



Humble Smile Foundation: Fostering equitable oral healthcare access alongside environmental sustainability

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The Humble Smile Foundation was established in 2015 by its president, Dr Darren Weiss, who felt that dentistry was not accessible to the people who needed it the most. The foundation works to build a bridge between dentistry and general healthcare, and a guiding thread in achieving its goals is awareness of the need for dentistry to be responsible.

The Humble Smile Foundation's mission is to help prevent suffering caused by oral disease, by developing and

sharing effective and sustainable models of oral health promotion for communities with high unmet needs and managing and supporting oral health outreach projects to promote hygienic and healthy lifestyles.

For the foundation, children everywhere should be able to live healthy lives with healthy smiles, and to try to achieve this vision, it relies on the FDI World Dental Federation's view that oral health is a fundamental component of overall health and mental well-being. It further envisions den-

tistry leading the promotion of oral health and the prevention of oral disease regardless of socio-economic status, age, religion, sex, nationality or geographical location.

The foundation fosters collaborations to enable the development, testing and promotion of innovative models that support communities in achieving healthy lifestyles and dedicates itself to providing vulnerable children with the means and motivation to prevent oral pathology, by implementing simple behavioural and dietary adjustments to their daily routine. The monitoring, research and evaluation of each project enables the foundation to further improve lifelong impacts, but also to develop new models of oral health promotion.

The objectives guiding the foundation are the integration of oral health promotion in schools, the adoption and implementation of oral health promotion policies and structures in schools and homes, the development of plans and activities to accelerate change in public health promotion, and the increase and strengthening of collaborations with other for-profit and non-profit organisations, dental professionals, and public and governmental institutions around the world that identify with the Humble Smile Foundation's vision and preventive oral health models.

To achieve its objectives, the foundation works with local and global partners to develop projects, programmes and initiatives specific to each community it becomes involved with, applying a holistic and human-centred approach. These objectives must go hand in hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs, including education, health, equality and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and working to preserve our ocean and forests. Therefore, each project is undertaken with an emphasis on the sustainability of its impact, both environmentally and socially, by using biodegradable materials as far as possible and by focusing on continual and long-lasting impact in communities, empowering them to be able to improve their children's nutritional and oral hygiene behaviours.

The foundation brings together people who have chosen to share responsibility for preventing oral disease. With its partners, the foundation invests in developing and testing ideas at the operative level, improving and diffusing the knowledge, to ultimately form initiatives for the promotion of humanitarian innovation within and across organisations, making a real difference to the lives of many.

Volunteerism is at the root of the foundation's work, and volunteers come from all over the world. Many carry on with outreach work back in their own communities.

Among the organisations the foundation has partnered with to ensure effective, efficient and authorised implementation of the projects are the Indian Dental Asso-

ciation, the University of Pretoria in South Africa, the Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration in Kenya, Mexico and Greece, Advocacy for Global Health Partnerships in the US, the Hand in Hand non-profit dental service organization in Armenia, the Jan Sahas non-profit in Nepal and the International Association of Dental Students in Switzerland. It also has the support of several companies in the dental industry, and its main corporate sponsor is The Humble Co.

The foundation collaborates with ambassadors and clinics around the world too. Some of dentistry's global leaders, as Humble Smile Ambassadors, leverage their worldwide recognition to advance the cause of environmentally and socially responsible toothbrushing. Currently, there are 13 Humble Smile Ambassadors in 13 countries.

Dr Miguel Stanley of Lisbon in Portugal is one. He teaches and shares his knowledge and principles all over the world. Stanley founded the Slow Dentistry movement to help improve the standards of care of patients as well as their treatment experience. He believes in taking a holistic approach to dentistry and has developed an advanced biological cosmetic dentistry approach to his work. Many have heard the passion in his words and embraced his conviction that dentistry must be practised with care.

Another ambassador is Dr Moody Alexander of Arlington in Texas in the US. Alexander has incorporated his love for serving and giving back into the lifeblood of his orthodontic practice and through a ministry that serves the dental needs of people in Ethiopia. In 2019, he received the American Association of Orthodontists Humanitarian Award. When I asked him why he chose to become an ambassador, his reply was: "I became involved in the Humble Smile Foundation because of what it stands for. Aside from my wife and children, the two greatest passions in my life are dental care and caring for the underserved. The Humble Smile Foundation combines those two beautifully in an effective and sustainable way."

At times, we think that the challenges of addressing things that should be changed are so unsurmountable that they are out of our reach. Weiss recalled a project in Cambodia, in a community where most of the children had decayed teeth due to poor nutrition and too much sugar in their diets, where the foundation transformed the school into a health-promoting school. Only healthy food was made available to the children. This initiative established such a wonderful model that officials of the ministry of education came to visit the school, and about a year later, Cambodia adopted new regulations to restrict sweets in schools. So indeed, as advertising pioneer John Wanamaker once said, "One may walk over the highest mountain one step at a time."