

# MealTimes



Community

## Finding Her Village in San Francisco

Orazgul begins every morning at Curry Senior Center

Orazgul moved to the United States from her home country, Turkmenistan, in 2007. With no prior understanding of the English language, upon arrival, she immediately felt lost.

"It was like being in space for me. I couldn't turn on or turn off the coffee pot. I was asking people how to do that."

Having first moved to Kansas for two years before making her way to San Francisco, Orazgul struggled with depression. She came to the U.S. with PTSD from her country, and while living in Kansas, she experienced culture shock.

"I didn't even want to live at that time. But when I visited San Francisco just for a week, I saw the people on the street, and I said,

'they look like me, I want to be with them.'"

After completing her move to the West Coast and settling into the Tenderloin, she passed a line

and the people responded, 'for meals, for seniors!'"

The Curry Senior Center quickly became a part of Orazgul's morning routine.

**"I love this place. I was very depressed, and here I received nutrition and friendship. I feel that my family is here and I'm happy now."**

—ORAZGUL

of people on Turk Street, waiting to enter a yellow, two-story classic San Francisco building, complete with blue trim.

"I asked, 'for what is this line?'

"I love this place. I was very depressed, and here I received nutrition and friendship. I feel that my family is here and I'm happy now." Erika, Curry Senior Center

site coordinator, passes by as Orazgul completes her thought. "Erika especially, she's like my daughter."

Orazgul fills up her schedule with exercise classes and Tai Chi lessons, as well as both a computer course and English course at City College. Having been a history teacher in Turkmenistan, Orazgul sees value in continuing her education.

"When I was a history teacher, I knew the whole world. Maybe that's what helped me accustomize here."

When Orazgul is asked about the meaning of life in an effort to spark an amusing anecdote, she laughs quickly and allows the question to sink in for a few moments.

"Life for me is always to sacrifice. Sacrifice for your friends, for

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your neighbors. Most people think about themselves so completely that they forget about their neighbor and their surroundings. I love to take care of my village, my community, my city.”

Of all the feelings Orazgul effortlessly expresses, perhaps gratitude is the most prominent.

“Before Project Open Hand, I felt that I was standing on the edge of life or death. They hugged me, fed

me, and saved my life. Even after I had knee surgery, I was relying on a walker to move. I am a strong person, but I was sinking, barely walking, with no appetite. I knew that first, I needed nutrition. After some time, I was able to throw the walker away because of Project Open Hand.”

Tara Blake, Marketing  
Communications Officer



Orazgul laughs as she holds up her placemat, indicating to the volunteers that she's ready for lunch.



Ana's Letter

# Trial Run for Project Care-O-Van

**W**orking in the community since moving to the Bay Area over ten years ago, Project Open Hand was one of the first organizations that I learned about. I can still remember Project Open Hand's strong presence and energy at AIDS Walk SF, where I started my career in social services. In my previous role at Catholic Charities, I saw the benefits of the

congregate meals program every day when my clients in permanent supportive housing would walk over to get breakfast and lunch at the neighborhood senior center. This work is also important to me on a personal level. As a Type 1 diabetic, I understand the daily challenges and complexities of caring for a chronic condition. I've been incredibly fortunate to have access to nutritious foods, healthcare and

a community that helps me stay healthy. I am honored to be part of a team that provides this support to others. For the past few weeks I've been meeting with clients, staff and community members. Together we believe that the best way to meet the needs of our community is to have a presence in the neighborhoods of those we serve, which is why I'm excited to announce that our mobile food van just had its inaugural voyage. The van will provide "pop-up" services to clients near their homes. Last month we partnered with a neighborhood clinic in the Mission District to provide local residents with medically tailored meals. I look forward to seeing the "Project Care-O-Van" in the Bayview, Hunters Point and throughout the Mission in the coming months. I am so excited to join the community at Project Open Hand. I'm also looking forward to taking my experience full-circle by joining the Project Open Hand/AIDS Walk team. Please do stop by and introduce yourself! Let's get to work!

Ana Ayala,  
Vice President,  
Programs



Ana Ayala brings a wealth of program experience to 730 Polk Street.

## From the Archives

Project Open Hand is proud to be a long-time participant in the SF PRIDE celebration to commemorate our years of service to the LGBTQ community – including our clients, volunteers, and staff – and we hope you'll join us on Sunday, June 25th as we march again! For more information, email [events@openhand.org](mailto:events@openhand.org)



We hope you'll join us on Sunday, June 25th as we march again!



Photography by Brenton Gieser (Orazgul)



Project Open Hand  
[openhand.org](http://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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**FOOD = LOVE**

# Silver linings for Wellness Program Coordinator, Mel Born

The whole world can fall apart. You can leave the job you love, get in a car wreck, and lose your ability to walk. All manner of things can go wrong. But even in the darkest hour, if you manage to hang on, there can be a lull in the disaster – a clear day or perhaps even a sunset.

