

Mission Waco Health Clinic

Healthcare is complex. Poverty is complex. People are complex. That is why Mission Waco Health Clinic tries to simplify their vocation into one word: *empowerment*. Teaching others to care for their mental and physical health and acquiring access to healthcare empowers people to bring back control of their lives. The Health Clinic transforms the lives of patients and moves volunteers towards an empathetic mindset.

Mission Waco started as a young couple hosting children's after school clubs, and now expands into an outreach organization that revolutionizes a small city in Texas. Mission Waco calls itself a "Christian, interdenominational, holistic ministry that works with people at many levels. It is a ministry that focuses on training middle-class Christians to work among the poor and develop a Christian worldview." Empowering the poor and marginalized has been the foundational reason why Mission Waco still strives for excellence after 25 years in service. "The Health Clinic wants people to live healthy lives, but they can't just help a person physically. They want every aspect of a person's life to be touched," Leigh Saxon, co-director of Mission Waco Health Clinic, said.

Mission Waco offers more than 30 programs to enable the poor working class and homeless population to take the next step towards fulfilling their needs. According to Volunteer Will Hancock, "as volunteers, interns, and donations increased, additional programs were added to the existing children and teen programs. A board of 20 Christian men and women from different churches oversee the direction of Mission Waco." The Health Clinic works in conjunction with Mission Waco to care for the medical needs of the poor-working class and the homeless.

Since its opening in 2005, the Mission Waco Health Center has not been a medical home for patients, Sarah Lockett, co-director of Mission Waco Health Center, said. Rather, their purpose is to facilitate medical care to those without health insurance. People of all race, religion, age and gender come seek care from doctors, nurses and students volunteering their time and skill sets. The clinic works with other agencies to accomplish their goals. “Each program works well individually, but programs work best together,” Lockett said.

Mission Waco owns the building that the Health Clinic practices in, with an agreement with the Family Health Center to share facilities, Lockett said. The Family Health Center renovated the building in exchange for using the building during daytime business hours. According to Mission Waco Health Clinic website, after closing, the Health Clinic opens from 4-7 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. The clinic only works with patients without Medicare, Medicaid, or any other form of insurance and who are not established with Family Health Center. They are here for people who do not have access to medical care yet need referrals. Doctors can issue patients referrals to see the Family Health Center doctors or to other organizations that suit their needs, Lockett said. The Family Health Center and the Mission Waco Health Clinic have a cooperative working relationship with one another with a shared ambition to provide affordable healthcare. Together, the Family Health Center and the Health Clinic work towards mobilizing patients.

The organization states that it considers ways to empower people seeking medical attention. “Some services within Mission Waco require a small contribution, such as a \$1 or \$2 charge,” Saxon said. Other services that Mission Waco provides, such as residency in the homeless shelter for more than three nights, can be accomplished by either doing chores around

the shelter or paying a fee of two-dollars per night. “These organizations believe that handouts can feel demeaning,” Saxon said. “The organization is all about bringing dignity back.” The Health Clinic is one exception to Mission Waco’s philosophy because people with healthcare needs should not be turned away if they lack a \$2 payment, she said.

Originally, the clinic consisted of a few volunteer doctors administering medical care two nights per week. According to Saxon, since the foundation, the clinic has expanded to offering several specialty treatments from local volunteer doctors. Often, there are so many patients that volunteers willingly stay past 9 p.m. Specialty services include tuberculosis testing, dental care, vision exams, occupational and physical therapy, chiropractic treatment, orthopedic services, and psychiatric screenings, Saxon said. To keep the clinic organized, these specialty nights rotate throughout the month.

When patients arrive at the clinic, they see Christian verses and inspirational anecdotes on every wall. They are greeted by volunteers from Baylor University, most being from a part of the pre-medical, pre-dental or social services department, Baylor junior Jacob Dunn said. Baylor students are afforded the unique opportunity of having hands-on experience with the patients. They administer a triage, which can entail checking vital signs, height and weight measurements. Often, they assist doctors by asking patients questions which can lead to a better diagnosis. On slower nights in the clinic, Baylor students shadow the doctors to learn more about what a career in the medical profession could look like. After volunteering, Baylor students can also apply for internship positions at the clinic.

Interns distinguish themselves from student volunteers because they come into the office the day before clinicals to prepare for the appointments. Lockett said that are all extremely

service-oriented. “They find needs before others,” Lockett said. “They are constantly on the lookout to improve the clinic, offering the best medical care possible.”

These interns are purpose-driven students who have a passion to serve. Intern Baylor senior Victoria Carreon said that before interning they are asked to read the book, “When Helping Hurts” by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett to understand the philosophy of empowering patients rather than offering hand-outs. Carreon said the Health Clinic transformed her time working at the clinic into “something more than a resume builder.”

“Since I have personally seen the effects of lacking proper healthcare, I have become more passionate about what I do,” Carreon said.

Intern Baylor senior Kirsten Gilliland displays passion and dedication in her daily responsibilities at the clinic. Gilliland said, “Interning at the Health Clinic is one of my favorite things I have done in college. Sometimes we can get stuck in the ‘Baylor Bubble,’ but Waco is so much more than that. Mission trips are great, but how are we helping our homes, our communities, our local families? How are we helping our own neighborhood and community?”

Working at the clinic, Gilliland said she developed a new mentality serving. “It’s their circumstances,” she said. “People can be too quick to accuse patients as lazy, but it is not the case. Put yourself in their shoes, grow some empathy, and know that they have experienced more in their lifetime than we probably ever will.”

Lockett said she is proud to have people like Gilliland working for this organization because they raise the level of expectation.

Co-directors Saxon and Lockett hold the only paid positions of the clinic. Everyone else serves on volunteer basis, including the doctors who administer surgeries and dentists who

perform tooth extractions. Directors Lockett and Saxon refer to themselves as “one-fourth of a person since they share a part-time position.” Before every clinical, they pray with the volunteers for the patients to heal from their ailments and for the doctors and nurses to find solutions to the patient’s medical problems.

Saxon and Lockett come from different specialties, together making a great team. Lockett, coming from a background in nursing, oversees much of the medical procedures and insightfully suggests ways to administer medicinal procedures. Always looking for ways to improve the clinic, Lockett heavily researches articles and tips found on the Food and Drug Administration’s website. She has recently found ways that volunteers can verify donated medication and ways to properly dispose of expired medicine.

Assisting the financial aspect of the clinic, Saxon graduated with a business administration degree and handles the clinic’s audits. Working under a tight budget, her job is to find the financial resources to keep the clinic in operation. These directors find it within themselves to pour everything they have into this ministry yet leaving time for other organizations, Carreon said. Both directors volunteer at other non-profits. They dedicate their lives to the service of others, making themselves exemplary directors. From the top leadership down to the student volunteers, all have helped the Health Clinic thrive.

The clinic is an expanding organization with many needs. Donations are always appreciated for extra physical therapy equipment, unwanted medication and office supplies. What keeps these busy volunteers focused on their purpose are the lives they see transformed each night. Gilliland said she believes she needs to “spread the luck” that as a relatively wealthy person she has been given. Her daily mantra is that “by helping one person you can help so many

others, every single person is an influencer. By helping one person, you can impact an entire community. Your sphere of influence is larger than you might think,” Gilliland said.

Keeping the focus on God and the impoverished Waco community keeps their priorities aligned. “The minute we think we are running the clinic is the minute we need to stop what we are doing here,” Lockett said. “Leigh and I do not run the clinic: God does.”

The Christ-centered approach is evident in the manner they treat their patients, always showing love and compassion. The success of this clinic lies in their attitude and vision for Waco’s future.