

## People coming together to celebrate community

*At On Lok 30th Street Senior Center, Openhouse + On Lok Community Day Services, and Aging Mastery Program workshops, community members find friendship and programs to support their best lives*



Photos by Saul Bromberger & Sandra Hoover Photography, Wilson Ferreira, and On Lok



Making time for the people in our lives

Dear Friends,

While in Seattle for the National PACE Conference in October, I walked by a Pike Market flower stall and stopped to admire its display of flowers. I soon found myself in warm conversation with other shoppers, with my own bouquet in hand. I can't tell you how much I cherished this brief interaction, connecting with strangers over the simple joy of picking up a token of natural beauty for the day.

In our highly polarized society, when many are feeling disconnected or misaligned with others, small moments like these can open our hearts to our humanity and engender a strong feeling of belonging. I appreciate them more and more as I get older. They remind me how important it is to make time for the people in my life.

I recently spent time with my father, who needed support while recovering from surgery. I was touched that he chose to come from Florida, where he lives, to stay with us in San Francisco, giving me the opportunity to care for him when he was at his most vulnerable. For years, his nurturing made me feel loved and safe, and now it was my turn to provide for him. While he was here, I was so conscious of our finite time together, I recorded our conversations and took lots of pictures. I cherished every moment, and the way we care for each other.

One may financially plan for aging but rarely are we ready for how hard it can be physically and emotionally, until we go through it ourselves or as caregivers. But when we come together to help each other, to support each other, acknowledging one another even through a kind gesture or a smile, we can make a tremendous positive impact on the lives of others, and our own. Whether it's the daughter assisting her parents or the driver delivering medication and meals to a senior in need, we carry and uplift each other, as family caregivers and as a healthcare organization. Doing what it takes to keep our elders in their homes. Letting them know they matter. These days, everyone can use a helping hand—that's when we see our mission really come alive.

As the year draws to a close, I look forward to more special moments with the people who are important to me. I invite you to do the same, to enjoy together this life we have, so magical and brief, and making your own memories to cherish. And as I think about all the people who make a difference, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support, which allows us to touch the lives of the older adults we serve.

Grace Li, CEO ■



On Lok PACE Peralta Center keeps growing with its East Bay community



In the late 1990s, the Sisters of the Holy Family approached On Lok about setting up a day center at their motherhouse in Fremont to address the healthcare needs of their elderly members. What began as a small start-up program for the Sisters of the Holy Family and the Dominican Sisters of the Mission of San Jose has evolved today into a busy On Lok PACE Center celebrating 20 years of service to an increasingly diverse East Bay community.

"Our presence in Alameda County grew out of our relationship with the Sisters," says On Lok PACE Peralta Center Director Danny Bi. He was just beginning his career in senior care when he joined On Lok's staff at the convent. "When I think about humanity and compassion in healthcare, the Sisters were an inspiration. We learned a lot about their backgrounds and their mission helping families in the community, which aligns with the work On Lok does to help older adults remain living in their homes."

Sharon Raver-Villaneuva, a senior director at the Institute on Aging in San Francisco, had just moved from Texas to California when she was hired as a program manager in Fremont. "The Sisters were from different cultures and different Catholic orders. The Sisters of the Holy Family wore street clothes and worked in the community around homelessness and family. The Dominican Sisters had traditional vestments and were more involved in education. It was a lot of fun serving both, getting to know them, and forming real friendships. They enjoyed interacting with staff and we learned a lot being with them. For example, they were much more comfortable talking about death and dying, and they taught us a great deal about providing compassionate end-of-life care."

It was the first time On Lok ventured outside of San Francisco County. "We had to figure out new workflows and processes to support the operations in Fremont, from strategy to logistics. We were such a small group that I would pick up paychecks and supplies in San Francisco to save shipping costs, put



Combating isolation in Santa Clara County

Sometimes it takes an entire center's team to keep an elder living with dignity and independence in the community. The experience of a participant who has been at the On Lok PACE East San Jose Center since it opened, five years ago, is representative of our staff's commitment to Santa Clara County seniors.

