

# Where Healthy Grins Begin



2003 BRYAN FELLOW

## Melissa Hoff

**HOMETOWN:** Chocowinity, NC

**MAJOR/DEGREE:**

School of Dentistry,  
Class of 2005

**FACULTY MENTOR:** Dr. Eugene Sandler, School of Dentistry

**COMMUNITY PARTNERS:**

El Centro Latino,  
Orange County  
Health Department

**PROJECT LOCATION:**

Orange and Wake counties

*“This project has allowed me to observe the immense need that North Carolina has for dental care. When I first entered dental school, I was determined to specialize in one aspect of dentistry. Now that I have seen the need for general dentists, I am considering general dentistry, and am definitely incorporating community service into my dental career.”*



The Where Healthy Grins Begin project stemmed from my observation that there are a significant number of local Hispanic families without dental insurance or access to dental services. The project's activities primarily focused on local Hispanic events held at several area preschools – Mi Escuelita, Tin Steps Pasitos, El Centro Latino and Early Headstart. The children were divided into groups. One group was taught oral hygiene with puppets and colored pictures, another group learned about cavities from Mike the Molar, and the last group received the fluoride treatment. The dental school volunteers rotated through each group, and when the rotations were complete, the children received stickers and had their faces painted. The parents were given bags containing children's toothbrushes, toothpaste, and informational material.

### Project Goals

- To provide oral hygiene instruction for Hispanic preschoolers in the Triangle and to educate their parents on the importance of dental care.
- To provide fluoride varnish treatments to these preschoolers and determine any serious dental needs.
- To make families aware of the dental services that UNC and Orange County provide to the community.

Another project activity consisted of two Spanish speakers giving a presentation to the Mother's Club at El Centro Latino. They explained the importance of seeing a dentist, when to start caring for a child's teeth, what kind of foods to eat, how to prevent caries, and what a fluoride treatment consists of and why it is beneficial to a child's oral health. During the presentation, nutritional foods were passed around to give the mothers some ideas on healthy snacks to feed their children.

The greatest challenge was publicizing the oral hygiene events to the Hispanic community. Because of this, several events and locations were added throughout the summer and early fall to ensure that more people were reached. Booths were organized at

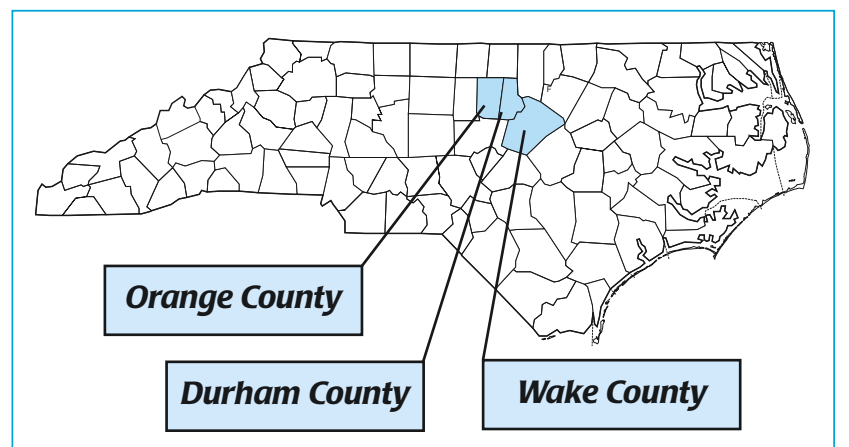


the Smart Start Family Fest in Orange County and the Durham County Health Fair. Dental school students volunteered with me to provide free fluoride varnish treatment to each child as well as to distribute oral hygiene educational materials

and a list of low cost dental service providers in each county.

Through my Robert E. Bryan Fellowship project, more than 300 children have been taught proper oral hygiene and 100 of these children have received free fluoride treatments. Nearly 200 parents also received education on the importance of dental care for themselves and their children.

The project has caught on in the dental school. There was always an overabundance of volunteers eager to help with the efforts. As a result, there are plans to continue similar outreach projects in the future.



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