



Smiles Change Lives' Candy Exchange Program is an efficient marketing tool for orthodontic offices nationwide.

Smiles Change Lives is leading a nationwide candy exchange drive that orthodontic offices can implement as a marketing tool and to improve engagement in their communities. To learn more about this program, *Orthotown Magazine* interviewed Smiles Change Lives Director of Marketing and Communications Andrea Umbreit.

Why is Smiles Change Lives (SCL) taking a lead role in coordinating candy exchange events nationwide?

Umbreit: Four years ago, we were searching for a way to support existing initiatives during October, which is National Orthodontic Health Month (NOHM). We helped a few practices in the Kansas City area host candy buy-back events and from there adapted the concept of a candy exchange. It's a fun and efficient marketing tool to reach new patients, strengthen relationships with existing patients and reinforce good habits during holidays. We've created an easy way for practices to gain media attention, celebrate NOHM and support an orthodontic charity. Since we have several years' lessons under our belt, we are able to support the practices who want to host a candy exchange and help spread the word about SCL in their community.

How is a candy exchange different from a candy buy-back?

Umbreit: Candy buy-back events are pretty straightforward. Kids bring in their candy and the doctor pays them a dollar per pound. We've taken this concept one step further to not only reward the kids who donate their candy, but also provide more opportunities for practices to build their community image and support charity.

This is how a Smiles Change Lives' candy exchange works: Each practice picks the time, location and duration of their

event. They market the event to current patients, as well as prospective patients. Kids donate some of their post-Halloween candy, and the practice provides healthy treats in exchange for their sweets. The practice or another local sponsor makes a donation to SCL equivalent to the weight of candy collected during the event. The practice then donates the candy to troops or charities while establishing a great outreach event and fundraiser for SCL.

What does SCL do to support the practices hosting candy exchange events?

Umbreit: SCL serves as the coordinating body for supplies, collateral, marketing materials, donated products and both national and local PR. We've created an event guide with resources, tips and a planning timeline which we hope helps practices to avoid making the mistakes we've already made. Banners, signage and event collateral are ready for each practice who signs on. Practices commit to an event sponsorship based on how large of an event they plan to have.

SCL also provides candy exchange bags for distributing to individuals who donate candy. Those bags come in handy to fill with the donated items solicited and distributed by SCL for each participating practice. This year we have our friends at 3M donating toothbrushes, Oral-B is donating toothpaste and Sonicare is donating power brushes for each venue to raffle off during their event. We're also lucky to have Orthotown as an

event sponsor, promoting our event in this great magazine and via their many online channels.

You mentioned some lessons learned. Can you share more about those learning experiences?

Umbreit: The public really likes to donate candy to ship to troops overseas. People will even go out and purchase candy on sale after Halloween just to bring more to the candy exchange. It's great to have a large card or notes available so that kids and adults can send a note of thanks to the troops along with their candy.

Research and determine several months in advance where to take your candy after the event. The day of the event is not the

This seems like a lot of work for a non-profit that is busy with national expansion. What do you hope to accomplish with this event?

Umbreit: It is a lot of work, but it gets easier each year with the support of great veteran practices like Dr. Steven Hechler, Dr. Dustin Burlison, Dr. Zachary Faber and the list goes on and on. We'd like our providers to get the most out of their work with SCL. Our orthodontists are the most wonderful, dedicated professionals and they are typically too humble to toot their own horns about their pro bono work with SCL. Why not use the candy exchange as a way to market their practices to new audiences and brand themselves as caring community-minded citizens? This event is a great way to communicate support of charity without

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time to worry about this, especially if there are 750 pounds of it in your waiting room. Shipping 750 pounds of candy to Iraq on your own is very expensive, or so we hear.

Plan how you will transport several hundred pounds of candy from your event venue to its final destination. Don't underestimate the weight of lollipops, hard candy and chocolate. It seems like it might fit in your trunk, but don't be fooled. One practice last year collected more than 1,000 pounds of candy (that's half a ton)! They had to call in a favor to a local Army base to request that a military transport vehicle stop by after the event. Soldiers loaded the truck with the candy and we think most of the candy made it back to the base, but we'll never really know if a few Kit Kats were skimmed off the top. It was still technically a donation to the troops, right?

Identify two or three target neighborhoods where you can find households to distribute candy exchange handouts in trick-or-treaters bags on Halloween night (SCL provides the templates for you). This is the easiest and most time-sensitive way to remind people that your office is hosting a fun, free, teeth-friendly event. Parents are very appreciative of having an outlet for getting rid of the many pounds of candy their children collect.

Ask SCL for help. Chances are we've tried, or one of our participating practices has tried what you're considering. Let us give you a sample, a resource, or just a few words of wisdom and encouragement.

feeling self-promoting. Personally, I think they should tell everyone about their work with SCL patients! They are heroes, miracle workers and a dream come true for every SCL case they take.

We also want each event to be an opportunity to tell the community about SCL. With more than 325 providers in 37 states, we need applicants to the program. Each grassroots event tells more people that SCL is eager to serve kids.

Finally, we sure do like the fundraising aspect of the event too! Each sponsorship dollar or candy-matching donation we receive helps us recruit more providers, serve more kids and expand our program more quickly. Just like all nonprofits, the economy has had an impact on us and this event is one way that practices can support SCL and get a tangible return on their investment – new paying patients!

How does a practice sign up?

Umbreit: Candy-snatching is easy. Visit www.smileschangelives.org/candyexchange to download an event guide. Fill out page 14 and fax to 816-421-3008. If you have questions or concerns, please contact brianna@smileschangelives.org or call 816-421-4949. You won't have to pry the candy out of their sweaty little hands – we promise! You'll be the good guy and they'll remember you for doing a good deed and supporting healthy habits and healthy smiles. Any practice interested in becoming a SCL provider can visit www.smileschangelives.org/learnmore for more information or e-mail partner@smileschangelives.org. ■