Q: How has this experience shaped your Stanford education?

A: LGBT activism is something that is very important to me, personally and academically. As a straight white male, it is very easy to make heads turn when people learn about my involvement in LGBT work. My continued activism, from working at the LGBT-CRC on campus to researching with the Family Acceptance Project of SFSU, has enabled me to be educated about the realities of being queer in contemporary American culture, and has informed much of my study related to civil rights law and political philosophy.

Q: Has this experience changed any of your perspectives towards LGBT community and if yes, how?

A: Going over all those audiotapes, it was striking just how similar many of the LGBT youth’s experiences were. In fact, they were nearly identical at times. The coming out experience, for example, was an incredibly intense moment for all of them, characterized by fear and uncertainty. This was especially the case when coming out to one’s parents. On the other end, the experience of parents whose children came out to them was also very similar. Many of them brushed it off as a phase or something that they child would grow out of; this was often cited as a source of frustration and hurt for many LGB youth, who wanted only to be taken seriously by their parents.

Q: What was the highlight of this project experience?

A: The highlight for me was working with a staff of very dedicated, intelligent staff and faculty from SFSU. They are completely committed to the project and all shared an intense desire to reshape the experience of queer youth toward a more livable adolescence. It is uncommon, I think, that individuals possess the desire to positively affect a group of people that is not their own. The staff of the Family Acceptance Project stood to gain nothing personally from improving the lives of gay youth; in this sense it is substantially different from fighting for gay marriage or protection from discrimination. Knowing them was a blast, and a privilege.

More about the project Adam was involved in can be found at [http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/index.htm](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/index.htm)

Adam is currently a senior at Stanford University majoring in Philosophy and is writing his honors thesis on sex change and health insurance in Ethics in Society. For the past two years, he was on staff at the LGBT.CRC (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender – Community Resource Center) at Stanford University. He is also currently a residential assistant at Theta Delta Chi on campus. Adam is a founder and the current Editor-in-Chief of Six Degrees, A Stanford Journal of Human Rights. He is planning to take a year off and move to Buenos Aires after he graduates. After his stay in Buenos Aires, Adam plans to attend law school in United States and study civil rights law so that one day he may be a part of rolling back the discriminatory legislation against LGBT people.

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**Special Features**

**Family Resource Desk:**

Connecting Patients with Community Resources

*Nancy Wang*

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Stanford undergraduates working at the Family Resource Desk (FRD) strive to address the non-medical but clearly health-related needs of Stanford Emergency Department (ED) patients and their families. Staffed and coordinated by Stanford undergraduates, the FRD serves the information needs of children and their families by connecting them with community resources and services. The resource desk was the brainchild of Dr. Ewen
Wang, Assistant Professor of Surgery in the Division of Emergency Medicine at Stanford. “I am very excited about the entire concept of the FRD,” said Dr. Wang. “As a physician, I am so busy with patient care, I am unable to give patients accurate information about programs, let alone solicit other worries, stresses or needs even though they directly affect their health. Within the FRD, our undergraduates provide direct service to individual patients, research social programs, as well as gain valuable exposure to the myriad of factors that affect health within the ED setting.”

Many Stanford ED patients are from East Palo Alto, which, according to the US Census bureau, consists of over 70% minorities and has an average income less than $14,000 per year. According to Prasanna Ananth, a second year medical student at Stanford and founder of the FRD, the combination of demographic factors and barriers to obtaining important social services contributes to health care disparities that the FRD hopes to address.

Ananth and several Stanford undergraduates conducted needs assessment surveys during the summer of 2004 to determine the types of information that would be helpful to families in the ED. The assessment found that more than a third of the patients in the ED were at or below the Federal Poverty Line, currently at an annual income of $18,850 for a family of four. Ananth and students also found that 70% of the patients were ethnic minorities, and 61% had received high school education or less. These findings reinforced the observation that many of the families of pediatric patients seen in the ED are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The assessment also confirmed patient interest in access to resources in the ED itself. Informational needs expressed by patients included details of educational opportunities for children and adults, housing and health insurance. “It became apparent, following my analysis of the needs assessment data, that families felt disconnected from public resources and would appreciate a help desk such as our own to more effectively utilize the social services available to them,” said Ananth. “This essentially validated our mission in initiating the desk.”

The FRD was initiated as a part of Ananth’s Valley Foundation Medical Scholars project in the Stanford School of Medicine, and initial logistics and organizing were done largely by Dr. Wang and Ananth. Wang and Ananth recruited undergraduates in April of 2004 to conduct preliminary research. Over 70 students expressed interest, and around 15 undergraduates formed study groups to examine the key topics of health care access, nutrition and food stamps, shelters, continuing education, and child care services. The Valley Foundation provided initial start-up funding for the organization, although the FRD is now registered as a volunteer student organization and will receive funding from the Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU).

Since the opening of the desk in November of 2004, the number of volunteers at the desk has grown to 24 individuals who work 4-6 hours per week at the desk. Over 20 patients have been comprehensively served. Three undergraduate coordinators, selected annually, are also responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the desk, meeting with staffers, publicizing the desk, and considering future directions of the program. Focusing on children with families, staffers introduce the program to patients in the ED, ask if patients need any specific assistance and present resources available. Patients are also referred to the desk by medical care teams who, according to the program coordinators, have been very responsive. Staffers follow up with patients to ensure that they were able to establish contacts or obtain the necessary services. Based on patient requests, volunteers also continuously update information and assess the need for new resource materials, which are then researched, compiled and incorporated into the FRD database.

Areas of current resources include low-cost community clinics such as Arbor and Pacific Free Clinics, health insurance, nutrition, adult education, obesity, child care, temporary housing, subsidized housing and child and crisis counseling. Sophomore Sherveen Salek, one of the coordinators, finds health insurance an area where the FRD can contribute greatly to a child’s health and well-being. “Since essentially all children within the San Mateo and Santa Clara counties are eligible for health insurance, the
FRD plays a crucial role in informing patients of the options available to them,” he said.

The FRD hopes to continue to increase the number of staffers through quarterly recruitments, and this year’s coordinators are looking into expanding the program. Sophomore Jessica Li, another coordinator, said, “Many undergrads are interested in our program because not only does it offer them a valuable learning experience – whether they are bound to medical school, law school, or even to the business sector – it also provides them with the opportunity to give back to the community.” Students who are interested in volunteering or learning more about the program should contact coordinators Jessica Li (jessli@stanford.edu), Sherveen Salek (Sherveen@stanford.edu) or Mari Suzuki (mari.suzuki@stanford.edu). Dr. Wang and the undergraduate coordinators will also be teaching a student-initiated course in the spring entitled “Community Health, Contemporary Issues in Health Care.” “Through the student-initiated course, we hope to foster more awareness of the socioeconomic factors profoundly affecting the health of many Emergency Room patients,” said Suzuki.

As the FRD continues to provide and expand services to the underserved community at the Stanford ED, it demonstrates that undergraduate research can have a large social impact. The program also serves as a reminder that research is most frequently an on-going process that depends on dedicated individuals working to further knowledge and thereby enable positive change.

The author would like to thank Prasanna Ananth, Jessica Li, Sherveen Salek and Mari Suzuki for their large contributions to this article.