That’s the silver lining – the hope that can be found in a series of unfortunate circumstances. Like rainbows appearing in war, Melanie

Mel adjusts her wheelchair to center herself with the table. What is apparent about Mel upon meeting her is that she is permanently in a wheelchair; but her irrefutable zest for life is even more obvious.

34 years ago, Mel was in a car accident during her last semester of college, while road tripping with friends to ski in Vermont.

“I was in intensive care for a month and rehab for six. The good news is the ADA just passed codes,

describing her state of mind, “I think it just sort of accentuates who you already are. I was already happy and I had a great life.”

**What is the meaning of life?**  
To find love.

**What is the most played artist/album/song on your iPod?**  
Right now? All Night, by Beyonce. Over time? Stevie Wonder, Heaven is 10 Zillion Light Years Away

“There’s nothing more fundamental than food and we get to provide that without a lot of hurdles.”

–MELANIE (MEL) BORN

Born showed up for Project Open Hand’s clients.

Originally from Atlanta, “Mel” visited San Francisco at age 19. Hypnotized with complete tunnel vision, she’s been living in The City ever since.

Mel loves traveling and cooking and eating, and she spent a large part of her career as a Psychiatric Nurse in both Atlanta and California. As the uneasy work environment worsened in 1996, Mel made a career move, went back to school, and then began donating and volunteering at Project Open Hand in 2001. She volunteered for seven years until she was hired on full-time. Mel is now Coordinator for our Wellness Program.

“I never thought about working full-time here,” Mel says, with a huge smile and widened eyes, as if she’s still a bit surprised with herself. “It seemed it was exactly like working with my Psych patients but it was better because I could just give them food! I was so stressed out being in charge of people who could hurt themselves before. Here, I get to do the people part, but it’s much happier and gratifying.”

“I love exactly what I do. I get to interact directly with the clients. To be able to call someone on the phone and say, ‘Guess what. Your doctor referred you. Do you want to spend 10 minutes on the phone with me and have meals delivered to your door tomorrow?’ What’s better than that?”

so if it had to happen, it was pretty great timing for it.”

Mel didn’t let the accident define her, to say the least. In fact, she even went on to get her scuba license.

“You wouldn’t expect a disabled woman to be a scuba diver,” Mel laughs as she reflects on it. “But they were giving classes and they were taking people like me out there, so I thought, ‘it’s got to be safe!’ It’s unlike anything you could imagine.”

“When something like that accident happens to you,” says Mel,

Mel’s work role is unique this year, as Project Open Hand just received its 50,000th client application.

“We are at 50,000,” she says, “but we have some three-digit numbers still getting services. When I talk to those clients, it makes me want to cry. It’s not just a number, it’s a revealing of their survival.”

Interviewed by Tara Blake



Mel helps shop for clients in the Grocery Center during busy hours.



## Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

**Every gift makes a difference.** In each issue of MealTimes, we give special acknowledgements to our supporters who have given a total of \$1,000 or more during the previous quarter (January 1, 2017 to March 31, 2017). Your generosity enables us to provide nourishing food to so many of our neighbors. If you have questions about this list, please contact John McArdle, Director of Development, at [jmcardle@openhand.org](mailto:jmcardle@openhand.org) or (415) 447-2413.

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From Our Kitchen to Yours

# Quinoa Chaufa

## Ingredients

Serves 4

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>2 cups</b> quinoa  | <b>1 cup</b> sliced mushrooms       |
| <b>4 cups</b> liquid (water, vegetable stock, or chicken stock) | <b>1 bunch</b> chopped green onions |
| <b>1 cup</b> small diced (1/4") green bell pepper               | <b>1 teaspoon</b> minced garlic     |
| <b>1 cup</b> small diced (1/4") carrots                         | <b>1 teaspoon</b> minced ginger     |
|   | <b>2 tablespoons</b> soy sauce      |
|   | <b>2 tablespoons</b> sesame oil     |

## Instructions

1. To cook quinoa, bring 4 cups of stock to a boil in a medium-sized pot
2. Add quinoa and turn heat down to a simmer
3. Cover pot, and cook until the liquid is absorbed – about 10 minutes
4. Fluff quinoa with a fork, cover, and let sit for 5-10 minutes
5. Heat a sauté pan over medium heat for 1 minute and add sesame oil
6. Add garlic and ginger and sauté for 1 minute. Do not allow to brown. Turn heat down if necessary
7. Add carrots and sauté for 1 minute. Then, add mushrooms and bell pepper.
8. When vegetables are cooked well, add quinoa to the sauté pan.
9. Add soy sauce and stir together
10. Garnish with green onion

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