

December E-Spotlight

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Help Your Neighbors in Need This Holiday Season



Compassionate supporters like you made Erie Family Health Center's spectrum of resources available, and Ron now has a beautiful chance at a full life.

"I was more or less homeless...more or less suicidal," says Ron. He was self-medicating mental health issues with heavy alcohol use, and dealing with the dual diagnoses of HIV and hepatitis C. An old friend invited him up to Chicago. Her apartment was across the street from Erie Humboldt Park Health Center, one of our 13 locations. What he found inside the health center saved his life.

Erie Family Health Center is dedicated to serving the most vulnerable members of our communities, and to treating our 70,000 patients with compassion, dignity and respect. Medicaid reimbursements and sliding fee payments from uninsured patients don't come close to covering the average cost of a patient visit to Erie. So we must rely on your donations to provide care. Help Erie provide nationally top-ranking medical, dental and behavioral health care to those in need, regardless of their ability to pay.

Without you and your generosity, thousands more like Ron would struggle with complex, chronic disease, worsened by

financial, social and legal challenges. Thousands more would have no choice but costly ER visits, instead of Erie's trusted, holistic primary care.

Thanks to Erie's care, Ron is now sober and thriving. His HIV is well under control, and his hepatitis C will be cured in a few weeks.

With your help, thousands more like Ron can take back their lives at Erie Family Health Center. Thank you for your donation.

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If you have a question about donating to Erie or the programs your support helps make possible, please contact Kate Birdwell at 312.432.7440 or e-mail her at kbirdwell@eriefamilyhealth.org.

Erie Staff Give Back



Every day our staff comes to work ready and willing to give back to the community by providing quality health care services – but at year end, they go above and beyond to ensure that our patients have a healthy and happy holiday.

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Vivian Moreno, Women's Health Promoter, and Brenda Manzardo, Health Educator at Erie Helping Hands, coordinate a gift drive for 50 Albany Park families every holiday season. The families who benefit from this special drive are identified by the medical providers at Erie Helping Hands. "These are families facing eviction, poverty, job loss – our patients who are facing difficult times," said Moreno.

Most of the donations come from other staff members, either at Erie Helping Hands or our other health centers. The donations are routed to Erie Helping Hands, where Moreno and her team sort them by type of gift and age range. Then, patients are invited to come in and "shop" for gifts for their children or other family members in a private area of the clinic. Moreno said that it's important to give families pride and choice in their gift selection process.

"I remember not having a gift under the Christmas tree," said Moreno. "What we do every day – it's what we do. But this is something extra. It's special."

Monica Ortiz, Licensed Practical Nurse, and Yesenia Gutierrez, Women's Health Promoter, also host an in-kind drive and dinner for community members in need – specifically adolescents. The Youth Holiday Dinner is a tradition that started five years ago, when Dulce Quintero, Director of Erie Humboldt Park and former employee at La Casa Norte, an organization that serves the homeless, invited a few Erie staff members to host a dinner for homeless youth at La Casa Norte.

"It was just a small group – maybe five of us that put this together. We just saw a huge impact. There was a huge need," said Ortiz. "The following year there wasn't a place for us to have it anymore, so we just decided to host the dinner on our own."

Many of the homeless youth (anywhere between ages 13 to 25) who are invited to the dinner have been kicked out of their homes and are living in shelters or with other youth. The holiday dinner is a way to create a safe space for them to spend time with the people they call family. There's a DJ, plenty of food donated by Cermak Foods and cooked by Erie staff, and even take-home boxes of extra food. A section of the space at the dinner is reserved for in-kind donations – warm clothing, coats, toiletries, Subway and McDonald's gift cards, and baby

items for young, expecting mothers.

Dulce works with the shelters around Chicago to make sure that they all know about the resources at the holiday dinner. And once the youth arrive, Erie staff help to connect them with our health care services.

"I'm always amazed at the donations we receive from our co-workers," said Ortiz. "Even \$5 or \$10 – anything helps. All of it goes towards making sure these youth have a safe space to spend a holiday meal with their peers."

Interested in contributing to the Youth Holiday Dinner? Please email Monica Ortiz at moortiz@eriefamilyhealth.org.

Interested in contributing to The Erie Helping Hands Gift Drive? Please email Vivian Moreno at vbarrett@eriefamilyhealth.org.

Erie Supports Puerto Ricans Impacted by Hurricane Maria



AmeriCorps members providing information about Erie's services to Puerto Ricans.

Hurricane Maria has been devastating to residents of Puerto Rico. With no humanitarian flights lifting people out, many are paying their own way to come to the US mainland – and many of them have come to reunite with friends and family in Chicago.

