



Remote relief: The dental team are all smiles in the Kimberley. Below: John and Jan Owen, who started the not-for-profit organisation.

Dental magic adds polish to outback smiles

KATIE ROBERTSON

A TUBE of toothpaste can change a life in the WA Outback.

That's why the Kimberley Dental Team needs about 5000 tubes for its August trip to remote communities.

South Guildford couple Jan and John Owen started the not-for-profit organisation in 2009 after they were shocked at the state of children's teeth during a visit to Halls Creek.

"The kids were in dire straits," Mrs Owen, a homeopath and dental nurse, said. "John and I came away from that deciding we really needed to do something."

Dr Owen, who has a dental practice in Perth, said he was horrified to find nearly 40 per cent of the children he examined on that first trip had pain, swelling and discomfort.

"We brought two children down to Perth for general anaesthetic. One little boy had

20 teeth taken out, and another little four-year-old had 12 teeth extracted," he said.

During their most recent visit last month with a team of volunteers, the Owens did check-ups on about 450 children and carried out more than 900 dental treatments on a journey from Broome to Halls Creek. They had support from Rotary, the McCusker Foundation and Lotterywest.

The team also makes artificial teeth for young women who

have lost some because of decay or domestic violence.

More than 40,000 educational booklets have been distributed across the Kimberley, and 16,000 toothbrushes have been given to 4000 children.

"The average cost of toothpaste in the community stores can be \$7," Dr Owen said. "It is a valuable commodity."

www.kimberleydentalteam.com

