

The Dental Wellness Trust

Linda Greenwall

I established the Dental Wellness Trust in 2011 with the aim, as an ICD Fellow, of giving back to less fortunate communities. I am a Specialist in Restorative Dentistry and Prosthodontics with a multidisciplinary specialist practice in Hampstead London. I undertake aesthetic dentistry cases and complex tooth whitening, and am author of several textbooks on tooth whitening.

To start the trust, I established a Board of trustees and advisors and investigated the best ways to making a meaningful difference in oral health. Doing good is one thing, but doing the right good is essential. I consulted with Professor Aubrey Sheiham, Consultant in Public Health. He advised that the focus should be on establishing tooth-brushing programmes in areas of high need, complimenting successful oral health programmes running in many countries throughout the world. I consulted also with Dr Lorna McPherson and Professor Ivor Chestnutt who established the Child Smile and Designed to Smile Programmes in Scotland and Wales respectively.

I was born in Cape Town, South Africa and so initially focussed on the poorest townships in Cape Town, namely Khayalitcha, Mfuleni and Blue Downs. I connected and consulted with Professor Neil Myburgh at the Department of Community Dentistry, University of the Western Cape to establish a task force and a research base.

Oral Health through dental wellness is the mission

What we have achieved so far and where do we work?

We have provided toothbrushes, toothpaste and oral health education in the following countries:

UK

- Homeless, Crisis at Christmas -for the last four years we have donated over 12,000 toothbrushes to this programme.
- North London Schools and care homes - oral health education for children and care home residents and their carers.
- Luton, Bedfordshire - oral health education for over 1,000 children over the past three years - Megamolars and the Saving Kids Teeth Campaign.
- We have commenced a toothbrushing programme for the children in schools in Luton. The children are enjoying the programme and we are currently devising a song to learn all the parts of the teeth to clean.



Linda Greenwall, Specialist Practitioner, London, and Founder of the Dental Wellness Trust

South Africa

- More than 10,000 children in schools in the poorest townships, including 2,000 children participating in the Trust's evening LiveSmart Oral Health programme.
- We have provided oral health education for carers in an elderly care facility in which we have undertaken screening programmes.
- Johannesburg - our newest programme, focussing on children in the poorest township of Johannesburg in Soweto, Alexandra and Doornfontein, where we will introduce our innovative oral health programmes Educare into nurseries and Schools.

We have created a group of 33 'Toothbrush Mamas' (figure 1) who help to sustain our programmes in 370 schools in the Cape Town townships. They visit our schools to ensure a regular supply of soap and toothpaste and that the programme remains sustainable. The toothbrushes are kept on a toothbrush board (figure 2) that the Mamas make themselves. The toothbrush board is kept at school with a cover. Each toothbrush is named and is separated to ensure that none of the toothbrushes touches each other. The Toothbrush Mamas continue to innovate the oral health programme with songs, rhymes and dances. Our song "We brighten the corner where we are" is popular with the kids and teachers.



Fig.1 Training the 'Mama's' in South Africa in brushing teeth.



Fig.2 A toothbrush board.

Uganda

We have worked with Chayli Fehler who has helped 500 Southern Sudan refugees in Uganda. Chayli gave the children their first Good Deed toothbrush (see below) and toothpaste. The toothpaste was very popular, and the children were delighted to receive instruction on how to brush their teeth. The toothpaste was a special luxury and a prized treasure. Chayli has made two trips in the past year, one at Christmas time and another in August 2017 to help 150 new refugees.

Other countries have included Kenya-Rwanda orphanages in Kigali, Ethiopia, Ghana, where the work of the Trust has been supported by students from King's College London Dental Institute, Ukraine and Croatia, reaching out to children in orphanages, and Israel-West Bank Toothbrushes organised by Dr Tariq Bashir.

The Dental Wellness Trust has also helped refugees in Calais and Greece, working with the Refugee Crisis Foundation.

Good Deed toothbrushes

We have continued to give away and sell our Good Deed toothbrushes. To date we have given over 16,000 toothbrushes to children and adults in many countries, including 10,000 toothbrushes for the homeless during Crisis at Christmas over the last four years.

