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I am pleased to provide a letter of support to the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) regarding oral health for young children. We know that many children under the age of six lack access to oral health services. Poor oral health greatly impacts children's overall health and well-being and may impede on their ability to participate fully in their daily lives. Additionally, for children with special needs, poor oral health may affect quality of life and a child's ability to sleep, eat, and function without pain.

Children First in Essex County partners with many agencies, including the WECHU, to provide Windsor-Essex Early Start (WEE Start) events to the community. These events focus on the promotion of early and healthy development for children from birth to six. A major draw to these events is the free dental screens offered to parents. The interest in the dental screenings far outnumber the interest in other partner agency services. During the dental screen, children receive free oral checkups with recommendations if needed. As a result, of these screens, many children are referred for follow-up dental care. This has been a documented trend for approximately 10 years.

Along with screenings, families are provided with age appropriate strategies to support oral health. This parent education piece is also critical to the oral health of the children in the early years. Many parents require not only the basic knowledge of the importance of brushing their child's teeth twice a day but they also appreciate receiving the tools such as. toothbrushes, toothpaste, and timers which allow them the opportunity to practice good oral health.

It has been shown, that children who lack oral health care are more susceptible to speech and language concerns, eating issues and overall self-esteem.

Barriers to accessing dental care for children with disabilities may include transportation challenges, limited number of specialized dentists, not to mention limited or inadequate dental coverage. For many of the families whose children receive services from Children First, these barriers along with others is an unfortunate reality. More accessible dental services, along with fluoride in drinking water, would certainly benefit many of our children and families.

I look forward to our continued partnership with the WECHU in the promotion of accessible oral health care.



Lori Kempe, M.S.W., R.S.W.
Executive Director