"It is a story very dear to our hearts," says On Lok PACE Center Director Jennifer Vickers. "We had a participant whose intake evaluation had us worried about our ability to provide a care plan because she was so isolated. She lived alone, without a social network or supervision. Her family would only visit occasionally. In spite of the many challenges her case presented, for the past five years we have safely maintained her living in the community. Now she regularly comes into the center for her medical care. At home, she has a full complement of services to support the activities of daily living. We have taught her to use the phone to call for help and reach out to us should she need anything. We are all rooting for her continued success and doing everything we can to support it."

On Lok PACE East San Jose Center began in 2014 as an adult day health care center and a PACE alternative care setting. The facility was originally created by the Mexican American Community Services Agency. According to Age Friendly Silicon Valley, the population age 65 to 84 will grow by 175,000 in Santa Clara County by 2030. To help address the growing need for senior healthcare and services, On Lok expanded the center with a \$3.3 million, 5,200-square-foot clinic.

The East San Jose site officially became a PACE center in 2017, complementing our San Jose location and five others across the Bay Area. Since it opened with 60-65 participants, the center has experienced significant growth, doubling in size during the pandemic up to an expected 180 seniors by the end of 2022. ■

Photo by Alain McLaughlin Photography

them in my trunk and drive to Fremont. Sometimes we would meet our vans halfway to deliver boxes," says Sharon. "I often worked late with Director of Program Management Janice Fujii, who was the project manager for our PACE expansion in Alameda County. One evening, we got a call from the hospital that one of the Sisters was being discharged and needed to be picked up. It was already the end of the day, but Janice said, 'I can drive,' and got the keys to the On Lok van. At the hospital, we loaded up the Sister in her wheelchair, and we were off. It was a start-up environment. We didn't have a lot of resources; you learned to roll up your sleeves and do what was needed."

Twenty years later, On Lok continues to provide care for the Sisters as well as a community of diverse participants. "In 2002, the starter population in Fremont was 43 Sisters. Soon after, once our presence in Fremont was known, we started to serve the greater community," says Danny. "To continue expanding services to the Tri-City community, in 2012 On Lok opened the On Lok PACE Peralta Center nearby, co-located in Eden Housing's 98-unit, low-income senior housing project. When the Sisters sold their property and knocked down the main convent building, in 2017, we consolidated that day center with our Peralta Center operations. Our census was 220 then. Today, we are at 340 participants and growing."

On Lok PACE Peralta Center brings together people from every part of the world, including China, Mexico, India, the Philippines—and many more. Participant Xiuye Chen receives medical care and enjoys a wide range of activities, both at the center and at home. "I feel at peace knowing that I am taken care of in all aspects by On Lok," says Mr. Chen. "I am not in good health; I have had two types of cancer. On Lok took care of all my medical treatment. There is always assistance and a car transfer. My social worker and mental health clinician helped me a lot not to be afraid or worry. I am very grateful for On Lok." ■

Aging fabulously at Openhouse + On Lok Community Day Services

Since it launched a year ago, Openhouse + On Lok Community Day Services (Community Day), affectionately known as "Club 75" by its members, has been delivering care, community, and hope to San Francisco's LGBTQ+ community.

Community Day provided Sharon with caregiver respite and crucial support for her wife Barbara, whose memory is starting to decline, so she can remain living at home. It helped Maryanne break out of isolation and share a hot meal, walks, and conversations with her queer peers. And it gave Miss Patti Ann, a transgender woman living with disability, access to safe transportation, exercise, and life-affirming activities she can enjoy as her authentic self.

"Community members are always sharing with us how the program has helped them psychologically and given them a sense of connection," says Su Waqa, Adult Day Program Manager at Community Day. "Many are isolated and have lost loved ones to HIV and other chronic health conditions. Community Day is the only place where they feel they have a family—we are so proud they come here every day to get the support and social interaction they are not getting anywhere else. If needed, community members and their caregivers are referred to additional services through Openhouse and On Lok to provide them with a continuum of care tailored to their changing needs."



"The Community Day program really is by and for LGBTQ+ seniors," says John Blazek, On Lok Chief Development Officer and Executive Director, Day Services. "The dream and the vision have become a reality. And it is a true partnership between Openhouse and On Lok. We are using the strength, expertise, and credibility of both organizations and bringing them together to create a program you don't see anywhere else in the nation. The confirmation of its success for us was when the community began to affectionately call it Club 75. The nickname tells us that our participants love and care about their program and that it's a fun and happy place to be."

