



Smile *together*



Two years ago, a very different kind of dental group was formed. Smile Together is a community interest company (CIC) delivering 'dentistry with social impact'. Here Managing Director Paul Critchley describes how he and his team go above and beyond.

We launched Smile Together in 2016 as an employee-owned social enterprise and community interest company (CIC). Our mission? To deliver dentistry with social impact. Having previously delivered community dentistry as part of the NHS, a CIC delivery model enabled us to have more autonomy in how to run our business while employee ownership offered the opportunity to give our one hundred plus staff more of a voice in how the organisation is run. In the two years since becoming an employee-

owned dental social enterprise, Smile Together has begun realising its vision to create happier, healthier communities.

Whether clinicians or professional support colleagues, everyone who works in Smile Together is here because they care. Being able to invest our profits into our community to help those who need us most is a powerful motivator for us all.

How does it work?

Everyone in the team can be a shareholder, a 'co-owner', with a genuine voice in our business. We all have access to financial information and the

opportunity to feed in ideas to the management team directly or via our elected staff council. These are changes which everyone is embracing. Becoming an employee-owned community interest company has allowed Smile Together to generate profits and invest surplus funds into oral health programmes that directly benefit our local community.

Brighter Smiles

One example of this is our Brighter Smiles oral health programme in schools to help tackle preventable tooth decay. The number one reason children age 5-9 go into hospital under general

anaesthetic is for teeth extraction. We want to prevent the decay so children don't end up in hospital.

Smiles at Sea

Another example is our #SmilesAtSea initiative where a specialist dental team visited harbours across Cornwall as well as in Brixham in June 2017 and 2018 providing free dental treatment for fishermen and their families. As part of National Smile Month, Smiles at Sea left the fishing community smiling and a great deal healthier thanks to the spirit of true partnership and a dedicated team of volunteers. Funded by The Seafarers Hospital Society and delivered by Smile Together in partnership with The Fishermen's Mission and Healthy Cornwall, we brought dental treatment and health checks to the harbourside and were able to offer subsidised follow-up private dental treatment with our Brighter Dental team, as recommended by the West Country Dental Care dentist on the day.

Employee ownership has seen Smile Together introduce a Staff Council, with representatives elected by their fellow shareholders. The group meets regularly to develop and review policies, discuss business developments, share fundraising ideas for the organisation's chosen charity of the year (currently Cornwall Air Ambulance), discuss and agree opportunities for Smile Together's employee owners, and share ideas or concerns from colleagues with the management team.



Award winning!

Although it is relatively new to employee ownership, Smile Together has already been recognised for its work in the sector, receiving Highly Commended for 'Employee Owned Positive Impact of the Year' in the prestigious Employee Ownership Awards 2017. As a social enterprise, Smile Together was thrilled to be shortlisted for "Rising Star" in the Social Enterprise UK Awards 2017, and we have won a number of other local and national accolades for our work.

Below: At the harbour (L-R) dentist Jamie Robbins, dental nurses Katie Rowe and Bex Scarr, finance director Catherine Batt and Ellie Tswei (project support)
Bottom left: Dentist Sarah Mount with child in clinic



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The Staff Council have led the development of four key values for the organisation:

- Be generous - demonstrate understanding and patience and go the extra mile for colleagues, patients and the community
- Be bold - feel confident to voice an opinion, offer innovative solutions and feel part of decision making
- Be inspirational – look to the future and do what you can to make things better
- Be authentic – do what you say you will do and build trust

We are passionate about delivering social impact and genuinely making a difference in our local communities. Our work is essentially focused on three core areas of reach, treat and prevent.

Reach – with over 16,000 people on the NHS waiting list in Cornwall and many not registered with a dentist, the challenge to improve access to dentistry is significant. Smile Together has therefore opened new brighter Dental practices across Cornwall, giving more people access to local, competitively-priced

and treated, including #DCBy1 (Dental Check by one). Free treatment for children is proving popular, with over 300 registrations since the scheme launched in May 2018. There is still more work to do as most people assume that children can go free to any dentist without realising it is conditional on NHS spaces being available.

