It is important to practice good oral hygiene and see a dentist regularly, not only to prevent dental disease, but also to contribute to good health overall. National standards set by dental and pediatric organizations call for children to visit a dentist every six months and yet some 48 million children and adults in the United States live in areas without enough dentists to provide routine oral health care. Millions more can get to a dentist but cannot afford to pay for dental care. Children without access to dental care use emergency room services more often and face worsened job prospects as adults compared to their peers who do receive care. As a result, many children and adults without regular access to dental care live with pain, miss school or work and, in extreme cases, face life-threatening medical emergencies stemming from dental infections.

United Way can help improve the overall health in our communities, address some of the issues associated with inadequate dental care, and deepen volunteer and community engagement by hosting a “dental fair.” A dental fair brings together dentists and other dental professionals, United Way volunteers and others in the community to help people in need of dental care see a dentist for cleaning, fillings, extraction and x-rays, and learn more about the importance of regular visits and good oral hygiene. Here are some ideas for planning and hosting a dental fair in your community.

### GETTING STARTED

- **Brand the effort as a United Way experience.** Integrating the United Way brand into the dental fair will bring visibility to United Way and demonstrate our value to the community. From volunteer recruitment and registration via a branded webpage to event promotion, banners, signs and T-shirts, help everyone involved understand United Way’s role in the event and the impact on the community. As part of your volunteer orientation you might invite experts to explain how lack of proper dental care can impact the lives of people from a very young age through adulthood, and include time to introduce United Way’s work in education, income and especially health.

  During the dental fair, make sure that banners and signs are in the background of possible photo opportunities. Consider using social media before, during, and after your event. You can build on the United Way brand with tweets of up-to-minute details, and post photos or videos the day after. Take photographs of volunteers wearing “Live United” T-shirts for future branding opportunities. And always collect volunteers’ contact information, so that you can keep them engaged in other aspects of United Way’s work after the event.

- **Select a date and location.** Be sure to allow ample time for planning the dental fair, soliciting sponsors and donors, inviting dental service providers to participate, recruiting volunteers and publicizing the event with both beneficiaries and the greater community. Selecting a location with sufficient space and amenities will depend on your service providers’ needs so be sure to consult with them early in the planning. Also, try to hold the fair in a location that is convenient for those who rely on public transportation.

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1 “Dental Care Crisis in America,” a 2013 report released by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Invite service providers. Dentists and other dental professionals should be invited first, as their response will help determine how many beneficiaries you can serve, how many volunteers you will need and what the budget should be. While your event is focused on dental care, this is an opportunity to promote other aspects of good health such as nutrition, exercise, CPR, first aid, hand washing, and preventing tobacco use and poisoning. Plan booths staffed by experts with whom attendees can talk and ask for information. Ask health agencies and organizations for brochures and handouts. Contact each participant two weeks ahead of the fair with a reminder of the date and where their display or booth will be located. Ensure that each has the necessary equipment needed for their booth and that power and lighting sources are adequate.

Identify the beneficiaries. Working with your service providers, decide on the population that you want to serve. For example, will you focus on children, adults, or both? Agree upon the specific services to be provided during the event, such as cleaning, x-rays, fillings, and extractions. Partnering with Title I schools or nonprofits that serve low-income families is an efficient strategy for identifying and inviting beneficiaries. Once you’ve determined who will benefit most from the dental fair, look for a champion who has direct interaction with your target audience. For example, if the fair is at a school, the principal’s endorsement is important, as is having buy-in from a person who works directly with students, such as the school nurse or social worker. Ask this person to help promote the event by encouraging students and their families to take advantage of the dental fair.

Generate interest. Promote the fair on local radio, newspapers and TV and social networking sites. Ask a radio station for public service announcements. Print posters, fliers or brochures that can be used by your partners in recruiting attendees. Invite special guests to the fair, such as representatives of local government, local celebrities, important faith and community leaders. Put out a post-event press release that includes the positive outcomes and share the news with United Way staff and your constituents. Include photos in press releases, on websites and via social media outlets.

Recruit volunteers. Volunteers might be engaged in the client registration process, setting up booths, and helping clients navigate the event. Make sure volunteers are clear on their responsibilities, time commitment and have the tools to do their work. If your event is longer than four hours, be sure to include care and feeding of volunteers in your planning.

Solicit Sponsors. Coordinate with your resource development teams for donor solicitations. Target companies that include health issues in their community investment strategies. If you have additional activities such as games or arts and crafts for children, consider asking for sponsorship of a complete activity that would cover the planning, execution, volunteers needed and the budget for that activity.

Thank supporters and solicit feedback. After the dental fair, send personal notes or emails to thank the dental professionals, volunteers, partner agencies and donors and report on the successful outcomes of this event and thank them for their support. If you expect to host the dental fair next year, let everyone involved know so they can plan to support it again. Include photos, information on the number of clients served and the types of services provided. Your team members, the community and other key stakeholders will want to know about your successes, so find a way to share your good news with them as well.

Always try to evaluate your service projects so that you know the true impact of the project on the community. Evaluation will also help you in planning, managing, and implementing your next project. Start planning your evaluation as you are planning your project. Think about how you will evaluate, whom you will involve, and how you will use the results.
United Way of Windham County

United Way of Windham County’s Free Adult Dental Care Day began in 2008 with Dr. John-Michael Stewart of Bennington Oral-Facial Surgery Associates, Dr. Louis Beaudette and Dr. Robert S. Ruhl, of Wilmington, Vermont. The event now takes place across Southern Vermont with providers participating in Rutland, Manchester, Bennington, Wilmington and Brattleboro, in partnership with the United Ways of Rutland, Bennington and Windham Counties and the use of Vermont 2-1-1 as a valuable information and registration tool.

Dental and oral surgery offices in Windham County provide donated medical services and all participants receive free tooth brushes, floss, toothpaste and dental care information. In 2012, dental professionals worked a combined 689 hours in one day; non-medical volunteer time totaled more than 60 hours. The value of the care provided exceeded $90,000. In-kind donations from local grocers and the Brattleboro Elks venue space all combined to make the day possible. In 2013, the services and procedures provided were valued at over $75,000, bringing the total value of professional services to $253,000 since the program’s inception.

United Way of Windham County’s dental day program is a model for a future Orange County, Vermont program. Dentists from Orange County came down to Brattleboro to observe the 2012 event but then rolled up their sleeves and pitched in.

Contact: Carmen Derby, Executive Director, United Way of Windham County
TeamSmile, based in Kansas City, Missouri, is a national advocacy group that pairs oral health professionals with professional athletic teams to provide life-changing dental care to underserved children in the community. United Way of Greater Kansas City partners with TeamSmile and the city’s professional baseball and football teams twice a year to host a dental fair offering free dental services to low-income children. In the summer, children from the Boys and Girls Club are invited to a day-long event at Kauffman Stadium, where the Kansas City Royals play, and in the fall, to Arrowhead Stadium, home of the Kansas City Chiefs. Players and coaches visited with the children waiting for their check-ups, posed for pictures and signed autographs. In addition to dental services at the events, there are arts and crafts, games, food and educational sessions to help promote good nutrition, exercise, health and dental care.

In 2013, United Way provided a grant to TeamSmile to handle the logistics for the fall event and the Kansas City Chiefs incorporated the event into their NFL Hometown Huddle® program. Some 40 United Way volunteers managed patient flow and kept children engaged. Nearly 300 patients were seen and more than 730 procedures completed including, cleanings, fillings, x-rays, extractions and crowns. The value of care provided in this one day of service exceeded $133,000.

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