

After 25 Years, Still Building Healthy Futures

When Americares opened its first free clinic in Norwalk 25 years ago, the ribbon was cut on a new way to deliver health care in Fairfield County: free, for low-income uninsured patients, with warmth, compassion and the power of donated time and services.



With every clinic opening and new health program, Americares Free Clinics continue to break ground in delivering health care to thousands—and in understanding how to best serve this unique population.

“Our patients don’t want to wait until they’re sick to address their health,” says Americares Free Clinics Executive Director Karen Gottlieb. “They are eager to learn how to prevent disease and illness and share this knowledge with their families and friends.” Collaborating with local corporate partners and community groups and supported by volunteers and critical donations, the four Americares Free Clinics are leading the way.

Health coaching reduces risk: Funded by Boehringer Ingelheim Cares Foundation, this program provides education, counseling and monitoring to patients with diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. After the first year, 96 percent of participants showed improvement in at least one clinical measure, including body weight. Americares Free Clinics has now replicated the program at all four locations.

Lifestyle classes prompt real change: The clinics offer small group health education and coaching to patients suffering with chronic disease. Patients learn lifestyle change and disease management skills from experts—and each other. Patients who felt isolated in their efforts to improve their health now collaborate and support one another. Classes include shopping and meal preparation, skills that patients share with family and friends. Similar patient education efforts began in 2012 when the Norwalk Clinic partnered with Riverbrook YMCA and offered an evidence-based diabetes prevention program to patients.



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Yoga helps manage stress: In spring and fall of 2018, Americares Free Clinic of Stamford offered patients yoga classes, which combined breathing, stretching, meditation, gentle movement and seated and standing yoga. The goal was to reduce stress, which can lead to physical and mental health issues and affects low-income people more severely than their higher income counterparts. The stress reduction classes were then offered in the Norwalk and Bridgeport clinics.

When the 800-square-foot **Stamford Wellness Center** opens later this year, it will be another way Americares Free Clinics can demonstrate how health care can, and should, be provided for our neighbors in need. Working in partnership with Building One Community and other nonprofits, Americares will provide a range of programming, including nutrition and lifestyle-change programs for disease prevention and programs geared toward improving social determinants of health, such as English as a Second Language, legal counsel for immigrants, employment search assistance and resume preparation.

From the Executive Director



It's true: The number of uninsured people in Connecticut is growing—from 172,000 in 2017 to 187,000 in 2019. That's 15,000 more people at risk.

Statistics tell the big story, but the Free Clinics staff and I know the personal stories of the patients who walk through our doors every day.

Our patients tell us they are working more, and that's great. But a small boost in income can often mean a family or individual no longer qualifies for Medicaid, the nation's safety net for low-income people. Then, they fall into a gap: Not making enough to afford insurance, but no longer covered by Connecticut's HUSKY Medicaid insurance.

And it's dangerous: Health costs can easily push low-income families further into poverty. No one should have to choose between food and medical care, yet when the number of uninsured increases, we can be certain—because we know—that's happening.

Your support for AmeriCare Free Clinics is the "insurance" that thousands of low-income uninsured families depend on for quality health care. Their future is brighter—and healthier—because of you. Just read Siu Lu's story on page 4.

You are improving lives. In this season of giving, thank you.

Karen Gottlieb

Volunteer News

AmeriCare Free Clinics 25-year history includes seven volunteers who have been with us since the beginning. We salute them here!

AmeriCare Free Clinics volunteers with 25 years of service

Susan Garofoli
Stella Korchinski, RN

Robert Lindberg, MD
Pat Podkowsky

Pat Porio, RN
Robin Rockafellow

Burton Rubin, MD



Five AmeriCare Free Clinics 25-year volunteers celebrated at the 2019 AmeriCare Airlift Benefit. From left, Dr. Robert Lindberg, Robin Rockafellow, Susan Garofoli, Pat Porio and Stella Korchinski.

Welcome to our new volunteers

BRIDGEPORT

Hannah Davey
Arnold Klipstein, MD
Mary Leon
Danielle McGibbon
Damara Rodrigues, RN
Marissa Werchan

Estrella Guaman
Lissett Lojano, RN
Edie Mullaly, RN
Louise Palma, RN

Christine Monroe, RN
Miguel Salinas
Val Collins
Celita Velasquez

DANBURY

Jannis Callisen, RN
Stefanie Ehnott, RN

NORWALK

Leslie Bonilla
David Ryan Cannata
Myriam Enriquez
Margarita Garces
Shapiro, RN

STAMFORD

Marissa Annunziata
Cassandra Esposito
Sarah Gold
Vicky Martinez
Jessica Murphy

Stamford Clinic Gains New Medical Director

Stamford Health physician Dr. Craig Olin has been named medical director of the AmeriCare Free Clinic of Stamford. In his new role, Dr. Olin will provide guidance on clinic policies and procedures, support volunteer recruitment and serve as an advocate within the community.

