



# Meat Times

FOOD = LOVE



Spotlight On

## The Journey Ahead: What's Next?

openhand.org  
volunteer



**W**hile cities continue to reopen and lift COVID restrictions after over a year of closure and uncertainty, Project Open Hand was never offline through it all. It was always open.

Just ask Robert, a Community Nutrition Program (CNP) Client.

"One night, everything is good. Then, all of a sudden, all hell broke loose," Robert said about the beginning of the pandemic. "You hear about people dying. It was scary."

The 74-year-old Brooklyn native, who found temporary residency in a hotel that was turned into a shelter for the homeless during the pandemic, believed that he needed to help out anyway he could.

Robert is not only a client, but he is also a volunteer at Project Open Hand and this past year he has been helping package meals and food that would find its way to our clients.

"It's good to help somebody. I have a gift which is to help people," he said. "I'm a stubborn old man. I was not going to let the virus stop me from going to work," he said.

Like Robert, Project Open Hand's staff and volunteers worked feverishly to provide access to life-saving nutrition

to its clients and community members, many of whom were sheltering in place and isolated from society.

But now that an end to this crisis (hopefully) appears to be in sight, Project Open Hand is beginning to visualize what a post-pandemic world looks like.

CNP, which shifted its operation to providing hot and frozen to-go meals to seniors and adults with disabilities in San Francisco, plans on reopening 12 community nutrition sites. They will modify their approach to meet the needs and comfortability of

**"I was not going to let the virus stop me."**

**- Robert**

its clients in the safest manner possible.

"Now more than ever do people feel socially isolated and in need of community and congregation. Research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, and cognitive decline. That's why

we are really eager to welcome folks back ASAP. We miss conversing and breaking bread with our clients," said Erika Molina, Director of CNP.

For seniors like Robert, the thought of enjoying a meal in a communal setting with friends brings him joy.

"We're not meant to be locked up. That's not how we were made. We are made to be socializing with others, and for seniors that's very important because it keeps our minds and bodies active," Robert said.

The Wellness Program, which offers medically-tailored

meals, groceries, and nutrition counseling and education, will continue to maintain social distancing for the foreseeable future and will prioritize client and staff safety. Client and Nutrition Services will continue to engage clients with reduced physical contact. The Wellness Program will also continue providing a service to clients that was started during the pandemic - home delivered groceries.

Did you know that on average,

Project Open Hand delivered nearly 270 bags of groceries per week to clients at home?

"We've always delivered meals, but groceries add an additional challenge for temperature control and packing produce in a way that maintains quality. We found the right sized cardboard box, worked out the flow with our distribution team, developed a good rotation of grocery items and started delivering grocery boxes to our clients," said Kristi Friesen, Manager of Nutrition Services said.

Volunteer services, which currently averages 40 volunteers per day and 280 volunteers per week, will continue to operate at minimum capacity until a full reopen and expansion of services is possible. It will assess all volunteer needs and staff them appropriately, based on need. The department will continue promoting COVID vaccinations and ask volunteers to self-screen for any health issues.

"For us to continue to engage volunteers in the months to come, it is imperative that we protect each other," Diana Contreras, Director of Volunteer Services said.

"The concept of going back to normal is not one I can relate

*(continued page 5)*



Paul's Letter

# We Were Never Offline



## Community Nutrition Program Wins Important Funding

The Community Nutrition Program (CNP) won three contracts from the City of San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS) that will support the program for the next four years. This means we will serve 294,200 meals in the fiscal year (starting July 1) to seniors, adults with disabilities (AWD), and delivery to AWD.

Once a full reopen occurs, a total of 12 CNP sites across the city will open its doors for clients to enjoy meals in a safe, communal setting.

Dear Friend,

Recently I heard that we are a community and a nation coming back online.

And thankfully, it is.

Every day we are witnessing a return back to normalcy. Families and friends are gathering without masks. Parents are dropping kids off at school. Restaurants are once again packed with diners who are more than willing to add a little extra tip to the dinner bill. And events can finally be enjoyed in-person rather than on your phone or laptop.

