

Healthy Smiles: Transportation is also a major obstacle for low-income families

Continued from Page A1

When screenings reveal students have a more serious dental problem or pain, Abbott said some parents don't know how to get their child the care they need.

"We go through the next steps with them," he said. "Is it trying to set them up with insurance? Is it getting them actually to the dentist? What can we do to help them get to the dentist?"

Molly Yeend, the strategic projects coordinator for the Oregon Community Foundation, said Healthy Smiles has found children who may have never been to a dentist before.

"(Abbott) is going in and helping to educate the kids so it kind of helps eliminate the fears that they might have about going to the dentist and understanding the importance of taking care of their teeth," she said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

John Jacob Astor Elementary School will participate in the Providence Healthy Smiles program in the coming school year.

Healthy Smiles guides parents and their children toward available dentists. However, children covered by the Oregon Health Plan have to see dentists

in Astoria, since there are no dentists in South County who accept the state's insurance. There are also no pediatric dentists in Clatsop County,

which creates a barrier for care if a child needs extensive work, or just can't be treated because they're too afraid and fidgety. The closest pediatric dentists

that take the Oregon Health Plan are in St. Helens and the Portland area.

"The issue is there's just not enough dental providers who will take OHP to see these folks who are either low income or no income," said Michael McNickle, the county's public health director.

McNickle and Abbott said transportation is also a major obstacle for low-income families in South County or rural areas who want to take their children to a dentist.

"Sometimes that's a huge barrier parents have to overcome is the distance that people have to travel, because if you're out in Jewell you have to come to Astoria for dental care and sometimes parents have to take entire days off work just to make that appointment.

"Then usually, I know when I go to the dentist, you go for the cleaning and then you have to go back, so that's like two

days off work. So if you do that twice a year then that's four days off work just taking your kids to the dentist if they're having any sort of problems at all."

Healthy Smiles also partners with the Oregon Health Authority, the local coordinated care organization, local dentists and others every year to provide a screening and services day at Lum's Auto Center in Warrenton.

McNickle said if children get access to dental care through programs like Healthy Smiles, they likely will not have as many dental issues when they get older.

"I think that what we'll see in the future, that the number of cavities and orthodontic issues and all those kind of things will go down. It's going to take some time, though," he said. "I sure am glad Providence has taken that on. I think that's a marvelous program."



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Passengers disembark a cruise ship at the Port of Astoria in 2018.

Transit: 'We'll make it happen. We always do'

Continued from Page A1

in Warrenton, including Fred Meyer, Costco and Walmart, where the crew can purchase groceries, toiletries and other items.

By the time the cruise ship season ends in late October, 18 ships will have visited Astoria this year. The number is expected to nearly double in 2020, when 33 cruise ships are scheduled to visit.

"Right now, we have enough buses to transport when we activate the Route 11 and Route 12 on cruise ship days," Hazen said. "But with the amount of cruise ships scheduled next year and the amount of passengers coming in, we won't have enough."

When passengers arrive at the Port, they are welcomed by the Clatsop Cruise Hosts, a group of volunteers in blue vests that help visitors navigate the city. Among other things, the volunteers set up a ticket kiosk at the Port, where passengers can purchase an all-day bus pass. Tickets are \$6 for guests, \$3 dollars for crew.

"It's on and off all day. Once they pay their ticket they don't have to pay again," said Cyndi Mudge, the volunteer coordinator. "It's really convenient."

Other transportation options include walking, renting a car or using tour buses for planned outings. But Mudge said the major-

ity of passengers use transit district buses.

The growing number of cruise ships will increase the burden on the two routes, and without enough bus drivers, passengers could have to wait longer.

"It's just a continual line for the first hour or two," Mudge said of the experience now. "Think of moving a thousand people. That's a lot of bus runs."

"Large ships, anything

2,000-plus, those are the ones that are a challenge," she said. "Moving even half of those passengers landing in our town (is) a lot of work."

One of the solutions Hazen has suggested is to acquire larger buses that can hold up to 100 people. Though steps have yet to be taken to acquire the buses, he is hopeful other agencies will donate used buses to Sunset Empire as there is

typically a fee to have older buses removed.

"It's one of the options. If it doesn't work out we just deal with what we have now," he said. "It may mean that when those ships come in people are going to have to stand in line longer."

Regardless of the expansion, cruise ship pressures and the shortage of drivers, Hazen remains confident.

"We'll make it happen," he said. "We always do."



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

The Northwest Oregon Housing Authority recently took ownership of more than 40 units at the Clatsop Shores Apartments in Seaside.

Seaside: 'There's more affordable housing needed ... as rents have gone up'

Continued from Page A1

The county began to merge its housing authority with the regional group in 2013 and has since been transferring over all its properties. The only property left to transfer is the Owens-Adair Building, a former hospital in downtown Astoria remodeled into a 46-unit complex for seniors and people with disabilities.

Todd Johnston, executive director of the regional housing authority, said the agency would assume the debt the county has on the Owens-Adair property and apply for money to fix some brickwork and replace the roof.

With the acquisition of Owens-Adair, the regional housing authority will own

180 units in the county, including 60 in Warrenton, 74 in Seaside and 46 in Astoria.

"There's more affordable housing needed, especially in the last few years as rents have gone up," he said.

Having a larger portfolio of housing helps the regional authority get financing for future projects, Johnston said. It recently secured more than \$14 million in federal, state and private funds to construct 60 units in Tillamook for people at or below 60 percent of the area median income.

The agency is partnering on the project with KemperCo LLC, a company contracted by the Tillamook County Housing Task Force to develop the project.

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