

# Helping the Underserved Stay Stable In an Unstable World

By Julia Vitale, Senior Editor at *Air Mail*

At the Homeopathy Institute of the Pacific (HIP), volunteers continue to lend a critical hand to homeless and veterans during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Staffed entirely by volunteers, the CA Bay Area-based Homeopathy Institute of the Pacific (HIP) is a non-profit that serves the community's underserved, specializing in Traumatic Brain Injuries, Post-Traumatic Stress, Addiction, Anxiety, Depression, Arthritis and more. No one is turned away due to lack of funds—the organization's focus is on economically marginalized people, and through accessible homeopathic care HIP has seen extremely promising results in the more than 400 clients it has worked with since its founding in 2011.

## Homeopathic care for the underserved and in disasters

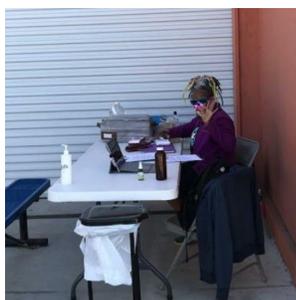
HIP operates clinics in San Francisco, Menlo Park, and Palo Alto. In addition, in the past few years its volunteers have worked with the Red Cross to help victims of the Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise in 2018, the Kincade Fire, which ravaged Sonoma County and its homes in 2019, and the CZU fire, which destroyed more than 900 residences in Santa Cruz and San Mateo



Counties this year. (Photo: Wanda Smith-Schick and Cristina Garelli meet with CZU Fire evacuees at the Santa Cruz Campground, September 2020.)

## Adjusting to the pandemic

Like the rest of the world, HIP was forced to close its clinics' doors in March of this year due to Covid-19. Disasters always hit the vulnerable the hardest, and the Covid-19 pandemic has been no exception. Under state legislation to remain indoors, most homeless in the Bay Area were placed in shelters and hotels with strangers, leading many to feel unsafe—screaming, smoking, and fighting are common, and often a whole floor is relegated to a single bathroom—and triggering their internal traumas. Used to experiencing healthy human contact on the streets and access to bathrooms in places like libraries, gyms, and community centers, the coronavirus-induced changes have led to loneliness and danger for many homeless.



"We knew that some people with high life challenges would need more support," says HIP co-founder Wanda Smith-Schick, CCH, and just when their clients needed them most, HIP volunteers were no longer able to meet with them in person.

In the course of just a few days, Smith-Schick and HIP clinical director Cristina Garelli, CCH shifted their whole practice to operate in the virtual sphere. "We are committed to helping our clients and being flexible under current unusual circumstances," Smith-Schick says. Since March 2020 they have been conducting weekly phone meetings—more often when needed—and shipping or delivering remedies directly to clients.

Though it wasn't easy to switch to phone consultations, the results have been remarkable. A HIP client, who in the past was a severe drug addict and spent time in jail, was struggling in SRO housing when Smith-Schick and Garelli met her. Since receiving her remedy shortly before the coronavirus hit, this client was able to find a job and a healthier place to live in the garage of an elderly person. Due to the coronavirus she lost her job, but she forged on, and now helps the elderly lady with her shopping and cleaning. Another HIP client was homeless and jumping from shelter to shelter when Smith-Schick and Garelli met her. The remedy they gave her has helped her break this cycle and get on the path toward finding a stable job.

This client also referred another homeless person she knew to HIP—the organization's vital services are traveling via word of mouth. Now, HIP has a client who its volunteers have never met in person, since she became a patient during the coronavirus. Through phone consultations alone, Smith-Schick and Garelli have prescribed a remedy to successfully keep this new client's asthma under control, despite the poor air quality that plagued the Bay Area in the early fall due to the fires.

It's not just the coronavirus that is making the current situation an especially difficult one for the community's underserved. Longstanding systemic racism, brought to the forefront of national consciousness with the Black Lives Matter movement, is an added burden for clients of color. One HIP client, a Black American veteran who has struggled for years with PTSD, was having trouble leaving her home when the pandemic started in March and was even more triggered by the recent racial turmoil and the reckoning that have led to the Black Lives Matter movement. "As a black person in a metropolitan area, you don't know if you're going to be collateral damage," says Smith-Schick. A Black American woman, Smith-Schick understands the added hardship faced by HIP's clients of color first hand. This has helped her to promote a safe space in which clients can feel comfortable opening up about their problems. The more they share, the better HIP is equipped to prescribe the right remedy, leading to overwhelmingly positive results. After a few phone consultations with HIP, its volunteers sent the veteran a remedy and received the



following feedback: *"Now I can go forward with daily life, go get my groceries and my mail. Thank you."*

To date since shelter-in-place orders were first enacted in California, HIP has conducted 297 client sessions, including with 20 veterans, 95 homeless, 44 underserved, and eight CZU fire evacuees.

## Looking forward

The Covid-19 pandemic hasn't been kind, and California is still grappling with closures and high numbers of cases. In these moments it's essential to keep in mind our communities' most vulnerable members, and help the important work of organizations like HIP, who are donating their time and expertise—and sometimes their own money—to help. While HIP has had various generous donations of remedies, they are still having to pay rent for their office space, where they store all of their remedies and equipment. Being a nonprofit, this year it's been more difficult than usual to raise the funds it needs to continue its work. And if there was any year that the work HIP does mattered especially, it would be this one.

To help and learn more, visit HIP's website: [www.homeopathyip.org](http://www.homeopathyip.org)

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