

Lorna Begg

## Empowerment of Fredericksburg's disempowered

With the community engagement project in mind, I set out to the Moss Free Clinic in Fredericksburg to find out how this non-profit benefits the Fredericksburg community. What I found was a series of power distributions that has left a community, specifically the uninsured, disempowered. This community within Fredericksburg has exclusive disadvantages in terms of access to health care for the greater Fredericksburg community. Dissimilarly to my first research project, which examined broad gentrification for the city of Cork, Ireland, I intend with this project to examine a clinic program that targets a direct community, and how it works to empower them.

To begin, good health is determined by one's access to care. However, access and health resources are maldistributed in this country. Access to health care is a privilege afforded either through a job, out of pocket, or through government subsidized Medicaid. As these three forms of access are restricted to jobs with good benefits, the wealthy, or those falling far beneath the poverty line, many do not access the care they need. Public health is what we do as a society to insure conditions under which people can be healthy. Therefore the restrictive and exclusive nature of health care becomes a public health crisis.

But don't we have Obamacare? Well, yes, but with restrictions. After a 2012 Supreme Court decision that rendered the expansion of Medicaid optional for state officials, the benefits of the Affordable Care Act became deeply restricted for states that utilized their powers to fail to expand Medicaid. In these states, like Virginia, extremely limited amounts of people remain the only ones eligible for Medicaid, leaving over three million within these states in the coverage gap, where they don't qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford market subsidies, often because the premiums would cost over half of their salaries. This was the highest ranking of power that has shaped the Fredericksburg community of uninsured people.

As a funneling effect of Virginia's failure to expand Medicaid, the families who make anything over \$8,840 for parents in a family of three remain economically powerless in terms of their access to care. This is essential in terms of individuals without children, as anyone without kids is automatically ineligible for Medicaid regardless of income. Their

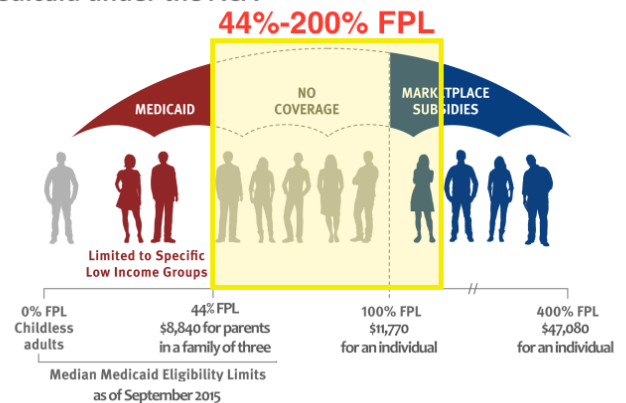
position in the coverage gap forces them to rely on over packed emergency rooms and free clinics. One option for care for these individuals is the Moss Free Clinic. Funded primarily with grant money the clinic serves uninsured adults from Fredericksburg, Carline, King George, Spotsylvania, or Stafford making between 44% and 200% below the national poverty line. After screening individuals to ensure they meet these qualifications, the volunteer physicians, nurses, and dentists provide dental, pharmaceutical, physician and mental health care to those in need, as well as education on how to remain healthy and active.

Beginning with two series of orientations, where my supervisor emphasized the importance of acting respectful and non-judgmental when at the front desk I began my first day at the clinic. Equipped with an ID code, volunteers enter through a back door, and are told not to come through the lobby. Through the back, I signed in through a computer in break room and began my training as a filing clerk behind the front desk. In addition to an emphasis of respectability, caution was specified in terms of talking about patients or leaving computer screens lit with patient information. Training in terms of confidentiality, in other words.

I have loved my experiences at the clinic thus far, and admire the good will of over 600 volunteers to empower the uninsured of Fredericksburg with health and economic benefits.

Figure 1

**Gap in Coverage for Adults in States that Do Not Expand Medicaid under the ACA**



**Image Citation**

Garfield, Rachel, and Anthony Damico. "The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States That Do Not Expand Medicaid – An Update." *The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States That Do Not Expand Medicaid – An Update*. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 23 Oct. 2015. Web. 01 Dec. 2015.