

Kimberley Dental Team E- Flyer 1. July 2009

Dear Team Member,

Many of you will be aware that, as an off shoot of the very successful "tour" of the reconciliation choir, Madjitol Moorna, which visited Halls Creek in the second week of May this year, Jan and I, are actively developing a Kimberley Dental Team to continue to assist at Halls Creek. In due course, it is hoped we can expand to include some of the other 100 Communities throughout the region. We also stopped at Mount Barnett Community on the Gibb River Road and Beagle Bay on the Dampier Peninsula on our return to Broome and made significant contacts which we will continue to follow up.

Our screening of 133 Children Halls Creek School children under the age of 11 years, found 38% (51) required urgent dental care and 18% (23) required treatment within six months. Treatment included 157 extractions for gross caries, 16 extractions for orthodontic and occlusal balance and 68 restorations were also required in these two groups. 44% of the group where caries free. 247 children and teenagers were still to be seen

Our second visit will be 10-14th August, 2009 and we are taking a team of seven including Dr Brian Koch and his nurse Kristal, two members of the choir to assist with teacher and student liaison, Jan and I and our daughter Ashleigh. Ashleigh is currently completing her bachelors degrees in Arts and Behavioural Science, majoring in politics and social justice. Ashleigh spent last January in Wyndham working with the kids, with the University of Notre Dame Australia.

Since the initial contacts with Dental Health Services (DHS) in October last year, the decommissioned dental van has been recommissioned and for the first time in 18 months will return to Halls Creek from the 20th July for a the term. This is excellent as it will be based at the school. Recently graduated School Dental Therapist, Natalie De Zilwa, has been employed to work in the van and Dr Bendre Otto (DHS) travels down from Kununurra approximately 6 weekly. He is currently preparing for his final ADC examinations.

Both Brian and I have been granted access / operating rights, in the Hospitals two, fully equipped dental surgeries

After considerable discussions and a meeting with Dr Peter Jarman, Director, Dental Health Services and Dr Vivian Li, we have been able to arrange for both Brian and Kristal and future Team members (not Jan and I), to be "employed" on a casual basis for this week. Police clearances and working with children checks are almost complete.

In preparation for the trip, Team members will be meeting with Dr Judith Kearins, retired head UWA Psychology. She has spent a lot of time in Halls Creek. Judith is very well connected and very happy to advise the team. She will give us an historical perspective on the town and the sad loss of purpose for the once proud station worker families. She has a reputation of being an old hand at putting *wadjelas* (us) wise to aboriginal ways.

Judith will advise on some of the basic no-nos when working with indigenous kids, will expand on the approaches, how to motivate and how to best use the resources. It is invaluable to have her guidance and advice for this and all future trips to the Kimberley.

It is also important to record that I have to met and received very positive support from the Minister for Health and Indigenous Affairs, Dr Kim Hames MLA, his senior adviser Mr. Neville Collard and director for the Centre for Rural and Remote Oral Health, Professor Marc Tennant. Miranda Tetlow of Kimberley Radio has also been supportive and I look forward to further

interviews soon. Through Marc, we will approach OHCWA to have a final year residents rostered to the visits next year

Dr Bruce Rudeforth from Albany, started working at Derby last week for DHS, and will be visiting the Community of Looma this week. This is an adhoc arrangement, primarily in response to pressure from the previous Minister, Mr. Ernie Bridge on DHS. He is aware of increased activity in the East Kimberley (Halls Creek) so what about the West.

Bruce and I met and had a great discussion last week on his way north. We both firmly agree that unfortunately, the dental problems we are seeing and attempting to address are simply one of the symptoms of a major health and social crisis.

In a recent submission to Minister for Education, Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, supporting the retention of the Ngurrawaana Community School in the Pilbara, I stated " the 3 U's with regards indigenous community living; *Unhealthy, Uneducated, Unskilled*. All three areas must be targeted simultaneously, with tremendous support from so many quarters, the decision to close the school on the 3rd of July has now been suspended.

Bruce stated after his first week in Derby, "I'm feeling low after a week of gross "Cola" caries and the frustrating under utilization of Dental Health Services. Somehow the population has to be made accountable for their problems. Beautiful mouths falling to bits because they all drink cola/sprite/powerade or alcohol and eat masses of processed food. The fix is simple -water and fibre but how to undo all the advertising". He went on to suggest, "perhaps ads asking "do you need that sugar or salt or fat" and illustrate it with a can of cola and another can showing how much is sugar. Maybe foods with sugar have to carry labels warning of the health consequences or be packed in bland containers" All very sound logic. We have a speech pathologist who is keen to join the team, but we also need to be on the look out for a nutritionalist or two.

Sadly, providing dental treatment and dialysis or insulin is avoiding the issue. No real improvement in life expectancy can be expected without a massive change at the fundament level of diet and lifestyle. The catch phrase for the Kimberley Dental Team, is "Its not just Teeth"

Better diet and health, leads to better lifestyle and better participation in education. Engendering a feeling of hope, the future and eventual self determination is essential. The reward is pride in achievements of self and community.

In conclusion, over the past six to nine months we have learned so much and met so many interested people. Indigenous health is a massive issue, but once you meet the great kids of the Kimberley, you know that any effort, even if it only assists one child, is worth it.

Regards

John & Jan Owen

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