

The Voice of Suitcase Clinic

Service provider named Outstanding Woman of the Year



By Antoinette Siu

This March, co-founder and acupuncturist Hope McDonnell of our Monday night Youth Clinic was honored by the city of Berkeley as one of seven Outstanding Women of the year.

As a close friend of Hope's brings her on stage to accept the award, the audience is told a story about Hope's early dedication in providing a service for others. At the age of 11, she laughed, Hope started babysitting for working moms and charged just a quarter per kid.

Today, Hope continues to volunteer treating homeless youth through acupuncture alongside supporting her non-profit United for Health, established in 1999 with the mission to design treatment and services specifically for youth with the least access to care.

At a young age, Hope turned to alternative medicine like herbs and acupuncture due to her condition of rheumatic arthritis.

Failing to find relief from Western medicinal approaches to her pain, Hope took her situation into her own hands. She explains, "I later decided after many nightmarish experiences with allopathic medicine to pursue Chinese medicine as a career, so that others wouldn't have to go through the same pain and frustration with their symptoms or puzzling conditions."

Hope has always taken an interest in working with and for younger age groups. "I started working with youth as a teenager and felt comfortable being with peers. Now I see a vibrancy and potential to move forward in youth, as well as an

ability to bounce back or take on another view of things quicker than adults. It also keeps me young and open to new outlooks and excited to see their esteem grow and characters develop with experience," Hope says.

Besides providing acupuncture services for free to youth at the Suitcase Clinic drop-in, Hope's accomplishments over the years have been immeasurable.

Abroad, Hope found herself working with El Salvadorian refugees to stand up against the 1982 Nicaraguan war that resulted in the lost of innocent lives.

"After living in a war zone, where there's no water or electricity for days and little food to be had, your outlook on what

is important changes dramatically," she remembers.

Hope describes the first time she was taken to a mental institution by her mother when she was only 11.

She explains, "I must have been complaining about not having enough or not getting my way or something and she wanted to show me another reality. It was brutal!"

Before the sight of people

"yelling into space and eating soap," Hope learned at a young age that her situation at home was good—food, clothes, shelter, love—compared to many others out there.

Most of all, she encourages that service work is something everyone can be a part of.

"Anybody who has a little spare time or money can reach out and connect with a cause, an underserved group, or even a neighbor in need. Unfortunately, you don't have to look far to see others who could use some help these days. And making the connection keeps you stimulated and part of a network; gives you a sense of belonging."



Photo by Namitha Malakkla

Long-time service provider Hope McDonnell (middle) receives her award as one of Berkeley's Outstanding Woman of the Year.

Back in 1980, she received a grant of \$10,000 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to start Berkeley's first Farmers' Market.

At the time, Hope helped with the collective People's Food System to provide easy access to fresh, organic food at affordable prices for the people.

With the help of a few students from the university, she was able to get the market running, as well as bring that same access to the college campus by starting a collective food store called Coop Connections.

Hope's social justice work extends beyond helping the community at home.

S.H.A.R.E. success story

Soap dispenser at People's Park

By Annie Pham, Stephanie Falwell, and Lexi Captanian

When S.H.A.R.E. members were discussing issues at People's Park, a common complaint that clients were bringing up again and again about was the lack of soap dispensers in bathrooms at the park. Every time soap dispensers were put in place, they would get vandalized so the people in charge of the park had just given up on replacing them.

The clients in S.H.A.R.E. discussed possible solutions and designs that would allow for new dispensers to be put up. Then a S.H.A.R.E. Coordinator, Lexi, went to a People's Park Advisory Board



Photo by Devin Woolridge

meeting and brought up the solutions that our clients in SHARE had decided were the best. Within a few weeks, Devon, the administrator in charge of the park emailed Lexi a picture of the new soap dispensers.

The design was one that had been discussed as solution in S.H.A.R.E. Although S.H.A.R.E. cannot take full credit for this project since the meeting's minutes had already included the soap dispensers as an item, it does seem that they listened to our suggestions at the very least.

Poverty Symposium: From Awareness to Action

By Sonia Sajja

The Suitcase Clinic, along with Cal Habitat for Humanity and the Cal Corps Public Service Center, put on the Third Annual Berkeley Poverty & Homelessness Symposium on Sunday, April 10, 2011 in order to bridge the gap between the campus and community by encouraging discussion of issues surrounding local poverty and homelessness. The event addressed many of the intertwining factors that influence this complex issue and invited a diverse group of community members and organizations, like Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, East Bay Community Law Center, Food Not Bombs, Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board, Tiny Garcia of POOR magazine, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, and YEAH!

