

WRITTEN BY NICHOLE HINES
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES STONEWALL



bracing for a *Positive Impact*

“Virginia Brown grew up during the Depression bullied by her peers,” says Andrea Umbreit, marketing coordinator for Smiles Change Lives, of the organization’s founder. “Kids are judged and don’t want to open their mouths.”

First impressions are everything. When we walk into a room and greet a stranger, the right thing to do is extend a hand for a firm handshake and exchange a warm smile. A smile is a natural reaction if there is a feeling of confidence about one’s appearance. There are more than 2 million children from low-income households suffering from moderate to severe misaligned teeth and/or jaws in the United States. They encounter years of bullying by peers that squelches self-confidence and can effect their grades and social interactions for many years. Quality orthodontic care for moderate to severe malocclusions—crooked teeth—goes beyond mere aesthetics with studies that show donning a disfigured smile increases the encounters of social and economic discrimination.

Smiles Change Lives (SCL) is a nonprofit organization founded in Kansas City, Mo., by Virginia Brown to provide braces to children from low-income families. Since 1997, SCL has grown to serve a five-state area including Missouri, Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, and Kentucky. Impending expansion areas include Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin.

Top 10 Ways to Adopt a Smile for the Holidays

1. Ask an employer to make a donation or use an existing employee gift-matching program.
2. Collect individual donations from your civic, social, or faith groups by hosting a holiday Adopt-A-Smile campaign.
3. Host a gift-giving silent auction with your family and friends during holidays and special occasions.
4. Create an online fundraising campaign through social-networking sites such as *Change.org*, MySpace, and Facebook.
5. Transform existing company or group events into benefits for the SCL Adopt-A-Smile program (golf tournaments, runs/walks, auctions, etc.).
6. Ask friends and family to make a donation to SCL in honor of a birthday, wedding, or holiday instead of traditional gifts.
7. Host a trivia or game night with proceeds benefiting SCL.
8. Encourage teenagers to choose SCL as the beneficiary of their dance-a-thon, lock-in, bake sale, tournament, or car wash.
9. Ask a local restaurant or business to host a party for your staff and allocate a percentage of the proceeds to benefit SCL.
10. Create a raffle contest among colleagues. The winner gets the prize, and SCL gets the funds raised from the sale of raffle tickets.


Smiles Change Lives would be honored to have you select it as your charity of choice.

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Endorsed by the American Association of Orthodontists for providing access to care, SCL is a program changing lives with the help of orthodontists who volunteer their time and services to a permanent contribution that will enhance self-confidence and well-being of every patient. The screening process is very rigorous, with a cost of \$500 per child for applications, clinical needs assessment, and oral-hygiene confirmation. Candidates must meet a series of criteria including residing in an SCL service area and agreeing to contribute \$250 toward orthodontic treatment. Candidates must also be aged 11 to 18 and have an annual income of \$10,000 or less per family member verified by a recent tax return.

SCL has a current waiting list of more than 300 children in Kansas City, and funding is needed to expand the treatment program. Volunteer orthodontists are standing by, waiting to begin treatment for approved applicants once SCL has adequate financial support. With the referrals from general dentists, dental clinics, case managers, churches, school districts, and other sources, it is imperative that SCL stringently abide by its application guidelines to ensure the volunteer orthodontists receive “the best, most dedicated families for care,” according to Umbreit. “One of 10 applicants gets braces,” she says.

In many cases, Umbreit says, the SCL treatment experience is the child’s first experience with a real doctor. SCL has a 98-percent treatment compliance success rate, which is attributed to the dedication of the kids, parents, and orthodontists, along with the \$250 contribution from the family.

Beyond physical appearance and self-assurance concerns, children who need braces may encounter physical discomfort due to a lack of quality dental care. Providing braces for a child in need can be an emotional makeover lasting a lifetime that will be reflected in a smile every time he or she walks into a room. 

For more information, visit www.smileschangelives.org.

Smiles Change Lives Wish List

1. Corporate sponsors for events, advertising, and marketing campaigns.
2. Donated printing and design services for mailings, newsletters, and collateral.
3. Development and purchase of a tradeshow display.
4. Four new computers for its growing staff, volunteers, and interns.
5. Adopt-A-Smile sponsors to meet the growing demand for the organization’s program—there is currently a waiting list of 300 in Kansas City.
6. Volunteers to serve on committees and work at events, in the office, and on the database.

For more information or details on any of the items listed above, visit www.smileschangelives.org or contact Andrea Umbreit at (816) 421-4949, ext. 229.

