

# Wheels for Good

## RVS TRANSFORMED INTO MISSION OF MERCY FREE MOBILE MEDICAL CLINICS

by Stephanie Jarnagan / photos courtesy of Mission of Mercy

Every year, millions of Americans delay medical care because they do not have transportation. Unsurprisingly, transportation barriers to healthcare have a disproportionate impact on individuals who are poor and who have chronic conditions.

One local healthcare nonprofit seeks to effect change in this area. For the past 25 years, Phoenix-based Mission of Mercy (MOM) has been bringing its mobile medical program into areas of high need within Maricopa County by partnering with clinic host sites like churches and community centers.

MOM provides "Healing through Love" by offering completely free primary healthcare and prescription medications delivered primarily by volun-

teer doctors and nurses. Currently operating six mobile medical clinics in Avondale, Maryvale, Phoenix (2), Chandler and Mesa, MOM serves approximately 2,500 patients annually. More than 90 percent have at least one chronic health condition requiring continuous care and medication.

### A culture of caring

"We serve anyone who needs primary care services regardless of age, status, background or ability to pay. This means no sliding scales or embarrassing qualification process," shared Executive Director Paula Carvalho. "We not only provide care and treatment for acute health concerns, we also pro-

vide holistic medical care and education for those dealing with chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes. Unlike traditional medical offices, we provide our patients with their medications, completely free. Without this service, most of our patients would choose to go without their medication, and for those with a chronic condition, this medication is often life-saving."

Over the past 25 years, MOM has provided 300,000 pro bono patient visits and dispensed nearly 500,000 free prescription medications to those who find themselves in need of care and unable to afford it.

Arizona has one of the highest rates of uninsured in the nation, impacting nearly 800,000 individuals. MOM's healthcare services keep the uninsured out of emergency rooms and prevent avoidable hospitalizations, positively affecting patient lives as well as lessening the expensive public burden of uncompensated care.

### Changing patients' lives

Raj G. grew up on a small island in Africa. At 60 years old, he had never seen a doctor when he first came to MOM. He found MOM's Avondale clinic after accompanying a friend to his appointment, which was in their neighborhood at the Avondale Baptist Church. Raj asked MOM volunteers if he, too, might be able to see a doctor and was surprised when they said yes.

After his first visit, Raj found out that he had extremely high cholesterol and Type 2 diabetes. He ended up in a month-long coma related to complications from his untreated diabetes. After coming out of the coma, he was told he would likely not see, walk or talk again. He did lose vision in one eye, but he can still walk and talk "thanks to the grace of God and my wonderful doctors."

Now 62, Raj has been visiting MOM's Avondale clinic for his medications and checkups every two months, and he adheres to a healthy, vegetable-based diet based on orders from MOM volunteer physician Dr. Carie Barlow. "She saved my life, and from the bottom of my heart, I am grateful,"

Raj shared at a clinic visit.

### Volunteers make a difference

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Mission of Mercy's work. A robust volunteer workforce of more than 100 medical, interpreting and data entry professionals contribute nearly 10,000 hours annually. MOM's work would not be possible without the generosity of compassionate volunteers, many of whom are retired healthcare professionals.

"I receive zero monetary compensation, but I receive a great deal of compensation in terms of the good feeling that I get being there, the ability to come home feeling 'I've made a difference.' That is compensation," said Dr. Ira Ehrlich, a long-time volunteer physician at MOM's Mesa clinic who is also a retired cardiologist.

Mission of Mercy receives no federal or state funding and operates primarily from foundation grants and donations.

For more information on how to support Mission of Mercy or how to receive services, visit [momaz.org](http://momaz.org).

### MOBILE MEDICAL RV: A CLOSER LOOK

RV: 2020 Fleetwood Bounder 35P (Class A)

ENGINE: Ford Triton V10

DEALER: La Mesa RV Center in Phoenix

RETROFIT: LazyDays RV in Tucson

CUSTOMIZATIONS: Three exam rooms, a pharmacy, an EKG machine, a refrigerator to house insulin, and storage for medical equipment, PPE and medications

FUNDERS: Thunderbirds Charities and Gila River Indian Community

