

Smile For A Lifetime

TO CREATE SELF-CONFIDENCE, INSPIRE HOPE, AND CHANGE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES IN A DRAMATIC WAY



Dr. Robert Sheffield is a local orthodontist with offices in Brentwood and Antioch. In 2010, he was encouraged as he listened to a colleague speak passionately about the Smile for a Lifetime Foundation, which enabled his friend to provide orthodontic scholarships to the underserved in his community. And while the altruism was noteworthy, Dr. Sheffield was just as excited about the spark it created for participating orthodontists to support their own local “pay it forward” campaigns.

The national Smile for a Lifetime organization boasts a participating doctor network of 162 offices across 45 states and provinces in Canada. Since 2008 when it was founded, more than 3,000 scholarships have been awarded. Another 1,000 youth are expected to receive the gift of their own best smile when last year’s numbers are finalized.

In 2011, Dr. Sheffield established a local chapter of the Smile for a Lifetime Foundation to award orthodontic scholarships to young people in our area who are in need of orthodontic care that they would not otherwise be able to afford. To date, Dr. Sheffield’s office has awarded 56 scholarships totaling more than \$375,000 worth of complimentary care. Each year he awards 12 new scholarships through application drives ending in March and September.

It is difficult to overstate the impact that the Foundation has made in the lives of young people. Badly aligned or missing teeth can make children the object of taunting, humiliation, and bullying — sometimes forcing a young person into a state of painful shyness and retreat from full engagement in life. On the other hand, a nice smile is a priceless possession with the potential to instill a sense of confidence that can have a ripple effect into every part of life, transforming the classroom experience, which

can improve the odds of future success in the working world.

Dr. Sheffield’s chapter awards scholarships consistent with its mission. Applicants must complete a written application with short essays, provide school transcripts and letters of recommendation, and include proof of household income. Each application is reviewed by a nine-member board, which is headed by Tammany Brooks, a captain with the Antioch Police Department. The vetting process is designed to select recipients on the basis of genuine need — both orthodontic and financial. Financial need is determined by guidelines similar to those used in reduced lunch programs.

Dr. Sheffield donates his time and professional supplies at no cost, but the foundation also accepts donations to offset costs for necessary related procedures. To date, a network of 17 local dental professionals have generously provided *pro bono* services to several of the children, many of whom haven’t had proper dental care for years. Our community has rallied around these children to “pay it forward.” Thirteen general dentists and four oral surgeons have donated their services including cleanings, checkups and restorative work. Dr. Wendy Herman, who has been on the Smile for a Lifetime board since inception, recently noted that Dr. Sheffield was the only orthodontist in the area reaching out to the underserved kids in this way. Dr. Herman said she appreciates the huge help that Smile for a Lifetime has been and the great lift it has provided for young people in our area.

In spite of its ongoing success, one of the challenges facing the foundation is educating the community about its presence. Even when families learn about the opportunity, young people and their parents tend to resist the opportunity, imagining it to be too good to be true. And while the foundation cannot accept

everyone, for those willing to complete the application, the reward will last a lifetime.

Local public schools are a major source of applicants. And when you combine location with a dedicated teacher anxious to help children succeed in every way possible, everyone wins. Ali Guerrero, an Antioch High School Spanish teacher, regularly encourages her students to apply for the orthodontic scholarship. As an application deadline approaches, Ms. Guerrero mentors and assists her students in assembling the required information. As her students are awarded scholarships, the foundation has seen an uptick in fellow students completing the application.

Dr. Sheffield tries to ensure that program benefits extend beyond the treatment time. “We encourage recipients to consider ways they can use their own gifts to make a difference in the community,” Dr. Sheffield said. He noted that some recipients discuss future leadership roles in their church’s youth group, for example. Others might volunteer to help with a food drive at the local YMCA, or get involved in their school’s tutoring programs. The options are endless.

“I try to set an example for each of my patients,” Dr. Sheffield said. “Following completion of treatment, I take a moment to share with each of them the sense of fulfillment I derive from caring for people and send them off with a challenge to serve others in the future.”

The Smile for a Lifetime Foundation is always looking for new scholarship recipients. Applications may be downloaded from www.sheffieldortho.com. (Click on the Smile for a Lifetime link under About Us.)

*For more information, check www.s4l.org.
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