncjfcj.org/content/blogcategory/280/535/>



Miami judges, health professionals, and children celebrated Children's Dental Health Month in February. Judges pictured from left to right are: Judge Cindy S. Lederman, Judge Jeri B. Cohen, Judge Marisa Tinkler Mendez, General Magistrate Steven Lieberman, and Judge Nushin A. Sayfie.

Every Penny Counts!



For more information on giving opportunities, please contact Cheryl Davidek, Director for Administration and Membership, at (775) 784-1652.