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MEDIA RELEASE

Ninth Free Day at the Dentist Taking Place Oct 21:

Oral Health Task Force Removes Barriers to Visiting the Dentist

October 8, 2019 – Cook County and Grand Portage children, youth up to age 26, along with pregnant mothers who do not have dental insurance, can receive free dental care at Grand Marais Family Dentistry on Monday, Oct 21. The Oral Health Task Force (OHTF), a program of the North Shore Health Care Foundation (NSHCF), is sponsoring its ninth 'Free Day at the Dentist' event which includes an exam, cleaning, x-rays, fluoride and/or sealants.

"Free Day allows greater access to dental care for children and young adults throughout Cook County and takes the financial burden off of families," said Paul Nelson, Oral Health Task Force Chair and NSHCF Board Member. "Unfortunately, and understandably, many times, dental care gets skipped if families do not have dental insurance or the means to visit the dentist regularly. The Oral Health Task Force has been able to assist more than 800 children, youth and pregnant moms, with dental care locally because of the collaborative way we are addressing oral health here in Cook County."

Appointment slots fill up quickly, anyone interested in getting in for a Free Day appointment on Oct. 21, is encouraged to call 218-387-2774, as soon as possible. Free Day is specifically for those without dental coverage and cannot be used instead of using dental insurance. "Free Day" is also available to students from Lake County who attend the Birch Grove Community School.

In-School Screenings & Fluoride Treatments Making Significant Difference

The Oral Health Task Force began in-school screenings with the majority of local schools in 2012, to identify dental concerns such as tooth decay including identification of cavities and provide oral health education and access to dental care through the OHTF. Since then, the number of children being screened has increased exponentially and the number of children exhibiting oral health concerns is decreasing. For example, in 2018/19 school year at Cook County ISD 166, of the 396 students screened, 51 students had signs of decay or cavity (12.9%) versus screenings performed in September of this 2019/20 school year, of the 404 students screened, 38 students (9.4%) had signs of decay. Oshki Ogimaag began partnering with the OHTF in the 2018/19 school year to begin screenings, and has already seen a 13.3% decrease in the number of students with cavities in just one year.

So far, this school year, the Oral Health Task Force has screened 514 children at Great Expectations School, Cook County ISD 166 Schools, and Oshki Ogimaag Charter School. Yet to come this fall, the OHTF will be visiting the Birch Grove Community School. Screenings are also done annually with the ECFE programs, preschools and in daycares in the spring.

About the Task Force

The Oral Health Task Force is a unique home-grown solution unique to Cook County, that works to provide dental care to the children of Cook County and the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in Grand Marais Family Dentistry. The Task Force provides community education on the importance of early preventative care and provides financial assistance that makes dental care more affordable and accessible, including transportation to appointments if necessary. In addition to leadership from the North Shore Health Care Foundation, the Task Force includes representation from:

- Grand Marais Family Dentistry
- Sawtooth Mountain Clinic
- Local schools and school nurses
- Cook County Public Health & Human Services, and
- the Grand Portage Health Service.

The program has been made possible through grants from Arrowhead Electric Cooperative, Aitkins Memorial Fund, Cliffs Foundation, Cook County Community Foundation, Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation, Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, First & Second St Thrift Store, Grand Marais Lions & Lioness Club, Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, Mardag Foundation, Medica Foundation, Minnesota Dental Foundation, Minnesota Power Foundation, North Shore Health Care Foundation, Northland Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Sawtooth Mountain Clinic, St. Luke's Foundation, and Walmart Foundation.

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