Community Day's festive environment belies the sense of

urgency and responsibility behind its work, at a time when the queer community feels particularly vulnerable. "We are standing on the shoulders of the pioneers who challenged the status quo and disrupted the system to build a society that works for all of us. We are passionate about making sure that they have the respect and safe space they deserve to be able to age gracefully—and fabulously," says Su. She sees the program is already making a difference. "One day we were dropping off a community member and she turned around and said, 'You take such good care of us! I hope someday someone will take care of you.'" ■

The more I give, the better I do

Why Christopher Cherney, a long-term care professional, supports On Lok.



Raised with financial and academic privilege, nurtured by a supportive family, Christopher Cherney was "on top of the world." And yet, the young man felt empty.

"There was a chasm in my soul, and I yearned to fill it," says Christopher. Searching for answers, he delved into Eastern and Western philosophies and traveled to Nepal and other far-flung destinations, eventually coming home to an integrated East-West spirituality, including the Roman Catholic faith of his upbringing, and a legacy that has inspired both his life's work and his philanthropy.

"While exploring the spirituality of death and dying, I became a hospice volunteer and, as part of my training, I was placed in a nursing

home. There I experienced in my heart and being the power of connecting with an elder. I knew immediately, after an 11-year search, that I had found my calling," says Christopher.

In 1997, he began his career as a licensed nursing home administrator. Since 2013, he has been a university lecturer on healthcare administration and policy. A passionate advocate for the elderly, Christopher has also served as a litigation consultant specializing in elder long-term care abuse, with 270 medical legal cases in 17 states and expert testimony in about three dozen depositions and arbitrations, plus one jury trial. Currently, he consults to five state attorneys general regarding long-term care administration and is the court-appointed monitor of three California nursing homes.

The example set by his late father, a self-made businessman who raised over \$25M for charity, inspired Christopher to support causes that he cares about, including On Lok's programs for older adults. "My work has been very rewarding, and I am delighted to share its benefits with On Lok. Giving to causes that are important to me aligns with the values of my faith and enlivens my heart. It not only fills me spiritually, but it reinforces the abundance in my life—the more I give, the better I do," says Christopher.

With three decades of experience in the long-term care system, including a master's degree in gerontology from San Francisco State University in 2012, Christopher has learned a lot about the care of older adults, and he strongly believes it should not be motivated primarily by profit. That's why he is happy to support On Lok's non-profit, community-based, patient-centered programs.

"What On Lok is doing is right in my wheelhouse. I trust On Lok because of its history, its mission, and its motives. I have reviewed many healthcare delivery systems and On Lok has created a stellar model for high-quality long-term care for older adults. PACE is effective and proven. On Lok also understands the politics of non-profit care and excels at it. PACE was the first program of its kind and Congress even wrote a new law for it. Today it has national import and keeps growing."

For Christopher, once you develop a strong connection to an organization because of your experience and shared values, the deciding factor for a donor is the strength of the organization's governance. "On Lok has demonstrated leadership, and a team of professionals with great heart, like my colleague Nathan McKenzie, a director at On Lok PACE, whom I had the pleasure to mentor academically and professionally, earlier in his career," he says. "On Lok has enlightened leaders, convictions of heart and mind, a politically savvy and stellar governance, an innovative and workable model; plus, it is right in my backyard.

"Where do I send the check?" ■

Poetry class opens hearts and minds



Poet and impresario Clara Hsu began writing later in life, in the quiet hours spent at her elderly parents' bedside, after her caregiving tasks were done. In 2005 she had sold her Chinatown music shop, Clarion, to her employees and started traveling the world. Then her parents' health declined, and she came back to San Francisco to take care of them. Poetry helped her overcome the challenges she faced and unfolded new horizons.

"When I discovered poetry, I knew that's what I wanted to do. I was not intimidated by anyone or anything. While at my parents' home, I also started translating Chinese poems into English and I found this exercise very invigorating. I began writing poetry in Chinese, reconnecting with the language of my origins and having fun doing so," says Clara.

