

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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### Free clinic in Auburn can save the lives of uninsured

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**By MARY SWIFT**

P-I COLUMNIST

THIS IS FOR a man I never met -- and all the others like him.

I don't know his name, his age or where he lived, whether he was married or single, had children or grandchildren, loved fishing or gardening or poker. I don't know a thing about his dreams or his disappointments.

What I do know is, he was the kind of person who is at the heart of Dr. Julie Stroud's vision.

Stroud, 31, lives in Kent with her husband, Steve, and their 3-year-old son, Bradley. She's a family-practice physician at MultiCare.

Stroud grew up in Salem, Ore., and went on to college at Western Washington University. After her junior year, she took a year off to travel to China to work in orphanages.

She was considering a career in medicine, but wasn't sure. Her father wanted to be a doctor, but never became one, and she wanted to make sure the dream she was fulfilling was hers, not his.

"Halfway through the year, I knew," she says.

At an orphanage on the mainland, she held a tiny infant, just a month old, with sunken cheeks that revealed failing health and poor nutrition. Stroud cared for the baby in her own home there, then found a Chinese family to foster her.

Two years later, she got a photo of the child -- looking robust, healthy and happy.

Stroud went on to study medicine at a hospital in England. (It was there that Steve, who was living and working in the U.S., proposed -- not at the Eiffel Tower as he'd planned, but in her "call room," the tiny sleeping area at the hospital).

Five days after their wedding, they were in Uganda, where she would do a three-month stint at a Ugandan hospital. Last year, Stroud finished a three-year residency at Swedish and now works part time while caring for Bradley, who was born just days before she began the residency.

"So I was working 80-hour weeks for the first three years of his life," she says. "I'm just getting to know him."

Not that her passion for volunteerism has idled in the wake of motherhood and career.

Only this time, her mission isn't in China. It's in South King and north Pierce counties.

Two years ago, Stroud, a member of Auburn's Grace Community Church, came up with the idea of creating a free community clinic in Auburn for those without health insurance. She floated the idea to friends and acquaintances.

On March 31, Christ Community Free Clinic -- staffed by volunteer doctors, nurses and other workers and funded by donations -- opened its doors at 1 A St. N.W., just west of Auburn City Hall.

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The clinic operates Saturdays from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. on a walk-in basis. Besides same-day medical consultations, volunteers work to connect the uninsured with available resources, including Medicaid and Washington Basic Health.

So far, patients are just trickling in -- five to six each Saturday.

But with 18 percent of residents in South King County uninsured, Stroud expects that number to climb as word spreads.

"We can handle about 20 patients a day," Stroud says. "I know people are grateful. I've had a patient tell me, 'I don't know what I would have done without you.' "

She knows the clinic may not only improve health, but also save lives.

"You can verify this with any emergency room: It's not uncommon that people without insurance delay in receiving care, and when they're really sick come in to the emergency room," says Fred McHugh, chaplain at Auburn Regional Medical Center and a member of the board of Christ Community Free Clinic.

Sometimes, that delay is deadly.

Which brings me back to that unidentified man I never met -- a man patient-privacy laws prevent McHugh from discussing.

Last month, the man got sick.

Because he was uninsured, he delayed getting treatment.

He died at Auburn Regional Medical Center.

## **LEARN MORE**

For more information on Christ Community Free Clinic, its "wish list" or how you can become involved, go to [christfreeclinic.org](http://christfreeclinic.org).

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