"Dr. Olin's remarkable commitment as a volunteer physician has resulted in hundreds of Stamford patients' receiving quality care," says Stamford Free Clinic Director Muguette Maignan. "We are thrilled for him to join the clinic's leadership team and look forward to his contributions as medical director."



Dr. Olin works as a practicing physician for the Stamford Health Medical Group and is the director of the division of general internal medicine at Stamford Hospital. He is also an assistant clinical professor of medicine with Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons as part of Stamford Health's affiliation with the university.



25-Year Snapshot



Partnering to Protect Against Flu

For low-income, uninsured patients, the flu brings more than fever and aches—it can mean days without pay, which few can afford.

To help patients stay healthy, AmeriCare and Walgreens partnered to offer free flu shots to qualifying patients at walk-in clinics throughout October at each of AmeriCare Free Clinics four locations. Now in its fifth year, the partnership protects more than 1,000 Fairfield County residents each flu season.

“By providing free access to this important vaccine, we can help prevent the spread of influenza in vulnerable communities,” says AmeriCare Free Clinics Director of Volunteer Services and Community Outreach Terri McCartney. “With Walgreens, we’re helping to keep Connecticut healthy.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate influenza vaccinations prevented 7.1 million illnesses and 3.7 million medical visits during the 2017-2018 flu season.

Plan a Gift, Leave a Legacy

You can give a gift of health that costs you nothing today but will benefit AmeriCare Free Clinics for years to come: Include AmeriCare Free Clinics in your will or living trust.

Donate a designated asset, specific sum or percentage of the residual of your estate. Simply insert language into your will or trust outlining your gift to the clinics.

For sample language, or to learn more about ways to give that help ensure the future of the clinics, please visit americares.mylegacygift.org or contact Karen Malner at 203.658.9569 or kmalner@americares.org.

1994

Bob Macauley
AmeriCare Free Clinic
of Norwalk opens

1997

Boehringer Ingelheim
AmeriCare Free Clinic
of Danbury opens

2001

20,000 patient
appointments
completed

2003

Bridgeport mobile
clinic opens

2007

Fred Weisman
AmeriCare Free Clinic
of Bridgeport opens at
fixed location

2009

Boehringer Ingelheim
AmeriCare Free Clinic
of Danbury relocates to
current site

2014

Stamford mobile
clinic opens

2017

AmeriCare Free Clinic
of Stamford opens at
fixed location

2019

\$107 million in health
care to 27,000 individual
patients over 25 years

Free Clinics

Headquarters
88 Hamilton Avenue
Stamford, CT 06902
203.658.9500
americaresfreeclinics.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
AmeriCares

Fred Weisman AmeriCares Free Clinic

115 Highland Avenue
Bridgeport, CT 06604
203.333.9175

Boehringer Ingelheim AmeriCares Free Clinic

76 West Street
Danbury, CT 06810
203.748.6188

Bob Macauley AmeriCares Free Clinic

98 South Main Street
Norwalk, CT 06854
203.899.2493

AmeriCares Free Clinic of Stamford

401 Shippan Avenue
Stamford, CT 06902
203.658.9507

When Siu Lu moved to Norwalk, Conn., from Costa Rica at age 15, her parents told her it was so she could have a better life. But the young woman didn't know that the better life would be full of health challenges. Luckily, Siu Lu lived close to the Bob Macauley AmeriCares Free Clinic.

Siu Lu first used the clinic for her school physical, then continued going, "for everything," she says. When she was 20, working at a fast food chain, an exam revealed she had diabetes. The diagnosis was daunting. But the clinic helped. "They were so supportive," says Siu Lu. "I had side effects from one medication, and they worked to find another that was better for me." Within a year, she had made changes so that she no longer needed diabetes medicine.

At age 25, Siu Lu, working as a nanny and juggling other "crazy survival" jobs, had muscle weakness and shallow breathing. Arriving at a diagnosis required multiple tests, but AmeriCares Norwalk clinic managed her care. The diagnosis was polymyositis, an inflammation of the blood vessels that supply muscles.

"Free Clinics staff made sure I had the medicine I needed—it was not a common medicine," says Siu Lu. "They found specialists for me. It was a difficult time, but they were with me every step of the way."

In fact, Siu Lu found it challenging when she began working at a job with health insurance and no longer used AmeriCares Free Clinics. "I had to find new doctors and coordinate my own care," she says. There was one more crisis for Siu Lu to overcome: She had a hole in one lung, caused by a fungal infection, a side effect of the immune suppressant medicine for the polymyositis. In 2016, Siu Lu received a lung transplant.

All through this, Siu Lu earned an associate's degree at college. She is now working fulltime and earning credits towards a bachelor's in health administration. "My life has led me here and I want to give back to my community," she says of her career choice. "AmeriCares Free Clinics was so important to me. I can't even describe it."



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medicine I needed.
They were with
me every step of
the way."**

**—Norwalk clinic patient
Siu Lu**