

TCU New Smiles Drive

Bridging the Gap in Oral Health: Education & Supplies for Underserved Communities

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Abstract

Oral health is a critical component of overall well-being, yet many individuals in underserved communities lack access to essential dental care and hygiene resources. The *New Smiles Drive* is a student-led initiative dedicated to improving oral health education and access to hygiene supplies in the Fort Worth community. Through the *TCU Tooth Fairies* program, we present at elementary schools, engaging students in interactive lessons on proper brushing and flossing techniques to foster lifelong oral hygiene habits. Additionally, we donate hygiene kits—containing toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, and a laminated educational card outlining proper brushing steps in both English and Spanish—to *Mercy Clinic*, which provides medical and dental care to uninsured patients, as well as to local homeless shelters. By combining education with tangible resources, *New Smiles Drive* aims to promote preventive dental care and address disparities in oral health access.

Introduction

Access to dental care remains a significant challenge in many communities, with financial barriers and lack of education contributing to poor oral health outcomes. Without early intervention and access to preventive care, minor dental issues can escalate into serious health concerns, leading to pain, infections, and difficulty eating or speaking.

Introduction continued

To address these disparities, our initiative focuses on early education and resource distribution to equip individuals with the knowledge and tools needed for lifelong oral health. By targeting young students, uninsured patients, and individuals experiencing homelessness, we aim to create sustainable oral hygiene habits and reduce the prevalence of preventable dental conditions.

Our program emphasizes hands-on learning, community collaboration, and accessibility—ensuring that proper oral care is not only taught but also made possible through the provision of essential hygiene supplies. Through these efforts, we strive to bridge the gap in oral health access and empower individuals to take control of their dental well-being.

Texas Oral Health Statistics

Over **66%** of 3rd graders have cavities



20% of those cavities go untreated

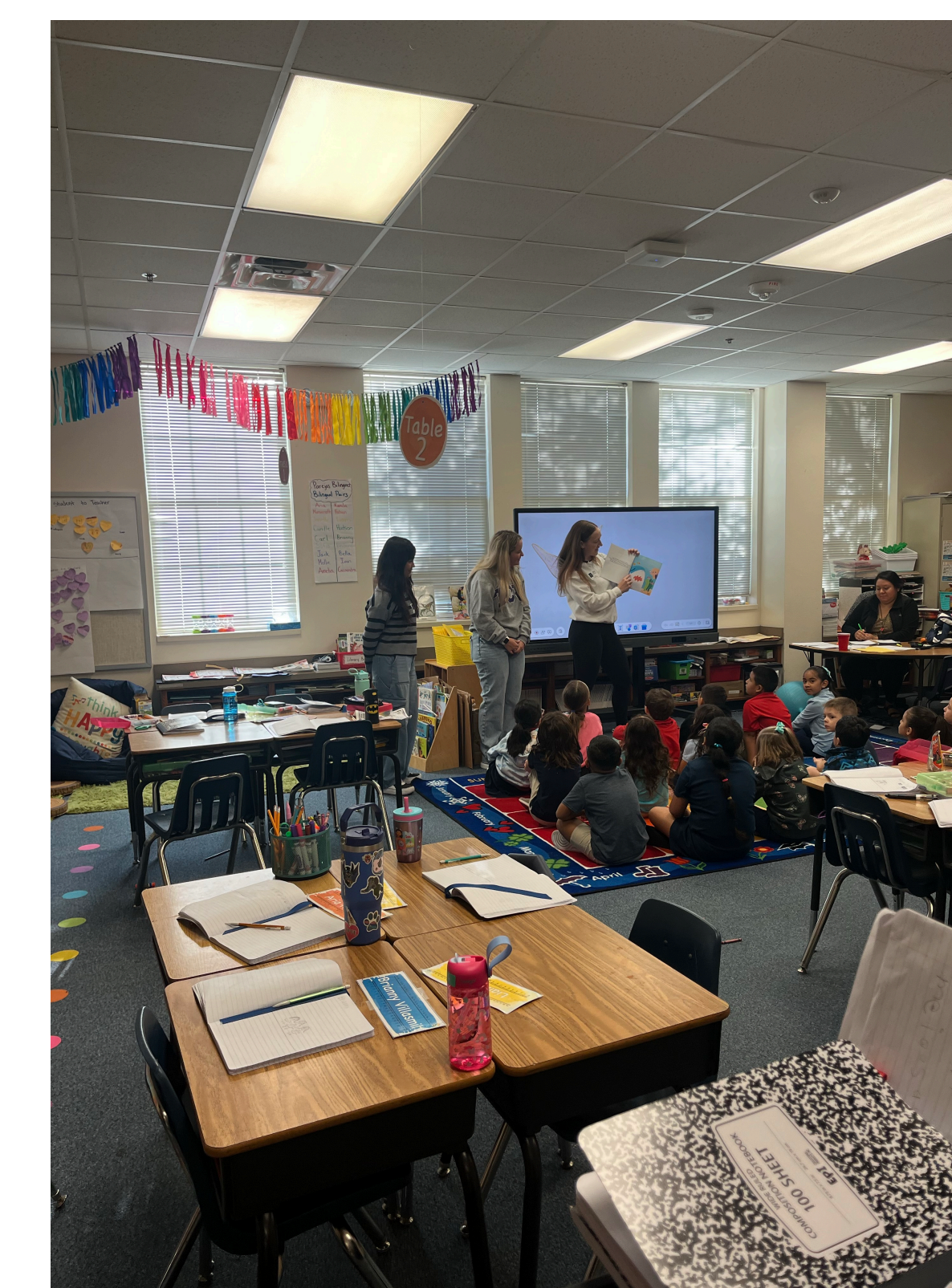


Texas ranks **48th** in the U.S. oral health

Implementation

1. Elementary School Education (TCU Tooth Fairies Program)

- Conduct interactive presentations on brushing, flossing, and cavity prevention.
- Engage students with hands-on activities to reinforce proper oral hygiene habits.
- Provide take-home hygiene kits with toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, and bilingual instructional cards.



← Tooth Fairies presentation at Lily B. Clayton Elementary School



Members of the Pre-Dental Club assembling hygiene kits. →

2. Hygiene Kit Distribution

- Pre-Dental Club volunteers assembled all hygiene kits, ensuring each included essential oral care supplies.
- Distributed kits to Mercy Clinic and local homeless shelters

Community Impact this Year

- 300 kits** donated to homeless shelters and presented to 150 individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 150 kits** provided to Mercy Clinic patients after their dental appointments.
- 150 kits** distributed to elementary school students during our Tooth Fairies.

Community Feedback

- Individual at Mercy Clinic**
“TCU dental hygiene kits have changed the lifestyles of Mercy Clinic patients in the greatest way possible. Patients are very grateful for the dental kits they receive and can be used on a daily basis, Mercy clinic appreciates the kindness and thoughtfulness y'all give to our patients.”
- Teacher from Lily B. Clayton Elementary School**
“The presentation was helpful and engaging. My students were very excited about the toothbrushes that were passed out and couldn't wait to use them!”

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