

Thousands more children visiting dentists thanks to Starting Well drive



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Around 30,000 children aged 0 to 5 in a London borough have been registered with a dental practice since the start of this year thanks to events taking place as part of the national Starting Well: A Smile4Life Initiative.

The success of the scheme was revealed during a presentation given at the BDIA Dental Showcase 2018 event in London on 4 October 2018.

NHS England's Starting Well: A Smile4Life Initiative is designed to reduce oral health inequalities and improve oral health in children under the age of five years by focusing on those who are not currently visiting the dentist and providing preventive advice to parents about reducing sugar intake and increasing exposure to fluoride on teeth.

The programme was launched in 13 high priority areas, chosen on the basis of decay experience at a local authority level, existing oral health improvement plans and trends in oral health.

Speaking at the Showcase event, Kelly Nizzer, Regional Lead for Dental, Pharmacy and Ophthalmic Services at NHS England's London Region Team, told the audience of how well the initiative was doing in Ealing – one of 13 places chosen as high priority areas.

Starting in January 2018, 12 dental practices had gone live as Starting Well practices, said Nizzer, which included running open days and being audited to see how many children aged 0 to 5 they were seeing.

'It's having an impact London-wide,' said Nizzer. 'Since we've started the campaigns in January, we have around 30,000 new children from 0 to 5 who have been attending a dental practice.'

'It has worked so well for us and we are giving training to the dentists with paediatricians from the hospital and community dental services along with Health Education England.'

'A number of our practices in Ealing have done things like events. In one event, there's a parade taking place. Around 40,000 people go through the whole of Ealing for a religious ceremony and all those practices came and had stands there and got to talk to a number of people. We had about 400 new children from 0 to 5 that have gone into the practice from that event. We provide them with various resources to help them.'

The regional team was also now seeking to expand the initiative to other boroughs including Stratford, Hillingdon, and Hammersmith and Fulham by commissioning new dental practices outside Ealing and including auditable oral health promotion in their contracts.

'It's not just about getting the 0 to 5 children in, there are children who are older and we'd like all children seen in an NHS dental practice,' added Nizzer. 'It's about making sure children are aware of going in early, having them have that check-up, getting them used to being in the dental chair and what it looks like and then coming back.'