



News From the Heart

"Feeding homebound seniors in Alameda County since 1966"

Volume XXIV | SOS Meals on Wheels | Summer/Fall 2020

From the Executive Director



We all know that 2020 has been record setting in several ways. Focusing on good news, the support we've received has so far, enabled SOS to say "Yes" to every single eligible senior who has reached out for help since the onset of COVID-19. The peace of mind and security that this has brought to our clients and

their loved ones is priceless! I am very grateful for the goodwill of so many in our community and organization that have stepped up to help us provide that service and relief.

We hear from family members who are worried about or trying to help their older parents or grandparents, all the time. I can so deeply empathize with those who feel anxious and vulnerable because they cannot physically be there for their loved one right now. The hardest thing for me these past seven months has been that I have only been able to hug my mom twice. And we are HUGGERS. Even though we both live in Oakland, she is especially at-risk for COVID, so we have been extremely careful about our distancing and contact. However, this experience has fueled inspiration to make SOS Meals on Wheels the organization that families throughout our service area can rely on to be there for their older loved ones in the most uncertain of times.

In Alameda County, much of 2020 has been focused on COVID-19, wildfires, a greater awakening to racial and social justice disparities, and a political and electoral process more divisive and under attack than any in recent memory. SOS is working with other local

organizations in order to ensure that we are doing all we can to provide support for our most vulnerable seniors, and that their voices are heard.

These efforts include:

- Partnering with PG&E to ensure that any clients affected by future Public Safety Power Shutoffs, receive meals that do not need to be refrigerated or reheated
- Working with Meals on Wheels of Alameda County to connect trained Census workers with seniors who need assistance participating in the 2020 Census
- Distributing Voter Registration packets to over 1,800 seniors, to help make sure they're able to vote in a way that is safe for them

When I first wrote one of these letters a year ago, I mentioned how humbled I was by the opportunity to join this organization, and to serve our community in this role. Today I remain humbled and inspired by the effort of everyone that has made this happen! Because of you, we are serving more meals to more people than ever before and will continue to do so. So, while I and everyone at SOS Meals on Wheels want to shout "Thank you!" from the rooftops for all the support we've received so far, we also know that our community must keep saying "Yes" to volunteering, donating, and sharing in our vision that no older loved one goes hungry or lonely.

Rest up. Take care of yourselves. Give of what you can. Tip generously. Vote. Wear a mask. Thank you!

Charlie Deterline | charlie@sosmow.org

A Special Thanks!

So many wonderful organizations and institutions stand with SOS Meals on Wheels in our efforts to reduce malnutrition and loneliness amongst local seniors. We would like to give a special thank you to the following organizations for their continued and exemplary support of our work.



Our Clients: “We were OK, then COVID-19 Hit”

In a typical year, we will conduct a number of get-to-know-you interviews with our clients and share what we learn with the wider SOS Meals on Wheels community via a newsletter like this, an email, a snail-mail letter.

Well, no surprise to anyone, this year is different. As the safety and well-being of our clients is paramount, we decided to forgo any in-person interviews while the public health officials maintain that we are still in a pandemic and social distancing is *de rigueur*.

So, in this edition of the SOS Meals on Wheels newsletter we will instead bring to you a selection of snippets about seniors whose circumstances changed in the face of the pandemic and shelter-in-place orders such that they found themselves in need of our service for the first time. There are over fourteen hundred of these stories. Here are three.

Mr. V is 91 years old. He lives alone in San Leandro. His daughter lives in Rohnert Park. Prior to the pandemic, she had been visiting him weekly to bring groceries and make sure his needs were met. When the shelter-in-place order was put into effect, Mr. V's daughter called us right away. She was frantic because she was in her 70's herself, living in a different county, and being advised not to leave the house. Mr. V had to stay home as well due to his age and health conditions: he is pre-diabetic, and has heart disease, high cholesterol, and a pacemaker. Mr. V's daughter was most grateful that SOS Meals on Wheels was able to set him up with daily meal service right away, and despite a language barrier—Mr. V only speaks Spanish—it was clear that he was relieved too.

Ms. R is 96 years old and very independent (she still drives!). Deborah, on our client services team, describes her as “amazing—very clear mentally.” Her only health issue is high blood pressure. Ms. R stocked up on groceries as soon as the stay-at-home order came down, but eventually she ran out of food. Upon the realization that the stores were total mayhem and she really shouldn't leave the house anyway, she called us to start meal service. It was a difficult choice, having prided herself on managing alone even at her advanced age, but ultimately, she was glad she made that call.

Mr. H is 72 years old. He was living independently until recently when he was diagnosed with end-stage lung cancer. That's when his friend, Ms. J, moved him into her home to care for him. Due to her age (she's over 60) and his risk factors, they have chosen to self-isolate as a unit as much as possible while she takes care of him. Our meals help with that tremendously.

