

# The Voice of Suitcase Clinic

www.suitcaseclinic.org

November 2011



## Suitcase Clinic volunteers at Homeless Connect

By AILEEN XU

On Friday, November 4, 2011, volunteers of the Suitcase Clinic participated in the third annual Homeless Connect Health Fair.

The event, put on by the Berkeley Food and Housing Project (BFHP), was the result of months of planning. The primary coordinator was former-Suitcaser and current-BFHP Health Care Coordinator, DJ Freitas. Current Suitcasers involved in the planning process included clinic coordinators, members of admin, and the volunteer coordinators from General Clinic.

Services at this year's Homeless Connect were spread out between the Trinity Church and the Berkeley Free

Clinic.

Representatives from different organizations around the area were present at the main entrance with information about a variety of things ranging from resources to sexual health. Flu shots were offered free of charge. Professional services ran throughout the day with medical services offered through a mobile medical clinic. The dental service which typically involves a lottery system and an undetermined wait time at General Clinic took clients in for triage throughout the day. Clients were provided a free bag lunch and everyone was given a bag of hygiene supplies as well as a free pair of socks.

The Suitcase Clinic was given a dedicated room for its services. Throughout the

day, many volunteers from more seasoned Suitcasers to students in the class this semester filed in to help out at the services, which included footwashing, haircutting, massage, optometry referrals and out-of-clinic referrals. Suitcase also provided neatly folded clothes and caps.

Turn out at Homeless Connect this year, though not as high as had been expected, was nonetheless promising. Client feedback was overall positive. One client who had gotten a haircut and footwashing remarked, "I feel so pampered right now...it's like I'm at a spa and I love my new haircut."

Due to the number of volunteers, many clients were exposed to the Suitcase Clinic for the first time and have expressed the desire to visit one of the three clinics in the future. This year's Homeless Connect successfully provided numerous clients with sought-after services, and was an opportunity for the Suitcase Clinic to increase publicity in the community.



Photo by Aileen Xu  
Haircutting was one of the services Suitcase Clinic offered at Homeless Connect.

## Dental service growing bigger, pushing limits

By STACY KIM

Those of us who can afford dental care often take it for granted. We rarely have to worry about severe oral health issues, because even sporadic visits to the dentist can prevent such problems. Yet while we complain about the numbing shot that made it hard to eat for a couple of hours, over 12 million people in California alone have great difficulty accessing dental care.

The Suitcase Clinic dental section, in collaboration with that of the Berkeley Free Clinic, provides free continuous dental care to the underserved. Though patient intake is limited, our program offers exams, x-rays, cleanings/deep cleanings, fillings, extractions and even anterior root canals.

Our dental section is growing rapidly; we now have 4 dentists and 3 licensed hygienists in

addition to volunteer student assistants. We rely on the generosity of many dental companies and vendors for donations of supplies and instruments to keep our clinic running. Unfortunately, we are still turning away twenty to forty people each week because we are limited by time and space.

Due to the shortage in funding, we are also unable to provide comprehensive care. Imagine that you have a toothache and because you cannot afford a visit to the dentist, your tooth becomes infected after a couple of weeks.



Photos given by Stacy Kim

That is bad news – in the years 2005-2008, 16% of children ages 6-19 and 23% of adults ages 20-24 with untreated dental caries died from

lack of treatment. Fortunately, you're selected into the Suitcase Clinic dental program; however, your troubles are far from over.

After your check-up, your dentist tells you that he's afraid that the tooth could cause you serious problems. But since you are already missing some teeth, another pulled tooth may cause your jaw to shift or suffer bone atrophy. In order to preserve your jaw and teeth,



Dental coordinators Melissa Lin and Stacy Kim pose with a client who received dental care.

you would require a crown or implant work.

Regrettably, our clinic is not able to offer dental crowns, implants or removables

because of the high cost of these items, though we are working hard to remedy this need. This is true across the board for free dental clinics throughout the nation.

The dental needs of our nation and our Bay Area community are far from being met. The Suitcase Clinic dental section is striving to expand so that we may provide continuous and comprehensive dental care to more clients. Our goal is to build back our clients' smiles so that they may be healthy in all aspects of their lives.

## Suitcase Clinic partners with Laundry Love

By ALEXIS CAPTANIAN

If you were to walk by the corner of Telegraph Avenue and Parker Street on a Tuesday night, you might notice that Bing Wong Wash Center looks decidedly more social than an average evening at the laundromat. Folks are talking to each other, smiling.

