

## 'Bombed out' teeth in Kenya saddens Tooth Fairy

This past July, on behalf of The Tooth Fairy Children's Foundation, founder CoraMarie Clark travelled along the dirt roads and open terrain of Kenya in search of Maasai children with problem teeth.

With a volunteer dentist and 3000 toothbrushes in tow, her aim was to provide dental care and oral hygiene education to Maasai children.

Working with the Maasai Development Project, CoraMarie, a trained dental hygienist, and a dentist hosted dental clinics in remote locations south of Nairobi, Kenya.

The Maasai children walked for miles to receive care. "It was sad to see how many children had 'bombed out' teeth," says CoraMarie.

Nevertheless, she administered dental anaesthetic, while the dentist did extractions, to get the children out of pain.

In her view, the overwhelming need for oral health care in Kenya was evident. CoraMarie pointed to the World Health Organization who estimates that 90% of the cavities in children in developing countries go untreated. "Rarely do these children see a dentist."

"When examining the Maasai children, we noticed there were few small cavities. Once decay started, it reduced healthy teeth to mere hollowed out shells

of what they once were. Much of the decay was in their baby teeth. Fortunately, these children will lose them and get a second chance with new permanent teeth. Unfortunately, without the proper knowledge and tools to take care of their teeth, the same destructive and decaying cycle will continue with their permanent teeth."

That scenario became reality in a 12-year-old girl they



Courtesy, The Tooth Fairy Children's Foundation

**CoraMarie Clark travelled along the dirt roads and open terrain of Kenya to help Maasai children with problem teeth.**

treated. All four of her new first molars had rotted right down to her gums. CoraMarie and her team were saddened to have to extract the permanent teeth on such a young person. "In these remote locations, children have no chance of ever having a bridge or implant to replace their missing teeth."

In all, CoraMarie estimates she saw upwards of 700 children during each of her oral hygiene presentations. As few Maasai speak English, she needed a local interpreter to help get her messages across. "When we asked the children how many had ever seen a toothbrush, only 30% of them raised their hand. Even fewer had ever owned a toothbrush."

"At the end of the presentations, and after being examined and treated in the dental clinic, everyone received their very own toothbrush.

With joyful appreciation, the children immediately began practicing what they had just learned, thrilled to add a toothbrush to their few worldly possessions."

The Foundation's hope is that oral hygiene education accompanied with the gift of toothbrushes will motivate children to brush their teeth so they can keep them for life.