

Community Dental Services create Oral Health Champions within schools

Community Dental Services CIC Essex in partnership with Essex County Council, has been funded by Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board to establish a 'Peer-Led Education Programme' in primary schools across Colchester and Tendring to tackle tooth decay in children.

Through bespoke training, CDS is delivering the oral health programme directly to primary schools who have been identified by the local Public Health team and the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service – using data from the National Child Measurement Programme, Oral Health Survey of 5-year-olds, and high proportion of free school meals – as a measure of deprivation.

Overall, 23.4% of 5-year-old children in England had experience of obvious dental decay according to the National Dental Epidemiology Programme Biennial Oral Health survey in 2019. Tooth decay is a serious health issue with recent figures revealing that 43,000 children and young people had been admitted to hospital to have teeth that are unable to be saved removed under general anaesthetic. It affects children's oral and general health, impacting on their confidence, wellbeing and ability to take part in everyday activities such as attending nurseries and schools, yet it is preventable.

Aiming to encourage schools via a peer-led approach to adopt tooth-friendly practices and reduce tooth decay, the programme encourages body positivity, the use of tooth-friendly foods and drinks between meals and the sharing of information in peer groups.

Helen Paisley, Chief Executive Officer, CDS is delighted how well the programme is being received: 'Our aim is to work with communities to raise awareness of oral health and its impact on overall health and wellbeing. Establishing good oral health habits from an early age is so important and a peer-to-peer programme like this could have a positive impact on these children for life.'

Toyah Khan and Sarah Nunn, the Oral Health Improvement Practitioners delivering the training in schools, added: 'We mobilised the programme four months ago and work closely with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System to support settings who have been chosen to participate in



the fully funded 'Peer Led Education' programme due to their proactive work around prevention. We are visiting schools to discuss good oral health and provide training to small groups of children from Years 3 to 6 who would like to become Oral Health Champions for their peers. We are delighted with the champions so far and it's encouraging to see them promoting oral health to their class and at school fetes.'

The young Oral Health Champions receive a certificate and pin badge which they wear on their uniforms to identify them as the oral health champions in the school, and share information and oral health education in peer groups using posters, brushing demonstrations or through assembly presentations.

Greg Brown, Interim Head of Dental, NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board said: 'Helping children learn how to look after their teeth and gums is key to setting them up for good oral health for life and improving their general wellbeing. As the network of Oral Health Champions in schools grows, we hope to see a reduction in the number of children – and subsequently adults – requiring emergency dental procedures.'

The CDS Essex Oral Health team continue to offer ongoing support to schools participating in the programme and offer oral health training to staff to support the Champions

A welcome from the Editor



It is such an old trope, but September really does seem to roll around quicker every year. The start of a new adventure for first year readers and members, and a step closer to your dream of becoming a fully-fledged dentist for the rest. While the journey is equal parts exciting, challenging, tiring and rewarding, how you get there and the knowledge you accrue along the way is perhaps more important than it ever has been.

That's where *BDJ Student* comes in. Our tagline is 'for dental students by dental students', which reflects how important we feel it is for you to hear from your peers and those who have walked the path before. Are you a fifth year student reminiscing about seeing your first patient, how you handled your first difficult case, how you struck the balance between practice, theory and play? Are you a first year with questions you'd like to ask and have answered? Would you like to hear from those recently qualified to offer a reassuring voice? These are just some of the ways in which *BDJ Student* can help. Throughout the year it's our aim to equip you with knowledge of how best to develop your skills and take you to the next level.

Our mix of professional development, careers insight and clinical knowledge from those who have been there and are wearing the t-shirt has served students well throughout the years, and we're constantly looking to provide the very best for our members. With a new student editor and student reader panel on board – and you can hear from them all in this issue – I'm expecting big things into 2024 and beyond.

One of those changes is the introduction of our new submission system. It'll enable you to upload, track and review decisions made about your article. We're still happy to receive questions, but if you have a piece ready to submit, our new platform is your place to go. From everyone at the BDA and *BDJ Student*, we wish you the very best of luck throughout this academic term and beyond. ■