



Mealtimes



Cover Story

Love, Care, and Nutrition

On a Tuesday afternoon in the Mission District, Susanne Ellis is picking out produce for the week from one of Project Open Hand’s mobile vans.

“A long time ago, we used to get CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm boxes delivered to our door weekly,” she says as she plucks a sweet potato from a crate and examines it, then hands it to her husband Sean to inspect, too. Once he nods in agreement, Susanne puts the sweet potato in her grocery bag.

“This is sort of like that. There’s always an excitement about what produce is going to be at the van this week – it’s always a fun surprise.”

Susanne is a natural storyteller. Animated, and always quick with an anecdote or a joke, she talks about how she was once a former small donor to Project Open Hand herself. (“In what feels like a lifetime ago,” she adds, laughing.) She found her way back to the organization when a local nonprofit gave her a list of nutritious meal services.

“I always loved your mission, and had been following Project Open Hand’s work since the 1990s,” she says. “I picked POH from the list because I knew that the quality of the food would be far above what I could find somewhere else.”

She went to her doctor’s office later on and they filled out the paperwork on the spot. The meals would help Susanne control her high cholesterol and blood pressure, as well as provide relief from the rising cost of food.

As increased pandemic-era SNAP benefits ended in 2023, many households have seen massive reductions in what kinds of high-quality foods they can purchase. And for many older adults, this reduction of benefits, coupled with the rising cost of groceries, has put nutritious foods that can treat and prevent serious illnesses out of reach.

“With that ending,” Susanne says, “I had to find a way to

"I picked POH from the list because I knew that the quality of the food would be far above what I could find somewhere else."

replenish it. Nutrition is such a big part of my well-being and health, and I have to prioritize that so that I can be strong and support Sean’s needs, as well.”

A former dancer, dance teacher, and writer, Susanne now spends her time as the primary caregiver for her husband, Sean, who is living with dementia. They will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this year.

The two met in downtown San Francisco in the early 1970s. Both transplants from the Midwest, Susanne had moved to the city to pursue a career in writing after college. Sean came to find a new life outside of the Navy, which he had recently left.

They lived in the Lower Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco for 25 years (“Where we raised our two incredible daughters, Sasha and Elizabeth,” Susanne adds). Later, they moved to the Ingleside neighborhood, where they have lived for the last 20-plus years.

“It was really when Sean’s situation got more difficult, going from moderate to severe dementia,” she says, that she had to start caring for him full-time. “I had to figure out how to deal with things myself. He really struggled with a lot of the home services and other programs for adults living with dementia,” she says.

“But that also meant I had to prioritize taking care of myself so that I could continue to

support him.” With that added stress, she says, her blood pressure and cholesterol kept getting higher and higher.

Unpaid family caregiving is on the rise in the United States, having increased by nearly 10 million caregivers in the last five decades. Susanne is one of the 4.5 million Californians who care for family members over the age of 18. She works hard to ensure that Sean can be at home, where he is comfortable, for as long as possible.

“I tried to get to the Grocery Center in San Francisco first,” Susanne says, as she starts loading her groceries (cabbages, sweet potatoes, melons, some grains, and a week’s worth of frozen meals) into a few bags she’s brought with her. “But that was difficult because of transportation issues. Plus,” she adds, “Sean has to come with me.”

Then she learned about Project Open Hand’s mobile

grocery vans, which provide convenience and access to clients like Susanne who are unable to travel far distances. Clients can pick up frozen meals, as well as pick out fresh groceries, from mobile locations throughout San Francisco and Oakland. Susanne and Sean are now regulars at the van.

Project Open Hand has given her a lot of relief, she says. Today, with medication and medically tailored meals, her blood pressure and cholesterol levels have returned to normal levels – and she doesn’t have to worry as much about what they’re going to be eating, or whether or not it’s going to be healthy.

“Besides the nutritional benefits, it’s given me a lot of mental relief. It relieves so much stress over food security,” she says. “And, when I’m overwhelmed, I always know that I can pull out a couple of your meals the night before and not have to worry about what we’re going to eat, or how nourishing it’s going to be.”

“It’s given me back the time, energy, and mental space to focus on caring for myself and for Sean,” she says.

