



Meatimes



Spotlight On

Michael's Story: A Walking Paradox

Michael "Kitten" has been receiving Project Open Hand food since 2011

Originally from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Project Open Hand wellness program client Michael moved to San Francisco in 1999, after getting a bachelor's degree in public administration with emphasis in nonprofit development. With the drastic relocation came another pivotal change – his name.

Michael sits on a chair in the third-floor conference room at Project Open Hand and smiles as he describes the moment, just one year after his move, when he decided to change his name to Kitten.

"It represents a paradox to me. I am a big guy, but I have a gentle spirit. I think that name better reflects a lighthearted view of the world."

When asked what made him decide

to finally move to San Francisco, Kitten replies with a sense of certainty, "Computers, gay people, and hippies" – and hippies he found where he now resides in the Haight

District of San Francisco.

Kitten seems quiet and reserved, but he speaks about instances in his life that counter his bashful exterior. For example, he spent five years as a Membership Director of the San

Francisco Bicycle Coalition and once worked as marketing director on a Netflix documentary called *Big Joy*, a film about censorship in cinema.

Upon receiving a dual diagnosis

of HIV and Hepatitis C, Kitten found Project Open Hand through his medical provider, and he has been receiving meals since April, 2011.

"For a long time, I wasn't taking medication because I was afraid

of the side effects. At one point, I was diagnosed with AIDS because my HIV was left untreated, and I became unhealthily skinny. I was the person who would forget to eat lunch."

In the midst of losing his battle for health, Kitten also found himself in an abusive relationship and rapidly plunging to what felt like rock bottom. He sits quietly for a moment and closes his eyes, seemingly placing himself back in a destructive moment from the past; the contrast in scenery is a stark reminder of how far he has come.

"Project Open Hand is more than nutrition," Kitten says with a faint grin. "I am rebuilding my life. It's so hard to make food for yourself when you're sick, and this food made

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being healthy easy." In fact, he now considers doing volunteer work at the food bank near his house, saying, "It would feel full circle in a way."

Kitten picks up a seven-pack of medically tailored vegetarian meals each week from Project Open Hand's grocery center at 730 Polk Street, and he enthusiastically praises the curries and tempheh dishes.

"Project Open Hand food is consistent. It is someone else saying, 'You're worth being on this planet, and you're supported.' We need to take care of each other."

Interested in learning more about Project Open Hand's wellness program and meal plans? Visit www.openhand.org/get-meals

Tara Blake, Marketing Communications Officer



Kitten poses in the Haight District of San Francisco, just a short walking distance from his home



Mark's Letter

Redefining Community Nutrition

In San Francisco and Oakland, it is sometimes hard to imagine the aging of America. Our cities incubate young, bright, technology-driven individuals who are set out to make our lives easier and more automated, eager to free up time for pursuits of the mind or heart. Whether I'm running along the Embarcadero, meeting friends for a beer in Oakland's Uptown, or chopping onions in Project Open Hand's kitchen, everyone around me seems like they're getting younger every day and the world is at their feet – they move through their day seemingly without sickness, vulnerability, or compromised

health.

Yet the quiet graying crisis in health is very real and is every bit as pervasive here in the Bay Area. In fact, seniors make up 15 percent of the Bay Area population and one of every three chronically or critically ill individuals in the Bay are older adults.

Project Open Hand began responding to this early crisis and expanded our work in nutrition to the aging community in 1998 by taking on the City's challenges in SF and Oakland to provide healthy meals at what were then called, "Senior Sites" – locations providing healthy breakfast and lunch daily.

Today, 20 years later, we are the largest provider of senior nutrition in SF, serving more than 4,500 elder adults, but we are so much more than a meal service. We are sharing stories and creating community. We are singing, dancing, laughing and engaging alongside our clients. We are facing the challenges of nutrition, depression, and social isolation head-on and awakening hope by providing a space for dignity, community, and a commitment to our neighbors ongoing good health.

If you stop by our Community Nutrition Program sites, you'll see the magic of young engineers from workplaces like Lyft and Salesforce volunteering and serving meals. You'll find our staff leading nutrition education games that demonstrate to our clients how nutrition can counter the effects of diabetes and heart failure.

Project Open Hand Community Nutrition Sites serve our seniors from more locations in SF than there are McDonald's, Jack in the Box, and Wendy's, combined! With the support of young professionals and people like you, we can continue to confront this quiet crisis through nutritious *meals with love*.

Mark Ryle, LCSW, Chief Executive Officer



A line forms before the doors open at the Curry Senior Center in the Tenderloin neighborhood. This September will mark the 20th anniversary of Project Open Hand serving meals at 21 Community Nutrition Sites located across San Francisco.


From the Archives
Project Open Hand has been participating in the San Francisco PRIDE parade since 1989, making this year our 29th year marching to commemorate our years of service to the LGBTQ community, including clients, volunteers, partners, and staff!



