

*Rural, Grassroots Community
Organizing Brings a Dental
Home to Those in Need*



Northern Dental
ACCESS CENTER

Northern Dental Access Center opened its doors this January, 2009

Serve children and families enrolled in Minnesota Health Care Programs .

Basic dental care and referrals for specialty care.

Serve 20-40 patients per day.





State of the Art Facility

With room to grow

In the heart of rural, northern Minnesota

No easy task:

- tremendous need
- economically depressed area
- no benefactor
- few resources (*financial and dental*)

Too big of a project for any one entity to take this on

We HAD to work together as a whole community

The outcome has been a resounding success—
it's our process that elicits the most curiosity



Our Approach

Harness the energy and commitment of people and agencies who knew the need was great

Locate planning funds

Hire a convener

Engage in best practices for community collaboration and use quality planning tools

Initiating organizations:

MeritCare Clinic

Beltrami County Health and Human Services

North Country Health Services Northern Medical Clinic

People's Church

Private Practice Dentists

Within a few months, this list grew to add:

Northwest Technical College Dental Assisting Program

Medsave Family Pharmacy

Boys and Girls Club of Bemidji

Additional private practice dentists and hygienists

Legal services of Northwest Minnesota

Bi-County Community Action Program (HeadStart)

Area legislators

Bemidji Area Schools

Indian Health Service

Today, this list includes more than fifty area agencies, employers, educators and individuals who remain committed to the success of this project.

Find common ground—what's your favorite?

Build trust

Reframe the issue

--not a dentist problem

--not a welfare problem

--but a looming public health crisis

Gathered the data

Shouted from the rooftops long
before we ever asked for money

Listened

Benchmarked success stories

Created a business model and a
financial plan

Community Advisory Team

Recognized individual strengths

People helped where they felt most comfortable

- Fundraising team
- Community Presentations and partnership building
- Policies and Procedures
- Dentist recruitment
- Benchmarking other clinics
- Facility design and identification
- Financial planning
- Legal research

We met monthly or more to report on progress

Struggles along the way

Identity—difficult to remain autonomous, but we agreed that was best

Geographic area—where will the boundaries be?

Who will we serve?

Unspoken conflicts

Name of the organization

Facility location

How to raise enough money?

Dentist recruitment

After four year of planning
the culmination of those struggles forced our hand

- Not enough money
- No facility
- No dentist
- Almost had to return initial grant awards

Leap of Faith!

Acting “as if” — *The Stockdale Paradox*

Then, a facility option came

...A couple more small grants

...Minnesota Dept of Human Services and Legislative support

...Hired a director

We Did It!

Raised over \$1 Million for start up (from a dozen funders)

12 dentists from around the state provide care

(as part time contractors or volunteers)

Still recruiting for a staff dentist (or two)

7 operatories with room for expansion

Open full time

Since January we've served 1,000 patients and 1,100 appointments scheduled into November.

Lessons Learned

- A disciplined approach
- External convener
- Building relationships before asking for money
- The right people
- Communication, communication, communication
- An open process, accountable to the community
- Money is an outcome, not a driver
- Our collective strength makes us less vulnerable to volatile political and economic landscape

Visit us anytime!