Your help makes life-changing services like our mobile vans and medically tailored meals possible for neighbors like Susanne and Sean.

To donate, please visit openhand.org/donate.

by Kimberly Kollwitz,
Marketing and Communications Manager



Paul’s Letter

It’s More Than Access

Dear Friend,

As you know, here at Project Open Hand, serving *Meals with Love* means more than just creating access to nutritious meals. It also means a commitment to providing clients with the resources and education they need to help them get stronger and lead healthier lives.

Each day, we serve thousands of older adults and people living with serious health challenges in the Bay Area. Through our Grocery Centers, mobile van locations, Community Nutrition Program meal sites, and meal deliveries, we provide them access to healthy groceries and meals.

Take Susanne, who you’ll read about on the cover. In her story, she shares how transportation issues made it difficult for her to get to a grocery center. But once she learned about our mobile vans, it made all the difference for her and her husband Sean.

It’s critical that we provide different ways to support all the generations, populations, and health conditions of people we serve. As Fernanda and Yessica showcase in the spotlight story, it’s this mix of compassionate nutrition and health services that makes all the difference in our clients’ lives.

To provide that support, our team is

continuously striving to seek out new and innovative ways to create a lasting impact in our clients’ lives, going beyond simple access to nutritious, medically tailored meals. Educational resources, like the Nutrition Kitchen, nutrition counseling, and high-quality meal ingredients are just a few of the many ways we can accomplish that.

None of this would be possible without your continued support. Thank you!

Paul Hepfer

Paul Hepfer,
Chief Executive Officer



Upcoming Events

Join us for these exciting upcoming events:

Every Monday in September | Nonprofit Mondays at Proposition Chicken (Oakland)

Every Monday in September, Proposition Chicken’s Oakland location will be donating a portion of their proceeds to Project Open Hand.

Sunday, September 10 | Oakland Pride

Oakland Pride returns to Downtown Oakland in September. Join our team as we boogie down Broadway!

Thursday, September 28 | 5th Annual

Dining Out For Life East Bay

Be sure to hold Thursday, September 28 on your calendar to dine out at participating restaurants to support Project Open Hand.

Friday, November 17 | Hand to Hand 2023

Our annual gala will be held at The Hibernia in San Francisco this year. More information coming soon.



For more information on any of these events, or to learn how to get involved, check out the Events page on our website at www.openhand.org/events or scan the QR code.

Please contact events@openhand.org with questions and inquiries.



Celebrating the Oakland Grocery Center Reopening

The Oakland Grocery Center reopened in late May after undergoing some much-needed renovations and expansion. Project Open Hand staff, volunteers, clients, and supporters joined us to celebrate the opening!



Thank You for Another Great SF Pride Parade

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us at the San Francisco Pride Parade in June!



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Project
Open Hand

Project Open Hand’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.

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FOOD=LOVE



Community

Spotlight: Serving Up Wellness in the Nutrition Kitchen

Over the last few months, the Project Open Hand team has been publishing video tutorials on YouTube to teach both clients and supporters of the organization how to cook healthy, nutritious meals at home .

“As an organization, we do a fantastic job at increasing access to nutritious, healthy foods. But just having access to these foods is not always enough,” said Fernanda Nunes, one of our four registered dietitians on staff.

“The idea behind Nutrition Kitchen was to film recipes with items primarily found in our grocery centers so that clients could learn how to cook them on their own, too.”

The videos range from the basics of cooking – like knife skills and how to build a healthy plate – to mastering more complex recipes and ingredients, like the baked tempeh or cauliflower chickpea patties found in our grocery centers.

Yessica Arias, a nutrition assistant based out of the San Francisco office, builds out nutritional education materials, hosts demonstrations, and gathers feedback from clients about their experiences with our services.

She says that the videos serve two primary functions: to provide new recipes and ideas for familiar ingredients, and to teach skills that clients can use to prepare new foods at home.

“For example,” she said, “a lot of our clients are hesitant to cook dry beans because they seem complicated or time-consuming. So if you can provide ideas for easier ways to cook them, or exciting new recipes to try with beans in them, it becomes easier to incorporate them into a meal.”