The event was unique in that it is a free event with a very specific focus on East Bay poverty and brought together a diverse variety of attendees. Its major goal was to inspire attendees into action by encouraging discussion through smaller break-out sessions to bridge the gap across differences and to allow community organizations to provide



Photo by Antoinette Sju

Speaker Keith Carson opens with his keynote.

volunteering opportunities to those in attendance.

"Those who attended the event ranged from Homeless Commission members to UC Berkeley students to Stanford graduates and more. It was extremely powerful to be able to gather so many people passionate about the same cause into one room," said Sonia Sajja.

The event closed with a panel featur-

ing Suitcase Clinic clients from the General and Women's drop-in centers, who shared their unique experiences in dealing with homelessness that ranged from substance abuse to domestic violence to mental illness. This allowed the audience to place a face on poverty and to view the various underlying causes associated with homelessness.

Client Spotlight

A night at clinic with Michelle

By Trevor Cline

When I first met Michelle in February, she was one of the most delightful people I had the pleasure of meeting. She was well dressed, articulate, and polite. She was well informed on a wide range of social issues, especially those that apply to individuals that, as she says, “have no voice.” After speaking to her multiple times, I learned that she was going to Berkeley City College with the hopes of transferring to UC Berkeley to eventually become a social worker. I met this amazing woman in my work at the Women’s Clinic division of Suitcase, where we operate out of the Dwight Way Women’s Shelter in North Berkeley. Yes, the amazing person I described above was homeless, recovering from a mental breakdown with no income stream and no one to take care of her.

Michelle, after unexpectedly being turned down for a small student loan to sustain her through her final year at Berkeley City College in the winter of 2010, literally lost her main source of income. She had given up the odd jobs she was working previously to go back to school full time to accomplish her dream of becoming a social worker. Without her loans, she had depleted her savings to the point where the only money she possessed was \$50 that she earned helping teacher with students that were struggling in her class. In line with her selfless personality, the other activities she took part in offered no remuneration- she tutored students in English and writing at the college for free, as well as offering to help any student that approached her in any way she could. The cascade of misfortune that befell Michelle is one that is not uncommon- without her student loan and with no savings, she could no longer afford her rental unit in Berkeley and was asked to leave; without housing or an income to go back to school, and realizing that her life’s dream was coming apart at the seams, she suffered from a minor mental breakdown. It was at this lowest point that she came to the Dwight

Way Shelter, who graciously took her in to help her get back on her feet and back into school.

After learning about her story, I was absolutely amazed that the person I had met was not a broken, depressed shell of a person, a state I would expect myself to be in if I had to suffer as she had. Instead, she was exactly the person I described before- humble, intelligent, presentable, empathetic, and above all else, kind. Moreover, Michelle was, and still is, doggedly pursuing her goal of getting back to a city college to complete her associate’s degree. She continues to jump through every administrative loop possible to apply for every scholarship she can find to scrap together the funds to finish her tenure at BCC and get into UC Berkeley. But perhaps the most incredible part of Michelle is her perspective about her experience with destitution and homelessness. She told me that she views her entire experience as one in which she has developed empathy and experience, which she told me will ideally suit her to not only helping her clients, but to be an agent of change at the decision making level, where she hopes to reform social services to be maximally beneficial to individuals like those at the women’s shelter.

It is people like Michelle that make me hopeful that perhaps, amid the depressing shadow of homelessness that cloaks our society with no way of lifting it, there are some rays of sunshine that pierce it and show it can be eliminated. I do know that I still appreciate talking to Michelle every week at the Women’s Clinic, and I will sorely miss her once she moves on with her life. I just hope her zeal is enough to expand her already intense ray of hopeful light to show the rest of the world that the homeless are capable of being empowered and empowering others. I know she certainly has empowered me, and I hope her story will empower you as well to always chase your dreams, even if you literally lose everything.

Volunteer Spotlight

Shivan Patel

By Neil Zhang

On any given night at the Youth Clinic, one can find Shivan enthusiastically participating in outreach, caseworking, footwashing, cooking, or any of the numerous jobs required to run clinic. Recently, he has taken initiative to develop and begin the administration of a risk behavior survey to Youth Clinic clients. His goals for the survey are to “...identify the sexual risk and drug use behavior of clients, to understand services clients are utilizing and to identify services that need to be added or improved, to understand stressors clients face, and to understand the demographic that attend Youth Clinic as clients.”

The survey is the most comprehensive assessment ever administered at Youth Clinic and totals nearly 10 pages in length. An initial obstacle that Shivan faced was the issue of encouraging clients to complete the survey in its entirety before turning it in. Demonstrating creativity, he decided that the best way was to link the survey with a small incentive. After experimenting with raffles and gift bags of snacks, he ultimately decided that giving away a small packet of useful supplies was the best method to get clients to finish the survey.