After her father passed away, Clara learned that Clarion's new owners were no longer interested in the business. She bought the space back, renovated it, built a stage, and launched a performance arts center. Today, Clarion is a cultural venue for people of all ages—recent projects include a student's documentary about language and identity and a rap music video in Cantonese with the Grant Avenue Follies, the legendary ensemble of performers from Chinatown's golden nightclub era. Clara also leads a poetry workshop in Cantonese for On Lok PACE participants, one of the most popular classes among Chinese elders.

"I see people craving connection through poetry. Many participants in their 80s and 90s have a formal Chinese education and are well-versed in Chinese poetry. I have learned a lot from them," says Clara. "You don't have to regularly read poetry, but it's important to know it exists for you, and it's like a magic potion. When you are healthy, you may not need it, but if you are sad or troubled, consider picking up a book of poems. And feel the magic happen."

An On Lok PACE participant, Mr. Lee, had become withdrawn and seemed very unhappy. He suffered from dementia and would often try to run away. "Then Mr. Lee's son came into the center to see the activity leader. He had with him a handful of scrolls, laid out in amazing calligraphy, and said they were his father's poems," says Clara. "The activity leader made copies and brought them and Mr. Lee to my poetry class. But he would just sit apart from others, in silence.

"One day, I showed his poems to the group, and someone said, 'Lee, why don't you read them to us?' And Mr. Lee did. It was the first time we had heard him speak. As he recited the poems, Mr. Lee's demeanor changed, and a beautiful smile lit up his face. From then on, he started coming to class, where he read his poetry out loud to his peers. And he never attempted to wander off again. That's how poetry can open the heart and mind in unexpected ways," says Clara. "It provides a different perspective—which is often what you need to keep going." ■







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Aging Mastery Program graduates learn skills to navigate longer lives

“Never regret your old age, it’s a privilege denied to many. Neither my father nor my brother lived to see it,” says Frank Brooks, a former schoolteacher and new graduate of the Aging Mastery Program (AMP), a 10-week workshop created by the National Council on Aging and sponsored and presented by On Lok.

For Frank, lifelong learning is key to embracing life’s changes. “After I retired, I started volunteering, and taking courses. I love being in a classroom, absorbing new knowledge. Now that I have completed the workshop, I use my AMP workbook to refresh if needed. The brain needs to be challenged, especially as we get older, to keep those billions of neurons fired up and working.”

With his long academic history, Frank is not interested in pursuing another degree but in learning he can use day to day. AMP helped him gain skills in areas that impact his quality of life, from interpersonal relationships to better sleep, so he can live the next phase of his life to the fullest.

“Our life expectancy continues to increase. AMP provides a basic toolbox to help older adults navigate the additional 10-20 years that are predicted for all of us,” says Valorie Villela, director of On Lok WELL Senior Programs. “AMP’s top-notch faculty is critical to the learning experience. Each discussion is led by leaders in their field, who provide invaluable viewpoints and up-to-date information on topics people in their 60s and 70s need to know more about to make the most of their longevity. Another benefit of AMP is how seniors help one another, enriching sessions with their own life experiences and expertise.”

“AMP was a gift,” says Joe Ochab, one of the workshop’s first graduates. “Now I feel much better equipped to embrace the opportunities and challenges of a longer life. The faculty was tremendous and very dedicated and responsive to our follow-up. There is a lot we can do through diet, exercise, and medical and financial management to make life better as we age. I am starting to implement what I learned, such as getting my medical power of attorney and a living trust.”

AMP continues to evolve and embrace more older adults. “We are bringing AMP to people through collaborations with Mission Neighborhood Centers, Capp Senior Center, Peninsula Jewish Community Center, and Santa Clara Family Health Plan, among other partners. We have also launched a version in Spanish to fulfill our commitment to diversity and increasing access to programs and services,” says Valorie.

Because the social component is integral to the program, every workshop creates its own community. Fourteen cohorts of close to 190 graduates have celebrated their new connections with virtual and in-person gatherings so far. “We are committed to maintaining these social connections beyond the classes,” says Joe. “The goal is not just living longer but living more rewarding longer lives.”

Registration is now open for workshops starting in January.  
To sign up for a prerequisite information session, please contact Valorie Villela at 415-439-9364 or email [valorie@onlok.org](mailto:valorie@onlok.org). ■

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