This open and friendly atmosphere is a result of Laundry Love Berkeley, a UC Berkeley student organization that facilitates a laundry service on the last Tuesday of the month.

From 6-8:30pm, laundry necessities are provided free of charge so that community members in need may wash and dry their clothes. As the laundry machines hum in the background, volunteers and clients mingle, and friendships form. Sounds great, right?

We think so too. That's why Suitcase Clinic is very excited to be partnering with Laundry Love. Both General and Youth Clinics now refer clients to Laundry Love, who in turn recommends Suitcase Clinic to its clients who inquire about other services.

Since Laundry Love and General Clinic happen at the same time, the SHARE Coordinators walk to Bing Wong Wash Center and back before discussion to drop off anyone wanting to do laundry and to pick up those interested in Suitcase services. We just started this arrangement last month, and we are optimistic about the benefits it will have for everyone involved.

It is always a pleasure to build connections with other community organizations. We are grateful to Laundry Love for being equally as enthusiastic about collaborating.

## Suitcase alumni reflect on their experiences *Suitcase philosophy builds strong personal platform*

By DIPPY BHATTACHARYA

My name is Dippy and I graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 2010. I am currently an M.D.-Ph.D. student at the Yale School of Medicine. When I began volunteering at the Suitcase Clinic in 2008, I could not have predicted how much my personal and professional life would be shaped by my time there.

At first, it was rather intimidating for me to talk to our homeless clients. I couldn't understand how I was supposed to empathize with people with vastly different backgrounds and life experiences than my own. I was afraid that I would have no way to relate to them. However, by the end of my first week at Suitcase, I realized that sharing common experiences isn't the key to connecting with others; they key is to be a good listener. I learned to never make assumptions about whether I could or

could not relate to a client. I learned the power of open-ended questions, like "how does that make you feel?" in helping others tell their stories. With experience, I learned to better phrase and



time my questions, and to provide a safe and respectful space for open communication.

As a medical student, I spend a lot of time in the hospital acquiring patient histories. I feel comfortable asking deeply personal and often difficult ques-

tions about a patient's lifestyle, illnesses, and fears. I feel comfortable listening to patients and providing them with a safe space. Listening shows that you respect and care for your patient. It reduces the stress and anxiety

of a vulnerable person and it helps elucidate important facts about your patient's illness, allowing you to create a more personalized and effective medical treatment plan. It is because of the Suitcase Clinic that I acquired this immensely valuable medical skill.

I find myself using these skills not only in the hospital, but also in my personal life, when making

new, as well as retaining old friends. Talking to people is one of my favorite hobbies, and I will always appreciate the Suitcase Clinic for giving me a platform to develop the skill to talk to and connect with people from all walks of life.

By JESSICA LAU

I stumbled upon the Suitcase Clinic spring semester of my freshman year, spontaneously accompanying a friend to a Thursday night info session. I was accepted into HMS 98/198 as part of the Unity small group spring '09 and began attending General Clinic every Tuesday. I continued to serve as Volunteer Coordinator '09-10 and Unity UGSI spring '10.

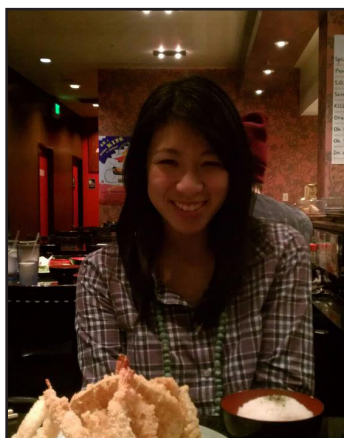
Suitcase was different from anything I had experienced, particularly in connecting with people whose walks of life differed greatly from mine. I was challenged to reconcile the differences in ethnic identity and privilege between myself and our clients.

Clinic also exposed me to the concept of case working – a way of relating to folks based on empathy, solidarity and advocacy.

It inadvertently sharpened my active listening and communication skills in forming relationships with others. I learned to lead and facilitate. I strategically

evaluated our volunteer retention efforts and restructured parts of our summer training.

My time with Suitcase ended as I struggled to pinpoint my



motivations for being there. I felt a disconnect between my involvement at a healthcare clinic with my desire to study business. Was I just doing "charity work" on the side? I was constantly torn between the two seemingly unrelated worlds.

Looking back, I realize that the tangible skills I gained are relevant to the business world as well. As a salesperson at LinkedIn, I too empathize with clients as they experience difficulty in their recruiting efforts. I strategize in communicating the value of our tools and help them navigate through the different services we provide. Both organizations connect people together on a common platform and space.

