



Dental Public Health State Activity Submission Form

ASTDD’s goal in collecting information about successful state Dental Public Health activities (e.g., practice, program, service, event, or policy) is to share this information with other states, territories, and stakeholders who may be interested in implementing similar activities. We thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences.

Please complete the form below and return to Lori Cofano, ASTDD Best Practices Project Coordinator, at lcofano@astdd.org

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STATE DENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIVITY (e.g., practice, program, service, event, or policy) Minimum=300 Maximum=500	
Activity title:	Apple Tree Dental
State/Territory:	Minnesota
Summary overview, which may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives • Rationale • Personnel • Key partners • Costs & sustainability 	
<p>Apple Tree Dental was founded as a non-profit dental organization to address the lack of access to dental care for residents of nursing and assisted living facilities in Minneapolis/ St. Paul MN. (Twin Cities) Its “Community Collaborative Practice” delivery model has evolved and grown over 35 years. Eight Centers for Dental Health serve as clinics for patients of all ages and abilities and as care coordination centers for a nationally recognized mobile dental program. Apple Tree’s approximately 200 employees include dentists, oral surgeons, nurse anesthetists, advanced dental therapists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, clinic and community care coordinators, and lab technicians, supported by corporate and administrative staff.</p> <p><u>Mission:</u> To overcome barriers to oral health. <u>Vision:</u> To inspire partnerships that foster healthy communities.</p>	

Strategies:

- Leverage our skilled teams and unique strengths to build sustainable community collaborations that help people of all ages and abilities achieve health and well-being.
- Advance oral health care delivery, education, research, and public policy by developing and testing innovative solutions that influence local and national systemic change.
- Strengthen Apple Tree's financial health and sustainability by investing in purposeful employee development, optimal clinical facilities, and strong community partnerships.

Apple Tree's multiple funding streams support a sustainable business model. Earned revenue from dental services is supplemented with federal, state, and local foundation grants, corporate support, individual gifts, and consulting services. Apple Tree's growth over 35 years demonstrates that a non-profit group dental practice with a diversified patient and funding mix can successfully serve older adults including the most dependent who reside in long-term care facilities. Research using Apple Tree's longitudinal database revealed that routine care can successfully stabilize the oral health of institutionalized elders. Although establishing Apple Tree as a 501(c)(3) organization required groundbreaking effort by Apple Tree's founders, that non-profit structure has proven essential to its sustainability.

Lessons learned (Successes and **Challenges**):

Apple Tree celebrated its 35th year of operation on July 3, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It has grown to be a significant provider of comprehensive dental care in Minnesota and has been recognized as a model program for overcoming barriers faced by underserved populations, including older adults, in partnership with local leaders and community organizations. Apple Tree's history of innovation and collaboration proved invaluable to its pandemic response.

Lessons learned over 35 years include:

- The importance of a well-defined mission and shared values statement that supports both patients and providers. Mission and values provide a foundation to develop and maintain strategic partnerships with both public and private entities.
- Dental expertise is not enough. Expertise and systems in marketing and communications, development, finance, human resources, and information technology systems are needed and require investment of time and resources.
- "Cookie cutter" replication is not possible. A successful program must be tailored to local needs and resources and take into account state-specific licensure and regulations. Highly specific local data is essential to launch a new program and for ongoing program evaluation.
- Community engagement is essential at all phases of a program from needs assessment, planning, fundraising, growth and evaluation.
- Effective public policy requires investment in paid representation at the state capitol and of leadership's time as well as building trusted relationships with community stakeholders within and beyond dentistry.
- Public health care programs (Medicaid, etc.) can be administratively burdensome and have not prioritized adults or the needs of vulnerable adults.
- Diversify sources of grant and gift income, avoiding reliance on a few funders. Under promise and over produce on grants.
- An interdisciplinary team is required to deliver clinical care for older adults with complex needs.
- A non-profit staff model organization with paid dental professional employees allows them to provide the same standard of care regardless of the payer.
- Although successful programs grow over time, in order to have sufficient capacity to generate earned revenue

and sustain a team of staff members, start big enough to make an impact.

- Recruit and retain mission-focused leadership at the Board and staff levels to manage the complexities of establishing and sustaining a dental care delivery system for nursing facility residents. The expertise needed goes well beyond understanding geriatric clinical needs.
- Value and reward innovation by creating a culture that welcomes adaptation and change.

Various challenges have arisen and been overcome during the past 35 years. For example, workforce shortages, inability to compete with private practice salaries, state budget deficits leading to benefit or reimbursement cuts, and the chronic underfunding and undervaluation of oral health. Apple Tree has benefitted from the strategic guidance of its board of directors, leveraged resources, collaboration with others, and innovative thinking. Dr. Helgeson often cites sage advice from Pete Frechette, former chairman and CEO of Patterson Companies, as helping guide him through difficult times: "Your bottom line should never be your goal." Instead, Apple Tree has pursued patients' best interest by delivering patient-centered dental care and advancing the system changes necessary to do so.

TO BE COMPLETED BY ASTDD	
Activity Number:	28006
Submission Date:	April 2021
Submission Filename:	SUM26006MNAppleTreeDental-2021