We here at SOS Meals on Wheels are truly honored to be able to say “yes” to all of the seniors who need us right now. Our mission has never been more relevant, our commitment to it more unshakeable. Of course, we hope to be able shake hands with our beloved senior clients again one day, to sit down and chat with them in their homes and marvel at the tales they tell about their time on this planet, but until then we will keep on moving, grateful that we get to serve them in some small way while we can.

East Bay Paratransit Shows Up for Seniors

Paratransit has been essential to our organization these last six months. They have covered about 18 routes a day delivering nearly 30,000 meals to our community's homebound seniors. That's an average

of 40 meals per day per unit!

On behalf of the seniors whose days you brighten, thank you, wonderful people of Paratransit!



Featured Volunteers: Lauren Davis & Bill Heil

Of the nearly 300 new volunteers that have signed up to deliver meals during the pandemic, a few have done so alongside a partner. We love it when friends, family members, colleagues or couples volunteer together.



Meet Oaklanders Lauren Davis and Bill Heil. They signed up to volunteer in March as the Bay Area started to lock down. Like so many others, they just were looking for a way to help out. Lauren learned that her aunt and uncle were delivering meals in Albuquerque and decided

to do the same in Oakland. We caught up with Lauren and Bill just recently and asked them how it's been going for them. Here's what Lauren had to say:

*"Driving for SOS has actually been a wonderful social experience during a time when social experiences outside the home are rare. It's been truly helpful for us to have a routine where we leave our house and interact with other human beings. Sometimes a client's neighbor or roommate or family member will stop us and mention that the client LOVES getting meals delivered (even if the client hasn't said so themselves). **It's not just about the meals for many folks.** We've heard that many of the clients enjoy the routine of interacting with the drivers and having a few minutes of socially distant chat -- about the weather, a household repair, their family members, their pets. Realizing that the meals are only one part of the SOS Meals on Wheels experience has made driving feel even more important."*

It really is about more than the meal, especially during this strange and stressful time. Lauren reflects further:

"The last few months have been filled with anxiety, but when we arrive to pick up meals, everyone is busily helping each other out and ready with a warm hello. And we look forward to seeing so many of the clients. Some of them we only see for a few seconds as they bring their meal inside; some want to chat for a few minutes. Either way, it's nice to be greeted with a smile multiple times a day."

It is about the smiles too. **We are truly blessed to be able count on Lauren and Bill and all of the incredible volunteers who show up for our seniors every day with a meal and a smile.**

Meet our new Volunteer

Program Manager: Adrien Abuyen



SOS Meals on Wheels recently welcomed a new member to the Team, Adrien Abuyen. Adrien comes to us from a public affairs firm, where

he specialized, in part, on outreach and strategic partnerships. Before that, Adrien worked in US Senator Dianne Feinstein's office where, notably, he authored a report about food insecurity among college students. He has a history of taking on leadership roles and advocating for equity, access, and inclusion, so when our ED Charlie Deterline met Adrien at Leadership Oakland, a competitive leadership training program run by the Oakland Chamber of Commerce for the last 31 years, it was clear that Adrien would make a dynamic addition to our Volunteer Program. And he has!

When asked what he sees for the future of the Volunteer Program, Adrien says:

I want our volunteer program to become something that sustains our current level of growth, that equips people with tools to make service part of their everyday lives. We have the opportunity to shape the culture of volunteerism and continue saying yes to a mission that instills hope, empathy and a love for people in our communities.

Heart, vision, hard work and connection—that's what our Volunteer Program is all about. Already, we are seeing great things from the triumphant trio that is our Volunteer Program Team. One volunteer, Karen Cheng, put it this way: "I'm happy to say that I've found SOS Meals on Wheels to be very professionally organized. Everyone I've come into contact with—Tara, Cynthia, Adrien—is so friendly and helpful, making volunteering really fun and enjoyable versus super stressful."

Of course, there is still much work that lies ahead. Just as the pandemic persists, so does our need for volunteers; for people, communities, church groups, clubs and corporations to continuing saying yes to volunteering with us.

Interested? Get in touch with our new Volunteer Program Manager today at adrien@sosmow.org or 510-582-1263 x122.

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OUR MISSION

SOS Meals on Wheels' mission is to promote nutritional health, decrease the possibility of premature institutionalization, and foster the independence and dignity of homebound seniors in Central Alameda County and the City of Oakland.

SOS MEALS ON WHEELS HAS ACCOMPLISHED A LOT IN SEVEN MONTHS:

- Over 1,450 new clients have been enrolled
- 74,000 meals per month are now produced in our kitchen for three meal programs
- Nearly 300 new volunteers have been recruited
- Lyft, Royal Ambulance, East Bay Paratransit, and other local organizations have helped deliver meals by helping re-launch our "Adopt-A-Route" program
- Drivers are providing wellness checks and interacting with clients with health and safety protections
- Office and warehouse space are expanding to sustain recent growth and improve service



See what it has been like in our 2-minute video: www.sosmow.org/news/nourishingneighbors