



Meal Times



Cover Story

Aging with Dignity



The Most Holy Redeemer Church sits on a quiet street in the Castro. It's a site where Ruth Brinker and early Project Open Hand volunteers once delivered meals for distribution during the AIDS epidemic. Today, it is the site of the Castro Senior Center, one of five senior centers throughout San Francisco that participates in Project Open Hand's Community Nutrition Program.

Thousands of clients come here every year to receive a nutritious meal and find community. Clients like Loretta.

Each day, Loretta's husband drops her off at the Center. She says she looks forward to the meals and seeing the friends that she's made there, as well as the exercise classes available. Loretta is ninety-four years old.

"I can still fend for myself," Loretta says, laughing. "I can get up and dress myself and cook for myself. I can manage a home and tend the garden, and I'm glad to be able to do that, still," she says.

Her adult sons have suggested that she and her husband, who is currently battling prostate cancer, move into a care facility; but Loretta wants to remain independent as long as she can.

Independence has been a common theme throughout Loretta's life. Born in Shanghai during World War II, Loretta and her family escaped the communist takeover of China by fleeing to Taiwan in 1948. She was a teenager at the time, leaving the country with only a single briefcase. "I had no fear," Loretta says, recalling her childhood. "The Japanese airplanes would bomb us sometimes, and we could see the pilot

and red marker on the planes. I just looked up at them, curious."

Years later, she attended college in Taipei, where she met and fell in love with the man who would later become her husband. Her family disapproved, but the two remained committed. After a year studying abroad in Los Angeles, Loretta moved to Japan, where the two reunited and married. A few years later, they relocated to Seattle, where her husband had received a scholarship to the University of Washington, and she pursued her Master's degree.

Loretta worked as a librarian and language tutor while her husband worked as a college professor. Since 1995, she and her husband have lived on and off in San Francisco.

**"In every respect,
Project Open Hand's meals
have supported my health."**

Whether it was making a life in a new country, marrying a man her family disapproved of, or choosing to age in her own home rather than a care facility, Loretta has always lived life on her own terms.

Loretta says that Project Open Hand has allowed her and her husband to age in their home with dignity, allowing an independence that they wouldn't have without it, especially as her husband navigates life with prostate cancer. With reliable access to nutritious meals and consistent routine, she can focus on caring for him while still maintaining a sense of normalcy and independence for them both.

"In every respect, Project Open Hand meals have supported my health," she says. She admits it can be a struggle to fix a balanced, healthy meal at home sometimes. And when she does cook at home, she can't match the variety of ingredients in a Project Open Hand meal. "Some of us cannot afford to buy things like artichokes and mushrooms. It's all very good. They are balanced, rich meals."

That reliability allows Loretta to plan ahead, with confidence and clarity about how she wants to age. "I will get care to my home instead of going to a care home," Loretta says, acknowledging the inevitable need for support in the future.

Until then, you'll be able to find her nearly every day at the Castro Senior Center, exercising, sharing meals, and enjoying the community she's built there.

From the earliest days of the AIDS epidemic, to partnerships with community and senior centers across San Francisco, Project Open Hand has continued to evolve to meet the needs of San Francisco residents. The Community Nutrition Program - operating in the Castro, as well as at nine other locations throughout the city - is just one of those ways that we continue to bring nutritious food to the people who need it most.

Loretta's story is just one of tens of thousands made possible through Project Open Hand's work. To learn more about our Community Nutrition Program and how to support it, visit www.openhand.org/cnp

by Kimberly Kollwitz, Director of Communications and Government Affairs

Happy Pride Month!



Dear Friend,
It's Pride Month in San Francisco.

The entire Project Open Hand team is always excited for this time of year. From the amazing turnout of supporters in our parade contingent to the energy that buzzes throughout the city, I am reminded of the affirming, inclusive, and engaging environment that is Project Open Hand. It's a universal sense of pride.

