



Project Open Hand
meals with love

For Immediate Release

Project Open Hand Commits to Continue Serving Medically Tailored Meals to Economically Disadvantaged Patients in San Francisco

POH continues vital services and prepares for increased demand in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

(San Francisco – March 18, 2020) Project Open Hand, under the Order issued by the Health Officer of the City and County of San Francisco, is considered an “Essential Business.”

Following the Stay at Home (shelter in place) Order effective on March 17, 2020, and in conversations with community health providers, POH, with additional funding and support, will consider extending its services to provide medically tailored meals to economically-disadvantaged patients diagnosed with COVID-19.

“There is no question that nutritious food, tailored to the medical needs of an individual, is vitally important. This was clear to me over 42 years of medical practice, and it is particularly clear in this time of public health crisis due to COVID-19,” said Preston Maring, MD, a retired Kaiser Permanente physician who serves on the Medical Advisory Committee of the California Food is Medicine Coalition, and the Board of POH. “Project Open Hand has provided nutritious food to the most in need since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic and they do it today and every day. The organization absolutely makes a difference in people’s lives.”

Residents in the six-county, San Francisco Bay Area region comprised of San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, San Mateo and Marin Counties were issued a Stay at Home Order effective 12:01am on Tuesday March 17, 2020. This Order requires all individuals anywhere within these counties to shelter in place. Exceptions to leave their place of residence to provide or receive government and business services considered essential activities may be made; however, all precautions must be taken including social distancing, handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, staying home when sick and working remotely. Among the essential services include “businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals.”

Project Open Hand (POH) is closely monitoring the latest updates from the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC) and the local San Francisco agencies on the coronavirus (COVID-19). The organization has quickly adapted their operations to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and clients.

POH’s mission is to improve health outcomes and quality of life by providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable, caring for and educating our community. As an essential services provider and public health partner, POH will continue to be open during this medical crisis and serve the community as the Bay Area implements the “shelter in place” order.

“For over three decades Project Open Hand has provided nutritious meals for people in San Francisco and Alameda county dealing with serious illnesses,” states Paul Hepfer, CEO of Project Open Hand, “This is what we do, it’s who we are. We are doing all we can to keep up our current level of service and prepare for what will certainly be an increased demand for our meals in the weeks and months to come.”

Project Open Hand has been seriously impacted at many levels. The organization’s cost-effective model has been able to serve nearly 1 million meals a year because of its nearly 9,000 volunteers who assist in all phases of the food production and delivery. Many of the volunteers came from nearby corporations and businesses, but those volunteers are now telecommuting. Additionally, many of the dedicated volunteers and staff are from the age group (60 years and older) that is most at risk of serious consequences if they contract the disease. Within the last few weeks, POH saw a drop of volunteers from 152 to 51. Employees over the age of 60 make up 30 percent of the staffing. This means that the organization must hire temporary staff, redirect paid staff or buy pre-processed ingredients to prepare their meals. This has raised costs for POH.

POH partners with community agencies and senior centers to provide those over 60 and adults with disabilities congregate meals in 16 Community Nutrition Program sites in San Francisco. Five of the 16 have closed their facilities, that will result in approximately 4,000 fewer meals served each month. In other sites that remain open, POH is offering pick-up service of take-home, frozen or shelf stable meals. POH is joining a feeding task force that has just been established today out of the Emergency Operations Center of San Francisco.

ABOUT PROJECT OPEN HAND

Founded in 1985 as a grassroots response to the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco, Project Open Hand is an innovative, outcome-driven, client-centered partner in the public health and medical arenas, preparing 2,500 medically tailored nutritious meals daily for clients with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and HIV/AIDS in San Francisco and Oakland. A leader in the "Food is Medicine" movement, Project Open Hand employs a staff of 120, relies on the support of nearly 125 volunteers every day and is headquartered in San Francisco’s Tenderloin with a second location in Oakland, CA. To learn more, visit www.openhand.org.

To volunteer: www.openhand.org/volunteer and to Donate: www.openhand.org/donate

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