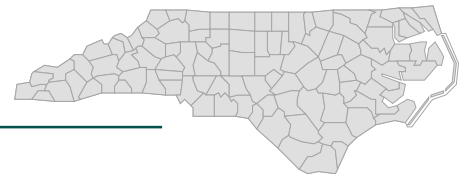


# OutReach



A Publication of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

September 2000  
Volume 3, Number 1

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The ToothBus is a 40-foot dental office on wheels that serves children who have no other access to dental care. It is a program of the Billy Graham Children's Health Center at Mission St. Joseph's Hospital in Asheville.

## Focus on Access to Dental Care

Although there has been great improvement in making health care accessible to all state residents in recent years, dental services remain out of reach for large numbers of North Carolinians. Because of the slow pace of improvement in the accessibility of dental care, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force on Dental Care Access made a comprehensive study of the problem. The study was partially funded by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, and the results were released in May 1999.

The study showed a number of multifaceted and complex issues that will require cooperative action by the public and private sectors before significant progress is made: attracting more dentists and dental hygienists, especially in rural areas; addressing the needs of low-income Medicaid-eligible and special needs populations; and educating groups about the importance of ongoing comprehensive dental care. The study also shows a need for additional emphasis on dental education and prevention strategies. Along with its findings, the task force listed 23 recommendations that, when implemented, will lay the foundation for delivering adequate preventive and curative dental care to residents across the state.

In June 2000, the Trust announced a new

initiative designed to 1) establish new or expand existing dental programs to serve primarily the financially needy population, and 2) fund dental manpower recruitment and technical assistance programs in cooperation with the NC Office of Rural Health and the NC Oral Health Section.

"We are especially hopeful of the impact the manpower recruitment emphasis will have in overall delivery of services," said John H. Frank, Director of the Health Care Division of the Trust. "In spite of recent efforts, the ratio of population to dental professionals in many critically underserved areas in 1993 showed little or no improvement when the 1998 statistics were released. According to the 1998 figures, four counties had no dentists and no dental hygienists within their boundaries. Several other counties had fewer than five. One county showed a population of more than 20,000 to be served by one dentist and one hygienist. North Carolina ranks 47th in the supply of dentists to serve its population.

"The focus of our initiative with the Office of Rural Health is to recruit dentists willing to practice in underserved areas or in public health and community clinics serving underserved populations. Obviously, if our recruitment efforts

(Continued on Page 3)

For more information about the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust or about specific grant programs, contact the Trust office in Winston-Salem.

Phone: (336) 723-1456 or  
(800) 485-9080 - NC only  
Fax: (336) 723-7765  
Website: www.kbr.org

**Meet  
Lori  
Fuller...**



**“Perfect, just perfect” is the way Lori Fuller describes her position with the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.**

**“Coming to the Trust immediately after graduate school has been a wonderful opportunity,” Fuller said.**

**After completing a master’s degree in social work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1999, Fuller spent the summer developing an online course through the School of Public Health; she joined the Trust the following September.**

**As a Program Associate, Fuller is busy writing review/evaluations of grants awarded by the Trust. “It’s a great experience to have exposure to these incredible programs on a day-to-day basis,” she said. “I seem to learn something new every day, and the job gives me the chance to grow and develop my skills.”**

**Fuller’s co-workers feel fortunate to have her as a member of the staff. “Lori brings a new understanding and fresh knowledge of technology to our office,” Sara Smith said. “She rounds out the balance of our staff and brings new and creative ideas to our workplace.”**

**In her time away from work, Fuller enjoys photography and is a member of a small book club.**

## *Perspective*

# BEYOND MEASURE

By Monica Teutsch, M.P.H.  
Mission St. Joseph’s Hospital, Asheville, NC (828) 213-1700

Five years ago, there was almost no dental care for young children or those covered by Medicaid in western North Carolina. Today — although there is still a tremendous need — the region is bustling with start-up programs focused on the delivery of dental services for children. The catalyst for much of this activity was \$75,000 of a grant of \$225,000 received by Mission Health Care Foundation in 1996 from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

The grant provided capital toward the purchase of a mobile dental van, which we named the ToothBus. Because of its success, we now have a second ToothBus, also entirely funded with gifts and grants, and have established a hospital practice for very young and medically compromised children needing dental care under general anesthesia. Almost as significant as this growth were the totally unanticipated synergies that have developed as spinoffs from our effort.

Shortly after receiving the initial grant, we realized the problem was bigger than we could address. Our scope of services was restricted by our resources. We had to limit our care to second-through-fifth-grade students — those children developmentally ready to come to the ToothBus without their parents. We reasoned that we could begin seeing youngsters in time to help maintain their important primary teeth and begin preventive care for their permanent teeth. As they advanced to middle school and out of our care, they would be old enough to be seen by other dentists, whose patients often must be at least 12 years old.

Gradually, the ToothBus became a familiar sight and local awareness of dental health concerns grew — local communities began to dream of possibilities: What about more education for child care providers and parents? What about mobile and fixed resources for children in counties not served by our program? The seed was sown.