As someone who has spent most of my career in service of historically underserved communities impacted by HIV and critical illnesses, the hope and pride that Project Open Hand represents is real. From our beginnings delivering meals during the AIDS epidemic, to expanding services to people living with other critical illnesses

across the Bay Area, our mission has always remained rooted in compassion and dignity. It's founded on the belief that everyone deserves to be nourished, respected, and loved.

This Pride Month, we're honoring our legacy of doing what's right, especially in the face of unprecedented challenges. From advancing our Client-Centered Nutrition Home model to transforming our operations through our Sustainability Manifesto, we are building a better future for everyone.

Wishing you a joyous Pride!

Alberto Cortés
Vice President of
Fund-Development and
Community Affairs



Sustainability Manifesto

On Earth Day, CEO Paul Hepfer shared our Sustainability Manifesto. Check out how Project Open Hand is stewarding resources, strengthening local food systems, and caring for our community today, and for generations to come.

We proudly serve nutritious meals to our communities today, and we also want them to be healthy and safe in the future. Grounded in our core values – Client-Centered Care, Stewardship, Sustainability, and an uncompromising commitment to food quality through what we call “Food First”– our responsibility extends beyond serving a good, hot meal. We are proud to contribute to an ecosystem where healthcare dollars strengthen regional economies, reduce environmental impact, and deliver dignified nutrition for all.

With all this in mind, there are three primary ways we are focused on sustainability here at Project Open Hand:

- 1. We engage local food systems
 - Fresher food is more nutrient-rich and supports better health outcomes
 - We source as much food as possible from small and mid-sized California farms
 - Last year, we exceeded our target, with more than 25% of our food purchased from producers within 250 miles

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Upcoming Events



SF Pride Parade: Sunday, June 28

Boogie down Market Street with Project Open Hand at SF Pride! All are welcome to join our parade contingent–participants receive an exclusive Pride T-shirt. Sign up on our website.

REAF Help is on the Way XXXII: Sunday, August 2

REAF's annual show returns in support of Project Open Hand. Enjoy performances by the Broadway touring cast of Beauty & the Beast, plus Alliana Yang, Leanne Borghesi, David Burnham, and Paula West. Tickets can be purchased at Help32.eventbrite.com

Hand to Hand Gala: Friday, September 18

Join us for our biggest fundraiser of the year—an unforgettable evening of great food, champagne, community celebration, and exciting auctions, all in support of our mission.

Interested in Sponsorship opportunities? Reach out to our team at events@openhand.org

For more information or to purchase tickets for these events, visit our website at www.openhand.org/events

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Project Open Hand
meals with love

At Project Open Hand we believe in the healing power of nutrition. Medically tailored nutrition is essential in addressing illness, supporting aging with dignity, and reducing social disparities.

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FOOD = LOVE



Community

Client-Centered Nutrition Home: Project Open Hand's Care Coordination Beyond Nutrition

At Project Open Hand, our clients' needs have always come first. When clients approach us with a concern that is outside the scope of our nutrition interventions, we don't throw our hands in the air. Instead, we put our heads together to bridge the gap, connecting them with community-based organizations and healthcare providers.

We do this because we know that health and social needs are complex and connected. Unstable housing and social isolation, for example, contribute to poor health. We already offer some care coordination—collaboration between us and other service providers to address client goals beyond nutrition. But to maximize the health benefits of our services, we must connect clients to other providers and partners efficiently and systematically. That's why we are evolving by building our Client-Centered Nutrition Home (CCNH) model. The CCNH is Project Open Hand's model for care that aims to put client priorities first and streamline care coordination.

The goal of CCNH is to see measurable improvements in client health, including lower blood pressure, improved HgbA1c levels, and fewer emergency room visits.

The CCNH model will be implemented gradually, but many of the changes described below are already underway at Project Open Hand.

Hearing Client Perspectives

Listening to clients is fundamental to the CCNH model. Project Open Hand's newly formed Community Food Council—an advisory body composed of clients, volunteers, and community partners—creates a formal channel for client-driven



recommendations. For example, based on recent Council recommendations, Project Open Hand recently added three new meals, including Kimchi Brown Rice. A Client Feedback Log helps staff collect feedback, spot data trends using an online tool, and respond accordingly. Under the CCNH model, client perspectives shape our programs and services.

