



Puppets Help Students Take an Active Role in Preventing Tooth Decay

Public Health Issue

By the time they enter kindergarten, four out of every 10 South Carolina children have already developed tooth decay, which is a completely preventable chronic disease.

Many parents don't realize that tooth decay can seriously harm a child's physical, mental and emotional health.

But public health workers specializing in oral health know that tooth decay can:

- Hamper a child's ability to learn.
- Slow their speech development.
- Keep them from eating healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Cause them to feel self-conscious and ashamed.

In 2007, the Division of Oral Health staff at the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control set out to:

- Find an affordable way to reach and influence thousands of young at-risk children around the state.
- Capture and hold the interest of children age 3-7 to teach them how to properly care for their teeth and gums.
- Make brushing, flossing and going to the dentist seem fun and important so that the preschoolers would remember and actually practice the good self-care habits that were promoted.

Program Description

Puppets have been used for thousands of years to educate people and tell stories. They are especially powerful communication tools for teaching young children.

In 2007, our Oral Health staff envisioned a interactive puppet show that would travel the state showing children what a trip to the dentist is like and how to take care of their teeth and gums. We created puppet characters and simple plots and dialogue. We then formed a collaborative production partnership with the talented Columbia Marionette Theatre and the S.C. Educational Television Network. An ADA Foundation Samuel Harris Fund Grant helped pay for construction of the marionettes, scenery and props.

Flora and Floppy Go to the Dentist

Our 20-minute interactive puppet show, "Flora and Floppy Go to the Dentist," debuted in August 2008 at a "Back to School Bash" held at the South Carolina State Fairgrounds. More than 300 children attended our first production.

In the following months, the show was performed at 16 elementary schools and three Head Start centers in 16 counties. By the end of the first tour, 3,580 children in rural and underserved communities had seen "Flora and Floppy Go to the Dentist." They also took home complimentary coloring books based on the show's characters.

We gave each school and Head Start center a complimentary resource kit containing books, DVD, and other tools and activities that reinforced the show's message. The S.C. Dental Association paid for the kits, which our staff compiled.





Impact Statement: What does all this mean?

To date, more than 7,000 children in S.C. have seen “Flora and Floppy Go the Dentist.” Response to the puppet show has been tremendously encouraging and enthusiastic.

We would love to continue using our puppet production to spread important public health messages on oral health. Many schools and Head Start centers have asked us to stage the production at their location so that their children can also benefit from the unique approach.

Unfortunately, serious funding cutbacks have threatened our ability to do that. Our agency, co-sponsoring organizations, the schools and the Head Start program can no longer cover the travel and production costs involved.

So we’re trying to find new sources of financial support. We’re asking organizations and individuals — folks like you — to consider sponsoring a performance in their local community.

If we can locate new sources of financial support, we can continue teaching children about crucial oral health care in a fun, engaging way that they will remember for years to come.

The Columbia Marionette Theater & DHEC's Oral Health Division Present

Flora and Floppy Go to the Dentist

Flora and Floppy go to the Dentist is a 20-minute interactive puppet show for children ages 3-8. The show engages and entertains school-age children while teaching them key messages about how to maintain good dental health.

The show is designed for school groups, Head Start Centers, daycares, and community outreach events. It is an effective way to reach out and educate children about the importance of good dental health.

Interested in reaching out to students in your community?
 Complete the form below to inquire about sponsoring a performance in your local area.

Name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Name and Location of School or Center: _____

Fax or email completed form to:
 John Scollon, Executive Director
 Telephone: (803) 252-7366 Fax: (803) 252-7669
 Email: puppetgnomes@msn.com

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