

The Voice of Suitcase Clinic General Clinic security revamped



By Jenna Hang

For a student-run organization with three drop-in clinics, the Suitcase Clinic has been fortunate over the years in regards to security. However, this lucky streak was challenged the night of Tuesday, July 19 at General Clinic when one client was stabbed by another on the balcony of the First Presbyterian Church. Although minor conflicts are not uncommon on clinic premises, an incident of this severity had never happened before, and it sparked a series of discussions and changes to be implemented at General Clinic.

“We realized that we have been letting security issues at General Clinic slide for a long time and that we need to finally address them,” stated the General Clinic Coordinators (GCCs). As a result, clinic was closed the following week and a meeting to discuss security measures was held in its stead.

One of the most popular ideas was to hire a security guard, an option that was met with opposing views. Although many said they would feel safer with a professional security guard at clinic, many others stated that clients would be dissuaded from coming to clinic if a figure of authority were present. Other measures were

suggested—including increasing student presence in the gym and making clinic guidelines more visible—but ultimately, Eric Jefferson from All About Security Agency was hired to

them feel safer at clinic.

Jefferson was introduced

to the Suitcase background philosophy before his first night at clinic on August 9. Accordingly, he is only to step in during extreme cases; students are encouraged to de-escalate situations as they have been taught, if they are comfortable.

Security measures run by the undergraduate volunteers have also been implemented: a new “client greeter” position has been created, in which students greet and sign clients in as they enter clinic; the students also brief the clients on the clinic guidelines, if needed. The client greeter also serves as a monitor of the gym in its entirety, in order to de-escalate any potential incidents more efficiently.

A volunteer also mans the coffee and bagel station in the gym in order to avoid conflict during the rush at the beginning of clinic, a change that has been welcomed by clients.

The new security measures are a step in a process that was long-coming, and although things are always changing, the Suitcase Clinic has taken care to address an issue that concerns both volunteers and clients.



Eric Jefferson was hired to watch over the gym at clinic. Photo by Antoinette Siu

keep watch over the gym.

“We ultimately decided to hire a security guard after asking clients their opinions on the matter. We were a little surprised to find that no clients that we spoke to were against the idea of having a security guard at clinic,” the GCCs said. On the contrary, clients were open to the idea, stating that increased security would help

Youth Clinic and Lifelong threatened by budget cuts

By Hope McDonnell

Times are tough and funding hard to come by these days, even for established programs for the homeless in Berkeley. This year, despite a massive effort from clients, students and health care professionals, our funds were slashed at both the Youth Suitcase Clinic and the Lifelong Acupuncture Clinic, compromising the successful treatment models that have served our clients well and kept the cost of health care / infectious disease control down, as well as decreasing street crime for Berkeley.

Since 2000, UC Berkeley students and United for Health staff have run the Youth Suitcase

Clinic with financial support from the City of Berkeley. Every Monday night at St. Mark’s Church, homeless youth are helped by our services of acupuncture, massage, medical care, foot washing, healthy dinners and giveaways of food, hygiene supplies and vouchers for optometry and dental appointments.

The original recommendation from the Homeless Commission/ City Manager was to cut off funds completely to the Youth Suitcase Clinic (from \$15,500 to \$0), and to cut the budget of Lifelong Clinic’s 5 day a week program to 2 days! Their rationale was “the services and care given at the YSC is drawing transient homeless

youth to Berkeley, where they lay around the streets causing trouble and disrupting business for Berkeley merchants.” According to our opponents, we are making life too comfortable for the homeless youth...

We fought a long and hard battle to convince the Mayor, City Council, and other Berkeley officials to maintain our current funding to keep our clinics intact, or at least minimize the cuts to the 3-5 % that most of the other community programs suffered.

Our struggle lasting over 6 months consisted of dozens of UCB student volunteers, clients from the Youth Suitcase Clinic and Lifelong Clinic showing up

and telling their stories in front of city council members, commissioners and officials at five public hearings, and four city council meetings.

Dozens of phone calls and emails were made to persuade city council members and the city manager, who held our future in their hands to restore our funds to current levels. Over 60 testimonials/life stories were written to the council members stressing the importance of the clinics’ services to their lives and ability to function on the streets.

After our efforts, the YSC received \$10,000 and Lifelong Clinic is on a 3 day a week schedule. Victory???

HOMELESS SHELTER
Suitcase Clinic Shelter in the works see page 2

Admin welcomes new PC members! see page 3

New Computer Literacy Program off to great start see page 3

Students stand up for the right to sit down

By Stephanie Falwell

Following the passage of San Francisco's sit lie ordinance in November of 2010, some members of the Berkeley business community, specifically those involved in the Telegraph Business Improvement District, became interested in establishing a sit ordinance in the city of Berkeley.

