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EDITOR'S PICK

Boys and Girls Club's dental lab promotes good health habits and careers

OGECHI EMECHEBE | The Capital Times | oemechebe@madison.com May 8, 2016



PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

Erica Olsen and Dr. Ed Batchelor explain dental hygiene to students at the Boys and Girls Club during a recent session.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, students at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County listened as Dr. Ed Batchelor, a dentist at Excellence in Dentistry, talked about his career. He went over how many years of school is required, what his job entails, how many days a week he works and the average salary of a dentist.

"Dentists make around \$200,000 a year. On average, I work about three to four days a week," he told them. "Life as a dentist is a pretty good life."

The presentation was part of a larger effort to educate kids about career opportunities while also teaching them about maintaining good health habits.

Students had gathered in the dental lab that recently opened at the Boys and Girls Club's Taft Street location. Erica Olsen, a dental hygienist that has worked with Dr. Batchelor for 15 years, spearheaded the program.

When students take part in their after-school activities at the club, they can participate in a session Olsen leads where she teaches them the importance of caring for teeth.

Around a year-and-a-half ago, she got the idea to educate students on preventative dental measures. Educating youth in the importance of oral hygiene is something she said she's passionate about.

"One of the biggest things in Madison and across the board is a lack of access to care, predominately in lower socioeconomic classes. There's not a lot of places that provide dental care for people who can't afford it or don't have assistance," Olsen said. "95 percent of dental problems can be prevented through good home care, oral hygiene and education."

Olsen thought the Boys and Girls Club would be a great place to begin the education lessons. She contacted Michael Johnson, CEO of the organization, who agreed to the idea. Last year, Delta Dental provided Olsen with a grant to work on the project.

"Tooth decay is one of the top reasons kids miss school. It's challenging to get quality health care," Johnson said. "For the future we're looking into opening up a full service dental clinic in one of our clubs. We're so honored that Erica is here doing such great work."

The program has four components: Oral health, overall health, nutrition and dental career exploration. At Wednesday's session, students also learned from Dr. Batchelor about how wellness in other parts of their bodies is tied to oral health. He described cases where issues like gum disease can cause other problems, such as knee and joint pain.

Last year, Olsen started working with younger kids, from 6 to 10 years old, and they did hands-on activities. She taught them how to properly brush and floss, and did experiments that illustrated how large amounts of sugar can damage the teeth and lead to diseases like high blood pressure or diabetes.

The second phase, working with older kids from 11 to 16 years of age, launched on May 4. On that day, in addition to the career information from Dr. Batchelor, Olsen took a dental screening of the students to identify if there was any plaque, tooth decay or other needs that had to be immediately addressed. Students learned how to take a blood pressure measurement. Olsen also went over what cavities are, braces and their costs, gum disease and the importance of good nutrition.

"Lack of knowledge can sometimes be a generational cycle," Olsen said. "If we can't get to the parents, we reach out to the kids so they can become informed and pass that knowledge down to future generations."

"There's a lot of suffering that goes on when you aren't educated on something," Batchelor said. "Ideally we would like to get the parents involved in the future but for now it's important to get the kids informed."

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Photos: Focusing on dental health at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County
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