

FOCUS ON HEALTH CARE

CONTRIBUTING WRITER | By Anne Marie Tarangelo

Taking the fear out of dental visits for people with developmental disabilities

When I met 35-year-old Leon, he had no teeth due to a lack of access to dental care and poor oral hygiene. Leon told me, "I want teeth," and he was very cooperative and patient through the process of making his teeth. After many months of coming in every two weeks and never missing an appointment, Leon finally got his teeth – a complete upper and lower denture!

Leon didn't only get teeth but a new chance at living a full and productive life. Leon now smiles and laughs openly. He goes out into the community and volunteers and speaks to people. He went from being a shy and reluctant person to now being able

to enjoy interacting with everyone he comes into contact with.

Leon now has a job where he finds satisfaction and greater independence. He looks forward to joining in on activities and can be found among people speaking, eating and enjoying himself. He eats everything he wants without worry or embarrassment. From the first day Leon received his teeth, I knew how important they would be and what a significant impact they would have on his life. He is now able to fully appreciate his bright and cheerful demeanor and personality which was just waiting to be set free.

The Westchester Institute



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for Human Development (WIHD) Dental Department gave him teeth but really they were wings allowing him to fly and go about his life in the way he was meant to.

Leon is just one of the success stories from WIHD's dental clinic.

Having clean teeth and a mouth free of dental disease is a goal for each of our

Touro Dental School has combined efforts with us and has their students rotating through our clinic. Students are being taught the importance of serving individuals with disabilities and their families with compassion while utilizing effective techniques.

To most people going to the dentist evokes fear and apprehension. The dental department at Westchester Institute for Human Development goes the extra mile to assist those with severe anxiety and behavioral limitations to have the dental treatment they so desperately need.

We also guide caregivers by teaching them proper home care techniques and directing them on the care

of dentures as well as nutritional counseling.

In the instances where fear and apprehension are not able to be overcome with anxiolytics and behavior management techniques, our patients will be seen in the operating room and put under general anesthesia so treatment can be rendered. In all cases, our goal is to prevent infection, promote periodontal health and maintain cavity-free teeth while saving all teeth whenever possible.

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