Shivan has begun to compile collected data, which have already been used to apply for a grant that would award the Youth Clinic \$6000. However, not only will this survey be useful in grant applications, but it will more importantly provide a deeper understanding of our clientele. Shivan’s efforts will allow us to tailor the services that are offered at the Youth Clinic to the needs of our clients. For truly adhering to our philosophies of empowerment and harm reduction, we awarded Shivan with Volunteer of the Year.

Students from Class reflect upon experiences at clinic

As part of our class division, students are asked to come to one of our three drop-in clinics and write a reflection of their experiences. Many students found clinic to be eye-opening and that it helped change their preconceptions of homelessness.

By Mark Jiang

Despite my best intentions, when I entered the Suitcase clinic for the first time, I had certain expectations as to who the clients are and how they will behave.

Though we hesitate to acknowledge these considerations as stereotyping practices and perhaps even brush them off as simple anxiety to a new environment, I find it helpful and even necessary to ruminate on how these preconceived notions came into existence, and how they may be ruptured or reproduced in the clinic.

I, for one, clearly remember my experience when I first shadowed at the General Clinic.

As I entered the premises that one rainy Tuesday night a few weeks ago, I was quickly overwhelmed by a musky odor that I could not avoid, and I began to visualize the chaos to which I would bear witness. Perhaps there would be rudeness, violence, and banality—granted that these characterizations are frequently applicable to society as a whole, to inject some cynicism. In an attempt to regain my bearings in the barrage of unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells that bombarded me, I located

the only volunteer coordinator available that night and agreed to help with the haircutting section for whatever reason.

Most of the clients I was able to serve, however, quickly put me at ease.

Aside from their general easygoing attitude, they thanked me repeatedly for being there for them and were very encouraging when it came to my haircutting endeavors. We shared many conversations ranging in topic from general routines to common interests and chatted as if we had been close friends for a long time. It was exactly because of those moments that I began to reflect on their marginalization and underrepresentation in the society, mechanisms that made them vulnerable to grossly unfaithful portrayals through which long-established exclusionary practices are constantly being reinforced.

In retrospect, I feel compelled to conclude (almost as a cliché) that the many clients that I met in the clinic were all



Photo by Jessica Lin

A client receives a haircut at General Clinic from one of our caseworkers.

unique in their own right—some were polite, others rude; some gregarious, others laconic; some jovial, others melancholic—and it would be impractical to lump them all into some grand category and ascribe to them arbitrary traits. That is precisely what we do in real life, though, is it not? So why do we have these seemingly illogical boundary practices that survived through decades of debate and evaluation? What functions do they serve in the society? These are all open questions.

By Thomas Pham

During one of the first wellness projects at Youth Clinic we did origami with the clients. Although participation was not as high as we had hoped, some clients did try some projects with us.

As it was my first time in Youth Clinic, I was quite surprised that dinner was provided every Monday night. This was

my first experience having dinner with a client. I proceeded to get my dinner and sat down next to a young man. When he settled down and began eating I tried to begin some small talk with him and conversed about the weather. It was really awkward. I felt like we had nothing in common. At this point I was ready to just give up and find another client to talk to. However, no other clients were around me, and I turned back to the young man and tried our conversation again.

The second time was a lot better. I asked him how his week had been and what is favorite wellness project was

and he finally opened up. He explained that the talent show was one of his favorite projects because he was in it! He sang with another volunteer and really loved it. Then he began to talk to me about how he performed at a wedding out of state and really enjoyed that. For me, talking about music was so relatable! My interest in music made me feel comfortable talking to the client and I felt connected to him. Soon enough, he was whipping out his cell phone showing me all the songs he covered and posted on Youtube. This was a really funny experience because I love searching Youtube for some good covers myself! The client was really good and singing and playing the piano and I was really impressed by his talent. My conversation

lasted with him until closing time and I was trying to find a nice way of saying goodbye. All of a sudden, he told me that he doesn't know what his plans are tonight and asked if I was free to hang out after suitcase. Awkwardness overcame me. I really was lost for words. On one hand, I really enjoyed talking to him and listening to his music, but I was just not comfortable spending time with someone I just met. I felt like a horrible person as I told him I had homework and other plans for that night. Although by now we have gone over the topic of personal boundaries, I still can't help but think how lonely he must have felt after our wonderful conversation and relationship was abruptly ended by my fear of the unknown.



Photo by Antoinette Siu

Dinner is served every Monday night at Youth Clinic.