



Giving Kids a Dental HEAD START in Our Community™

## **Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project**

### **KinderSmile Foundation**

The mission of KinderSmile Foundation is to provide underserved children with access to comprehensive dental care and to educate children and their families about the importance of dental hygiene as related to total health. We envision a future where every child has access to a dentist, and preventable dental diseases are eradicated. We provide access to care and a link to a barrier-free brick-and-mortar Dental Home, while focusing on Education, Intervention, and Prevention in order to empower patients and their families with methods to combat dental disease.

The dental field poses a unique high risk of transmission of COVID-19, due to close proximity to unmasked patients and unavoidable aerosol droplets produced during dental procedures. Notwithstanding the risks, the increase in need, and the escalating costs of PPE and infection control supplies due to this pandemic, KinderSmile Foundation continues its mission of providing comprehensive dental care to at-risk patients while providing a safe environment to staff, volunteers, and the community. Unlike many private dentists who implemented additional fees per visit to offset the extra costs, consistent with KSF's mission, we are not seeking any additional fees from our patients.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the health inequities that continue to plague the inner cities, underscoring socioeconomic and racial disparities in access to care. The high unemployment rates and lack of full time schooling are undoubtedly increasing the number of uninsured and underserved families, and are further disparaging these communities. Black and Hispanic Americans have been affected at four times the rate of white Americans by COVID-19. These groups make up the vast majority of our patients. Our Dental Homes are designed to serve the most underserved and at-risk populations. We open our doors to undocumented immigrants, who are not entitled to NJ FamilyCare, and who are eligible to be treated at KinderSmile Foundation at no cost. Over 90% of our patients come from at-risk families with income between 100-150% of the federal poverty level: 80% of our patients are insured by Medicaid/NJ FamilyCare and 11% are uninsured.

KSF's Founder & CEO, Dr. Nicole McGrath-Barnes, tirelessly works to raise awareness of inequities in oral health access, and was selected to receive the 2020 Benco Lucy Hobbs Humanitarian Award, by the National Council of Negro Women Montclair Branch, and was one of the four finalists for the 2020 NJ Biz Public Health Heroes. In October 2020 she was acknowledged for her service and dedication to dentistry by the New Jersey Dental Association, at their 150th Anniversary Event.

The year 2020 has been quite a year! We have been challenged and tested through this pandemic, and we will overcome and heal! We are very grateful to our partners, donors, and grantors whose continued support has enabled us to provide preventive and comprehensive care to at-risk uninsured and underinsured patients throughout our programs and in our Dental Homes KinderSmile Community Oral Health Center Bloomfield, Newark, and Trenton.