



WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CATHERINE KASPER

Giving People a Reason to Smile

Lisa Hammond-Laughlin
Dental Hygienist
Neighborhood Health Clinics

Catherine Kasper, the Foundress of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, once exclaimed, "Oh what joy I have in being able to fulfill my duties." Lisa Hammond-Laughlin exudes a similar passion for her job as a dental hygienist at the Neighborhood Health Clinics (NHC). Since 1998, the Clinic has offered dental care for low income and uninsured residents of Allen County, on a sliding scale fee structure.

Hammond-Laughlin explained the importance of these dental services, advising that because dental problems are usually not life-threatening, they are often overlooked. This, however, can have debilitating consequences, according to Hammond-Laughlin. Children in school, she says, "lack self esteem" when they have serious and often times unsightly dental problems. Sadly, many of the children Hammond-Laughlin sees, like one four-year-old

with "a mouthful of cavities," just don't smile due to embarrassment. Hammond-Laughlin also shared that she and her coworkers do have patients whose lives are at risk. One 17-year-old's life was saved when they realized the abscess in his mouth was cancerous. To find this out, the dental

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team at the Clinic "went the extra mile," according to Hammond-Laughlin, and "successfully referred him to an oral surgeon...today, he's fine."

A common story, she says, are those of patients "who can't find a job because their teeth are missing." Due to years with a lack of dental care, they don't "have the confidence to find a job."

"They are thrilled," Lisa says, when they finally have a healthy set of teeth. And Hammond-Laughlin is plainly thrilled for them.

Another important effort is the Dental Sealant Program that travels to low income Fort Wayne schools, providing checkups and education for the children. Similarly, Hammond-Laughlin believes one of the keys is educating the parents to "limit sugars, especially sodas" from a young age and encourage basic care.

Whether saving a smile or a life, Hammond-Laughlin, and those at Neighborhood Health Clinics, demonstrate the Poor Handmaid value that "the best service possible" should be given "because this is the appropriate response to the God who gave us all." With this commitment, the NHC Dental Services has allowed people to obtain dignity in their everyday lives. This should bring a bright smile to anyone's face.

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To learn more on Blessed Catherine Kasper and the mission of The St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, visit sjchf.org.