Mitzvah Day 2015-2017

We have participated in Mitzvah Day (Good Deed Day) when over 200 children in London pack up Good Deed toothbrushes for children in townships, together with a special personalised note to each child. The children in London enjoy this activity, increasing their awareness of the importance of kindness and charity and doing good deeds. This activity has helped introduce oral health programmes into the poorest township in South Africa.

Live Smart Teachers Conferences

In February 2017 and 2018 we held training conferences for 160 teachers participating in our schools programme. We taught the teachers how to brush their own teeth first. We then introduced the LiveSmart programme and taught the teachers our handwashing and tooth brushing songs. We started off the morning expressing gratitude to each participating teacher, followed by a women's em-

powerment and enrichment lecture to help the teachers induct and conduct the oral health programme in their schools. The mornings included a jive session which everyone enthusiastically participated in. This energised the group making it ready for action. Each teacher received the LiveSmart oral health manual to help them implement the programme in their school. We also provided toothpaste plates (figure 3) for each teacher, together with Dental Wellness Trust soap bottles. The key to our programmes is sustainability. This is done through daily monitoring of our programmes in schools and our evening health programmes with our Toothbrush Mamas.

Luton

We have started the toothbrushing programmes into an infant (4-5 year-old age group) school in Luton as a pilot study (figure 4). There are three classes of 30 children. After lunch each day the children wash their hands and brush their teeth. We continue to monitor the programme in the schools and provide them with the supplies they



Fig.3 The Dental Wellness Trust, have come up with the idea of placing the toothpaste on a plate, this allows a clean and non-contaminated application of toothpaste onto the brush. This also prevents waste as only a small pea size amount is used.



Fig.4 Children from Whipperley Infant School in Luton participating in tooth brushing programme.

► need. In the future we hope to train parents to become ‘toothbrushing ambassadors’ who will help sustain the programme. The children look forward to their daily brushing programme.

Going forward – our goal is that:

- Each child has their own toothbrush.
- Each child will know how to look after their own teeth, taking responsibility for their own oral health and, in turn, general health.

We are working with the Level Trust, a poverty charity based in Luton where there are 16,000 children living below the poverty line.

Saving Kids Teeth

We are asking questions...

- Why do 46,000 children in England need to be admitted to hospital each year to have teeth extracted under general anaesthesia?
- What are the methods and strategies that can be implemented to help more children attain dental wellness?
- How can we improve oral health to enhance general health in children?
- What is the relationship between sugar, dental health, obesity, diabetes and general health in children?
- What strategies are needed to help more children?

Saving Kids Teeth - a Dental Wellness Trust campaign, highlights the oral health plight of so many children in England. Over the last three years we have organised a conference to address our questions. The 2017 conference was attended by over 200 dentists. All the money raised has been invested in the Dental Wellness Trust LiveSmart toothbrushing programmes.

Research

We have undertaken four research projects to measure the impact of our programmes. These have included a

toothbrushing programme, an elderly oral health assessment in Cape Town, a fissure sealant study and a fluoride varnish study. An abstract of the varnish study has been submitted to the 2018 IADR Conference in London. The fluoride varnish, supported by DMG Germany, has involved screening 400 children and the application of topical fluoride to their teeth. The children will be monitored and screened every three months over the course of the next 12-18 months. The research, which has involved training Toothbrush Mamas in the application of fluoride varnish, received ethical approval from the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town.

Dental Clinic in Mfuleni

In the townships of Cape Town there are nearly one million children with high levels of dental disease (<85% of 15-year olds with dental caries), but without access to dental care. Although there is a Government Dental Clinic, this is insufficient to meet needs - many children missing school because of dental pain. We are planning on establishing a Dental Clinic in Mfuleni to help address this problem. We are seeking funders and donors to make this dream a reality. We are planning to create an innovative health pod which will serve also as a community centre as well as a dental clinic. We are collaborating with, in addition to the University of Western Cape and Afrika Tikkun Organisation, Cape Town Architects Louis Karol and Associates and Arup Engineers, who have agreed to provide their services on a pro bono basis, to help progress this project.

Website

More information on The Dental Wellness Trust, including ‘how to get involved’ and ‘how to donate’ facilities may be found on the Trust website <http://dentalwellnesstrust.org/> ■