

‘The aim is to continue to raise money so we can support the wonderful charities who are out there getting the work done to improve our society’

BDJ In Practice spoke to **Leticia Casanova**, founder of Gold for Kids, about the charity, her inspiration and the impact small acts of kindness can have

Where did the idea to establish the charity come from, and what was your inspiration?

LC The idea came from all the scrap metal we started accumulating when we started our dental practice (London Periodontics, Implants & Dentistry) in 2013/14. We knew that some good had to be done with all that waste metal that belonged to the patient. The only available way to recycle it was to give it to a scrap metal company in exchange for cash, only worth a proportion of its real value.

The real inspiration came from Bridget Ogilvie, who has achieved so much in her life. Very early on, when my husband and I were in our 20s, she started planting the seed of our duty to give back to society, being as privileged as we were to have had a good education, come from a nourishing environment, have skills to progress in life, that can be very challenging and unwelcoming at times. She used to give a large percentage of her yearly earnings to charity, and so we decided to start a charity, which really is a lifelong commitment.

The other inspiration of donating the proceeds from the scrap metal to children’s charities came when I became a mother for the first time and became more

sensitive/aware of the extreme differences in children’s childhoods. They are so innocent, and are really just at the mercy of the luck of the family into which they’ve been born.

There are ongoing discussions about sustainability and being eco-friendly. What is the environmental impact of the vast amounts of precious scrap metal discarded from dental practices?

LC The most commonly used direct-placement materials in everyday modern dentistry are dental amalgam and resin-based composites and due to the detrimental effect that mercury from amalgam can have in the environment, the industry is trying to phase out this material by 2030. Another big hazard is the silver in the form of thiosulfate in radiographic fixer solutions, and luckily this has been replaced to a great extent by digital radiographs. We are making good progress.

Another issue is unrecycled plastic from dental clinics – it is one of the most hazardous wastes due to its significant environmental impact. Dental clinics should make greater efforts to recycle aluminium, glass, plastic, paper and steel, which have

essay pathways, as well as take steps to produce less waste aside from the essential clinical waste such as needles, scalpels, drills, blades, orthodontic wires.

The green dentistry concept involves high-tech dentistry, reduction of dental waste and pollution, savings of water, energy and money and we should all be following this new way of practising.

At Gold for Kids we advocate for recycling of precious metals, which have already been placed back in the day, and need to be removed for clinical reasons. These metals have value and can easily be recycled and resold. Most people know this, and hence I don’t imagine many crowns and bridge work end up in the clinical waste bin, but they are given to a scrap metal company instead in exchange for cash.

What we would like to do is cut the scrap metal company out of the equation and ask those dental clinics who currently receive cash in exchange for their discarded metals, to please donate the metal to us and we will use the cash raised to help charities for underprivileged children. Again, most of the people on the dental team don’t rely on this income to live, or to live well, and it does make a huge difference to these children’s charities.



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What impact have you made on the lives of the children the charity supports?

LC We know we have invested in helping two youngsters leave the care system to become economically independent people to our society, so important, and difficult to achieve when one doesn't have anyone to turn to. We have helped single mothers that could not cope with the rent and at risk of losing their children, by introducing them into the work place and helping them renegotiate their rent, we have helped educate children in schools to be aware of what sexual abuse is, and have helped train therapists to help children dissolve previous traumas from abuse.

The sad thing is, that there is so much more to do. Research suggests that 1 in 20 young people 11-17 will have been sexually abused and more than one in three police registered sexual abuse cases are against children – a jump of 57% since the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, 4.3 million children were living in poverty in the UK – about 30%. In 2020/21, this fell to 3.9 million (or 27%) largely thanks to the temporary £20 a week increase to Universal Credit. This shows that change is possible – child poverty can be reduced with the right policies. And

yet, the end of the £20 increase in October 2021 and the rising cost of living throughout 2022 has likely pushed this progress firmly into reverse. One in three children living in poverty fall behind in their education which will then affect their offspring and future development.

At the moment, anyone who can do anything to help, must take action, and all we're asking, is for dentists to choose to give this minute part of their income, which they do not rely on, to us, so we can recycle their waste metal, and can put the proceeds, to some very good, and some very needed use.

What is next in the story of Gold for Kids?

LC If we could waive the magic wand, most dental practices in the UK would be signed up to Gold for Kids, and would regularly donate their scrap metal to us. The general population would also know of Gold for Kids to donate their broken and unwanted jewellery, and we would also receive regular cash donations. The aim is to continue to raise money so we can support the wonderful charities who are out there getting the work done to improve our society as a whole.

What message would you like to give to our members reading this who may be interested in contributing?

LC Please help us help the children of this country. They did not do anything to deserve poverty, or abuse, or whatever unfair situation they have landed. It's the least we can do. To find out more, please visit <https://www.goldforkids.org/> ♦



Bio

Leticia is a Periodontist at London Periodontics and Implant Dentistry, as well as Diabetes Dental Care, specialist clinical teacher Guy's Hospital. In her spare time she enjoys spending time with friends and family, painting, playing sports, travelling

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