



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

ARIELLE CAWSTON

Breaking Down Barriers and Changing the Mindset about Dental Care for Future Generations Increases Overall Health

Arielle Cawston was a dental assistant who wanted to do more and provide a trusting environment for oral health care, so she pursued a career in dental therapy. Today, she is proud to be one of the first female dental therapists practicing in Washington, which she achieved by completing both the Ilisaqvik College program as well as a 400+ hour preceptorship with her current supervising dentist.



Arielle knows firsthand the trauma that can be associated with going to the dentist. She's studied how history affects people as part of her coursework at Washington State University, but she also recalls events from her own youth – *"I must have been about 5 years old, when I was sitting in a dental chair crying that my tooth hurt after receiving a shot, the dental assistant came up to me, slapped my hand and told me to stop because it didn't hurt. I never wanted to go back to the dentist, and I didn't, until I was about 15, when I broke a tooth and needed to have one of my permanent adult teeth extracted."*

Arielle doesn't want other children to have to endure what she experienced.

As a dental therapist, Arielle is motivated to change people's mindset about dental care, but she recognizes that sentiments are rooted deep and are often passed down through families. She understands that when parents show fear, children will mimic their behavior.

With dental therapy, there's an opportunity to change the outlook for future generations. Arielle looks at the body as a whole and talks to her patients about dentistry and how it affects their overall health. She says, *"Patients are people, not just mouths."*

Arielle grew up in the community she is currently serving, consistently watching healthcare providers come and go. **She chose to pursue dental therapy because she recognized that her people, her family and her children deserved better.** Even further, Arielle was attracted to the culturally competent element of dental therapy and the potential for a provider that deeply understands the community in which he or she serves.

Her main objective for the Colville Reservation is to focus on preventive care for patients in order to avoid problems before they start.

Going forward, Arielle knows that local youth will see her career path and the meaningful contribution dental therapy has made to the practice itself. She also hopes that they'll see that health care professionals can and do come from their own communities and that, with hard work and dedication, they too can achieve their goals.