

Panhandle

Public Health District

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For Immediate Release:

Cow Country Community Health Foundation Donation Vital to Panhandle Public Health District's Dental Health Program Successful Completion of 5-Year Challenge Grant with Nebraska Community Foundation

In 2019, Panhandle Public Health District's Dental Health Program, Keeping Teeth Strong received the exciting opportunity from an Anonymous Fund through the Nebraska Community Foundation of a 5-year challenge grant to continue to provide much needed preventive dental services to Panhandle children.

Cow Country Community Health Foundation contributed a significant amount in assisting with the dental health program. Hyannis Public Schools have had this program in the schools for 5 years. Dental screenings are a part of yearly school health screenings and having a dental professional is helpful to do the dental screenings because they know what they are looking for when it comes to teeth.

The program provides basic preventive dentistry:

- Dental screenings are critical because these can detect early signs of dental disease and determine the level of urgency for parents needing to get their child to see a dentist.
- Fluoride treatments which help keep teeth strong and prevent cavities.
- Dental sealants which are placed on the back molars to prevent cavities in the grooves of the teeth.
- Dental health presentations, teaching kids why teeth are important, how to brush, how parents can help, how to choose healthy foods, and what it's like to go to the dentist.

Lauruhn touted the importance of school nurses saying, "School nurses like Heidi Merrihew from Hyannis are vital to the dental health program. They send out and collect dental forms, work with the school administration and staff for scheduling, and round up the children. I could not do what I do without them. School nurses have the biggest hearts for the health of their students. They see children that come to their offices with teeth that hurt, and they value the dental health program. To all the school nurses here today, thank you for all your promotion and advocacy for the dental health program."

Dr. Charles Craft, Director of the Office of Oral Health and Dentistry for the Nebraska DHHS attended the celebration to share just how significant of an impact this program is to rural areas.

"Public health dental hygienists like Kendra Lauruhn at PPHD have demonstrated a significantly positive impact in the delivery of essential oral health services to underserved populations for more than 15 years. This program, and their outstanding dental personnel, are a shining example of what we hope

every community in Nebraska can someday achieve to improve oral health outcomes for generations of future Nebraskans,” said Dr. Craft.

He added, “This unique oral workforce averaged more than 100,000 dental services each year from 2017-2019. The recent Nebraska Oral Health Survey of Young Children report indicated that statewide dental experience rates for third grade children decreased from 64% in 2016 to 58% in 2022. Decay experience for rural third grade children dropped from 81% in 2016 to 65% in 2022. The dental disease disparity between urban and rural children has been significantly reduced.”

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