While the country continues to come back online, I am even more proud to say that Project Open Hand was never offline during this whole time. Our 130 employees and hundreds of volunteers came to work every day and we adapted every aspect of our work in ways that we would have never imagined.

We didn't do this because we had to. We did this because our clients and community needed us to.

But as life continues to go back to normal and we pivot to living in a post-pandemic world, we understand that there are bigger issues moving forward.

According to a recent Washinton Post story, we've learned that over the last 25 years, nutrition has become the most powerful detriment of health for everyone.

And in the United States, it's estimated that 45 percent of deaths from heart disease, stroke, or diabetes are linked to poor diet.

And individuals who are food and nutrition insecure are at higher risk for chronic disease, especially for Black, Latino, and Native American people, and residents of lower-income areas. And this problem was especially heightened during the pandemic.

These are some of the reasons why our work of providing more access to nutrition is so vital to the health of our clients and our community. As mentioned in our cover story, our grocery delivery program, which was adopted during the pandemic, is one example. With over 270 grocery bag deliveries per week, we understood that this was a service we had to continue.

Another issue is a great concern. According to the Administration for Community Living, nearly 25% of U.S. adults over 65 are considered to be socially isolated. And for those experiencing social isolation, harmful health outcomes have been associated with chronic isolation and loneliness, including premature death, a higher risk for developing dementia, heart failure and stroke, and increased risk of hospitalizations. Because of these outcomes, an AARP study revealed that an additional \$6.7 billion is spent annually on enrollees who are socially isolated.

Our Community Nutrition Program, which provides meals in communal settings to seniors and adults with disabilities across San Francisco, is important in addressing the health risks and costs of social isolation.

As our cover-story, CNP client Robert said, "We are not meant to be locked up... we are meant to be socializing."

And our efforts to continue to serve this population received a huge boost after the CNP program recently won three contracts from the City of San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS). We anticipate serving 294,200 CNP meals in the first year of a four-year period.

Yes, the pandemic is nearing an end and normal life is coming back online. But for Project Open Hand, the path to helping our clients and community will always continue, no matter what roadblocks we may face.

Thank you for your support!

Paul Hepfer  
Chief Executive Officer

To help, go to [openhand.org](http://openhand.org).

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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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## Community

# Spotlight: Destined to Help

Erika Molina always kept an ear out for the doorbell. It was the most important duty of the day for her.

When the doorbell rang, she would head to the entrance and open the front door. But she wasn't welcoming the mail-carrier or a visitor. It was a Project Open Hand delivery driver, who had hot meals to give her.

Over 30 years ago, Erika would visit her father and his partner in a hospice house in the Castro District of San Francisco. The house took care of gay men who were experiencing the effects of HIV/AIDS and were too ill to leave their beds. Her father's partner was one of those taken care of by the staff and Erika. Her job -- take the Project Open Hand meals she received from the delivery driver to the bedside of her dad's partner and all other men in the house.

It was this early-life experience that laid the foundation for a life and career dedicated to helping others.

"I grew up seeing my father's partners and friends go through HIV in the 90s, and my mind was already set that I wanted to be a part of those people who help that community," Molina said. "I didn't have to choose what I wanted to do. I always knew."

Molina, a Bay Area native who received a bachelor's degree in psychology from San Francisco State University and a master's degree in public health from Argosy, started out working in public health at the age of 18 in Contra Costa County where she worked with teenagers getting them access to sexual health care services.

She then moved on in the public health sector, working with the San Francisco Public Health Department in the HIV research section and various other agencies that provided important services to the HIV/AIDS community.

"I had a goal to go back to work through the different agencies that helped my community when I was growing up," Molina said. "I knew that there were levels I always wanted to tackle."

"The direction of HIV prevention changed. It became a more holistic approach. What else goes into it? It's the lack of your foundations - housing, community and food. There are layers of priority for people and their health, and nutrition is one of them," Molina said.

Her path to Project Open Hand seemed almost pre-determined,

and it came to fruition in August of 2017 when the organization was hiring a Director of Community Nutrition Program (CNP), that provides nutritious meals to older adults and adults with disabilities in San Francisco in a communal setting.