Through the evolution of our program, we have learned much and are sharing our experience with others whose programs are still in the early stages of development. Because of our contacts, we function as a clearinghouse for regional efforts to improve the accessibility of dental care for children. We have facilitated cooperative programming among state and local groups, and together we are having an impact on the level of accessibility in western North Carolina and across the state.

One such collaboration is the Smart Smiles program, which offers fluoride varnishing for children 9 to 36 months of age. This program carries us beyond the level of treatment to preventive intervention. It is offered by an impressive coalition of child advocates and dental providers, and its genesis was our informal contacts with other local, state and regional organizations.

It’s amazing how fast seed money can grow.



*Inside the ToothBus . . .*

## Important Dates

### Satellite Offices:

Fayetteville satellite office will be open  
December 4-8, 2000

Greenville satellite office will be open  
January 22-26, 2001

### Health Care Division:

Grant Applications Due: September 15, 2000  
March 15, 2001

### Poor and Needy Division

Grant Applications Due: January 1, 2001

(For appointments, call the Trust office, 1-800-485-9080)

(Continued from Page 1)

prove successful, we can take a giant step forward in delivering dental services,” Frank said.

“The overall shortage and maldistribution of dentists and dental hygienists is compounded by the low dentist participation rate in the Medicaid program. The Task Force on Dental Care Access has recommended that the state increase the Medicaid reimbursement levels for all dental codes to 80% of the usual and customary rates. Over half of the state’s dentists have indicated they would take Medicaid patients if this reimbursement rate could be achieved.”

Even before the dental care access study was undertaken, the Health Care Division of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust had begun funding programs to establish and expand dental services around the state. Since 1996, the Trust has made 56 dental grants totaling approximately \$9.5 million. A large percentage target children and other special needs groups. Because many dentists do not treat children under 12 years of age, the inaccessibility to care is especially critical.

The programs funded by these grants generally fit one of three structural categories: hospital-based; health department-based; or rural health center-based although almost all rely on cooperative programming among existing organizations. Overviews of representative programs in each category are below.

#### Hospital-based Programs:

**Mission St. Joseph’s Hospital, Asheville** — In 1996, the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust awarded a grant of \$225,000, part of which supported a mobile dental van, called the ToothBus. The van, which was intended to be a stand alone program, evolved into a dynamic children’s dental program. The ToothBus delivers services to 46 elementary schools in ten counties. Another 400 children are treated under general anesthesia in three hospitals in the region. The Children’s Dental Program also provides education to primary care providers and advocates for systemic changes to dental education and reimbursement.

The original ToothBus served second graders in Cherokee, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, and Yancey counties. A second ToothBus has been added to deliver services to Clay, Graham, McDowell, Transylvania, and Madison counties. In 1999, the two vans enabled 2,000 comprehensive visits to children from low-income families. Of the children seen, 29% had dental pain at the time of the visit, and the average child had 5.4 teeth that needed restoration.

**FirstHealth of the Carolinas** — In 1997, the Trust approved a three-year grant of \$465,160 to FirstHealth to assist in

building and operating dental clinics in Moore, Montgomery, and Hoke counties to serve Medicaid- and Health Choice-eligible and medically indigent children. The centers in each county see children up to age 18, but 50% are between the ages of 5 and 12. Of the total patient base, 35% have never seen a dentist. As of August 2000, the Centers have seen over 4,500 of the approximately 10,000 eligible children in these counties.

The centers have low no-show rates, which are attributed to strict scheduling policies, high patient satisfaction, positive rapport with providers and staff, and an effective educational process on the broken appointment policy. When transportation issues arise, dental personnel seek assistance from the local transport services. A bilingual staff member is available in each center to assist the Hispanic population.

#### North Carolina Baptist Hospitals, Inc. —

Although 111 general dentists practice in Forsyth County, there is a severe shortage of dental services available to Medicaid and other low-income populations. Only nine see limited numbers of Medicaid recipients, and two of those do not treat children. In 1999, there were 16,000 families and 7,700 individual adults enrolled in Medicaid, 1,700 children in Health Choice, and about 30,000 uninsured persons in the county.

The hospital’s former Reynolds Health Center included a small dental clinic, which had a four-month waiting list. When the new Center was planned, it included a single operatory; however, the demand was so great that the hospital recently converted a former physician’s office nearby to a freestanding dental clinic with two dentists and two hygienists. The hospital also provides transportation to clients who need the service. The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust awarded \$200,000 in support of the program.