I thank my friends and mentors in Suitcase who planted seeds in me to pursue social change in all that I do.

I am now involved with our LinkedIn for Good initiative to 1) help nonprofits leverage our network to raise funds and 2) challenge the ways in which people disregard their volunteer experience as an integral part of their professional identity.

I love and embrace my current role as an INtrepeneur – one who makes change from within – and work relentlessly towards redeeming the corporate world as a vehicle for social change.

# Students gain perspective through client interactions

## Seeing the value of Suitcase Clinic's optometry service

By MORWENNA ROWE

When shadowing for the first time at general clinic, I was taken aback by just how valuable the services we provide are to Berkeley's homeless population. I spent the evening case-working with two clients who both received optometry services. The first client had travelled all the way from his usual hang-out spots in Oregon and Washington just to come to the Suitcase Clinic in Berkeley because he had heard about our optometry services. This client needed a new pair of glasses and was able to receive an eye exam and schedule an appointment to get an eyeglass prescription all in one evening.

The second client who received optometry services that evening was in desperate need of a new pair of glasses as well. This woman was subsisting on a pair of glasses that were 10 years old, constantly falling apart, and didn't fit her more recent prescription. This client has medicare coverage so was able to get numerous eye exams in the past, but could not afford the co-pay for actually purchasing the glasses. When listening to this woman's struggles in obtaining glasses, I couldn't imagine the frustration she had. This woman had numerous eye exams only to be disappointed again and again because she couldn't afford to pay for the glasses she so desperately needed. Luckily, she was able to receive her free preliminary eye

exam and was schedule for her appointment to receive her thorough eye exam and order a new pair of glasses.

In both cases, both clients had been through significant ordeals for a service that many of us may take for granted. This experience has added on to my perspective of not taking my privileges as a Berkeley student for granted. Additionally, I was amazed by the number of professional and academic programs that assist with the Suitcase Clinic. The Berkeley optometry students that I interacted with were incredibly professional and personable with clients and really took their time with each eye exam to give the best care. Seeing others dedicate their time to such a great cause was reassuring and beautiful to see.

## Learning a valuable lesson from a homeless man

By DEREK WONG

I met John\*, a homeless man, over this summer. On that day, I had decided that I would invite the first homeless person I saw to eat lunch with me, and I saw John as I was exiting the Walgreens on Telegraph. He unfortunately responded back saying that he was in a rush to gather enough money to buy a bus fare to Oakland, but would appreciate a simple chicken sandwich to eat along the way. Then a man approached John and asked if he had lost his stereo. John said that he had, and the man replied that he had found it and would return it to him right away. Then something

utterly surprising and amazing happened. John looked at that man in his eyes and resolutely said, "Keep it." The man's mouth dropped. My mouth dropped. Here was a homeless man giving away his only possession to another man he didn't even know. I was shocked. And ashamed. Here am I, often lacking the heart to give away my money, possessions, and even time to help those in need.

I came to meet John with the expectations that I would help him. But he was the one who helped me. He showed me that he was the one who was empowered, and I was the one driven only by sympathy. Since then, I can truly say

that John and I have built a close relationship. We will often chill together on the streets and laugh as people give us dumbfounded stares wondering why an old black man is hanging out with a young Asian teenager. We laugh about it now, but I wish we didn't have to laugh about something that should be considered normal.

I just wanted to encourage everyone through my experience to go and build deeper relationships with the homeless. Only then was I able to get a better understanding of his life and realize that he's just human like me.

*\*The author has fabricated the name in order to maintain confidentiality.*

## Clinic Hours, Location and Services



Photo by Aileen Xu

All three clinics regularly provide dinner for clients.

**General Clinic** (Tuesdays, 6:15 – 9:00PM)  
First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley  
2407 Dana St. at Haste St.  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
Voicemail: (510) 269-7242  
gcc@suitcaseclinic.org

**Women's Clinic** (Mondays, 7:30 – 9:00PM)  
Dwight Way Women's Shelter  
2140 Dwight Way between Shattuck Ave. & Fulton St.  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
Voicemail: (510) 423-3659  
Email: womenscoords@suitcaseclinic.org

**Youth Clinic** (Mondays, 6:00 – 9:00PM)  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
2300 Bancroft Way at Ellsworth St.  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
Voicemail: (510) 423-3303  
Email: youthcoords@suitcaseclinic.org



Photo from suitcaseclinic.org

The General Clinic is the oldest of the Suitcase Clinic's 3 drop-in centers, receiving up to 40 clients per night.

