

Al-Aqsa Clinic: run by Muslims, service for all

BY ROBERT PACHECO
STAFF WRITER

I extended my hand to shake hers, as is the custom that my father taught me.

"I'm sorry, I cannot," Amal Khmour, founder of Al-Aqsa Community Clinic, said while recoiling from my gesture.

Remembering my time in the Middle East as a U.S. sailor, I greeted her again. I took a deep bow, raised my right hand to my forehead, and gently touched my index and middle-finger to my brow while uttering a respectful, "Salaam."

Salaam means peace in Arabic, and is the proper greeting at Al-Aqsa Community Clinic, whose motto is "Run by Muslims, providing service for all."

Tucked away at 108 South Walnut Street in Greensboro, Al-Aqsa works to heal our most desperate townfolk.

"We receive no support from the state," said Khmour. "All doctors and staff are volunteers. Medication is what doctors can provide from samples that pharmaceutical representatives leave at their clinics."

Founded in February 2009, the clinic was initially started to address the hundreds of refugees that were settling in the Triad from Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and other nations affected by war.

"When refugees first come to America, they often do not trust government services," said Khmour. "Partly because of experiences in their home nations, and partly due to the language barrier."

Refugees who come to our country seeking the American dream quickly find it hidden behind a fog of bureaucracy.

"The hardest thing for my family, coming to America, was getting past the language barrier," Bluebird taxi driver Khmer Rhyad said. "Even when you speak good English, the accent barrier can make communication hard."

"Legally, they are supposed to get Medicaid, but it takes a very long time for their paperwork to get done," said Khmour. "The refugees are settled in the Triad due to our strong Muslim community."

"The government brings the refugees to our door and says, 'Here, you take care of them,'

without providing financial support," said volunteer Dr. Muhammad Arida.

Thirty doctors volunteer their services at the clinic, which is open to the general public on the first and third weekends of every month.

Soon after opening, the clinic discovered the need for low-cost health care in the Triad extended beyond the refugee community.

"We quickly found out that health care was not just a refugee crisis," said Khmour. "As the recession deepened, we expanded our scope to help the entire community."

"No one should go without healthcare."

While other low-cost clinics in the Triad have closed their doors as financial support from Raleigh has been cut, Al-Aqsa Community Clinic has continued to serve over 2,000 people who regularly rely on their services.

Al-Aqsa finds itself in a peculiar position. Because it does not rely on subsidies from the state of North Carolina, it is not affected by state budget cuts. But because they do not rely on the state, they have trouble reaching everyone they would like to provide health care to.

"We would love to have much more

support from the state," said Dr. Arida. "But we will not let that lack of support affect our mission to help those who need it."

Al-Aqsa operates in a building whose landlord is seeking a permanent tenant and allowing them to use the facility until then.

"If we lose this building we disaffect 2,000 people," said Khmour, "we need a dedicated site for our clinic and charitable donations to achieve that goal."

Al-Aqsa Community Clinic is a mere two miles from Guilford College, and its values show that it is a close neighbor to our community. It was founded by women, strongly molded by a call to charity and open to anyone who is in need.

If you would like to volunteer your time, donate to their cause or are in need of low-cost health care contact:
Al-Aqsa Community Clinic
(336)350-1642
<http://www.al-aqsaclinic.org>

Five small Greensboro businesses join together to support LGBTQ equality

BY NICOLE BARNARD
STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 21, five small businesses teamed up for Equality GSO, an event to support the LGBTQ community. The businesses — Golden Spiral, Crafted, Fahrenheit Kollektiv, Green Bean and Elsewhere — worked with the organization NC Equality to make the event a success.

"Proceeds from the (day) will go to NC Equality," said Rebecca Cisneros of Fahrenheit Kollektiv, a local salon.

According to their website, NC Equality is an organization "dedicated to securing equal rights and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender North Carolinians."

"Hopefully, this event will show the LGBTQ community how many businesses are accepting," said Kristina Fuller, chief proprietor of Crafted, a taco shop.

The day was a success, with artists like Dalton Village, Whisky Christy and the Half Pint Orchestra, Laura Jane Vincent and 10 others performing at the Green Bean Cafe, and crowds of people coming to the event from all around Greensboro and the towns nearby.

"It was a very nice atmosphere," said first-year Ellie Weiner, who visited the Green Bean Cafe and Elsewhere. "I do think it's a really good way to ... support (NC Equality)."

Weiner also observed the zines being sold by Elsewhere.

"They were a collection of short stories from high school students (sharing experiences)," said Weiner. "They also had a table where you could share stories about your experiences."

Additionally, Fahrenheit Kollektiv offered special prices on haircuts for those who wanted to support the event, while Golden Spiral offered custom and flash tattoos.

Lea Brown, president of Queer People of Color, thinks that even with events like this, the community still has a long way to go.

"I think the five small businesses that donated to NC Equality are definitely headed in the right direction," said Brown. "I appreciate their efforts and applaud them for taking a public stand for equality. However, I don't think doing charity work for one day should be so highly glorified."

On the other hand, Brian Daniel, director of Binford Hall and advisor of Pride, was impressed with the efforts of the five small businesses.

"It's unique that small businesses are assisting organizations that they're passionate about," Daniel said.

"It's really special that they're supporting organizations that align with their values. It's important."

When asked about what these businesses hope to do in the future, Fuller said, "This is our first (event). More than likely it will be an annual event."

Brown hopes for the same.

"I think this event was successful, and if more events like this follow, it will also share the same results," said Brown. "I just hope these businesses don't stop here. There is a lot of work that needs to be done, and although it is not necessarily their responsibility, I just hope their efforts continue. I am happy this will become an annual event. I hope more businesses join the cause and hopefully contribute even more than this year. I just wish it didn't stop there."

When asked why this event is so important, Fuller said that she wants the LGBTQ community to know that they are being supported, just like they are supporting those small businesses.

"It's important for there to be more public LGBTQ awareness in the south, where it isn't a part of every day education," said Weiner. "These issues aren't even on people's radars. I also think that ... a place like Greensboro, (which) is fairly liberal, is a very good and very important place to start."

With this event, the answer as to whether or not the LGBTQ community is being supported is clear: there is a lot of support for the LGBTQ community coming from Greensboro. At the same time, Brown is right: we still do have a long way to go before we can achieve equality.



Kristina Fuller (left), proprietor of Crafted! The Art of the Taco, donated proceeds from Sept. 21 sales to N.C. Equality.