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## **Lower Columbia College Head Start Wins Innovation Award**

Lower Columbia College Head Start was recently awarded the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP's (WSA) Innovation Award at the association's fall meeting in October. Lower Columbia College Head Start won the award for its innovative dental home initiative. Sandy Junker, Head Start Director, accepted the award on behalf of Lower Columbia College Head Start. While the initial grant for this project was focused on Head Start children, the program expanded its reach efforts to focus on all Medicaid eligible children in two counties. The new expanded initiative educates child care centers and families homes about the importance of good oral health and teeth brushing. Their results have been staggering:

- ✓ For Medicaid insured children through age 5, dental utilization increased from 25% in 2007 to 52% in 2010.
- ✓ From 2009 to 2012 the Emergency Department of St. Johns Medical Center has treated fewer Medicaid or uninsured children under six years of age for dental needs. In 2009 the number of patients was 172 and for 2012 the number is only 65.
- ✓ Several years ago Cowlitz County was rated number 36 out of 39 counties in Washington State with the poorest oral health outcomes for children under six years of age—now the county is rated number 2 with 5,559 children enrolled in the oral health initiative and 4,459 children having made their very first visit to a dentist.

**Sandy Junker, Head Start Director, LCC Head Start, said the following:**

"Our work in Cowlitz County regarding oral health for Medicaid children under six years of age has been phenomenal. Due to the collaboration of many community partners including our local dentists and medical professionals we have been able to sustain this important program and be successful in decreasing dental caries."

**Joel Ryan, Executive Director, WSA, said the following**

“Lower Columbia College Head Start is proving that preventive oral care is not only a good way to keep kids healthy but can save taxpayers money. When children go untreated for cavities or other dental needs and end up in the emergency room with pain that is not only a major hardship for the child and family but a major expense for all of us. We are so delighted that Lower Columbia College Head Start has taken on this important initiative and we are happy to award them with this prestigious award.”

**More Information:**

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