



healthbrigade

Inside Scoop

June 2025 | Issue #137

WELCOMING • TRUSTED • INCLUSIVE • INTEGRATED • IMPACTFUL • RESPONSIVE

Health Brigade provides exceptional health services to those least served in a caring and non-judgmental environment.

Exercising Our First Amendment Rights

On **June 14**, several Health Brigade staff, family, volunteers and friends participated in Richmond's NO KINGS march protesting the current administration's policies and funding cuts to public health programs. The march began at the Bell Tower on the state capital grounds and drew an estimated 5,000 people.

Photos continued on page 3

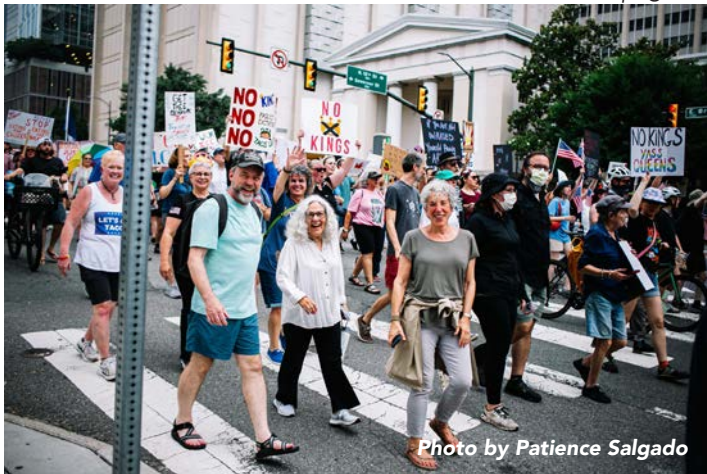


Photo by Patience Salgado



Cocktails for a Cause



On **June 26**, the Health Brigade board and the Emerging Leaders Council sponsored a happy hour gathering at the Quirk Hotel from 5-7 pm. Ten percent of the sales during that time will be donated to support the agency's mission. Thank you to everyone who was able to join us.

Photos continued on page 5

1010 North Thompson Street • Richmond, Virginia 23230 • www.healthbrigade.org



www.facebook.com/healthbrigade



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Diabetes Management at Health Brigade

By Wendy Klein, MD, MACP

Diagnosing and managing diabetes is an ongoing challenge for all patients and providers everywhere, but even more so at HB Medical Clinic, where prevalence is high and barriers to care abound.

Health Brigade patients are routinely screened and followed with hemoglobin A1c measurements that help to diagnose and manage blood sugar, since failure to control diabetes is a clear risk for heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and nerve damage. This can be overwhelming for our patients who struggle with so many challenges.

At HB Medical Clinic, there is a well-established team approach. Our nurse practitioners and medical director are highly skilled in diabetes management, and their care is augmented by the expertise of volunteer endocrinologists, **Drs. Kelsey Salley** and **Deb Koehn**.

Patients are followed closely, with help from our dedicated corps of volunteer nurses who provide diabetes teaching that includes glucose control, medication adherence, and lifestyle modification.



Photo by Patience Salgado

HB Medical Clinic Volunteer Dr. Kelsey Salley



Fortunately, Health Brigade is able to provide both insulin and newer medications such as once weekly Trulicity and Invokana through our **Access to Medication Program** with **Rx Partnership**.

Ozempic and Jardiance are obtained through **The Pharmacy Connection**, a program established by the **Virginia Health Care Foundation** that helps provide prescription medications to chronically ill, uninsured individuals throughout Virginia and other states.

Our diabetic folks also benefit from the seasonal

Food Farmacy program in collaboration with **Shalom Farms** that offers weekly prescriptions of fresh, locally grown produce, along with culturally relevant nutrition education and cooking classes.

Diabetes care is a broad and complex effort, but to quote Dr Salley, "It is wonderful to have these options for our patients. We are able to reduce the chances of our patients developing complications from diabetes, which makes a big difference in their longterm health and lifespan."



On **June 8**, **Dr. Muriel Azria-Evans**, HB director of Mental Health & Wellness, completed the Jamestown Triathlon in Williamsburg.

To her surprise, both of her daughters Laken and Kyra drove to the finish line with handmade signs to say job well done! Congratulations, Dr. Azria-Evans!

