

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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**Alabama Department of Public Health Grant
for
HandsOn River Region's *Pay It Forward* Program**

Pay It Forward is a value-based volunteer program where participants may exchange volunteer hours at any of more than 200 local venues for dental treatment ranging from prophylaxis, to extractions, to amalgam and composite restorations. Originally intended for pregnant women enrolled (and vetted) through Gift of Life, expectant fathers enrolled in Gift of Life programs are now also eligible. Most recently, clients of Hope Inspired Ministries, who provide training to low socioeconomic status and/or chronically unemployed men and women to help them obtain and maintain employment, are also eligible. Dentists volunteer their time and new ones are actively recruited by HandsOn River Region staff as they are the lead agency for facilitation. The program is intended to create greater access to care for the target population while enabling clients to actively contribute in acquiring the dental treatment they receive.

Alabama Department of Public Health provided a \$25,000 grant initially for FY 2019 and has now renewed it for its second year. The money is used for administrative costs, business supply needs, staffing, and recruitment. The program has effectively increased access to care for expectant mothers, expectant fathers, and chronically unemployed individuals of all ages. By requiring the clients to bank volunteer hours in exchange for their treatment, individuals feel empowered in having a role in addressing their treatment needs. Unfortunately, barriers such as lack of transportation still exist, resulting in potential providers being hesitant to sign on due to broken appointments by clients.

Lessons Learned:

The largest obstacle for the Pay It Forward program is transportation for the clients to get to their appointments. Perhaps consider the possibility of bus vouchers to be a covered expense by grant funds.

Surprisingly, the implementation of the Pay It Forward grant went very smoothly and encountered no opposition.

The biggest challenge was to have in place a referral base of dentists who would accept the clients of Pay It Forward. That framework was necessary initially to build upon as the number of patients (hopefully) continues to increase.

Contact Person(s) for Inquiries:

Tommy Johnson, DMD, State Dental Director, Alabama Department of Public Health, 201 Monroe Street, RSA Tower #1370, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, Phone: 334-206-5398, Email: tommy.johnson@adph.state.al.us

Tasha Cooper, Executive Director, HandsOn River Region, 101 Coliseum Boulevard, Montgomery, Alabama 36109, Phone: 334-264-3335, Email: tcooper@handsonriverregion.org