Because the city of Berkeley already has a lie ordinance in effect, the Berkeley sit ordinance would be used to ban sitting in commercial areas during certain hours to be determined.

Given that the mission of the Suitcase Clinic is "to promote the health and overall well being of underserved individuals," we felt compelled to prevent such a sit ordinance from being enforced.

As a statute that specifically targets those who regularly sit on the street, this ordinance criminalizes the homeless. It in no way alleviates the root causes of homelessness, but rather makes the lives of the homeless more difficult.

When word of a push for the ordinance began circulating in April, the Suitcase Clinic made a strong effort to fight this ordinance before it could even be voted on in city council.

We began by discussing the sit ordinance, its implications and possible alternatives over many SHARE (Searching for How to Achieve Respect and Empowerment) discussions at both General and Youth Clinics. On April 26, members of Suitcase and Cal Habitat for Humanity

joined a protest and march to city council organized by BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency).

Following this collaboration, members of Suitcase Clinic, Cal Habitat and CalPIRG helped push for the ASUC to send a letter to city council urging them not to pass any potential sit ordinance.

After compelling arguments from all three student groups, the ASUC Senate passed this motion eighteen to one on May 5.

Since this time, Berkeley's Peace and Justice, Mental Health, Community Health and Housing Advisory Committees have passed similar resolutions to urge city council to refrain from passing a sit ordinance.

An alliance between many organizations--including the Suitcase Clinic, Cal Habitat for Humanity, CalPIRG, BOSS, the Neighborhood Justice Clinic and other local groups working with the homeless--has formed, referred to as the Sit-Lie Coalition.

As the supposed target date for the sit ordinance to be voted on in city council passed in July without word that any ordinance

would put on the city council agenda, news on this issue has been quiet. Nonetheless, this certainly does not indicate that the struggle is over.

The Suitcase Clinic is prepared to respond with continued advocacy efforts.



Photo by Janny Castillo, streetspirit.org

Suitcasers made posters and chalked sidewalks to protest against the ordinance and to promote the right to sit down.

Suitcase Clinic: Episode 4 — A New Shelter

By Kira Xie

After 22 years of unwavering service to the underserved members of the Berkeley community, Suitcase Clinic volunteers are once again discussing how they can do more for their clients.

For years, volunteers at the Suitcase Clinic have worked to help the homeless in Berkeley, with the ultimate goal of eliminating homelessness altogether. Such a lofty goal may seem naïve and unrealistic, especially coming from a group that is composed almost entirely of undergraduate college students, untrained and unqualified for any sort of professional work.

But considering how far the organization has come – from a suitcase of basic medical supplies, to an extensive organization with not just one, but three fully operational clinics – it almost seems like anything is possible.

That is a statement that may be put to the test soon, because the plans for a new Suitcase Shelter may be in the works!

While Suitcase volunteers work to provide the most comprehensive care in their power, it does not change the reality that the clients have to return to once it is over.

There is a strong feeling that not only *can* be done, but also *should* be done.

The idea for possibly including a homeless shelter under Suitcase's umbrella of facilities was first presented for consideration in 2009 by former class coordinator, DJ Freitas, but no further action was taken until this summer.

While brainstorming ideas for what more Suitcase could do for its clients, General Clinic Coordinators Joshua Lee and Monica Guo revived the Suitcase Shelter idea and began to take serious steps towards making it happen.

Lee says, "As daunting as this task may seem, Harvard undergrads have been running a shelter for nearly 30 years now, and we already have experience running the only three undergrad-run free health clinics in the country."

The Harvard shelter provides a good model to start from, and furthermore, Stanford and Villanova have both been working to set up shelters of their own. Clinic Coordinators are already consulting all three organizations for advice.

The project is still in its early stages, but teams have already been formed to assemble a budget, find funding, scout for locations, and most importantly, find out what needs are currently not being met by already-existing shelters in the area.

There is a strong belief that Suitcase Clinic is in a unique position, as a student-run organization, to provide care that clients cannot receive elsewhere, and the hope is that this will be confirmed through community surveys.

With the data from the Needs Assessment, groups will be able to move forward with petitioning organizations around Berkeley for financial support or donations to help bring this dream to fruition.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions and blanks that need to be filled.

It is likely that, if the shelter becomes a serious

endeavor, most of the volunteers that are currently present will be long gone before the fruits of their labor can be tasted, but through generation after generation of volunteers, the ideals and goals of Suitcase Clinic will continue to thrive.

As volunteer Leanne Fan says, "Projects aren't made of talk, but action; so instead of daydreaming about how great this project could be, we'll focus on how we can actually fulfill it."