March in the Project Open Hand parade contingent at San Francisco PRIDE!
Sunday, June 24, 2018
www.openhand.org/events



Project Open Hand
openhand.org

Project Open Hand's mission is to nourish and engage our community by providing meals with love to the sick and the elderly. MealTimes is published quarterly for the friends and clients of Project Open Hand.

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Community

Staff Spotlight: Meet Cassandra



Cassandra pauses for a moment in the kitchen, before continuing to chop fresh veggies alongside a group of afternoon volunteers

Kitchen Administrative Manager Cassandra Miles is widely known by all at Project Open Hand headquarters at 730 Polk Street. She can be seen hustling up and down the stairwells of the three floors that the kitchen, grocery center, and administrative offices operate on.

Born in Philadelphia and raised in New Jersey, Cassandra was influenced by a family of chefs and found her way to culinary school at Johnson and Wales in Rhode Island. But after landing a job at a well-known restaurant at Pier 39, the East Coast foodie was soon on her way to San Francisco.

"My mom was the greatest influence on me. When I was growing up, we went to New York a lot, always went to different restaurants, the theater, Broadway plays – we were the odd family on the street in the burbs of New Jersey. Nothing stopped us."

Cassandra recalls the very moment she decided to leave the restaurant management industry, when she overheard what she describes as a "selfish comment" made by a server. That became her epiphany and the moment she knew everything had changed.

"I heard that comment and I wanted to say, 'You're making 400 dollars tonight and you're complaining. You should go to the corner of Fillmore and California and see the person begging for a dollar and know how fortunate you are.' I went home that night and thought, I just don't want to do this anymore. I want to give back and make a difference. That's all I want to be remembered as, is a sweet old lady when I die – that I was nice and gave back."

Cassandra joined the Project Open Hand team in April of 2016 and never looked back. Her tenacity, pursuit of quality, and accomplishments contribute to her success overseeing all the moving parts in the kitchen that produces our *meals with love*. Constantly on her feet, Cassandra connects with chefs, instructs volunteers, and supervises all kitchen production.

"I admire everyone here. When you're in the kitchen, you have to work hard. Every day I come to this place, I know how fortunate and honored I am. The staff is here for a purpose, and they all have different reasons for being here."

Cassandra cheerfully comments on Project Open Hand's location, the Tenderloin

neighborhood of San Francisco.

"It makes me aware of what is going on in the world. It's in your face and right up front. What happens in the Tenderloin may not be happening everywhere on this Earth, but it's happening. And you can see you're making a difference here, and it makes you humble."

The 125 volunteers carrying on Project Open Hand's mission every single day are arguably the heroes of the organization and Cassandra's favorite part of her job. She says, "What they do makes all the difference in the world. Without them,

we wouldn't be able to do this work."

Q: Spirit animal?

A: An eagle. I like traveling, and you can't kill them or you'll have a heavy fine. They are survivors and they're independent. That's me.

Q: Most played song?

A: I'm streaming a lot of WWOZ from New Orleans. It's one of the baddest stations around.

Q: Favorite food?

A: Butter pecan ice cream.



Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

Every gift makes a difference. In each issue of MealTimes, we give special acknowledgment to our supporters who have made gifts to Project Open Hand during the previous quarter (January 1, 2017, through March 31, 2018) and whose giving totals \$1,000 or more since July 1, 2017. Your generosity enables us to provide nourishing food to so many of our neighbors. If you have questions about this list, please contact David Newcomb, Director of Advancement & Community Relations, at dnewcomb@openhand.org.

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From Our Kitchen to Yours

Chicken & Veggie Fajitas

Ingredients

Serves 6

4 tbsp. olive oil
 2 tbsp. lemon or lime juice
 1 1/2 tsp. salt
 1 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
 1 1/2 tsp. chili powder
 1 1/2 tsp. cumin
 1/2 tsp. paprika

1 1/2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2 in. strips
 1 yellow onion, julienned
 1/2 red bell pepper, julienned
 1/2 green bell pepper, julienned
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 bunch cilantro, chopped

Instructions

1. Place chicken strips in ziplock bag; add 2 tbsp. oil, juice, salt, and spices
2. Seal the bag and toss chicken in the mixture to coat; refrigerate for 1-4 hours
3. In a large pan, sauté peppers, onions, and garlic until tender but not mushy; remove from pan and keep warm
4. Take chicken out of bag and discard marinade; sauté over medium-high heat until cooked through, 6-7 minutes
5. Add peppers and onions to pan with chicken
6. Serve on warm flour tortillas with cilantro, sour cream, salsa, and guacamole

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Walk with Project Open Hand at AIDS Walk San Francisco

Project Open Hand is honored to be a co-beneficiary for AIDS Walk 2018 on Sunday, July 15, 2018, at Golden Gate Park, and we want you to join our team!

Interested in walking, volunteering, or donating to Project Open Hand? Please visit:

sf.aidswalk.net/projectopenhand

or reach our Events team at:

(415) 447-4320



www.openhand.org/events

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