In addition to the Nutrition Kitchen

videos, Project Open Hand provides a number of different ways for clients to try new foods and learn how to cook them at home. Printed recipe cards are available at our grocery center locations, and clients can engage in cooking demonstrations with staff in the San Francisco and Oakland offices, as well as at any of the three mobile van sites throughout the Bay Area.

For clients who are unable to make it to the grocery centers, though, the videos are especially helpful. In Alameda, for example, most clients have their Project Open Hand meals



now, because videos were something we were just starting to talk about when I joined Project Open Hand in 2018. We thought it could really add to our services,” said Yessica.

But it wasn’t until the COVID-19 pandemic that video tutorials gained traction. Suddenly, the team was no longer able to host in-person cooking demonstrations, and printed recipe cards alone were not enough to help fill that void.

“We still needed to provide that education to clients that we couldn’t give in-person,” said Yessica. In addition

The demonstrations, she said, have been really successful in helping people try new foods.

“We’ve actually seen people who tried a new food at the demonstrations put away chicken and choose the cauliflower chickpea patties instead,” Yessica said. “We’re hoping that this provides an extra tool for people to feel empowered to do something similar at home.”

So what’s next for Nutrition Kitchen?

Right now, the videos are only available in English and Spanish, and Fernanda and Yessica are hoping to expand to Cantonese in the future. They’re also focusing on aligning the videos with food tastings and demonstrations that happen at our locations in-person, as well as finding ways to incorporate them into existing Project Open Hand spaces, like playing them on the televisions at grocery centers.

“There’s still a lot of space for growth,” said Fernanda. “We want to make sure that the videos are serving complementary roles. The demonstrations in-person allow a client to taste new foods, and then the videos can help guide them to prepare them at home.”

“We are trying to cover different generations, populations, and health conditions, so we need to find different ways to approach each person.”

delivered, and may not have regular access to printed recipe cards or demonstrations. The videos help fill some of those gaps.

“We are trying to cover different generations, populations, and health conditions, so we need to find different ways to approach each person. ‘What do our clients want? What do they need?’ is something that we’re always asking,” Fernanda said.

While Nutrition Kitchen is still in its infancy, discussions about how to incorporate videos into our work and mission have been around for a while.

“It’s very exciting to be doing this

to Zoom calls, videos were another touchpoint to provide clients with additional nutrition knowledge.

However, there’s no “one-size-fits-all” approach to increasing the consumption of healthy, nourishing meals for Project Open Hand’s clients.

“Our client population is very diverse, and the amount of access each individual has to the internet, a kitchen space, and cooking equipment varies,” Fernanda added. “Some have all of that – and some don’t have access to any of that. So that’s why it’s important to keep providing resources like the recipe cards and demonstrations to clients, too, in tandem with the videos.”

It’s your generous support that helps make this possible. Thank you!

Check out the Nutrition Kitchen: www.projectopenhand.org www.youtube.com/@ProjectOpenHand.

by Kimberly Kollwitz,
Marketing and Communications Manager



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Your gift makes a difference. MealTimes offers special acknowledgment to Project Open Hand supporters who have made gifts totaling \$1,000 or more from January 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023. If you have questions about this list, please contact donations@openhand.org or 415-447-2300.

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From Our
Kitchen
to Yours

Quick Summer Soup

Ingredients

- 3 potatoes, chopped
- 2 bell peppers, chopped
- 2 fresh corn cobs, shelled
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 cups of low sodium vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions

1. Add olive oil with onions and garlic to a pot; cook them until they are soft and transparent.
2. Add the bell peppers and mix them with the onions and garlic. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Add the potatoes to the pot. Cover it and let everything cook for 6 to 8 minutes.
4. Take off the lid of the pot and add vegetable or chicken broth. Let everything cook for 10 minutes at low-medium heat.
5. Add fresh corn, salt, and pepper. Let all ingredients simmer for about 20 minutes.

This soup goes well with diced avocado and a few drops of lime juice. Add just before eating. Enjoy!



Check out the full video on how to make the summer soup on the Nutrition Kitchen YouTube channel!
bit.ly/pohquicksummersoup

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