



DAILY POINT OF LIGHT

CALIFORNIA TEEN CONNECTS MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND HOMELESS COMMUNITY

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BY [KAY NOLAN](#)



ISHAAN BRAR AND HIS VOLUNTEERS WITH HEALTHY COMMUNITY GATHER AT THE MISSION AT KERN COUNTY, TO PROVIDE A MOBILE HEALTH CLINIC TO RESIDENTS OF THE HOMELESS SHELTER./COURTESY ISHAAN BRAR

Ishaan Brar first toured a homeless shelter as a Boy Scout. His Scout troop in Bakersfield, Calif., was doing a community service project.

But Ishaan, whose parents are both doctors, noticed something that other teenagers might have overlooked.

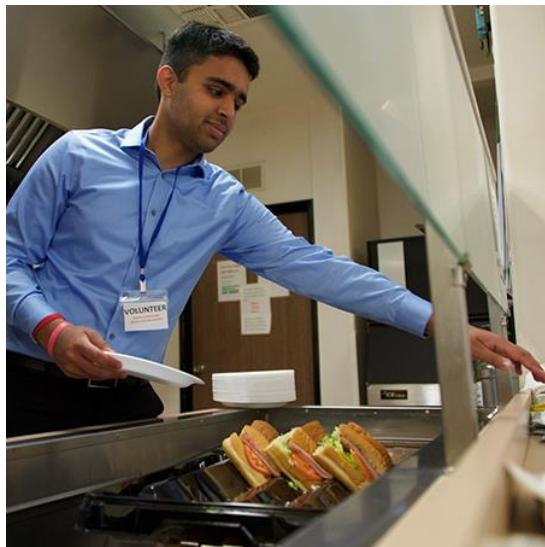
"I was noticing injuries, bandages everywhere – some people were really in pain," says Ishaan. "It really opened my eyes to realizing that the homeless have barriers to accessing health care. I wanted to do something about that."

"Bakersfield, and literally the rest of California, even before the COVID pandemic, has had an unprecedented homelessness crisis," says Ishaan. "But Bakersfield especially, because it's one of the cheapest areas to live in California, has had homeless people flocking to the area. Homeless shelters are over capacity and they actually are building new ones. Because of this occurring, it was a really great time for me to start helping the community. I could see people definitely needed help and I thought I could definitely do something about it."

The Kern County Homeless Collaborative in January 2019 reported a 50 percent increase in homeless individuals compared with the year before, with 80 percent of the county's homeless population located in metro Bakersfield.

Ishaan, now 17, created [Healthy Community](#), an organization that brings volunteer medical professionals to shelters and rehabilitation programs to offer health screenings and information on follow-up health care, regardless of people's ability to pay, immigration status, age or race. Since the group started in 2018, it has held 14 such mobile health clinics, helping at least 850 people to receive health care and information.

Although the in-person clinics have been temporarily suspended due to COVID-19, Ishaan is continuing to collect donations of money and supplies. In addition, he's stepping up his efforts to post health information online.



ISHAAN BRAR SERVES FOOD AT NEW LIFE RESIDENTIAL RECOVERY CENTER IN BAKERSFIELD, CALIF., DURING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY MEDICAL CAMP IN APRIL 2019./COURTESY ISHAAN BRAR

He's also launching two sets of podcasts. One series, called "Brarcasts," is aimed at youth, to talk about current issues, their passion for helping others and how quarantine measures are affecting them. The

second series, which Ishaan calls “Doctor Speak,” interviews doctors and nurses about their inspiration for getting into medicine and describing the personal sacrifices that accompany medical careers.

At first, turning his idea into reality wasn’t easy.

Ishaan was only a high school freshman when he first wanted to help people, but he wasn’t sure how to do it. In his sophomore year, he felt bolder, so he started out by approaching local houses of worship for assistance. “I kept getting turned down,” he recalls, “I realized that in their view, I was only 16 and didn’t have a portfolio.” Ishaan then reached out to a social worker who was able to direct him to homeless shelters that might want to be involved. Ishaan began contacting doctor’s clinics to ask for donations of supplies, as well as for staff to volunteer their time.

The mobile clinics grew to monthly events, where participants are given height, weight, blood pressure and glucose measurements and other screenings. Doctors are on hand to discuss results and go over medications. Contact information is provided for participants who need further treatment or exams. Ishaan and other teen volunteers arrive ahead of time, to set up the equipment and tables. They welcome the participants and assist with taking down information and measuring height and weight.

Rhonda Palmbach, whose daughter, now 19, and two sons, ages 24 and 15, have all volunteered with Healthy Community, says it’s taught them leadership, as well as made them aware of those less fortunate. “A lot of kids, especially if they’re in high school, don’t really realize the need that’s out there,” says Palmbach.



ISHAAN BRAR, CENTER, CONDUCTS HEALTH SCREENINGS FEB. 15, 2020, WITH OTHER VOLUNTEERS AT THE MISSION AT KERN COUNTY, A HOMELESS SHELTER AND RESCUE MISSION IN BAKERSFIELD, CALIF. FREE HEALTH SCREENINGS WERE GIVEN TO 119 PEOPLE THAT DAY./COURTESY ISHAAN BRAR

Although the commitment of just one Saturday per month is easy for high school and college students to manage, Palmbach says her family is impressed with the impact it's having. "At first, I thought we're not doing that much," she said, "but we're at least telling these people that they matter, and they do appreciate it. When they see younger people in high school coming out, they do think it's cool, from some of the comments I've heard. Those older gentlemen say things like, 'This is really nice, this is really kind.'"

Palmbach's oldest son is now studying medicine. Ishaan also says he wants to study medicine or a related field after high school.

As the mobile clinics have made repeat visits to some locations, Palmbach has seen the residents becoming more comfortable – and so have the teen volunteers, who no longer hang back, but go forward and greet them, she said.

"Ishaan has really grown from being a leader, but really quiet, to being able to say, "OK, now we have to do this." she said. "I've seen him grow in the past year. I've seen all the kids grow in the past year."

Do you want to make a difference in your community like Ishaan Brar? [Find local volunteer opportunities](#).