University of Utah School of Dentistry to host Give Kids A Smile

(SALT LAKE CITY) – Give Kids A Smile, a national program launched in 2003 by the American Dental Association (ADA), provides no-cost care for thousands of children at hundreds of locations nationwide. There are a number of Give Kids A Smile events held throughout Utah, including Salt Lake City. The University of Utah School of Dentistry is the new, permanent home for the Salt Lake City event, and will host Give Kids A Smile for the second time since it opened in 2015. This year’s event takes place on Saturday, February 27th, from 8 am to 2 pm.

The 2016 event will provide treatment to 400 children who have been screened and qualified prior to the event. The 400 children will be brought in by four partnering organizations in the Salt Lake Valley – Midvale City Community Building Community, the Health Access Project, Sealants for Smiles, and the Intercity Mission.

The event is held every year in February nationwide. The School of Dentistry, in partnership with the Utah Dental Association (UDA), has chosen the last Saturday of the month as the standing date to treat kids in the Salt Lake Valley. Jim Williamson, DMD, local dentist, co-founder and co-chair of the event estimates that last year more than $200,000 in services was provided at no cost to patients, thanks to the large number of volunteers. “We do serious dentistry. This isn’t just cleanings and a few fillings here and there,” Dr. Williamson said. This is Dr. Williamson’s 13th year working with Give Kids A Smile.

Providers come from the University of Utah School of Dentistry, Utah Valley University dental hygiene program, and private practices throughout the valley. The event benefits everyone involved – volunteers serve within their local community, hygiene students are mentored by hygienists, and dental students work closely with seasoned dentists, all to provide much-needed healthy smiles to local children.

Although the newly-opened clinic has 60 chairs, providers need to work quickly and efficiently to see all 400 children by day’s end. Everyone who participates in the program volunteers their time and talent on a Saturday to help these kids. Dr. Williamson wants to keep the event as easy as possible for volunteer dentists. “The goal is to allow volunteer dentists and hygienists to focus on what they do best – provide care. To enable this, the Give Kids A Smile event needs resources like funding to procure equipment and supplies. The School of Dentistry stepped up to this challenge by offering the use of their clinic space and equipment for the event,” Dr. Williamson said.

The need for care is high around the state, more so in the heavily-populated Salt Lake region. As such, it is the largest Give Kids A Smile event in Utah. People interested in providing support to this event can contact the University of Utah School of Dentistry for giving opportunities.