"I was really excited about this position. I used to refer clients to Project Open Hand. I even walked a few of them to 730 Polk Street," Molina said. "Programs and public health create community. I feel the importance of it. I am a product of it, and it felt right."

As the director of the CNP program, she manages a staff of over 20 and ensures that the over 4,000 clients the CNP program serves are receiving meals 365 days a year.

This was of course particularly difficult during COVID-19. In this time, Molina helped shift CNP operations from a communal setting to pick-up or delivery of frozen meals with select sites serving hot to-go meals.

She said the transition was tough, but "CNP didn't skip a day," because of the number of people who stepped up in the organization from different departments to help out.

The next challenge for Molina is reopening 12 CNP sites for clients - many experienced the health detriments of social isolation - so that they can enjoy meals in a communal setting with friends again.

"It's like opening a number of new restaurants at multiple locations at the same time. We have to do it thoughtfully and safely for our clients and staff," she said.

Over 30 years ago, Erika received hot meals from Project Open Hand. Now, she is the one helping to provide meals to the community.

"Now I get to be the one to make sure the people get the food when they need it. It makes me tear up just thinking about it, because I remember being in that position 30 years ago, waiting for that delivery of food. I don't take it for granted because I know what it can be like on that other side."

None of this is possible without the help from supporters like you. Will you please consider a donation today to help support our services? [openhand.org/donate](https://openhand.org/donate).



by Marcus Tolero, Marketing and Communications Manager



# Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

Your gift makes a difference. MealTimes offers special acknowledgment to Project Open Hand supporters who have made gifts totaling \$1,000 or more from February 1, 2021 through April 30, 2021. If you have questions about this list, please contact [donations@openhand.org](mailto:donations@openhand.org) or 415-447-2300.

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From Our Kitchen to Yours



## Lemon Herb Dressing

### Ingredients

- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon nutritional yeast
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest (optional)
- Splash tabasco sauce (optional)
- 2 tablespoons fresh & diced herbs, or dried herbs of your choice (try oregano, basil, and garlic powder)

### Instructions

Measure out all ingredients into a mason jar or a container with a tight fitting lid. Shake to mix together. Store salad dressing in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Salad dressing may thicken as it chills, you can set it out on the counter to return to room temperature before use. Alternatively, just mix together the amount you will use for your salad in the bottom of a large serving bowl, then add salad greens to toss and coat with dressing. Add the rest of your salad ingredients, mix and enjoy.

to. While many industries were impacted by the pandemic and are starting to open back up, Project Open Hand remained open. Our frontline staff and volunteers do not get to work from home and our clients will not stop needing meals; this is our normal."

The kitchen, which prepared 22,158 medically tailored meals in the first few weeks of June, anticipate adjusting their operation to preparing more hot meals once a full reopen occurs.

The kitchen also plans to continue to use cost-saving products like pre-cut and frozen vegetables and pre-cooked whole wheat grains.

"Our production level will still be the same, but we're planning to serve more hot meals to CNP clients once the communal sites reopen," Executive Chef Adrian Barrow said.

This brings us full circle back to CNP client/volunteer Robert.

He first received a Project Open Hand meal 10 years ago at the Curry Senior Center, a CNP site, after a long three-day, cross-country bus trip from the East Coast. He always wanted to come to San Francisco. The

hills. The ocean. The trees. The scenery. The City called to him.

But when he arrived, the harsh reality was that he had nowhere to go and he was in need of a meal. He noticed a line of people outside of Curry Senior Center. It was a breakfast line. "I just saw people standing outside the building, and they were being served meals."

When he sat down to eat his hot breakfast, he was approached by a Project Open Hand staff member and was asked if he wanted to volunteer. He signed up immediately. And almost every day since then he's received a meal and volunteered with Project Open Hand.

"It's like love is medicine -- a good kind deed is medicine. People need to know that you care," he said.

And it's that reason alone why Project Open Hand has always stayed open.

This was only possible because of the help from caring supporters like you. Thank you!

by Marcus Tolero,  
Marketing and Communications Manager

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