

‘It’s more than just bricks; it’s about building smiles and fostering a positive environment for children facing dental challenges’



BDJ In Practice spoke to **Manolis Roditakis**, Founder of Small Bricks Project, about how the charity is impacting paediatric dental patients through play

Where did the idea to start the charity come from?

Small Bricks Project can be traced a few years back as a home project. It all started with my five year-old son and me playing with Lego. Soon enough, I found myself captivated, recognising how easily children could be engaged through Lego play. The idea struck me – why not leverage our own Lego bricks to craft minibuilds for the more challenging young patients in my clinic?

I introduced simple minibuilds to anxious child patients and the response was overwhelmingly positive. The modest creations had huge potential in behaviour management! Subsequently I created a loyalty card, where children would need to collect three stamps (three appointments or three stainless steel crowns etc) in order to receive their Lego reward!

And so, Small Bricks Project was born – a humble idea with a powerful impact. Our goal is simple: to utilise the universal appeal and creative potential of Lego bricks to offer support to children undergoing dental treatment within the community dental service. It’s more than just bricks; it’s about building smiles and fostering a positive

environment for children facing dental challenges.

What is your mission, and why is it important to you?

The ethos of Small Bricks Project rests on three pillars: Dream, Build and Share.

Our dream is this: Every child, regardless of their social background or health challenges, deserves a healthy smile. Every child deserves the opportunity to engage in creative play. This dream propels our commitment to making a positive impact on children’s oral health and overall wellbeing.

The build pillar describes our unique approach. Using donated and second hand Lego bricks we build spaceships and unicorns, parrots and helicopters, but it goes beyond just building toys with bricks, we aim at fostering a sense of empowerment to children. We want to build confident, creative and resilient children.

Everything we build, we share. This is fundamental for me, as founder of the charity. We do not sell products or services and we operate a not-for-profit policy. CDS teams receive all the resources at no cost. Children are also encouraged to share their bricks and

toys with others, instilling the values of giving and supporting others.

Our mission is important to me for two reasons. Firstly, we are witnessing a concerning rise in unmet dental need in the UK, children grappling with pain, infection and dental anxiety. As dentists, it is our duty to find new ways to deliver prudent care.

Secondly, community dentistry has faced years of underfunding and underinvestment. In this challenging period for NHS dentistry, thinking outside the box and adopting cost-efficient practices is not just beneficial – it is an absolute necessity. I strongly believe that initiatives like ours provide a model for sustainable and innovative intervention in the clinical dental setting.

Tell us a little bit about the charity and how people can get involved

We are based in Swansea, Wales; a small, dynamic and diverse team of volunteers. I am immensely grateful to this dedicated team, without whom I wouldn’t have been able to establish our website, social media presence, and successfully register with the Charity Commission in England and Wales.

dream build share



Additionally, you can support us by donating your old Lego bricks and parts or by raising funds for Small Bricks Project. We look forward to hearing from you and welcoming you to our charity!

There are lots of news articles about the current state of dentistry. What problems does

the CDS face in Wales?

As a full-time community dentist for over a decade, I've witnessed first-hand the escalating challenges facing the CDS in Wales. The primary issues stem from a chronic lack of investment needed to develop a dynamic and attractive CDS capable of meeting the growing needs of our vulnerable patients.

Post-Covid, we've witnessed a big surge in patient referrals to the CDS, of both adults and children. Alongside this, there has been an increase in the complexity of cases, untreated dental disease, and the demand for conscious sedation and general anaesthesia. Unfortunately, the allocated funding for the CDS, and its current utilisation, falls short of providing a sustainable service. The present state of the CDS in Wales is disheartening, marked by extensive waiting lists, exhausted dentists and overburdened dental teams.

The BDA Welsh Committee for Community Dentistry (WCCD) consistently tries to engage with all stakeholders, including Health Boards and the Welsh Government. The emphasis is on the need for funding, support, and acknowledgment of the vital role CDS plays in reducing dental inequalities. Moreover, we serve as advocates for the rights of our core vulnerable patient groups, who too often lack a voice in these discussions.

What are your plans for developing the charity and branching out?

As a newly established charity, we have development plans while maintaining a

commitment to sustainability and loyalty to our core values. Community dentists and dental teams throughout Wales and England are encouraged to engage with us. We operate on a cost-free basis, dedicated to providing our resources at no charge. In return, participating teams are requested to utilise the project judiciously, strictly in accordance with its intended purpose, and provide valuable feedback for ongoing improvement.

Small Bricks Project also presents research opportunities. One CDS team in Swansea, led by a specialist in paediatric dentistry, is actively evaluating our project. We envision Small Bricks Project evolving into a substantiated and evidence-based tool for positive reinforcement and behavioural change within the dental setting. Researchers and dental students are invited to reach out to us. Presently, we collaborate with 11 CDS clinics across Wales, spanning from North Wales to Pembrokeshire, and from Aberystwyth to Newport. Our goal for 2024 is to double the number of collaborating clinics; however expansion is subject to securing the necessary funding in the form of sponsorships. We are optimistic that the dental industry will support our charitable objectives and boost our capabilities.

Crucially, our plans going forward are shaped by a commitment to sustainability. Operating with an environmentally responsible way and maintaining a low carbon footprint are paramount. By reusing and upcycling second hand Lego bricks for our minibuilds, we take pride in achieving our objectives in an environmentally sustainable and friendly manner.

Where can people find out more?

If you want to learn more about Small Bricks Project and ways to get involved, please visit our website www.smallbricksproject.com. You can also follow us on Instagram @smallbricksproject for updates and lots of pictures of our minibuilds! For direct inquiries and registration of interest in our project, please email us at smallbricksproject@gmail.com ♦

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Our work begins with the meticulous process of sourcing, cleaning, and categorising donated and second-hand Lego bricks and parts. [Disclaimer: Small Bricks Project is an independent initiative and not affiliated with or sponsored by the LEGO Group]. Once we have sorted and identified the right bricks, we employ simple design ideas from the internet, classic Lego sets, and a few MOCs from my son. From rainbow hearts to firetrucks and speedboats, our minibuilds, along with additional resources such as cards, stamps, leaflets, and forms, are then distributed to participating Community Dental Service (CDS) clinics.

Small Bricks Project is adaptable for use by dentists, therapists, and nurses in various ways. In my practice, I employ it as an 'ice-breaker' to build rapport with children, an attention-shifting tool during uncomfortable procedures, a positive reinforcement tool, and, of course, as a reward at the conclusion of treatment. The feedback from patients, parents, and participating dentists is excellent, with high levels of engagement, patient satisfaction, fewer failed appointments and improved clinical outcomes.

Getting involved with our work is easy and impactful. If your community dental team wishes to participate, please get in touch and register your interest. Volunteering opportunities within our charity are also available, and we welcome new members committed to children's health and welfare. The love for Lego is an added bonus!