Erie Family Health Center has been proud to step forward to serve displaced Puerto Ricans as part of a city-wide

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collaborative to provide relief services, along with other hospitals and health care providers. Additionally, the Humboldt Park Fieldhouse has been set up as a hub of resources for those coming in from Puerto Rico. At the fieldhouse, people can obtain information about where to get food, clothing, shelter – and, of course, health care.

Robin Varnado, Erie's Regional Director of Operations and Behavioral Health, is leading Erie's initiative to provide care to those coming from Puerto Rico, along with Marisol Jimenez, Director of Erie Division Street and Teen Center; Yessenia Feliciano, Patient Benefit Advocate Supervisor at Erie Teen Center; and Victoria Fernandez, Patient Benefit Advocate Supervisor at Erie Division Street. "Because of Erie's proximity to the Humboldt Park neighborhood, our providers have a real opportunity to see a lot of patients," Varnado said. "We have an opportunity to make a huge impact."

To best accommodate these new patients, Erie's usual intake process has been modified to give them time to get their documents in order. "People are coming in without a whole lot of paperwork. Certainly not birth certificates or social security numbers. They've lost everything." Puerto Ricans coming into the health center without documentation verifying their identity are connected to free legal services via the Health Justice Project, a medical-legal partnership between Erie and Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Some people coming in also lack health insurance, and Erie navigators have been assisting patients with enrolling or re-enrolling them in health insurance that we accept.

Patients are receiving care at either Erie Division Street or Erie Teen Center, depending on their age. As of December 6, Erie has seen over 130 patients from Puerto Rico. "A lot of patients are coming in with critical needs – for immediate access to necessary medications for diabetes and high cholesterol, severe toothaches," said Varnado. "But we expect that once people settle in, they'll be coming in for school physicals for their children and establishing more routine care with us."

Erie staff members are also stepping forward and have donated money or emergency supplies towards the relief

effort in Puerto Rico. Erie Family Health Center will continue to gauge what the need is and accommodate our process to continue to provide care for our neighbors.

Residency Spotlight: Dr. Geraldine Malana



Dr. Geraldine Malana is a family medicine resident physician at Erie Humboldt Park Health Center through Erie's partnership with the Northwestern McGaw Medical Center at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. She's now in her third and final year of residency, but Malana wasn't always sure that she wanted to go into medicine. Her journey towards becoming a doctor began in college. There she discovered the positive impact she could have on those in need during her volunteer work as a tutor for elementary and middle school kids in underserved areas of Columbus, Ohio. "I was fortunate to grow up privileged," she said. "And when I volunteered, I noticed a huge difference in the opportunity and the kind of education these kids were getting. That was a surprise to me."

Malana continued volunteering, this time at a hospital assisting with elderly patients, and that's when the lightbulb went off. "That really solidified it for me," she said. "I would observe the doctors interacting with patients, and thought, I want to do that, too." Malana went on to obtain her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from A.T. Still University of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona, specifically selecting her school because of its strong relationship with the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) and the opportunity it offered to work with rural or urban underserved communities during her education.

But when the time to apply to residencies came around, Malana was hit with the classic wave of self-doubt that every medical

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student endures. She felt her life had been unremarkable, disappointingly so, and she wasn't sure how to make the residencies she was applying to believe that she was a unique candidate. She confided her worries to her advisor, who promptly asked Malana to reflect on her background.

Malana was born in the Philippines, and her family came to the United States when she was still a baby. "I'm an immigrant, and my life was so different because of the opportunities my family was fortunate enough to have," said Malana. "Going into community medicine is a way for me to give back and help those who weren't as lucky as I was."

Malana's bright and warm demeanor has certainly made an impact on the patients she sees at Erie. She remembers one of the first patients she saw, a woman struggling with diabetes and recurring infections. "She had a pretty uphill battle to fight," said Malana. "But I told her that she could get her health back under control, and that we were going to do it together." Malana saw her patient again four months later, and was surprised to see that she had lost weight and was exercising and eating healthy. The patient reported that she followed Malana's advice and was seeing great results. "That was amazing to me as an early doctor in training," said Malana. "People in our population feel so vulnerable. They don't feel empowered. But they do care about their health, and it's our job as doctors to care just as much, if not more."

Besides caring for Erie's patients, Malana is also engaged in a research project to understand how Erie can better reach out to local immigrant communities in need of health care. By surveying all the health data at Erie Humboldt Park Health Center and tracking the general areas of patients that are coming in with chronic diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, Malana is compiling a more targeted list of areas where outreach could be improved. "We are seeing that certain areas have more access to food and transportation than other areas," she said. "And I think that's something we can eventually bring up to the Alderman as an issue that needs addressing."

Malana graduates from her residency program in June 2018, and after that she's considering working with community health centers on the East Coast. We know she will continue to change lives wherever she goes, and we're grateful for the

dedication and compassion she's showed to our patients during her time with Erie.