This offer enables more local families to access competitively priced dental care together on a regular basis rather than simply waiting on a list for NHS places to become available. Dental care

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from an early age not only improves their oral health but removes that anxiety about visiting the dentist. As a social enterprise, every penny of the profit we make is invested back into our community, to enable us to continue reaching more and more local people, including children, with both dental treatment and oral healthcare advice and guidance.



Smile Together's reach extends beyond getting more patients the dental treatment they need. Influencing at commissioning level, reaching out to local partners and playing an active role in organisations such as the Employee Ownership Association and Social Enterprise UK enables us to spread our message as well as learn from best practice in other organisations and business sectors.

Prevent – we all know that prevention is better than cure so encouraging local people, young and old, to improve their oral health remains a high priority. Smile Together is reaching out to more local people and engaging with other local companies to support Brighter Smiles, Cornwall's oral health campaign. This support has enabled Smile Together to educate over 3,000 children in over 30 schools



countrywide, all so inspired by our dedicated oral health team.

Engaging with the business community and communicating that children's oral health is a serious public health issue in Cornwall is critical. Most people are staggered by the statistics and very sympathetic to what Smile Together is trying to achieve.

Treat – With a dedicated Call Centre, Smile Together's West Country Dental Care team provides urgent and emergency dental care to people across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, together with orthodontics, oral surgery and special care dentistry for patients with complex requirements. They treat tens of thousands of



patients every year from 14 locations across the county.

Our ability and willingness to treat more patients than the organisation is commissioned and funded to see is something we are extremely proud of. There is no better way to demonstrate care and commitment than going above and beyond for local people. That impact is evidenced by a consistent 97% Friends & Family Test rating from our patients.

Employee ownership also helps to differentiate us in a competitive national environment for recruiting dentists and other clinicians into Cornwall.



Left: Out with the fishermen (L-R): dental nurses Katie Rowe and Cindy Freeman with driver Phil Cleverdon

Above: (L-R) Jenna Dixon and Heidi Wyatt (Brighter Smiles oral health nurses)

Far left: Smiles at Sea team in Hayle (L-R): dental nurses Heidi Wyatt and Amy Jowett with dentist Veronique John

To continue meeting this level of demand, Smile Together has made significant investment this year in new IT equipment including a dedicated Training Academy, and in building and developing our team of both clinical and professional support colleagues. Ultimately, it's about making a real and sustainable difference to our patients so we can all genuinely Smile Together.

For more information: www.smiletogether.co.uk



Below: At the 2017 EOA Awards from L-R: Heidi Wyatt, Tracy Wilson (head of marketing), Maria Cockle (chair of our staff council), Katie Rowe, Tina Allen (head of HR) and Nicola Barr (clinical director)



Julie Sillence, dental nurse with West Country Dental Care (a Smile Together Service)

I moved to Surrey a few years ago but, as the months passed, I missed my parents, colleagues, job and Cornish lifestyle more and more until it became apparent that I needed to return! I had been following the company's development, regularly viewing the website and proudly showing my new work colleagues what I had been a part of before relocating. The consequences of this were a heavy heart and a yearning to return to Cornwall, which I finally achieved!

As a dental nurse with West Country Dental Care, Smile Together's community dental team, I have been fortunate to gain experience in the majority of areas that our service provides. I have worked in Orthodontics in Bodmin one day a week for many years which I really enjoy, and in Access and Community dentistry and in Oral Surgery during the remaining days - a varied experience each week which gives me tremendous job satisfaction.

I love working alongside our dentists in delivering excellent patient care, helping and offering support as and when needed. It's so rewarding knowing that together we have made a difference to the patients we see, and that I have done the best of my ability.

One of the other things I enjoy most about working here is the team - they're such a great bunch! It also helps to have a decent contract and hours of work but, above all, it's so nice to get up in the morning and look forward to what the day has to offer.

To anyone considering joining our company, I'd sum us up as one big family. It's a genuinely great place to work, make new friends and enhance your clinical career with superb opportunities.

I am quite biased and very loyal, I love my job and the people that I have the good fortune to work with. I am very proud to be a part of Smile Together as it goes from strength to strength in making a difference to the Cornish community.

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