Photos continued from page 1, Exercising Our First Amendment Rights



Photos above line by Patience Salgado



Mark Your Calendars & Plan to Join Us

The Art Brigade

Presents Its 32nd Exhibition

featuring

Melissa Casanova

Opening Event

Thursday, July 24, 2025

5:30 pm – 7 pm

Artist's Presentation 6:00 pm

- FREE Admission & Refreshments
- Entrance/Parking Rear of Building
- Art Available for Sale
- Wheelchair Accessible



Melissa Casanova's work explores the intersection of abstract realism and cultural storytelling. Inspired by her Dominican heritage and a passion for creating meaningful connections, her paintings are known for vibrant palettes, intricate textures, and thought-provoking narratives. Through her art, Melissa aims to inspire viewers to dream boldly, embrace their roots, and find beauty in everyday moments.



We're so excited to showcase the creative talents of **Melissa Casanova** (@melissacasanovaart) and her mother **Virginia Casanova** (@va.casanova), joining forces for a special mother-daughter collaboration!

This unique exhibit blends Melissa's vibrant, layered paintings with Virginia's beautiful pottery, all in support of Health Brigade's vital mission.



health brigade

1010 North Thompson Street
Richmond, Virginia 23230



Photos continued from page 1, Cocktails for Cause at Quirk Hotel



Editor's Note: On May 29, 2025, Health Brigade held a Town Hall. Executive director Karen Legato opened the event with remarks. Below is an excerpt from those remarks with a section in yellow that was inadvertently left out of last month's Inside Scoop coverage of the event. We felt it was important to share these left out thoughts.

“Health Brigade is at a turning point—a crisis created by a rapid loss of federal and state funding, despite good performance and impactful results for patients and clients. In less than one year, Health Brigade has received **1.84 million in federal/state cuts to programs and facility maintenance upgrades**. We are witnessing the largest cuts in the healthcare safety net system that has ever been made.

This is not just Health Brigade, these cuts are impacting multiple nonprofit health clinics, public health departments, hospitals and medical providers across the state. **We are now on the verge of the feds taking a chainsaw to Medicaid, which will exacerbate the crisis of access to care primarily for low-income residents and vulnerable community members.**

Medical and public health professionals know that a virus like COVID or more deadly virus could hit us at any time. If that were to happen today, given the damage done, and the further anticipated dismantling of the health safety net system. It could snuff us out person by person and community by community.

If there was ever a time we needed to speak up and act, it is today. We are asking you to CARE.

Care is resistance!

Today, the spirit and experience of Fan Free Clinic will rise again in Health Brigade to lead efforts in our community to prompt people to CARE again! We don't know every form that will take yet, but our goal is to educate, advocate, and activate we the people.

We know there are many huge problems in our systems and institutions. We know public policy is complicated despite how simple people will try to make it. We know as humans, we can easily fall into “either/or thinking” about people, issues, problems, and even solutions.

We know how to deeply hurt each other and devolve into mobs. We know most humans are control freaks because the alternative seems to be living in fear all the time. Our antidote to this is to choose to CARE again.

When we care, we resist the fear, we resist the bullying, we resist the hate, we resist turning others into enemies to push our political agendas, enrich ourselves, or gain power over others.

When we care, we embrace all of us—

We care about the poor, the disenfranchised, the well-heeled, the first world and third world problems.

We care about our neighbors—immigrants, Black and Brown people, all people of color, white people, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Atheists, Agnostics, Hindus and people of all religious or non-religious backgrounds.

We care about persons who use drugs, those with chronic illnesses, those living with STI's and HIV/AIDS. We care about people of all generations and their dignity.

We care about those incarcerated, those living with mental illnesses, those living without a home.

We care about the LGBTQ+ community, those living with disabilities, and all who are stigmatized for whatever reasons. We care about women and men and those who identify with another gender or no gender.

We care about our public health workers and civil servants and those in uniforms or not.

We even care about those who hate and seek to oppress us—because ultimately, they are the ones most insecure, sick, and broken in our society.

Our call to action today is to CARE, when we lean into caring, it will move us to productive action—personally, professionally, and politically. None of us have the luxury of checking out. Now is the time for courage, creativity, and turning caring into action.

