

MARINA'S STORY

Marina found her way to Open Door through a friend. She called to make an urgent appointment for cardiovascular care, although she was only in her early twenties. Prior to reaching us, Marina had arrived from Central America and presented to a major medical center in another state, pregnant with her first child and in acute heart failure. The obstetric and cardiovascular teams there, remarkably, enabled her to deliver a healthy baby boy. She then moved to Vermont to live with her sister.

Marina arrived in Addison County in August 2023 with her infant son, needing open heart surgery for a double valve replacement. When she contacted us, ODC's longtime bilingual Clinical Director recognized that we needed to connect her with UVM Medical Center. We established one of our volunteer doctors as Marina's provider, who quickly called a specialist at UVMMC to share her complex cardiac case history.

At the same time, our Patient Services Coordinator worked with Marina to schedule multiple follow-up appointments and prepare a patient financial aid application for UVMMC. This allowed her to access the extensive care she would need at low or no cost.

Our volunteer doctor, working with an interpreter, followed Marina's case, meeting by phone and at Tuesday evening clinics to help her understand the lifechanging surgical choices she faced, and to prepare for the pre-op, post-op and lifelong care implications of her surgery. She would be unable to lift more than 12 lbs—less than the weight of her baby—for three months after her operation.

Given the close connection between oral and heart health, Marina's surgery required dental clearance. Our Dental Coordinator set her up to be assessed and treated by our Dental Hygienist and Extern, with support from our Dental Assistant. Over four visits, they deep-cleaned Marina's teeth and repaired

multiple cavities so she could proceed with surgery just after the new year.

Meanwhile, ODC's Communications Coordinator translated key pre- and postsurgical information from Marina's cardiothoracic care team, and interpreted phone appointments between Marina and our doctor, to support continuity.

Just after the new year, Marina was wheeled into the OR for successful placement of two mechanical valves. When she was discharged from UVMMC to a medically-required housing situation in the Burlington area, we learned it would take Marina 8 -10 months to access a primary care provider there. So, ODC continued to act as her primary care home, providing medication and case management and coordinating with her cardiothoracic nurse around post-surgical care.

Our same volunteer doctor visited Marina weekly, to set up her pill box. He also coordinated required labs, initially driving Marina to the lab two to three times a week to check her INR (clotting time) so her blood thinner dosage could be adjusted accordingly.

In the fourth month out from surgery, ODC took over management of Marina's now-weekly labs. We continued to coordinate check-in calls with her post-op surgical care team. By May, Marina was doing well, able to lift her son again, and expected to live a normal life.

This extraordinary example of wraparound care involved 9 clinic staff members and at least half a dozen volunteer medical provider and interpreters, across 9 months and more than 50 patient interactions, not counting the volunteer doctor's dozens of home visits and rides. At its core, it was enabled by the trust we have built with the community, evident in the actions of that friend who first connected Marina to us.

'LA VUELTA A CASA'



Sharom Yallico Mendoza, 2024



2024 Winter intern Sharom Yallico Mendoza (Midd '24) transcended her internship, continuing to volunteer with us for the entire spring. Her formidable talents extend to art: we are honored to see ourselves in this piece, titled "La Vuelta a Casa / The Return Home", which will greet visitors to the clinic.

Sharom says, "I wanted patients to feel welcome, and to communicate to them that they'll be treated with the same care, dedication and respect as they would in their home country."

Sharom's piece indeed welcomes the viewer in, just as we hope our staff and volunteers welcome our patients. Our gratitude to the artist--we look forward to the doctor you'll become!

WELCOME, MICHELLE!

Michelle Langmaid, MS-RN, joined the ODC in May of 2024 as our new Clinic Coordinator and Nurse Case Manager.

Michelle is from northern Vermont and worked on dairy farms as a young adult. She also spent many years in California and Arizona involved in seed saving, crop production and produce handling. She has a master's degree in nursing from the University of Arizona, and has experience working in an acute care setting as well as home health. Here at ODC, she is very honored to serve a patient population with such fortitude and resilience .

Michelle leads our Tuesday evening clinics, and supports patient care. We are thrilled she's joined our team!





CELEBRATING KATHLEEN READY

We invited Kathleen Ready, RN, a volunteer since the inception of ODC, to reflect on her tenure with us. Instead, she mainly reflected on us! Clinical Director Julia Doucet says, "Kathleen is a rare mix of clinical excellence and kind presence, a wonderful, thorough, detail-oriented nurse who also happens to be one of the kindest people in the world!"

