Investing in the Future of Dentistry Starts Earlier Than We Think

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As dentists, we spend a great deal of time talking about the workforce challenges facing our profession. Whether it's finding qualified dental assistants, front office staff, hygienists, or encouraging more young people to pursue careers in oral healthcare, we all recognize that the talent pipeline has become increasingly difficult to sustain.

After several years as a Corporate Work Study partner with Arrupe Jesuit High School, I've come to believe that one of the most effective solutions begins much earlier than most of us realize.

Denver Tech Dentistry has partnered with Arrupe Jesuit's Corporate Work Study Program since 2008. During that time, we've welcomed talented high school students into our practice, where they contribute in meaningful ways while experiencing the day-to-day realities of a professional dental office. What continues to impress me isn't just how capable these students are, it's how transformative early career exposure can be.

One-third of Arrupe students identify healthcare as the primary industry they are interested in learning more about. The Corporate Work Study Program gives those students something many teenagers never receive: the opportunity to see what a healthcare career actually looks like before they choose a college major or professional path.

One student who immediately comes to mind is Luz Castrejon, AJHS Class of 2018. Luz joined Denver Tech Dentistry as a freshman. Looking back on that experience, she shared:

> *"I was only fourteen when I was placed at Denver Tech Dentistry as my first CWSP job, and this was where I began planting the seeds for my passion for dentistry. My CWSP experience allowed me to further develop my capabilities in leadership, adaptability, and networking."*

Watching students discover what excites them is one of the greatest rewards of participating in this program. Luz's experience in our office helped shape her academic journey. In college, she pursued research related to dental anthropology through a National Science Foundation funded project, building on the curiosity and interest that first developed during her time in our practice.

Another student whose story has stayed with me is Juan Madera.

Juan spent two of his four years at Arrupe working at Denver Tech Dentistry. While his path ultimately led him beyond dentistry, it remained firmly rooted in healthcare. Today, Juan serves as a Pediatric Emergency Nurse at Denver Health. His experience reminds me that our responsibility isn't simply to recruit future dentists. By opening our practices to young people, we introduce them to the broader world of healthcare, helping them discover where their talents and passions can make the greatest impact.

That is what makes the Arrupe Corporate Work Study Program so unique.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Andrea Taylor is a general dentist, partner at Denver Tech Dentistry and team dentist for the Colorado Avalanche. Originally from Kansas, she earned her dental degree from Creighton University School of Dentistry before making Colorado her home. Outside the office, she enjoys exploring all the Centennial State has to offer with her husband and three children.

When patients ask about the students working in our office, I genuinely enjoy telling them about Arrupe Jesuit. I explain that these students aren't simply shadowing; they're balancing meaningful professional responsibilities while completing an exceptionally rigorous college preparatory education. They arrive prepared, eager to learn and ready to contribute. Our team benefits from their enthusiasm and support, and our patients love seeing young people being welcomed into a professional environment.



For our practice, this partnership has never been about filling an entry-level position. It has always been about investing in people.

The workforce challenges facing dentistry won't be solved overnight. But if we want more young people to consider careers in dentistry and healthcare, we need to invite them into our profession earlier. We need to let them see what we do, ask questions, build confidence and imagine themselves in these spaces.

Over the past decade, I've watched students grow into confident college graduates, healthcare professionals and community leaders. Some stay connected to dentistry. Others find their calling elsewhere in healthcare. Every one of them leaves with a clearer understanding of what is possible.

Arrupe Jesuit is college preparatory high school in the Tennyson neighborhood of Denver whose innovative educational model combines rigorous academics with professional work experience.

Every student participates in the Corporate Work Study Program, spending one day each week in a professional workplace. Students earn a significant portion of their tuition while gaining real-world experience, and employers receive meaningful administrative and operational support.

AS DENTAL PROFESSIONALS, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO MORE THAN CARE FOR PATIENTS.

We can help cultivate the next generation of healthcare professionals:
one student,
one relationship and
one workday at a time. ■

To learn more about Arrupe's Corporate Work Study program, please visit the arrupejesuit.com or reach out to Erin Breen at ebreen@arrupemail.org.