

# Free dental initiative reaches out to needy

By Alex Bayes, NZ Herald  
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## **Dr Clarence Tam works on Teremoana David, who booked five members of his family in for appointments during the free dentistry clinic. Picture / Greg Bowker**

A pilot programme providing free dentistry to people with high needs has been launched in Mangere.

Under the initiative by Colgate and the Dental Association, 16 dentist volunteers are providing basic treatment over two days to people who need it badly.

"Most people who have come in have complex oral health problems," said oral health educator Deepa Krishnan.

"We have seen a lot of extractions - generally our patients have got to the point where we are not able to save their teeth."

Eighty people booked in for appointments at the Auckland University of Technology's Buckland Rd dental centre.

Most had been referred from the Counties Manukau District Health Board's dental pain community clinics.

Mangere resident Teremoana David needed two teeth pulled out during his appointment yesterday.

"I haven't been to the dentist in six years - I'm really afraid of them and I just put it off," he said.

"Mainly it's just because I can't afford it."

Five members of Mr David's family had booked in for appointments.

Volunteer dentist Jocelyn Logan said she wanted to be part of the programme to try to change public perception.

"Most members of the public think that dentistry is too inaccessible and expensive.

"I want to show them that dentists do have a kind heart and we're not all about the money."

Dr Logan said it was the first time she had been a part of something like this initiative, and she would be interested in volunteering again.

South Auckland was chosen as the clinic's location because a 2009 oral health survey found that people who lived in low socio-economic areas had poor oral health.

"We wanted to go somewhere where we could make a difference and create a relationship with the community," said Ms Krish-nan.

The report also found that two in five adults had avoided medical care for financial reasons in the previous year.

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