

## Big Smiles

### Collaboration with UCSF promotes dental health

#### An orange kangaroo

patiently demonstrated oral hygiene for children across San Francisco this spring. The stuffed animal—sporting an oversized set of fake teeth—visited child care centers, shelters and family resource centers as part of a program to catch dental health problems and offer crucial early interventions.

The Department of Public Health Child Care Health Project is a collaborative jointly funded by HSA and First 5, with volunteer assistance from the UCSF School of Dental Public Health. “In just one year, teams of supervised students and public health nurses screened nearly 2,500 children in 60 child care centers as well as family resource centers, shelters and health fairs, and referred many for follow-up care,” said Michele Rutherford, HSA’s Manager of Child Care Policy and Planning. “Nearly 300 children on CalWORKs received fluoride varnish to reduce cavities. It’s an amazing opportunity for families.”

“Our charge is to provide consultation and screening to the most underserved and needy children in the city,” said Jane Evans,

a Nurse Manager for the Department of Public Health. “The impact is so valuable on many levels—cavity prevention, dental education, and creating comfort with dental professionals. We want to help these children establish the right behaviors early on so we can prevent oral disease.”

Some people think that since baby teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth, they aren’t important. But baby teeth are important for good nutrition, language development, self-esteem, and as placeholders for permanent teeth. Severe tooth decay—identifiable at a glance as brown or blackened teeth or inflamed gums—can interfere with children’s ability to eat,

sleep, speak and learn, and even cause fatal systemic infections.

Staff members made their visits fun, holding circle time with the children so they could sing a song and brush the teeth on the puppets. After visits, team members followed up with the children’s parents in multiple languages over a period of several months to make sure that children who needed additional dental care made visits to dentists, and that even children without problems were connected to a dentist for regular check ups.

The program has the potential to effect long-term change in the children’s lives. A randomized clinical trial conducted at

UCSF demonstrated that as little as one fluoride varnish treatment per year, in addition to parental oral health counseling, can cut the cavity rate in half for young children at high risk for developing tooth decay.

“This program wouldn’t be possible without funding from HSA and First 5,” said Evans. “We’re so grateful to be able to prioritize prevention and provide this service to these children, many of whom have never been to a dentist before.”



A child brushes a puppet’s teeth at a recent health fair.

# INSERVICE

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY



## Finally Home

Agency searches for families to adopt children from the foster care system

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**Hundreds of children** in San Francisco are waiting to be adopted. These children are currently in the foster care system because of parental abuse and neglect, and they need families who will welcome them into their homes forever. Some are very young, and others are in their teens. Some have special needs, but many do not. A great many of them are over the age of 12. And the people who work every day to find them permanent homes want everyone to know about how wonderful they are.

“I am amazed at the number of people who don’t know that there are so many children looking for parents,” said Carol Crittenden, an HSA Child Welfare Worker. “There are a lot of people who haven’t heard the message.”

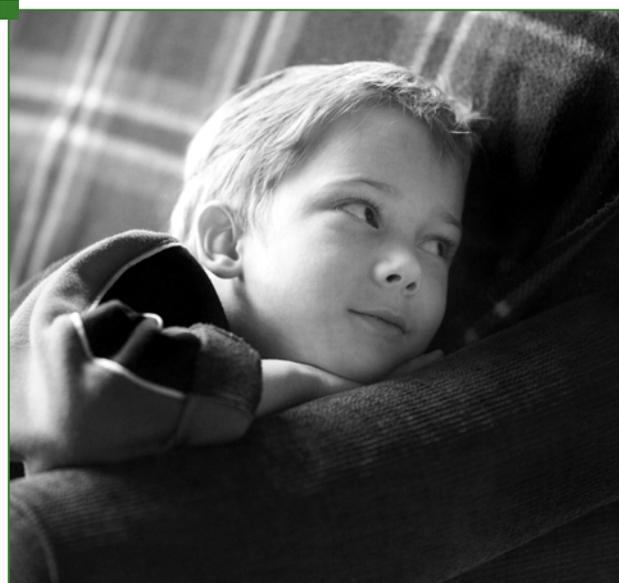
Crittenden is herself the parent of two daughters she adopted from the foster care system. “Being a parent has changed my life in wonderful ways,” she said. “My children have brought everything important to me—I love watching them learn new things and grow.”

Although she is often asked if she chose to adopt after working in the foster care

system, Crittenden said she had always wanted to become an adoptive parent. “But I sort of stumbled into my career,” she said. “While doing fundraising for an adoption agency I decided to pursue my MSW degree and become a social worker, so now I work with children in the foster care system and help them find the permanent and loving homes that every child deserves. These are great kids. Many of them are amazingly resilient and fun and funny. They’ve experienced some hard things and they still come out laughing.”

Because there are many older children and even teenagers waiting to be adopted, HSA and nonprofit Family Builders have recently begun an Older Youth Adoption Project to encourage adoption of children ages 9 or older who have been in the system at least 18 months. The project is funded by HSA as part of a pilot program using state dollars, and it

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Phoenix, who is 6 years old, is one of the many San Francisco children waiting to find a home.