Today's gathering is not a one and done. Today in the beginning of our **Care is Resistance** movement to hold the people's town halls. Ghandi said, when the people lead, the leaders will follow. It is time for the people to lead. Let's do this. ”



Deloitte Lends A Hand



Photos above line by Patience Salgado



On **June 6**, our friends at Deloitte sent a crew of helping hands to Health Brigade. Their Impact Day group split into two brigades to pack supplies for our Comprehensive Harm Reduction Program and paint six doors in our medical clinic.

Health Brigade Afghan Program



On **May 16**, our Community Health Worker Team conducted an outreach event at **The Mantu Market** in partnership with community leader and businessman **Chef Hamidullah Noori** and internationally known comedian and influencer **Nabi Roshan**. The event was aimed at introducing Health Brigade's Services to Afghan Survivors Impacted by Combat (SASIC) Program to the community.



L to R: Sultana Salehzada, HB Social Work & Support Service Manager Jenee Johnson and Sifatullah Pardes

On **June 14**, HB Community Health Workers **Sifatullah Pardes** and **Sultana Salehzada** conducted outreach at this year's Multicultural Festival, hosted by ReEstablish Richmond and themed Imagine 2025. The event was held at the Dogwood Dell Amphitheater and focused on encouraging the Afghan community to connect with service providers like Health Brigade.

Giving Students Opportunities to Serve



On **June 16**, visitors including faculty and students from the *University of Richmond/Bonner Summer Leadership Institute Conference* visited Health Brigade. Participants included students from Bonner programs at universities around the country. After hearing about the HB Comprehensive Harm Reduction program, the group assembled summer survival kits for clients.

The motto "Access to Education, Opportunity to Serve" is the overarching goal of the Bonner Program. Since 1990, a diverse, multi-state consortium of participating colleges and universities have been joined through a common commitment to "transform students, communities, and campuses through service." The Bonner Program provides diverse, predominantly low-income students with opportunities to serve the underserved in communities where they attend college.



Ironwood Automotive Keeping Us Cool

The folks at **Ironwood Automotive** contributed their time and labor to give the HB Comprehensive Harm Reduction program some very cool assistance this month.

The "Vanpire", which CHR Phlebotomist **Ernest Charles** takes out to our outreach spots for HIV/Hep C testing, was struggling to push out cold air, which could make for a very uncomfortable summer.

"I talked to family friend and owner, **Aaron Williams**. He was kind enough to do the much needed job of replacing the blower! I'm not sure if Aaron really understands the gravity of our situation serving outside in the heat and what this assist means for us as a program," said **Joe Santiago**, CHR Program Associate.

"Ironwood only works on foreign cars but they took in the Chevy Vanpire despite this. If you ever need some auto repairs, stop in Ironwood and say hello. Let him know that Health Brigade appreciates this awesome gesture!"

As an aside, Aaron was not interested in a photo shoot, but insisted that the folks behind the scenes have that exposure!



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Instagram & Facebook: @ironwoodautomotive



The Importance of Representation

Special thanks to HB Mental Health Counselor **Josette Utsey** for gifting the medical clinic with a 40" x 50" original painting that she bought at an estate sale. "At first I was buying the art for me, but then I thought of the many Latino patients and staff in our medical clinic," Josette said. "It is so important that we are intentional about reflecting representation of, and for the people we serve in the art we choose for the agency."



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The Bucket Brigade



Volunteers Recognized in June 2025

Emily Garloff, a William & Mary student volunteering in the Medication Program this summer, won the June drawing. Kelsea Jeter, Volunteer Program Manager, shared, "Thank you for sharing so much of your time with us this month!" Since starting in late May, Emily has given over 65 hours of her time!

Gena Borda
Anne Marie Fontaine
Emily Garloff
Ash Jacobs
Luke Jenkusky

Shreya Kodu
Anita Kozakewicz
Nancy Ovando Perez
Alice Strawn
Bradley Walling

The Bucket Brigade was started by our Volunteer Program Manager Kelsea Jeter in 2021 to provide a process for staff to recognize outstanding volunteer service. All volunteers and interns are eligible for the drawing. Cards to share your thanks and nomination are available in the buckets in the Super Cube, Medical Assistant's Office, and the Administrative Hallway.

