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Peace & Health

Charles Barber

Community Health Center & OctoberWorks

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<https://www.amazon.com/Peace-Health-Small-Town-Activists-Healthcare/dp/B0BN6N2V98>

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Peace & Health: How a Group of Small-Town Activists and College Students Set Out to Change Healthcare adopts a "yes we can" attitude over the elephant in American society—a lumbering healthcare system that most admit is broken, but few feel can be repaired.

The premise behind one community's actions is basic: health care is not a privilege, but a right that should be equally affordable by all. The story of how various ordinary individuals in one community joined forces to enact this vision on their own turf makes for not just inspirational reading, but a set of blueprints on how a series of disparate people and diverse actions reinforce this principle in one community's healthcare system.

From a 22-year-old Middletown, Connecticut man who has no money or connections, but literally walks into a vacant downtown storefront to create his dream of a clinic, to the problems faced by those who have no healthcare or management background, this story follows the construction of an impossible dream.

From the start, Charles Barber acknowledges the daunting reality of enacting this vision: "*In many ways, Mark Masselli's vision was a terrible idea. Building a free clinic for the poor in Middletown, Connecticut, in 1972 was an impractical, even absurd, goal for a number of reasons.*"

The real joy to this story is how practicality is set aside in the pursuit of an "impossible" dream, and how it comes to fruition through the advocacy and actions of ordinary individuals.

As the case histories unfold, various residents face many social changes and obstacles to their dream. They also face daunting challenges on how to address changing health concerns that range from the crack epidemic to AIDS.

Barber's ability to juxtapose the financial and physical challenges of building a clinic to its social challenges in remaining viable and responsive to changing community needs is the special strength of a story packed with biographical insights and social inspection. These not only provide practical assessments of community makeup and response, but chart the typical obstacles healthcare faces in remaining both relevant and affordable to all.

Packed with black and white articles and photos that reinforce community history and issues, the visuals nicely compliment the heart of this exploration.

Libraries and readers interested not just in healthcare advocacy, but the process of reinventing a system from the microcosm of building a clinic and pathways to using it will find *Peace & Health* not just idealistic and inspiring, but practical in charting routes to achieving community goals.

Ideally, *Peace & Health* will be enjoyed by a wide audience, from those interested in grassroots social change to participants in the existing American healthcare system who have a vision for creating something greater than it is now.