Services include (based on availability): Medical, Chiropractic, Optometry, Dental, Acupuncture, Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine, Massage, Legal, Haircutting, Footwashing, Housing & Employment Assistance, Hygiene Supplies, Laundry, Internet Access, Dinners

## Working with The Berkeley Group

By **SIMON WANG** and **ALBERT LIN**

Suitcase Clinic is partnering with The Berkeley Group (TBG) this semester to improve Suitcase's organizational structure and overall influence in the community. TBG is an on-campus consulting organization composed of passionate UC Berkeley undergraduate students who are dedicated to providing strategic recommendations to Bay Area nonprofits for the good of the community free of charge. Some of their past clients include East Bay Community Law Center, Alameda County Community Food Bank, and the City of Berkeley.

TBG has five consultants working with Suitcase Clinic. After interviewing our Administrative Coordinators and several other officers, TBG Project Leader Samantha Smiley presented the team's findings to an energetic and supportive audience at our Planning Committee meeting on October 26. TBG had three suggestions. First was that we should restructure our officer core, with the intention of clarifying officer duties and increasing accountability with regards to tasks that need to be completed. Second was that we should develop and implement a metrics system that quantifies the work that we do. This initiative aims at making grant applications more accessible, specifically because Suitcase Clinic would have data to show where money is spent and how many people we reach in the community. Finally, Suitcase officers and volunteers should be held accountable to each other and to our clients. This is the first step to achieving a higher volunteer-retention rate, which was an issue brought up by multiple coordinators in Suitcase Clinic during internal interviews.

At the end of this semester, TBG will present detailed recommendations and action-steps for us to follow. We are excited to see how TBG can help us better serve our clients and further Suitcase Clinic's mission of serving the under-served. To learn more, please visit their website at [www.theberkeleygroup.org](http://www.theberkeleygroup.org).

# Client as a friend

By **TREVOR CLINE**

I can remember with exquisite clarity the night I met Ralph. It was my first time at the General Clinic, where I was supposed to shadow a more experienced caseworker to gain experience through HMS 98/198, the training course for Suitcase. The older caseworker I was assigned with had a "from the frying pan into the fire approach"- he simply dropped me off with Ralph, one of his clients, and told him to "show me the ropes." Besides being completely and totally confused and nervous, I had no earthly idea what being "showed the ropes" involved. When Ralph looked me in the eyes after quickly introducing himself and asked "Are you lost?" I thought I was done for.

I was lost, and Ralph quickly and kindly helped me get my bearings. Reflecting on that first night two years ago, I am still amazed with how close I felt to him and how many interests we shared, despite coming from completely different economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Ralph subsequently helped me execute a 4 week pilot project distributing information about expunging one's criminal record, through which I got an amazingly detailed overview of the criminal justice system by Ralph, who had been through it himself. As

the weeks and months and years wore on, Ralph and I's relationship became something more than one between a caseworker and a client. We talked about our families, our views on politics, religion, education, and life in general. We shared embarrassing moments in our lives and reflected on how we could improve ourselves. We exchanged phone numbers and went out to lunch many times. When Ralph was no longer homeless (after a long protracted battle to expunge his own criminal record, gain health insurance, and secure affordable housing that lasted 7 years), I visited his new home and helped him pick out furniture. It finally dawned on me after he drove me home from his house that this man was no longer a client to me- he was my friend.

Ralph and I's relationship still is going strong today, though I admit I am not the best friend in the world because of my hectic student's schedule. But, whenever we see each other at General Clinic once again, I come up to him and give him a big hug and we catch up and reminisce. I am proud to say that I am now one of Ralph's "nephews," and indeed he is my "uncle," my first client, my first introduction to and above all else, my friend.

## Total funding from Nov. 2010 to Nov. 2011

Donation Mailer	\$2500
First Congregational Church of Berkeley	\$2000
Benefit Concert 2010	\$3000
Test prep course (BC Silent Auction)	\$3600
Big Ideas	\$3500
UCB Chancellor Community Partnership Fund (Dental)	\$6000
ASUC	\$2189
Cal Corps	\$3000
Donations	\$750
Small fundraisers	\$1550



## Save the date for Suitcase Clinic's Benefit Concert!

Dec. 3, 2011 | 155 Dwinelle | 7pm



Photo by Sonia Sajja