Where Are They Now?

Health Brigade—as well as Fan Free Clinic before it—has had a long history training volunteers to become the next generation of leaders in health care, mental health and social work. In each issue, we will work to bring you stories of where some of these incredible individuals have landed in the world of service.

Medical Clinic



L to R: Medical Director **Dr. Rachel Waller**, **Dr. Soojin Lee**, Clinical Practice Administrator **Marianny De Aza**

Soojin Lee, MD, Medical Clinic Volunteer 2011-2025

"My first time volunteering at Fan Free Clinic was actually so long ago I can't remember. I was a freshman or sophomore at VCU and was a biology major considering the pre-med track maybe in 2011. I remember a largely different staff and paper charts.

I graduated from VCU with a very different degree, in interdisciplinary studies (with a focus in anthropology, history, and political science) and continued working in the service industry.

In 2017 I started volunteering regularly as a volunteer in the medical clinic after I returned to VCU to complete my pre-med prerequisites at VCU. I tried to volunteer once a week, if my schedule would allow. I continued doing this until

everything shut down during the summer of 2020 during the height of COVID-19.

During the summer of 2020, BLM protests were erupting across the city and we were still unsure about the spread of COVID-19 in outdoor settings. I wanted to find my role and how I could support my friends while also being mindful of the older family I interacted with. I saw Health Brigade was providing free COVID-19 testing and I got involved. Eventually, I was offered the position of *COVID-19 Coordinator* and began organizing these events and assisting with the vaccine rollout.

In 2021 I was accepted and matriculated into medical school, which took me to Des Moines, Iowa. I knew I wanted to finish out my last year of medical school at home and there was no place I would have rather been than at Health Brigade. So through my school, I arranged to complete my last clinical rotation at Health Brigade. **Dr. Waller** was gracious enough to take me back in the capacity of a fourth year medical student. I graduated on May 30, 2025 and am officially **Dr. Soojin Lee DO**. I will be starting my residency training in internal medicine at the University of Iowa - Des Moines on July 1. It is very surreal.

Volunteering and working at Health Brigade in every iteration over the years has been truly a formative experience. These were my first clinical experiences and allowed me to gain unique insight into healthcare delivery to a patient population I am extremely passionate about. I have accessed Health Brigade's services when it was Fan Free Clinic and many of my loved ones have accessed FFC/HB's programs."

This is not just a place where I've been able to check off a box, it is a critical resource for my community and this whole experience has been steeped in gratitude, symbolism, and passion to continue my commitment to equity in healthcare and to actively engage with the forces that threaten this mission, even in Iowa.

Social Work

Our six outstanding social work students and four dedicated supervisors came together to celebrate the conclusion of the Fall 2024/Spring 2025 field placement on May 2. This year's cohort was the second largest in the agency's history, and the farewell celebration at Brambley Park offered a meaningful opportunity to connect, reflect, and honor the journey shared.



L to R Top: **Emely Baez Salazar, Jackie Marin, Celia Strasburg, Cristina Kincaid, Kim Koger**
L to R Bottom: **Colin King, Sharon Tamayo, Emily Park, Olivia Warner, Jenee Johnson**

Mental Health



Amy Goss, MA, LMFT, Mental Health Volunteer 2015-2019

"I began volunteering at Health Brigade as a mental health counselor in 2015, shortly after I completed my master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at Syracuse University. Prior to my move to the Richmond area, I had done research on mental health services for transgender folks, and was directed to Health Brigade. I was so thankful to be connected with an organization that shared my values.

The nearly four years I spent volunteering has greatly impacted my work as a therapist, and I am forever grateful for the experience I gained and the support I received. **Dr. Muriel Azria-Evans**, Director of Mental Health & Wellness, continues to be an inspiration of my continued growth as a clinician.

After completing my residency hours in 2019, I opened my private practice. A core tenet of my business has been to provide affordable, quality mental health care for folks in the LGBTQIA+ community. This was a value I shared with Health Brigade, and it encouraged me to create my current business model which offers an equitable sliding scale.

Volunteering at Health Brigade was meaningful to me because it supported my professional, and personal, development. I learned so much from the staff, fellow volunteers, and of course my clients, that still impacts my practice today."