

Breaking Down Cultural Barriers on the Tooth Taxi

Imagine you are a nine-year old boy born in Korea and your family recently moved to this country to seek a better life. You are surrounded by new sights and sounds, people who look and act differently than you, and you speak very little English. You might be a little intimidated.

Changhyun “Jay” Park, a third-grade student at Hazeldale Elementary school in Aloha, whose family had just moved to the United States, made an emergency visit to the Tooth Taxi after he collided with another student while playing in gym class and the gums around his two front teeth started bleeding.



In a panic, Jay’s teacher quickly brought him over to the van, and even though he was in pain, he stopped and removed his shoes out of courtesy before climbing on board. He had not spoken to anyone besides his family for a long time and his teachers were unsure how to communicate with him about his injury.

As luck would have it, Tooth Taxi Dental Assistant Chanel Kim spoke fluent Korean. “Jay was clearly upset by the injury, and I could see he was struggling to understand what was going on around him,” said Chanel. She spoke to him softly in Korean to assure him everything was going to be okay, and he looked up in surprise when he heard her speaking in Korean and gave her a faint smile of recognition.



Chanel and Tooth Taxi dentist Dr. Jennifer McLeod took x-rays of Jay’s mouth and determined that the accident had caused no serious damage to his mouth. However, they noticed Jay needed other unrelated dental treatment which they provided on the van that day as Jay watched cartoons on the ceiling video screen.

As Jay was finishing up his treatment, his teacher brought him Sushi for his lunch which he ate in the dental chair as Chanel and Dr. McLeod looked on. They had helped take care of Jay’s playground emergency, provided important dental care, and made a new friend who would stop by the Tooth Taxi frequently during the week to say hello and speak Korean with Chanel.



“Jay’s visit reminded me that we do a lot more than just provide dental care on the Tooth Taxi,” said Dr. McLeod. “We are helping to breakdown cultural barriers, providing a positive experience which helps eliminate the fear of going to the dentist, and teaching valuable lessons about the importance of good oral health.” Chanel added, “And they are teaching us about compassion and appreciating the value of every individual life regardless of where someone comes from or how much money they make.”