

SUN, SAND, FLOSS AND FLUORIDE



BY CHRISTINE SCHRUM

Kimberly Daley loves to make people smile—after all, she’s a dental hygienist. And thanks to Nine Miles of Smiles, her volunteer organization, nearly 10,000 Jamaicans have something worth smiling about.

“I’m a hygienist, so I look at teeth,” says Daley, a Sudbury native who graduated from George Brown College in 1999 and works in Toronto.

“I’d gone to Jamaica a couple times and when I went to resorts I noticed that the people who served me—the waitresses, the bartenders—they all had nice teeth, but when you caught a glimpse of the maid cleaning your room or the chef behind the kitchen door, they often had really rotten teeth.

KIMBERLY DALEY

So I thought maybe I could help.”

Access to dental care is a big issue in Jamaica, which is one of the most indebted middle-income nations in the world according to the World Bank. When Nine Miles of Smiles was formed in 2005, there was only one dentist for every 15,000 people on the island. (The World Health Organization recommends one for every 300 people). There were no dental hygienists at all.

Determined to help out, Daley began researching volunteering opportunities. But at the time, no organizations were accepting hygienists.

“That was a bummer because I was really hyped up!” she says. “They would only take dentists and assistants. They focused mainly on pain relief—emergency care, extractions and things. But I wanted to do something more preventive in nature and sort of share the quality of care that we give to people here.”

So she created her own organization.

“I just researched how to start a non-profit organization and gathered a few colleagues who were interested in being our first board members and we were off.”

Nine Miles of Smiles operates from a mobile clinic in a rural village spice factory. Daley and her team of

THIS PAST WINTER COLLEGE BOREAL STUDENTS HELPED OUT AT THE DENTAL CLINIC IN JAMAICA.



dentists, hygienists, restorative hygienists, denturists and dental technicians visit Jamaica twice a year to help locals with tooth cleaning, extractions, fillings, dentures and dental hygiene education.

"We go back to the same community year after year, so there is a continuum of care, whereas some groups go from town to town and pull teeth and never see that same group again," says Daley. "People know where to find us every February."

Word of mouth is growing, and apparently Nine Miles of Smiles is pretty popular.

"There's enough work there to keep us busy for five lifetimes," she laughs. "We have people coming from all over the island to see us now, on buses. And we try to serve everyone. We work in the morning from 7:30 till sometimes 6 or 7 at night. We probably see over 400 people in four days."

Supplies and equipment are donated, and team members pay for their flights, food and accommodations. For the Nine Miles of Smiles crew, the big payback is

in the smiles of their patients.

"It makes a big difference in people's lives. Tourism is a big industry there, and if people have better teeth, they'll be able to get better jobs and tips. Our patients have a lot of gratitude, just knowing that someone cares about them."

Dental hygiene is a relatively new concept to Jamaica, so Nine Miles of Smiles ends up doing a fair amount of extractions and denture fittings. And since 2009, Daley has been enlisting dental tech professors and third-year dental tech students from George Brown College as volunteers. This past winter Collège Boréal students also participated in the dental clinic.

"I really wanted students to have an opportunity to volunteer and see how their career choice could make a difference in people's lives. Some of the students from Collège Boréal were from Quebec, so they didn't speak a lot of English, but they had the time of their life. They said it was their best experience ever."



In addition to running the clinic, Daley is also a bit of an event planner.

"I like to make sure people have a fun time and see all the beautiful things in Jamaica—not just kids' rotten teeth. I make sure they get out and take in the beauty."

One of the island's scenic spots is Nine Mile, hometown of the legendary reggae singer-songwriter Bob Marley. Daley is a huge Marley fan and her organization's name is an obvious tip of the hat to him.

Learn more about Nine Miles of Smiles at www.ninemilesofsmiles.org. 