Kathleen shares, "In the late '80s and early '90s, I worked as a nurse at the Addison County Parent Child Center (ACPCC). Our staff and those of other non-profit organizations had many clients who were unable to access health care for all the reasons still present today.

Cheryl Mitchell was the co-director of the ACPCC at that time. She suggested convening a group

I have drifted in and out of the ODC's sphere over the years as a volunteer. I love this agency, for the wonderful services they provide to so many hard-working individuals who would otherwise fall through the cracks. They have the flexibility to see what their patients need and develop the services to provide that care. They have close relationships with their clients, who call on them when they are in need, and the clinic always come through.



representing the non-profit agencies and the medical community to work on this issue. The Open Door Clinic, formed as Community Health Services of Addison County, was born from this collaboration in 1991. The newly formed organization purchased a big blue bus and outfitted it to be a traveling clinic. The bus had both paid and volunteer clinicians who served people throughout Addison County. Over time, the bus was sold, and clinics were established in Vergennes and Middlebury, with the support of Porter Hospital. The clinics were staffed by volunteer clinicians and nurses, as they are today.

ODC's skilled and diligent core staff diagnose and treat a great many chronic and acute problems with great care and respect. The staff set the highest standards of care, and successfully coordinate the cast of characters who serve as clinicians, interpreters, nurses and administrative assistants. ODC board members and a set of incredibly committed volunteer medical and dental directors round out a community of people who have been doing a lot of good for more than 30 years. Bravo! May we continue to recognize and support the ODC for the valuable services they provide.

LAST WORD

HIGHLIGHTING ALYSSE ANTON, ODC'S DEPARTING WELLNESS COORDINATOR



When did you start at ODC, and what did you do there?

I started as an administrative assistant in the fall of 2021, while the entire world was still in full-blown pandemic mode. I loved it! There was so much to learn: how a clinic is organized, the medical conditions patients face, the hospital departments we work with to treat them, and strange medication names. I was so impressed by how so small a clinic could manage and oversee care of so many patients!

By the fall of 2022, the Clinic started envisioning a more patient-centered role for me. With grant support, I became the ODC Wellness Coordinator. The vision was to offer support groups for women and new moms and implement, coordinate and lead wellness activities in the community with the intention to create a sense of connection and belonging among our patients and with the environments they live in.

What was the most important things ODC taught you?

“ There is always something we can do to help a patient – and the first thing is listening to them and treating them with respect. ”

What was the greatest part of your job here? What do you like most about your position?

I have so much enjoyed being the person who offers fun activities and community events outside of patients’ daily work routines. I have enjoyed being able to reach out to ODC patients, presenting them with new experiences that provide a time of relaxation, fun and reflection, focusing on the present time, being in their bodies, connecting with others, and feeling safe and welcome in Vermont.

I also appreciated the work-place and people I have gotten to spend my work time with – the ODC team. These amazing individuals, passionate and caring, are always thinking about how to better serve our patients. They came from a variety of professional paths before working at the clinic, and I believe the Clinic attracted them for its grassroots and social justice values. I feel so privileged to have been working with such beautiful minds and hearts.

Finally, so much of the planning and completion of the wellness activities has depended on the trust and help of community members and local organizations – I am thinking about all the volunteer drivers, hosts at Gather, Ilsley Library, the Congregational Church, Middlebury College students who volunteered or interned, and community members who offered their time and helpful expertise to make things happen.

What next steps do you see for the Wellness Program?

The Wellness Program helped connect our patients to each other, encouraged them to participate in outdoor activities safely and connect with their environment in different ways than they were accustomed to. There is so much more we can do to help, especially in the field of mental health, where services have been scarce all over Vermont. Not the least of it is a lack of counselors who have openings to see new patients, and even fewer who speak Spanish. The clinic is fortunate to have a few therapists who volunteer their time to see our patients, but the need for mental health counseling is present and growing.

This fall, to build on the Wellness Program, the Clinic will welcome Fiona, a social work intern from UVM, who will spend an academic year at ODC, seeing patients and offering community resources. And the cherry on the cake? Fiona is fluent in Spanish! We are excited to welcome her, and her ideas to better serve our patients.

ODC Wellness Program offerings, Fall 2022 through Summer 2024

Support Groups

- 2 women’s groups
- 1 mamas’ group
- 1 gender-inclusive ‘butterfly’ group

Activities

- Yoga X-country skiing Fishing
- Ice skating Sailing Rowing
- Monthly community dinners

Resources

- Bilingual ODC Family Resources Guide