



Six-year-old, Justin Scott of Waukegan gets a flouride treatment from Dr. Richard Kirchhof.

Vince Pierri | Staff Photographer

Effort provides kids dental care

Lake County charitable effort provides homeless children with dental care

By Gwen Jader | [Daily Herald Correspondent](#)

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Leslie Scott, the mother of two boys ages 14 and 6, received good news Saturday during her sons' visit with a dentist at Mundelein's HealthReach Community Care Clinic.

Scott, now living at a Public Action to Deliver Shelter and Support Services residence in Waukegan, learned neither boy had cavities and that the gaps in her 6-year-old's mouth would disappear when his permanent teeth grew in. She also learned her older son would need braces.

Scott's sons were among 21 children participating in a free dental services program for homeless children sponsored by the Lake County Community Foundation, the HealthReach clinic and PADS Crisis Services.

Funded by a \$50,000 grant from an anonymous donor late last year, the program will continue as long as the money lasts, said Elizabeth Dietel, the Executive Director of the Lake County Community Foundation. The funding supports a part-time dental assistant and transportation costs, while dentists volunteer their time to treat children referred through PADS.

"Our goal is to get philanthropists to be more strategic when they donate money," Dietel said. "Lake County is one of the wealthiest areas in the country, yet at the same time, there is a lot of poverty that is invisible."

Although unemployed, Scott was not as worried about the cost of braces as she was about her son's concern about starting high school wearing both new braces and new glasses.

"They told us they would find a way to provide the braces," she said. "Coming here was a good experience. My biggest concern is that he doesn't want them. I told him that, in the long run, he will be better off after having the braces."

About 200,000 Lake County residents are uninsured or underinsured, said James Zimmerman, executive director of Health Reach.

Scott and her two children were among the second group to participate in the program. Twenty-six children visited the clinic Jan. 26. Of those, 14 required varying degrees of follow-up ranging in complexity from filling cavities to caring for serious periodontal disease, Zimmerman said.

Participants are referred through PADS, an emergency shelter for Lake County's homeless. Many of the children never have been to a dentist, said Cathy Curran, Executive Director of PADS Crisis Services.

Retired Libertyville dentist Lee Bomgaars has been working one day a week at the clinic for the past three years. He has seen his treatment area grow from a one-chair office with portable equipment to two dental rooms equipped with donated sterilizing equipment, gloves, masks, trays and an X-ray machine. Dentists Richard Kirchhoff of Crystal Lake and Egon Schein, who practices in Waukegan, joined him Saturday.

"Working with kids helps you keep it all in perspective," Bomgaars said.