

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Thanks to a comprehensive early intervention program, more expectant mothers, infants and young children in El Paso County are receiving important preventive health oral health services and education.

Community Partnership for Child Development (CPCD), supported by a four-year grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Head Start and Early Head Start, has implemented an oral health program to provide education, prevention, early intervention and access to dental care for enrolled children and families enrolled in the programs. CPCD, based in Colorado Springs, was one of 52 organizations across the country awarded an oral health grant in 2006 and was the only one in Colorado to receive the funding.

The oral health program annually serves approximately 1,000 Head Start (ages 3-5) and 135 Early Head Start children (ages 0-3), said Michelle Hair, CPCD oral health program coordinator.

Hair, a dental hygienist, provides dental screenings, fluoride varnish applications, risk assessments for uninsured and/or overdue children, and anticipatory guidance for parents. Her primary focus is on reaching the Early Head Start children and their parents. Parents are normally in the classroom during screenings, so she uses this opportunity to promote oral health awareness to the adults.

"More infants and young children in the county are being seen by a dentist so we know the program is paying off," said Hair. Local access to dental care is not a major problem in El Paso County where seven dental clinics take Medicaid-eligible patients. However, providing the needed prevention of fluoride varnish applications and anticipatory guidance with parents remains a challenge.

Hair also makes herself available to do presentations to the dental and medical communities, including clinics and local health departments. Armed with a Power Point presentation and handouts, she discusses oral



health issues concerning pregnant women, infants and young children. Due to a training presented to El Paso County's Child Health Liaison Program participants, more than 14,000 children in the Colorado Springs area are now brushing their teeth on a regular basis in their preschool settings.

She also is responsible for coordinating a group of volunteer dental professionals who provide oral health education at parent center meetings conducted for over 66 classrooms throughout the year.

CPCD provides early childhood education and family development programs throughout El Paso County. It was founded in 1987 to administer the Head Start Program. Initially funded to serve nearly 300 four-year-old children in two programs, it now reaches more than 1,700 children and parents in three core programs: Head Start, Early Head Start and the Colorado Preschool Programs.

For more information, contact Michelle Hair at 719-884-1473 or mhair@cpcd.org, or visit the CPCD website at www.cpcdheadstart.org.