Practicing Client-Centered Care

The CCNH model emphasizes individualized care and close coordination with other service providers. At intake, our Client and Nutrition Services teams ask better questions—conducting comprehensive nutrition, physical, emotional, and environmental assessments. Registered Dietitians empower clients to set their own goals and, when those goals fall outside of our scope, connect them to appropriate resources. Project Open Hand, in-home caregivers, caseworkers, and medical providers work together to support each client's goals.

Strengthening Partnerships

The success of the CCNH model depends on strong partnerships. Current

outreach efforts focus on health clinics in neighborhoods with high rates of chronic illness. Under the CCNH model, providers routinely connect patients to Project Open Hand and maintain ongoing communication. Staff coordinate warm hand-offs to community-based organizations to address social, economic, environmental, and physical needs, and regularly communicate with partners. For example, we are partnering with Vouchers 4 Veggies, a food assistance program, to connect clients to food vouchers. Together, we and our partners study and strengthen our shared impact on community health.

Improving Technology and Communication

The CCNH model relies on technology and communication systems that support coordination. A new client database, launching within the next year, will help our teams track client progress. Project management software enhances coordination across departments. In the long term, the CCNH model includes integration with healthcare partners' data systems—allowing, with client consent, secure sharing of relevant health information to further improve service delivery.

To ensure the best possible health outcomes and experience for our clients, we must do more to help them address their goals beyond nutrition. We invite our partners, referring providers, and funders to join us in building the Client-Centered Nutrition Home model—for the people at the center of it all.

By William Cooke, Healthcare and Community Partnership Liaison



Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

Make a difference. *MealTimes* offers special acknowledgment to Project Open Hand supporters who have made gifts totaling \$1,000 or more from January 1, 2026 through March 31, 2026. If you have questions about this list, please contact donations@openhand.org or 415-447-2300.

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* Designates members of The Supper Club, Project Open Hand's monthly giving program.

To Learn more about The Supper Club at: www.openhand.org/give/supper-club



Strawberry Compote

Use this delicious compote as a jam (but with a fraction of the added of sugar)!

Ingredients

- 2 cups strawberries, roughly chopped
- 1 TBS honey
- 1 TBS lemon juice
- 2 TBS of water
- Pinch of salt

Directions

1. Rinse the strawberries.
2. This recipe can be completed on a stove top or in the microwave:
 - A) Stove top: Add chopped strawberries, honey, lemon, salt, and water to a pan. Simmer uncovered over medium heat for 15 – 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the strawberries break down.
 - B) Microwave: Add all the ingredients plus 2 tablespoons water in a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave 1-2 minutes. Stir the mixture and microwave for an additional 30 seconds – 1 minute until strawberries are broken down into a fruit spread. Mixture can bubble over – be ready to hit the stop button, if needed. Caution: the bowl will become very hot in the microwave. Use oven mitts to remove safely.
3. Remove from heat and cool completely. The compote will thicken once cooled. Store covered in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Sustainability Manifesto (Continued from page 2)

2. We use green energy
 - We have a lot of energy needs, from food storage to utilities and vehicles
 - But we want better health for our neighbors, so we prioritize green energy
 - This looks like solar panels on our roof and working towards an electric vehicle fleet. (Our first electric vehicle was delivered in May 2026!)
3. We center plant-based protein
 - The science is clear: plant-forward meals reduce disease and environmental impact, so we’ve increased our use of plant-based protein and decreased our meat
 - Over the last 3 years:
 - Pork and beef spending has decreased from 51.9% to 19.9%
 - Our plant-forward menu strategies saved more than 25.6 million pounds of CO2 net emissions

Just like it’s our responsibility to provide quality nutrition for our clients, it’s also our responsibility to think long term about how we impact our community. In working toward this, we are also caring for future generations who aren’t even our clients, all while spending the same amount of money or less. This way, everyone wins.

Paul Hepfer
Chief Executive Officer

