

# A STUDENT-RUN GROUP PROVIDES CRITICAL SUPPORT SERVICES TO UNDERSERVED RESIDENTS

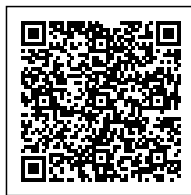
Posted on December 18, 2024 by Magaly Munoz



Those visiting The Suitcase Clinic can get legal advice, sign up for food assistance, receive housing resources, get medical help, or enjoy a hot, fresh meal. They can also get haircuts and foot washes from the student volunteers. Nilo Golchini, executive director of the clinic, said one of the goals for most of the students working there is helping bridge the gap of trust that exists between many unhoused people and the healthcare and social welfare systems. The post A Student-Run Group Provides Critical Support Services to Underserved Residents first appeared on Post News Group.

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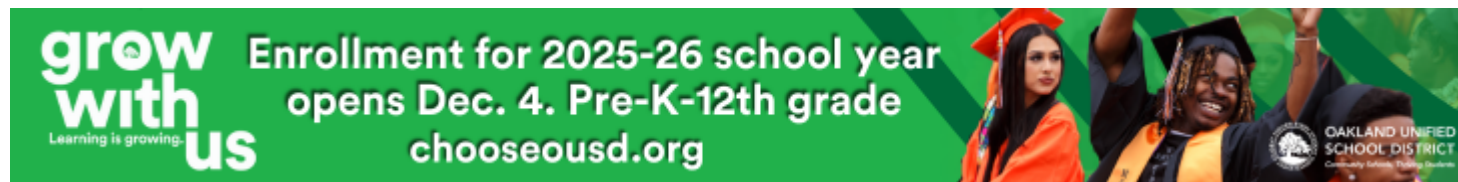
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## Part One

By Magaly Muñoz

Every Tuesday evening, the dining hall of First Presbyterian Church fills up with dozens of people eating, laughing and moving from table to table, receiving much-needed services from UC Berkeley students – just a few blocks away from the university's campus.



Individuals seeking support services can be found in this multi-stationed room on the south end of the church talking to law students, student case managers, or receiving medical attention in a corner by healthcare professionals.

This weekly event is hosted by Cal students through a volunteer-run program called The Suitcase Clinic.

The clinic, founded in 1989, was intended to offer free resources to underserved communities in Berkeley and surrounding cities. The majority of the clinic's clientele are unhoused or low-income people looking for extra support.

Those visiting the clinic can get legal advice, sign up for food assistance, receive housing resources, get medical help, or enjoy a hot, fresh meal. They can also get haircuts and foot washes from the student volunteers.

Nilo Golchini, executive director of the clinic, said one of the goals for most of the students working there is helping bridge the gap of trust that exists between many unhoused people and the healthcare and social welfare systems.

During their tenure in the program, many of the students say they become strong advocates for homelessness rights.

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Visitors of the Suitcase Clinic can receive haircuts and foot washing by student volunteers every Tuesday evening. Photo by Magaly Muñoz.

"We're also standing in solidarity with them. So, it's not saying, 'I'm going to help you, but I'm also going to stand with you,'" Golchini said.

Student volunteers get extensive training prior to working directly with clients. Those interested have to take a semester-long class to become versed in areas such as outreach, intersectionality, how to interact with unhoused people, how to sign people up for social services, and more.

Volunteers then get to pick from three different clinics: General, Women's, or Youth and LGBTQ+.

The General Clinic is the most popular among visiting residents, while Women's and Youth/LGBTQ+ have more specialized services for attendees.

The Women's Clinic has many of the similar services to General, but also includes nail painting, childcare, and massages.

The Youth and LGBTQ+ Clinic offers a safe space for young people navigating living on the streets,

with services that include housing referrals, wellness and recreation classes and employment resources.

Golchini explained that it's important for them to keep these clinics separate because the different demographics experience poverty and homelessness differently than those who visit the General Clinic.



Suitcase Clinic student workers posing for a photo with a frequent clinic attendee. The Clinic is open to Berkeley unhoused and low-income residents who need medical or legal service, or a hot meal.

Photo by Magaly Muñoz.

"We're able to provide spaces where people can come in and feel safe and not feel like they're constantly worried that something's going to happen to them," she said.

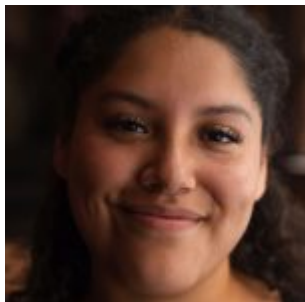
An outreach team also visits encampments every other Saturday in the Berkeley area to provide hygiene kits and encourage people to visit the in-person clinic, if possible.

However, Golchini said engagement has been low for some time now due to a recent decision by

the U.S. Supreme Court that allows cities to ban and cite people for sleeping on the streets.

She said a lot of their clientele got displaced to other cities over time, making it difficult to stay in contact with the services the Clinic was providing for them.

But that hasn't slowed down the students at the Clinic, if anything, it has pushed them to do more for the community they serve.



## **Magaly Muñoz**

A graduate of Sacramento State University, Magaly Muñoz's journalism experience includes working for the State Hornet, the university's student-run newspaper and conducting research and producing projects for "All Things Considered" at National Public Radio. She also was a community reporter for El Timpano, serving Latino and Mayan communities, and contributed to the Sacramento Observer, the area's African American newspaper.

Muñoz is one of 40 early career journalists who are part of the California Local News Fellowship program, a state-funded initiative designed to strengthen local news reporting in California, with a focus on underserved communities.

The fellowship program places journalism fellows throughout the state in two-year, full-time reporting positions.

**There are no comments yet.**