

Special Smiles at the Special Olympics Vermont Summer Games

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The Special Olympics Vermont Summer Games are the weekend of June 3 & 4. At the games there is a health village where local health organizations collaboratively work to provide free health care screenings for the athletes in three areas: Special Smiles, Healthy Hearing & Opening Eyes. Health care screenings are a special and unique “Reciprocal Relationship” for athletes and health providers that not only helps monitor athlete’s health – it also helps promote participation to current and future health providers. In the case of the Special Smiles, there are over 200 athletes screened by dentists, residents and dental students. If problem areas are identified, the athletes and their families are asked if they have a dental home, if not, there are resources provided.

People with intellectual disabilities often experience anxiety and trepidation when faced with a visit to a doctor or dentist, so screenings are done in a fun and welcoming environment. The Healthy Athletes programs also trains health care professionals who then go back to their practices with increased knowledge of and compassion for people with intellectual disabilities. This is a win-win!

During the weekend, dental students are given a tour of the UVM Dental Residency Clinic. This year there are 20 dental students registered to volunteer their time in the village. The UVM Residency clinic is home to four residents each year. In the newest class two of the four residents previously volunteered at Special Smiles and their decision to apply to the UVM Residency Clinic program was influenced by their visit during previous games. One of the new resident’s recently shared, “I can’t wait to go back again as a UVM Resident!”