

FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY



ALICE GRASVELD

I'm a **dental hygienist**, medical anthropologist, and founder of **The Healthy Teeth Foundation**, on a mission to bridge science and real-world impact. As a **PhD student** at the Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam, I dive deep into oral health research, exploring how it connects to overall health and society—from the classroom to communities.



THE HEALTHY TEETH FOUNDATION

Over 80% of children in African townships suffer from tooth decay, with toothaches being a leading cause of school absenteeism—trapping them in the cycle of poverty. At **The Healthy Teeth Foundation**, we tackle this through oral health and **WASH (water, sanitation & hygiene)**. Simple habits like handwashing with soap and brushing with fluoride toothpaste can prevent toothaches and diarrheal diseases, keeping children healthy and in school.



FROM RESECH TO REAL IMPACT

WHAT INSPIRED MY TRANSITION INTO FIELDWORK?

I first started as a volunteer for other NGOs in Kenya and South Africa working on water and dental issues. Actually, I was inspired to study Cultural Anthropology after joining a dental charity in Kenya. I was intrigued by how other cultures deal with their (oral) health. After finishing my master in Medical Anthropology, and after 10 years of volunteering for other organisations, I started my own foundation. This year, The Healthy Teeth Foundation will do oral health & WASH projects in poor neighbourhoods in The Netherlands, Kenya and South Africa.



THE SKILLS THAT SHAPED MY JOURNEY

Cultural sensitivity, the ability to build rapport, respect, patience, admiration for and interest in other cultures. However, I wished to learn about how poverty works and it's intertwined with history and politics.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTION

Poverty is a major challenge in the slums we work in. Unfortunately, we cannot solve poverty but we solved some basic necessities. To address this, we built a water pump and donated several water tanks and water trucks.



FROM RESEARCH TO ORAL HEALTH IMPACT

With The Healthy Teeth Foundation we apply a **participatory action research (PAR)** approach. This means that we do qualitative research together with the community members and then co-create an action plan to improve oral health. This often means that we also have to improve the water supply. Without water, there is no hygiene or health. We also collaborate with other dental charities on dental outreaches and roll out supervised toothbrushing programmes at primary schools.



SUGGESTIONS FOR EARLY CAREER PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS

Find your own unique niche , in my case it is the 'Anthropology of oral health'. Invest a lot of time in building a network and gaining experience in the field.

Due to climate crisis, there are several opportunities in the field of contribute in the field of WASH (water, sanitation & hygiene).



[HTTPS://WWW.HEALTHYTEETHFOUNDATION.COM/](https://www.healthyteethfoundation.com/)



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