

## Keeping Smiles Healthy, a Priceless Effort

Area residents receive free dental cleanings



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**Stamford, CT** | Added on March 25, 2014 At 12:21 PM

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A smile is worth a thousand words, but it can cost you.

"People want oral healthcare, but they just can't afford it," said Adele Gordon, the site director for community health centers in Fairfield County.

But thanks to Neighbors Link Stamford and the Franklin Street Community Health Center area residents, like Astrid Vasquez, are getting their teeth cleaned at no charge.

"This is wonderful," said Astrid Vasquez.

Neighbors Link and the community health center are teaming up for a third year to provide dental and medical services to Stamford's recently immigrated residents.

"It is a chance for, like I said, a lot of people who haven't been able to see a dentist in years. This is their opportunity to get that care, so it's very important," said Christian Mendoza, operations manager at Neighbors Link Stamford.

Their "health day" also includes a little bit of everything from nutrition to blood pressure to hand hygiene information.

"We want to educate, not just in job opportunities and ESL (English as a Second Language), but everything for a more holistic approach," said Mendoza.

Neighbor's Link provides English language, computer and other classes. It's mission is to "strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants."

The community health center's staff and mobile dental unit, on site at Neighbor's Link, performing 76 cleanings.

"Oral health, now it's been established that it causes other diseases," said Gordon. "So if you have good oral health, you can stay better, stay well."

Vasquez also volunteers at Neighbor's Link, and her smile, says it all.

"This is amazing. I love information that the hispanic community and other communities can get," said Vasquez.

This year, Mendoza says 126 people signed up for dental cleanings. With only so many spots open, he says they used a raffle system to choose who would receive them.

In total, about 500 people benefit from the event.

### Further information:

The Connecticut Mission of Mercy, coming up in April, will provide free dental care to the underserved and uninsured in Connecticut. The Connecticut Foundation for Dental Outreach (CDFO) in collaboration with the Connecticut State Dental Association (CSDA) held the state's first Mission of Mercy project in 2008. Every year, the Connecticut Mission of Mercy project is held in a different location throughout the state.

This year, it's taking place in Hartford, April 25 and 26 at the XL Center, 1 Civic Center Plaza. Patients are taken without appointment on a first-come, first-served basis.