

# Homeless Not Toothless

## Dr. Jay Grossman, DDS, Provides Free Dental Care to Homeless Patients

By Nicole Behnam

**YOU'RE THE BOSS. YOU'RE INTERVIEWING A POTENTIAL EMPLOYEE. YOU LOOK AT HIS RÉSUMÉ. IT LOOKS GOOD. YOU TALK TO HIM ON THE PHONE TO SCHEDULE THE INTERVIEW. HE SOUNDS LIKE THE PERFECT CANDIDATE. HE SHOWS UP TO THE INTERVIEW. HE SHAKES YOUR HAND AND SMILES. ONLY HE HAS NO TEETH.**

"Thank you for coming. Who's next?"

Ever meet a homeless person with all of his teeth in tact? Doubtful. How can he ever get a job? Dr. Jay Grossman, DDS, answers, "Just come to me."

Dr. Grossman is a general, cosmetic, and implant dentist who volunteers a few hours a week in his Brentwood office to help those patients who are less fortunate.

Dr. Grossman feels that the necessity for free dental care is often mistakenly overlooked. "Dental pain saps energy, concentration, and drive," he says. "Unightly or missing teeth turn off potential employers—this can perpetuate the vicious cycle of homelessness."

When coming across a homeless individual, Dr. Grossman gives he or she his business card instead of spare change. After his first few business cards were given out, Dr. Grossman was not certain whether his offer would be taken advantage of, but he figured that it was the least he could do. "If I could provide the homeless with quality dental care, maybe it would raise their pride and dignity and they could gain employment," says Dr. Grossman.

Soon enough, dozens of poverty-stricken cardholders called Dr. Grossman's office to schedule appointments for free dental care. He soon realized, however, that more practitioners would be needed to make a significant impact within the homeless community. Thus, in 1993, Dr. Grossman set out to find other passionate, like-minded dentists by going straight to the board of the Western Los Angeles Dental Society to pitch his vision and concerns. They agreed to go forth with his proposed idea and establish the "Homeless Not Toothless" project, coined by Dr. Grossman himself. Within months, several dentists began volunteering for the cause.

Dr. Grossman realizes the project is not going to completely

cure the social problem of homelessness, but he makes a strong case for the difference it can make, "With the homeless, there are two categories; those who want to help themselves and those who, for whatever reasons, aren't interested. Obviously, we're only focusing on those who want to help themselves and be gainfully employed."

Patients are generally referred to participating dentists by the Venice Family Clinic, where they undergo an initial screening and, if necessary, a hot shower. Los Angeles dental laboratories have been very supportive as well, donating crowns, dentures, and other prosthetic devices.

Dr. Grossman remembers a recent remarkable experience with the Homeless Not Toothless project, "A homeless patient named Jon was on the street for 15 years. He came into my office 6 months ago with no teeth that I could salvage. After removing all of his teeth and replacing them, he is now fully employed, has one year of sobriety, has gotten into communication with his ex-wife, making amends, and has reestablished a relationship with his now 17-year-old son, who he hasn't seen in 15 years. Jon is now financially contributing to his son's upbringing, has cleared his legal issues, has a small savings account, and is a tax-paying, contributing member of society."

As of today, Dr. Grossman's office alone has provided over 1 million dollars of dental services to the homeless. This number does not include the 3 dozen other offices participating in West LA.

Dr. Grossman has been featured in a Department of Defense awareness campaign highlighting the community involvement and contributions of those who have served in the US Military. He is currently featured in a number of high-profile publications, including Time, People, Sports Illustrated, Scientific American, Better Homes and Gardens, and The New Yorker.

Many contributors have supplied funds for the lab costs of dental work for Homeless Not Toothless. The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Weingart Foundation, S. Mark Taper Foundation, The Ruth/Allen Ziegler Foundation, The Ahmanson Foundation, and The Skirball Foundation are just some who have donated generous amounts to the cause.

Homeless Not Toothless is officially recognized as a non-profit organization and now qualifies for grants and

government funding.

If you are a dentist and would like to volunteer 1 hour a month, please contact Dr. Grossman at (310) 820-0123.

*Requests for future information and contributions to expand this program and provide supplies can be sent to:*

*Dr. Jay Grossman  
C/O Homeless Not Toothless  
11980 San Vicente Blvd, Suite 507  
LA, CA 90049*

*Credit Card donations can be made online at  
[www.HomelessNotToothless.org](http://www.HomelessNotToothless.org).*

