

ENFIELD

Dental care offered to the uninsured

By JENNIFER COE
Staff Writer

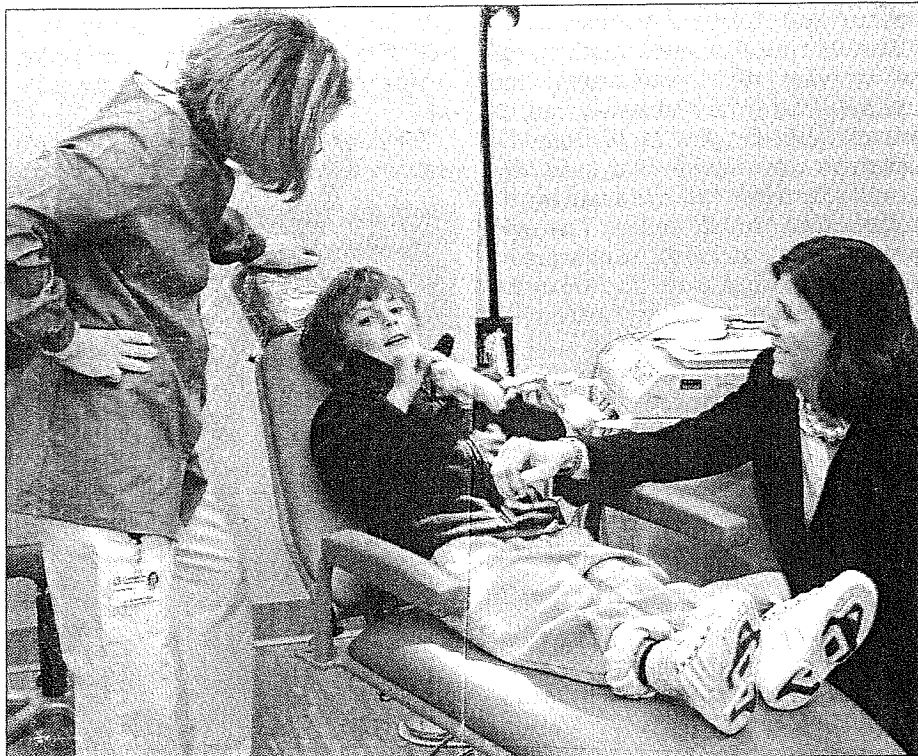
If you have more than one child old enough to have to make regular visits to the dentist, you know how difficult it is to make two or three consecutive dental appointments while trying to balance differing work and school schedules, sports and after school activities and other family demands. Likewise, if your family presently cannot afford health insurance or your child is enrolled in the state health program HUSKY, your chances of making an appointment with a local dentist are slim to none.

According to most recent HUSKY enrollment statistics, of the 1,463 Enfield children enrolled in HUSKY, only 33 percent of Enfield children are receiving preventive dental care. The number for Somers children is 31 percent. Shockingly, according to state Rep. Karen Jarmoc (D), there is only one local dentist accepting HUSKY patients in Enfield to every 600 children enrolled in the program. Community Health Center, Inc. in Enfield has received a grant from the Connecticut Health Foundation to collaborate ways that will increase access to oral health care in communities. Community Health Center is a private, non-profit agency providing primary health care and social services particularly to those who cannot gain access to such services elsewhere.

Melissa Thibeault is Enfield's Dental Care Coordinator. According to Thibeault, the present dental program services nine elementary schools, the Headstart program and both the high schools. She thinks it's a smart program. "It's an advantage to parents. I think that's what most parents love," said Thibeault. Appointments are held in empty classrooms or even teachers' lounges.

Lori Clavette is the hygienist that sees these children on a daily basis. She makes appointments with students who have signed up and offers them cleanings, screenings, fluoride treatments, and if need be, sealing treatments. Clavette works hard, often seeing 12 students a day.

She has been working with the program for a relatively short amount of



Lori Clavette shows how she works with students. Daniel is posing with state Rep. Karen Jarmoc. Courtesy photo.

general practitioner's office were personal, like scheduling and hours, but upon starting this position, she immediately saw the need that the program is addressing in the community. "We are providing for people who otherwise wouldn't have gotten treatment. Professionally, it has opened my eyes."

Clavette's time is spent on cleanings and other treatments, but she cannot treat cavities. Only dentists are trained to handle cavities. Clavette is amazed at how few dentists in the Enfield area will take appointments from HUSKY clients. And she added, "The ones that do provide are full."

But she loves her job. "It's rewarding to see the kids come back. I do feel like they have a dental-home," said Clavette, who begins treating children as young as two via the Headstart program. "We believe it's an ideal situation as far as access is concerned. They have to be in school."

During her first legislative term, Jarmoc was successful in obtaining a \$130,000 earmark in the state budget to establish the mobile dental program in the town. Jarmoc requested that the mobile program provide cleanings at

the center with the support of grant funding.

In addition, Jarmoc has reached out to the Community Health Center, Inc. in Enfield to encourage a further expansion of these dental services offered to families and to those who are covered by Husky. Jarmoc recently spoke at a meeting coordinated by Community Health Center, Inc., that operates the Mary Lou Strom Primary Care Center in Enfield, to advocate and discuss the great need to increase access to preventive dental services for uninsured children and adults.

She said, "The Mary Lou Strom Primary Care Center has done an incredible job of reaching out in Enfield to provide mobile dental services and demonstrating a need for such care, for the past year." She added, "It's necessary to take this program a step further." The hope is that permanent dental care will be available at the agency's North Main Street location by late spring 2009.

Melissa Thibeault explains, "The service is open to any student, but it was designed to help with the uninsured and the children enrolled in HUSKY."