

Emma-Beth scores great Australian bite

Michelle Pountney

health reporter

A TRIP to the orthodontist is often associated with fear by both patient and parent.

But for Emma-Beth White-Reece the phone call confirming she could visit the orthodontist to get the braces she wanted was cause for celebration.

"I was really glad and happy ... there are no real words to describe it," she said.

Emma-Beth, who now sports braces in her school colours of yellow and blue, has known for several years that her crooked teeth would need the device to help them straighten.

Her front teeth protruded, she had a 13mm gap between her upper and lower teeth, and her teeth were so crowded she could not close her lips properly.

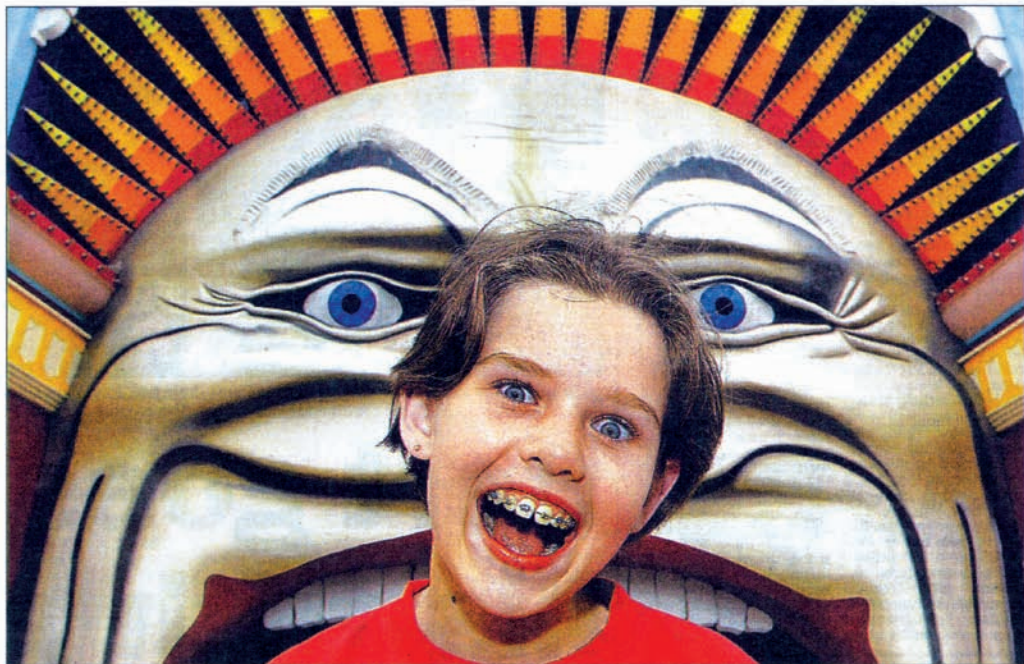
But with family finances tight, she faced a long wait on the public dental health list for treatment.

To her delight, she was plucked from the list to become the first patient under the Give A Smile program.

Since June, Emma-Beth has had braces on her top teeth and an appliance to help move her lower jaw forward. She will soon have braces fitted to her lower teeth.

"I am really enjoying seeing my smile improve and I am feeling more confident," she said.

Australian Society of



Braced for action: Emma-Beth White-Reece, 10, shows off her new smile outside Luna Park. Picture: IAN CURRIE

Orthodontists president Ted Crawford founded the program a year ago and since then more than 200 young Australians had begun orthodontic treatment.

More than half of the ASO's 395 members, have

agreed to take one patient each from the public dental health waiting list each year. Many have taken more than one.

Each full course of treatment takes about two years and would typically cost \$5000 to \$7000 per patient.

It typically involves fitting braces and retainers to allow the teeth to fit better within the mouth.

In one year the Give A Smile program has reduced public dental waiting lists by 10 per cent, saving taxpayers more than \$1 million.

"The goal of Give a Smile is simple and heartfelt; it's to give a smile both figuratively and literally to people in our community who face financial difficulties as well as having significant orthodontic needs," Dr Crawford said.

Dr Crawford said the work would eventually be carried out under the public system, but patients faced long waits.

Dr Crawford hopes to have more than 300 orthodontists signed up to the program this year.