#### Health Department-Based Programs:

**Clay County Health Department** — Since 1997, the department has operated a small, part-time clinic leased from the Cherokee County Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. From this office, the



Western NC Community Health Services

## A Special Need . . . Dental Care for HIV/AIDS Patients

**Carlos Gomez,**  
Executive Director of  
the Western North  
Carolina Community

**Health Services, Inc., speaks proudly of the dental care the clinic provides to individuals with HIV/AIDS.**

**“We are one of only a few organized clinical settings in the state that provide this**

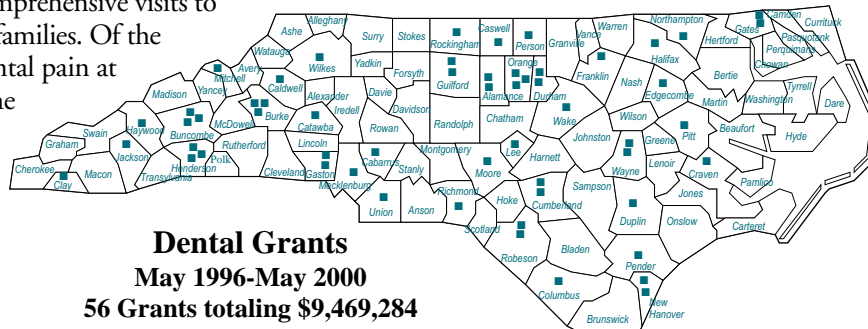
**service. Although our center is neighborhood-based, our clients come from as far west as Franklin and as far east as Morganton,” he said.**

**“When we expanded the health center in 1998, there was undesignated space on an upper floor, so we made minor adjustments and set up a dental lab and two operatories. We applied to the Trust for funding, and now we treat more than 300 patients, reducing the waiting period for appointments from four months to four weeks.**

**“This is a success story from many perspectives. Years ago, the life expectancy for HIV/AIDS patients was so short that dental care was only an after-thought. Because of the advances in HIV/AIDS treatment, dental care is now a quality of life issue for these patients,” Gomez added.**

**“HIV/AIDS patients have to minimize their exposure to bacteria, which can grow rapidly in the oral cavity, so good dental health is critical.”**

(Continued on Page 4)



**For additional information:**

**Mission St. Joseph's Hospital — Monica Teutsch, 828-213-1700**

**FirstHealth of the Carolinas — Leigh Smith, 910-692-5111**

**N. C. Baptist Hospitals, Inc. — Jenny Kirksey, 336-716-3378**

**Clay County Health Dept. — Janice Patterson, 828-389-8052**

**Public Health Authority of Cabarrus County — Fred Pilkington, 704-939-1200**

**Craven County Health Dept. — Wanda Sandele 252-636-4930**

**Pender County Health Dept. — Connie Bell 910-259-1230**

**New Hanover Community Health Center — Alfred Thomas 910-254-4690**

**Roanoke Amaranth Community Health Group, Inc. — Steve Greene 252-534-1024**

*(Continued from Page 3)*

health department has provided more than 3,000 dental visits to children in Cherokee and Clay counties who otherwise had no access to dental care or traveled to Tennessee or Asheville.

The Murphy Medical Center has agreed to provide an office that includes four operatories. A dentist has committed to three days per week, and the Office of Rural Health is recruiting additional dentists. The Trust has granted \$119,950 to support this program.

**Public Health Authority of Cabarrus County —** In 1997, the Trust granted \$37,750 toward the purchase of a new mobile dental unit for the department's established program, which serves schools, HeadStart programs, and community centers in low-income neighborhoods.

The previous van, which was 18 years old, had to be transported by a mobile home moving tractor and could not accommodate children with special needs. The new unit answers these needs, expands the scope of services available, and increases the average number of patient visits per day from 4.4 to 14. Last year, the van visited three elementary schools and one community center and served approximately 600 patients.

**Craven County Health Department —** In a cooperative effort with Jones and Pamlico health departments, schools, and local government, Craven County's Smile Mobile II delivers dental care to more than 1,200 Medicaid-eligible or other low-income children.

In 1997, the Trust awarded a grant of \$243,500 toward the purchase of Smile Mobile II to replace the department's 30-year-old mobile unit. The unit was self-supporting within eighteen months.

**Pender County Health Department —** The Trust granted \$229,648 toward the purchase of a

mobile medical/dental van in 1997 and a follow-up grant of \$120,510 for dental equipment for a new modular building. The mobile clinic is utilized five-six days and one evening per week. Financial considerations and the lack of public transportation make it difficult for people to pay for and/or access health services. This explains the approximately 3000 visits per year on our mobile clinic.

**Rural Health Center-Based Programs:**

**New Hanover Community Health Center —** New Hanover County and the surrounding four counties have been designated medical and dental manpower shortage areas. The Trust approved a two-year grant of \$350,000 as capital for equipment and operating funds for a five-operators dental clinic, which opened in April 2000.

The clinic now serves almost 3,000 low-income individuals and families.

**Roanoke Amaranth Community Health Group, Inc. —** This community-oriented health system has provided health care to residents of Northampton and Halifax counties for 22 years. In 1999, the group purchased a retiring dentist's office in Jackson, in order to make dental services available to Medicaid-eligible individuals, particularly children served through Health Check, Health Choice, and Smart Start, as well as the frail elderly, and persons with HIV/AIDS.

Approximately 3,000 patients are seen through the program each year.

"Nationally, the unmet need for dental care is almost twice as pressing as for medical services, even though this lack often results in severe or persistent pain and increased susceptibility to other medical conditions," said E. Ray Cope, President of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. "Meeting the dental health needs of the state's most vulnerable citizens — most often children — is a Trust priority."

  
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