

Children's Dental Program



Dr Samantha Lew with patient

Early last year, the eviDent project 'Children's Dental Program' conducted a pilot school dental check-up program to determine whether they improve access to dental care for children.

The project invited children and their families to participate in this study from Jacaranda Pre-school and Thomastown West Primary School. Free school dental check-ups were completed in the school setting. Children who would benefit from further dental care had appointments made to attend Plenty Valley Community Health Dental Services in Epping and Whittlesea.

The project team completed 149 school dental check-ups for children attending Jacaranda Pre-school and Thomastown West Primary School between February and April 2013. Ninety-nine children (66%) held a Health Care Card. This was compared with 133 dental check-ups completed at Plenty Valley Community Health, where 69 children (52%) held a Health Care Card. The project found that school dental check-ups can increase dental access to care for children from high-needs families.

For children who received a school dental check-up, 71 children (48%) never had a dental check-up, 30 children (20%) had a dental check-up less than six months ago, and 48 children (32%) had a dental check-up more than one year ago. One hundred children (67%) who had a school dental check-up had never used public dental services before.

For children who had a school dental check-up, 84 children (56%) were referred for dental care, and 62 children (74%) returned for their booked dental appointments at Plenty Valley Community Health. Most of the children who had a school dental check-up attended their follow-up dental appointments.

The preliminary findings suggest that school dental check-up programs can improve and retain dental access to care for high-needs families using public dental service. Furthermore, there is a low participation rate for children having school dental check-ups, and more work is needed to find out how to improve participation rates.

The Children's Dental Program is a recipient of the Dental Health Services Victoria Research and Innovation Grant 2013.

eviDent thanks the school community, children and their families who participated in this study, as well as the project team (Prof Mike Morgan, Dr Sajeev Koshy, Dr Samantha Lew, Dr Shibu Mathew, Mr Tan Nguyen) for their contributions to the success of this project.



From Right to Left: PVCH staff: Practice manager Carmel Aliano, Receptionist Simone Aliano, Dental Assistant Cheryl Bailey, Dr Samantha Lew and Dr Shibu Mathew