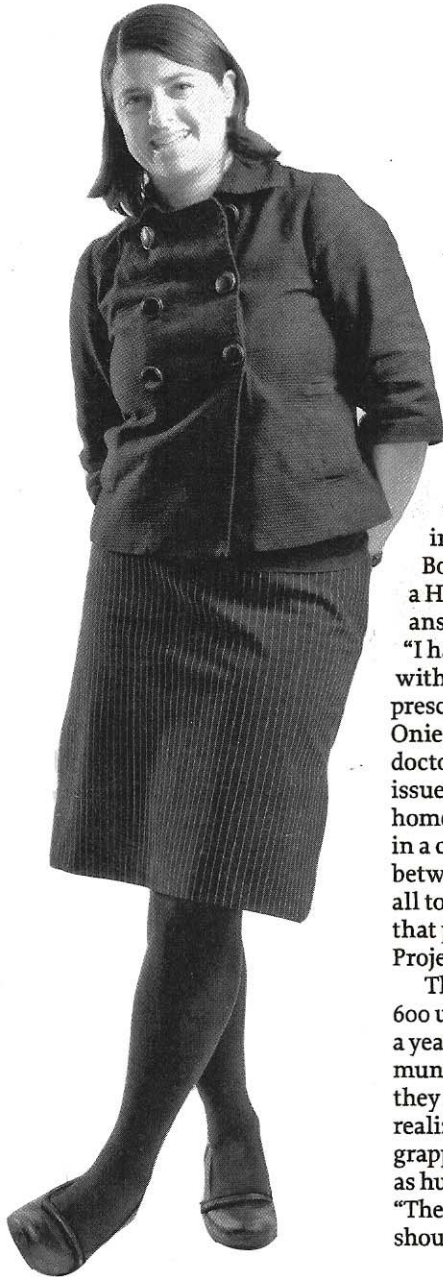


Power of One.

By assembling a corps of college volunteers, **Rebecca Onie** is helping physicians address the connection between health and poverty



BY GILBERT CRUZ

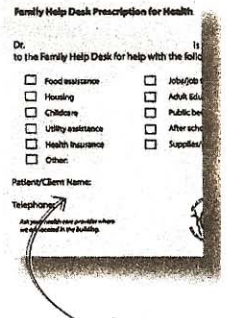
IT STARTED WITH A simple question: "If you had unlimited resources, what would you give your patients?" For Rebecca Onie, who asked this of physicians during her weekly visits to Boston Medical Center as a Harvard sophomore, the answers were illuminating. "I have a kid who comes in with an ear infection, and I prescribe antibiotics," says Onie, paraphrasing one of the doctors. "Meanwhile, the real issue is that there's no food at home, or the family is living in a car." It is that connection between health and poverty, all too often unaddressed, that pushed Onie to found Project Health.

The nonprofit places some 600 undergraduate volunteers a year in hospitals and community health centers, where they assist physicians who realize that their patients are grappling with such problems as hunger or homelessness. "The idea is that these factors should be treated like any

other clinical indicator," says Onie. "Access to food and access to housing are just as critical to a patient's health and likewise should be screened for as a standard part of every patient visit."

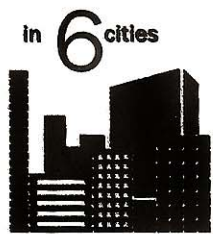
Doctors at participating clinics in six cities can write nonmedical prescriptions for assistance with utilities or other factors that may be underlying reasons for low-income patients' health problems. Patients then take their prescriptions to a Project Health desk, where a volunteer will help them find government or community resources (housing vouchers, child care, etc.). The process is meant to bridge what Onie calls an information gap, which exists both for patients who don't know where to go for help and for doctors who are equally clueless about where to send them.

Founded in 1996, the program now helps about 4,000 families a year in clinics where social workers are few or nonexistent. Says Onie: "We're an example of how a very simple solution can have a real impact on health." ■



Take two of these ...
The program lets doctors prescribe help for nonmedical needs

HOW PROJECT HEALTH WORKS



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nonmedical help for
14,500
children and adults a year
whose health is affected by
a lack of food, housing, etc.

