



► Ameen Hussein, *Dental Society President, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry*

It also happens to be the chosen charity for Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry. Dental Society President Ameen Hussein spoke to Atena Ahmed, Charities Officer at the school, to talk about why they chose this charity, their ongoing commitment to helping and plans for the future.

AH Tell us a bit about the charity

AA Todos Juntos is one of the few charities specialising in free dentistry in the third world. The charity was founded in 2006 in Argentina by Fiona Watson who noticed that the children who attended the soup kitchens in the slums around the city had serious tooth decay and had often lost their secondary teeth. The Argentine government do not provide help for these impoverished children whose life can be seriously impaired by their inability to smile with confidence.

Since 2007, Todos Juntos Children's Trust UK have been fund-raising here in the UK through events and grant donations. Over a period of three years we raised enough money to open three 'Sonrisa' Dental Clinics (1, 2 and 3) and they now see up to 6,000 children a year and provide 30,000 restorative dental treatments totally free of charge. Alongside these clinics, they also run oral hygiene sessions in local kindergartens and primary schools teaching preventative care and showing children how to care for their teeth – many of these children have never seen a toothbrush. The numbers speak for themselves.

With regards to oral diseases, 6-year-old children presented with a dmft of 4.6 in 2008 which is nearly 3 times the dmft of 5-year olds in England (1.7). Most children living in the slums of Buenos Aires have poor access to education and health services as well as inadequate supply of food which prove to be social risks of caries development.

AH Why did Barts choose Todos Juntos as their charity?

AA There were several reasons for choosing to support Todos Juntos. Firstly, as we are a Dental Institute it was only fitting that we chose to support a dental charity. Having seen the detrimental effects poor oral health can have in the UK, which is a first world country one could only imagine how this may be exaggerated in more deprived areas across the globe. We hope that our contributions to Todos Juntos can be a driver for change for ourselves and other dental institutes across the UK to help children all over the world to improve their oral health and subsequently their general health.

In addition, being a Dental Society, we have limitations as to how much money we can raise each year due to our size and influence. With this in mind we wanted to make sure that any money we generate for charity is used in the most effective manner. With Todos Juntos being a small charity who engage in such beneficial work, we believe they were the right choice to achieve effective altruism.

AH How have you looked to raise funds for the charity this year?

AA The aim of fundraising this year was to organise events that were fun and inclusive whilst remaining on a tight budget to maximise our profit. For our bake sales, several local bakers and patisseries were kind enough to donate their delicious baked goods so that we could sell them on campus for both students and staff to buy. We also hosted a baking competition – our East London, student-style version of the *Great British Bake Off*. It was a great opportunity for students at the university to show off their amazing talent and dexterity in baking and decorating cakes. Their peers were then able to try samples of each of the cake submissions and award scores to determine the winner. This was a new idea that worked well to engage both staff and students and raised lots of money.

Other events included Games Night and Beer Race and we are ending our academic year with a charity skydive. This is a once-in-a-lifetime, exhilarating opportunity that gives students a chance to challenge themselves whilst raising money for charity. Despite the charity role in our dental society being a fairly new position, we have done exceedingly well to fundraise, and we hope to continue our charitable work for many years to come.

AH Why it's important for schools to engage with charities and give back?

AA It's always important to recognise the



IN PROFILE: TODOS JUNTOS

Todos Juntos Children's Trust is a small grassroots charity registered in the UK and Argentina which provides free dental care and oral hygiene education to children in the slum areas of Buenos Aires.





abilities that we have, as students, to make a difference – whether that is in the environment we work in or impacting other parts of the world. Being from such privileged backgrounds, where we have easy access to education, health services and an abundance of opportunities, it is often easy to underappreciate the privileges that have almost been spoon-fed to us. Therefore, engaging with charities and gaining an insight into other people's backgrounds, cultures and differences, can be a very humbling and self-rewarding experience.

Moreover, by giving back to even the smallest of charities, like Todos Juntos, we are getting that extra step closer to rectifying the vast health inequalities swept across the globe.

Ultimately, as dental students supporting charities throughout our academic journey, we are reflecting the most fundamental principle of what dentistry represents – helping people regardless of their background.

AH *What are the future plans for the charity?*

AA Todos Juntos are looking to relocate their first clinic, Sonrisa 1, to another health centre in a nearby slum area as the current site where the clinic is located is no longer available to the charity. The fund-raising for the relocation of the new clinic will take priority for the next six months. Alongside this fundraising for the new clinic, they are looking to expand their Oral Hygiene Programme in all the primary schools nearby. This programme is proving very successful in preventing future dental decay. The fundraising the charity requires for this programme will be spent primarily on toothbrushes and toothpaste to handout and dental teaching aids for the dentists to teach with.

Todos Juntos is also working hard to recruit dental ambassadors in every dental school in the UK to raise awareness of their work and to raise funds on their behalf. Naomi Jadwat, Trustee of Todos Juntos, has often said the enthusiasm of students to raise money for this grass roots charity has been tremendous and heart-warming, and we wish to continue that.

AH *What can students learn by engaging with overseas trips to work with charities like Todos Juntos?*

AA Students can gain an eye-opening experience into the language, culture and lifestyles of other populations overseas and an overall expansion on their worldview. One of the harsh realities to observe in Argentina are the immense income inequalities and debilitating poverty rates. The richest 10th of the country has 23 times more wealth than the poorest, with 50% of children under the age of 14 living in poverty. Although the concentration of wealth is very high, there is a lack of social responsibility from Argentina's leaders. By recognising these issues, students can be motivated and inspired to tackle the poverty crisis through voluntary services.

It is also striking to observe and learn about the differences in dentistry abroad in comparison to the UK. In Argentina, the responsibility of dental public health lies with local authorities and its organisation is still in its initial phases. The ratio of dentists in Buenos Aires to population is 1:700 and there are only four university dental schools in the



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city, which places a large number of students in each year thus compromises the quality of teaching.

Furthermore, dental public health and preventative dentistry are not well integrated into the curriculum as they are in UK dental schools. Within the UK, our health care systems are targeting risk factors and preventative approaches to tackling chronic diseases. Although programmes have been implemented to combat non-communicable diseases in Argentina, most of the funding and resources are dedicated to treating infectious diseases and maternal-child health, which poses limitations on prioritising prevention.

Treatment guidelines highlighting the effectiveness of preventative measures have been implemented in Argentina. However, the cost-effectiveness of these measures and whether or not GDPs would actively apply them may pose as limiting factors in this agenda.

It is these vast differences in the way dentistry is practiced and the prevalence of disease and deprivation that can be an enlightening experience for students. Perhaps money isn't always easy to donate to charity what with being on a student budget, but we can certainly donate our time. Aside from differences in background and prevalence of disease, it is important to also appreciate the cultures and art that a country or community have to offer, which are often overshadowed by negative portrayals in the media. It is easy to pity third-world countries and assume what struggles they go through. However, it may be nice to learn that they have simplistic lifestyles, free from materialistic goals and modern stresses, which are all they need to be happy.

Ameen Hussein and Atena Ahmed ■

DOI: 10.1038/s41406-019-0057-6