

Posted Online: Oct. 19, 2011, 6:39 pm

Mobile clinic brings dentist to kids

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About 17,000 kids in the Quad-Cities area do not receive regular dental care.

Dr. Jim Bishop, chairman of the local chapter of the American Dental Association's Give Kids a Smile program, hopes a new mobile dental clinic will help to fix that problem.

The mobile clinic, housed in a converted recreational vehicle, was unveiled Wednesday evening during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Bethany for Children and Families in Moline. Dr. Bishop said the RV will visit schools in Rock Island and Scott counties with the goal of seeing thousands of kids each year.

"If next year we can visit schools 100 days and if we can see 40 children a day, we're going to bring care to 4,000 kids," he said.

Katie Nelson, Bethany's communications coordinator, said any child between 3 and 17 who does not have a regular dentist is eligible to use the mobile clinic.

Bill Steinhauser, Bethany's CEO, said kids will be able to get regular exams, cleanings, fluoride treatments and molar sealants through the mobile clinic. If the kids are found to have more serious problems, Mr. Steinhauser said they will be referred to one of 94 dentists donating services.

"Forty-six to 52 percent of kids will have cavities," Mr. Steinhauser said. "The real commitment is to get the restorative care to the kids who need it."

Mr. Steinhauser said the Give Kids a Smile program, in the past, provided rides for kids from schools to a dentist. But that meant kids were out of school for a few hours at a time. With the mobile clinic, kids will be out of school for less than an hour, he said, with rides still provided for children who need more serious care.

"It's really kind of a full-service approach to dental care," he said.

Dr. Bishop said the key to developing good dental habits by children is to get them to see dentists at an early age. But times are tough, he said, and many families can't afford dental care or have no time to take children to a dentist.



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Photo: Aaron Facemire

Dental assistant Jen Felsman demonstrates some of the functions of the mobile dental clinic sponsored by Bethany at the ribbon-cutting ceremony in Moline on Wednesday, Oct. 19, 2011. The bus is used as part of the Give Kids a Smile program and will serve a large area in and around the Quad-Cities.

"So many stresses are on families," he said. "This, oftentimes, isn't termed a priority."

Dr. Bishop said the mobile clinic's goal is to get kids into a "dental home."

"Kids need to grow up learning that preventive dental care, regular dental care, needs to be a part of their lives," he said. "We want preventive dental care to be right up there with those other priorities."