

New bus helps with dental screenings

Deirdre Cox Baker | Posted: Wednesday, October 19, 2011 5:42 pm

A custom-made dental clinic on four wheels is a new tool in the quest to provide quality care to all children in Rock Island and Scott counties.

The vehicle was unveiled Wednesday in a ceremony at Bethany for Children & Families in Moline. It will be used as part of the Give Kids A Smile program.

“This is a monumental step forward,” said Dr. Jim Bishop, a dentist from Moline. He sits on the Give Kids A Smile board and has been active for years in the screening of young children’s teeth in both his regular practice and through the special program.

A partnership of many individuals, businesses and organizations made the vehicle possible, he said.

The new mobile clinic was featured Oct. 10-13 at the American Dental Association’s annual session in Las Vegas. It includes three dental chairs and will carry three hygienists, a dentist, a receptionist and a driver. It is expected to visit at least 100 schools within a 50-mile radius of the Quad-Cities during the next year.

“We are very excited to have our bus, and now we can use it to make an impact on the children of the Quad-Cities,” Bishop said, noting that an estimated 17,000 children in the region have not seen a dentist in the past year and lack a dental home, or place to go for regular care.

For years, schools have taken youngsters — mostly through donated bus transportation — to local dentists’ offices to get checkups through the program. The mobile clinic will rely on Community Health Care’s dental offices for referrals, and they also may go to one of the 95 dentists in Scott and Rock Island counties who donate their time.

“This turns the direction around and brings the dental services to the kids,” said Bill Steinhauser, the president and CEO at Bethany. The mobile clinic may reach 40 children a day for about 100 days during the year. That bumps up the numbers of children who will be seen by a dentist by about 4,000.

“It’s phenomenal who’s all helping in this program, and we’re happy to be part of it,” Steinhauser said.

The number of children who have received dental health checkups has increased in the past five years, said Briana Boswell of the Scott County Health Department. Boswell is with Iowa’s I-SMILE program, the state’s initiative to provide dental care to children, and is also on the Give Kids A Smile advisory board.

“A lot has changed since 2006,” Boswell said. In the past five years, programs such as Give Kids A Smile have begun, dental services have expanded at Community Health Care, dental hygienists work in the Women, Infants and Children clinics, and physicians are more aware of oral health and its effect on overall health.

“All these should help improve children’s health,” Boswell said.

The mobile clinic was built by Farber Specialty Vehicles. The Illinois State Dental Society, Patterson Dental, US Adventure RV and private donors have supported the program, with additional assistance from the health departments in Scott and Rock Island counties. Bethany for Children & Families coordinates the Give Kids A Smile program.

In Scott County

Children in Scott County have received far more dental screenings when compared with youngsters throughout the state, according to a recent audit by the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Some 90 percent of Scott County children have valid certificates of a dental screening, compared with 73 percent around the state.

For kindergartners, it’s 99 percent in Scott County compared with 84 percent statewide. For ninth-graders, it’s 81 percent in Scott County versus 63 percent around the state.

A significant number of the screenings in Scott County were accomplished by elementary school nurses, who added the dental screenings to routine screenings done in schools such as those for vision and hearing.

— Source: Scott County Health Department