

live

NORTH SHORE GUIDE TO ACTIVE LIVING



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

WEST Vancouver dentist Dr. Ali Behmard gets ready for his next patient. Behmard has joined forces with community activist Shane Collins to offer a free day of dental care to children in need.

Putting a smile on their faces

Duo teams up to offer free dental care to children in need

Caroline Skelton

cskelton@nsnews.com

TWO North Shore bright lights are proving that all it takes to help a lot of kids is a little work and a big idea.

Dr. Ali Behmard, a dentist at Park Royal Village Dental Centre, is getting together with his client, Shane Collins, founder of Athletics for Kids, to see if they can't put some very bright smiles onto the faces of local kids.

On one weekend day in March, Behmard is hoping to open his office, with himself and his staff working the day for free, offering their services to kids in need. His main motivation,

says Behmard, is simply to give back to the community.

"I think it's a nice thing to do, because dentistry's very expensive," he says.

Collins, who began A4K as a means of involving underprivileged kids in sports, says an initiative like this could help hard-working single parents and low-income families to get access to dental care for their children.

Sometimes, he says, there is an in-between group of families who don't make enough to afford regular dental care for their children, but may not qualify for government assistance, which covers basic dental expenses for kids.

"We're in a position to help those families," says Collins.

While the initiative isn't linked with A4K, the program, and Collins himself, gave Behmard inspiration as a way to help kids in the community. In the future, he's hoping that the single day could lead to bigger things, and possibly an ongoing program.

"The first step was to start maybe one day

and see where we go from there, and maybe we can organize other dentists to get involved as well," he says. "I think it's a great idea and a great cause."

Behmard and Collins also share an enthusiasm for giving back to a community that helped them along the way, as both had rocky starts in life.

Collins' father died when he was only 12, leaving the family destitute and sometimes homeless, while Behmard took some wrong turns early in life, dropping out of school in Grade 10.

Both were encouraged back onto very positive tracks by mentors and members of their communities, and now hope to provide the same encouragement and hope to others.

For more information on the program, or to find out whether your child qualifies for assistance, contact Behmard at www.prvdental.com. The British Columbia Dental Association also runs a Save a Smile program which, similarly, helps fund urgent dental care for underprivileged kids.