

Before they walked, they crawled. Before than ran, they walked...and now they're running!

Over the years, San Antonio Christian Dental Clinic has been the incubator for many of our next generation dental professionals – dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants. This year, past records were shattered when two long-time administrative volunteers were accepted to the dental program and one dental assistant staff member was accepted to the dental hygiene program at UT Health San Antonio School of Dentistry (UTHSA).



Joel Elizondo (center) with David Rickey, DDS (left) and Vidal Balderas, DDS (right)

Joel Elizondo and Seve Trujillo began as administrative volunteers at the clinic helping with patient discharge, answering phones, responding to email requests, and a myriad of other front office tasks. Since they did not have any type of dental professional license, they were not allowed to volunteer in the clinical area, but this did not deter them! Joel volunteered for over two years while Seve volunteered for just over a year – all while working and studying for the Dental Admission Test. Joel also started a master's research program at UT Health while waiting for acceptance to the dental program; getting two research articles published in the Texas

Dental Journal. Their hard work and determination paid off when they received their letters of acceptance in January 2017.

Katie Grant was trained as a dental hygiene technician while serving in the Air Force. After separation, she earned her dental assistant certification and was hired by the clinic. She soon caught the professional eye of the dental hygiene director, Gino Garza, who encouraged her to pursue a degree in dental hygiene. Katie soon began the application process, all while working full time and raising a family. Katie received her letter of acceptance in April 2017.



Katie Grant (center) with Gino Garza, MS, RDH (left), and Vidal Balderas, DDS (right).

Our Dental Assistant Job Training Program provides disadvantaged young adults professional skills to move from below-subsistence to self-sufficiency. The fully underwritten program teaches participants how to work in dental clinics through both classroom and clinical training held onsite. The program design anticipates potential barriers to enrollment not only

by offering free tuition, but also by assuming costs of all barriers to education including uniforms and shoes, immunizations and bus passes, books and supplies, certification testing and CPR training fees. In exchange, participants are asked for 96 volunteer clinic hours in the year after program completion (one day each month).

Each year, we conduct three 18-week program cycles of 5-6 students each with the goal of successful completion for 100% of participants. Recruitment efforts target high schools, homeless shelters, and applicants who lack personal resources for career training. Four graduates of the program are currently employed by the clinic - three of these in leadership positions.

On June 24, 2017, graduation ceremonies were held for 14 participants completing the program within the past year. More than 150 friends and family members attended the event at First Presbyterian Church. Dr. Rickey gave the commencement address and Valerie Herbsleb the alumni address. Jennifer Gutierrez, Program Manager, recognized longtime volunteers Dr. Cheryl Beltrane and Dr. Roque Mariscal in her remarks.



2016-17 graduates of the onsite Dental Assistant Job Training Program. Longtime volunteer, Dr. Cheryl Beltrane (far left) and program manager, Jennifer Gutierrez (center).