Someday, the vision of the Suitcase Shelter will become a reality.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

8/31: first Planning Committee meeting

9/1 & 9/2: Class info sessions

9/14: second PC meeting + mini-elections

9/16-9/18: Retreat

Admin extends welcome to new PC members

By Sonia Sajja,
Shalini Eragoda and
Charlie Shi

“When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn’t change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn’t change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.” - Anonymous

When we think of this quote, we think of every Suitcaser: every Suitcaser who is here because they are unhappy with the way things are; every Suitcaser who has made a change in themselves after their experience here, and every Suitcaser who wants to make a change in the world.

Welcome to our new Planning Committee members: Cheston, Shelley, Shobna, Stacy, Calliope, Jonathan, New, Nathan, Kira, Shivan, Ming, Tracy, Michelle, Brooke, Laura, Jan, Abhi, Elise, Ashlynn, Caitlyn, and Esther!

We look forward to working with you this upcoming semester to make a change in the world!



New Computer Literacy program off to a great start

By Sonia Sajja

Since the computer literacy program’s launch in February 2011, caseworkers at General Clinic have trained over 50 clients. Started by the Employment small group led by Daniel Kim and Monica Guo, the program began after several CARE coordinators stressed the need to provide clients with computer skills necessary to find employment. “The overall goal of the computer literacy program is to make sure that one’s lacking computer skills does not become a drawback in his or her job hunting process,” said Kim.

A brief intake process assesses where instruction should begin because every client that comes in is at a different skill level. The questions cover basic computer skills such as surfing search engines, checking emails, using Microsoft Word

for resume-writing, and learning Microsoft Powerpoint and Excel. The most common topic covered is how to set up an email account and send e-mails. Many clients, even though they have an email address, are not familiar with using email due to limited computer access. Others have forgotten their passwords and can not access their email accounts.

Each session is done one-on-one with a client by a caseworker. The length of the session depends on how many clients request the service on a given night. The program tries its best to give each client the maximum amount of time. With more volunteers and more computers available, the program is able to teach more clients. Therefore, the program encourages volunteers to bring their own laptops. Throughout the session, the caseworker

takes notes on what was gone over during the session so that the client can review prior to coming back to the program. If clients already know the basics, then they have the option to learn how to use PowerPoint or Excel as well.

In order to encourage clients to continue learning about computers, Daniel Kim, the Media Resources Coordinator, provides a list of resources with addresses and contact information for free computer access or free computer teaching class in the East Bay.

This program also functions as a good place to review and ask specific questions in regards to various computer programs. Often clients who come to the Suitcase Clinic’s computer literacy program are able to leave with a new skill to add to their resume.

What does “student-run” really mean?

By Leanne Fan

We robotically recite that we are a student-run organization serving the underserved, but in the recent debates about the shelter, the reality of student-run is constantly brought up.

Realistically, what does it mean for the volunteers and our clients?

Coming into the Suitcase Clinic class, we were told about how remarkable the Suitcase environment is, with a caseworking model in contrast to professional, “medical” practices. But the question that kept gnawing at me was how potentially alienating caseworking could be.

We are students at a great public university, the shining example of “successful students” with “productive lives,” serving people who are perceived as the opposite. Isn’t there something--albeit humbling for us--a little disturbing about this violent dichotomy?

To me, the difference is even more evident at Youth Clinic; a clear disconnect of circumstance between service

provider and client.

My interests have taken me from caseworking to (unsuccessfully) pursuing money management and now to Housing and Employment as CARE Coordinator.

What started out as tiptoeing around sensitive subjects and asking superficial questions developed into real relationships. Being in clinic provided an opportunity for me to meet the most real people I’ve met!

Questions about their week turned into conversations about life, the choices we make, the things that we want. When I had my computer stolen at clinic, many clients came up and offered to look for it and consoled me.

This is somewhat in contrast to the tangling bureaucracy I sometimes see in more professional social services: finding someone to ask a question will inevitably turn into a referral to someone else; unanswered emails and voice mails; and an acute sense of acrobatic maneuvering of hoops.

At clinic, we are run on

what seems like an endless supply of youth-branded idealism, but we make “student-run” a reassuring alternative to the necessary difficulty of other services.

What we can offer our clients is more than just referrals to Craigslist, prescriptions or deodorant, but a sanctuary on Monday and Tuesday nights.

We might not have the resources to put in program --> HEALTH --> HOUSING; but we are where a conversation can happen, where we can be cheerleaders or listeners but not self-righteous students.

The Suitcase Clinic runs three drop-in clinics on Monday and Tuesday nights.

General Clinic (Tuesday 6:15-9 pm)

Youth Clinic (Monday 6-9 pm)

Women’s Clinic (Monday 7:30-9 pm)