



Application for 2008 Outstanding County Program Awards

County (if multi-county entry, list all): Pender County

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The Association encourages electronic submissions. E-mail the application and project/program description to Todd McGee at todd.mcgee@ncacc.org. You can also fax your entry to (919) 733-1065 (attn. Todd McGee), or mail it to: NCACC, 215 N. Dawson St., Raleigh, NC 27603. Applications must be postmarked by **Friday, March 6, 2009**.

Projects/programs must have been implemented between Jan. 1, 2007, and Dec. 31, 2008. For additional information and category criteria, visit www.ncacc.org/awards/ocpa/about.html.

Project title: Pender County Health Dept Mobile Dental Clinic: Forever Smiles

Category (you may check more than one):

General Government Human Services Public Information/Participation

Address each of the following questions in a typed program/project summary in a separate Word document attached to this application form. Limit your responses to two pages. Use single-spaced lines and 12-point, Times New Roman font. Supporting materials may be submitted, but due to time constraints, judges may not review the materials.

1. What are the purpose, history, timeline and budget of the program/project? Will the county realize any projected cost savings? (For public information/participation programs, please try to estimate participation levels).
2. What makes the program/project unique? How does it differ from similar projects in your county or in other counties?
3. How well did the program use available resources, given the limitations on such resources?
4. Can this project be duplicated in other counties? If another county wanted to do a similar project, what advice would you give them to minimize obstacles and problems?
5. How did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, jurisdictions, nonprofits, businesses, etc.? How well did this collaboration work and is it on-going?

Pender County Mobile Dental Unit: Forever Smiles

The new state-of-the-art mobile dental clinic (a 50 ft, 3 operatory clinic) was financed by funding from the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation; the Cape Fear Memorial Foundation; and Medicaid funds. This clinic was placed in service in October 2008. The clinic is parked at each school for as long as necessary to treat any needy child, and then moved to the next school on the schedule (approximately one month, depending on demand).

The purpose of this new mobile dental unit program is to provide the best possible dental care for children where: 22% of all children live below the national poverty level; 55.2% of new mothers receive Medicaid compared with 48.8% statewide; 4% of our population receives Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC); more than 10% of the population receives food stamps; and more than 51% of the children in our schools receive subsidized lunches.

For many years, the health department has operated a primary dental clinic to provide dental care to low-income and indigent residents of the county. From the inception of the primary dental clinic in 2000, demand has increased yearly, particularly as the economy appears to have faltered somewhat. For example, in the initial year, our dentist treated only a few hundred patients, but over the past several years the primary dental clinic patient base has grown to almost 6,000 patients.

The initial startup cost for “Forever Smiles”, including construction of the 50’ trailer, equipment, supplies, and salaries, among other things, was \$625,550.00. The current budget for “Forever Smiles” is \$403,974.00 and it is self-supporting through Medicaid and 3rd Party Payers receiving no county appropriations. We expect to continue to provide dental care to children in Pender Schools on a long-term basis. Hopefully the program will be able to treat High School students in the coming years.

The dental staff performs complete dental care from evaluations and preventive dentistry, to fillings, extractions, and crowns. Any child requiring more extensive care will be referred to the health department’s primary dental clinic or to an appropriate dental specialist within the community.

Pender County is a designated medical and dental under-served county by the US Health Services Resources Administration (HRSA). In North Carolina there is one dentist for every 2,302 people, but in Pender County there are nine dentists (seven in private practice; two in Public Health practice) for a ratio of one dentist for every 5,403 people. Forever Smiles is scheduled to go to each elementary and middle school in Pender County while the Head Start students are bussed to the unit while at various schools.

Since we haven’t completed a full year, our projections for school year 08/09 is to treat 1,119 students, and 1,544 patient visits: 43% Blacks; 36% Whites; 20% Hispanics; and < 1% Asians. Payment for services: Medicaid (50.4%); Health Choice (10.3%); 3rd Party Payer (9.3%); and Zero Pay (30%).

Pender County Health Department is one of the few health departments in a low-wealth, mostly rural county that has a permanent dental program and a permanent full-time dentist with support staff to provide complete dental services to needy school students on a 12 month basis. We are

one of only four (4) Health Departments in the state of NC to have both a primary dental clinic and a mobile dental clinic.

The Pender County Board of Health clearly saw a need for dental care to be taken to the low-income and indigent children of Pender County. Kate B. Reynolds Foundation and the Cape Fear Memorial Foundation each donated \$150,000.00 combined with additional funds from Medicaid we were able to see this new state of the art unit come to fruition for the benefit of our school children. Grant funds were used to purchase all of the equipment, including the mobile dental clinic itself. Granting institutions have been satisfied with our programs.

We found from considerable experience¹ since 2000 that we are able to support our dental program, primarily through Medicaid. The primary problem in operating a dental program is quite severe. For example, our ability to recruit and retain a dentist (in our case two dentists) is extremely difficult and problematic since we are simply not able to compensate them as well as a private practice; further, in the school dental program a dentist must be willing to work on pediatric dentistry with children of Head Start age and many dentists are simply unwilling to work with this age group; additionally, there are problems associated with the purchase of dental equipment (very expensive) and materials (also very expensive), and our budget is always operating on the margin. In our clinics, we do not refuse any one care because they are unable to pay for services, however, with considerable care we have been able to keep the program self-sufficient until this year (the economic downturn will have an impact on our patient base: more patients, more need, and fewer resources). We have been fortunate to attract two excellent dentists who have a great affinity for Public Health; treating low-income patients; and working with children (In 2008, the health department's dental program was awarded the GlaxoSmithKline Child Recognition award).

We fully expect Forever Smiles to remain self-supporting through Medicaid and 3rd Party Payers receiving no county appropriations. In addition, not only do we think this program can be duplicated in other counties, we believe that it should be for the health benefits of low-income and indigent children. The advice that this health department would give is to identify, recruit, and maintain a dentist first and foremost; this is very difficult to do in North Carolina.

We have worked quite closely with the Board of Education in Pender County and the Superintendent of Schools, e.g., The School Administration has been responsible for paying for and setting up a power source for our mobile clinic at each elementary and middle school. The Principals at each school, along with faculty and school nurses have worked closely with our clinic staff to enroll student patients and see that they are available for treatment during the school year (this is not a minor detail, since class time is very valuable to the faculty and any program from an outside source is considered to take time away from instruction time).

School nurses feel that they are already very busy with Board of Education assigned duties, and are reluctant to take on additional duties from an "outside" group. However everyone, principals, teachers, nurses, and parents recognize the need for dental care among the students and have strongly supported this program.

1_Griffith J. *Establishing a Dental Practice in a Rural, Low-Income County Health Department*. J Public Health Management Practice, 9(6), 538-541, 2003, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, Inc., 2003.