

MealTimes



Cover Story

A Real Blessing



Graham remembers Project Open Hand from the early days. But it wasn't until years later that he'd find our organization again, this time as a client.

Graham came to San Francisco in the mid-1980s, after being kicked out of his home at age sixteen for being gay.

"I come from a middle-class family from a very conservative state," he says. "Being gay wasn't looked upon too well. So, at age sixteen I was asked to leave home. I hadn't finished high school or anything, and I had to do a lot of things just to survive and get by."

"I knew San Francisco was a liberal place and had a gay community, so I hopped on a plane with one suitcase and found myself here."

Graham had been living in group supportive housing in San Francisco when he found Most Holy Redeemer, a Catholic church in the Castro. Graham, who was not raised Catholic, found community, God, and comfort there, eventually converting to Catholicism and attending mass regularly.

He started a part-time job in the administration office at the Most Holy Redeemer church at the height of the AIDS epidemic. He remembers how community members mobilized to provide desperately needed support. One memorable community member at the time included Ruth Brinker, founder of Project Open Hand.

Ruth had just recently moved the nonprofit out of her home and into the kitchen of Trinity Episcopal Church, where volunteers would pack hot meals into coolers and distribute them.

About five of these coolers each day went to Most Holy Redeemer,

whose volunteers would then distribute them. Graham watched as meals were delivered to the rectory and the basement of the parish regularly - thick, styrofoam coolers like a beach cooler, that contained maybe twenty-five or thirty meals each.

"I would get the coolers and go give them to the volunteers - usually a team of two people," says Graham, "and they would go do their deliveries."

He remembers Ruth being a "kind, loving person," and how heavily she was involved in the community.

It was the support he received and witnessed during his first few

years later, unable to cook for himself after a stomach surgery in January 2023, Graham spoke with a social worker at the hospital about healthy meal options. She suggested Project Open Hand. Remembering Project Open Hand from the 1980s, he didn't realize he could use our services.

However, his work as a counselor stopped after Graham was in a major car accident that left him on disability. Unable to work, he relied on the support he had from his network, as well as resources through nonprofits and the city. To make ends meet, Graham rented a room in a Single Residency Occupancy, also known as an SRO.

receive them. I know that if I wasn't using your services, I wouldn't be getting well-balanced meals that support my health. I'd be real nervous if I didn't have them."

Unfortunately, Graham's health struggles have not ended at COPD. Three months ago, Graham received results for a biopsy: Stage 4 cancer.

"This diagnosis was a shocker. I had no idea. When the doctor said, you've got prostate cancer, stage 4, I said, oh my gourd!"

Fortunately, Graham is able to receive treatment close to his home. But he says that radiation therapy makes him tired and affects his appetite: "It's hard on the body because what it's doing."

"I'm on disability so finances are tight, so this helps out a lot because I know I'm getting at least one good balanced meal [a day] from you!"

Because of your help and support from other friends like you and his faith, Graham is able to eat healthy and cope. He says: "I've got a good spiritual connection that helps keep me strong - and in many ways that's an advantage for me."

At night, Graham cuddles up with Sweetpea, his seventeen-year-old chihuahua, who is "the love of my life."

He is hopeful and tremendously grateful for how you and your support of Project Open Hand are making a difference.

To find other stories of how your gifts are making a difference, or to donate, go to openhand.org/donate

"Project Open Hand has been a real blessing for me."

years in San Francisco that inspired Graham to return to school and get his GED, then a bachelor's degree in social work.

Eventually, Graham became a counselor at a correctional facility. Although it hadn't been what he had imagined for himself in social work, he found fulfillment in the role.

"I wanted to help people that were in the same predicaments that I had fallen into and help them out. I wanted to work with kids on the streets who had fallen into the same sort of situations that I had," says Graham.

"To be able to be someone who could provide loving and empathetic care for people who had been beaten down, not only be the system, but by family and friends, meant a lot to me."

"I said, 'I'm not HIV positive...,'" says Graham. "I thought that was the only way I could get meals from you."

But the nurse pointed out to him that he has Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a lung disease that restricts airflow and causes breathing problems. It's an illness that qualifies him to receive Project Open Hand meals for six months at a time. Since then, Graham receives frozen meals each week, which is one less thing he has to worry about financially.

"San Francisco had gotten so expensive to live in," says Graham, "Project Open Hand has been a real blessing for me."

The meals, he says, are very nutritious, and he enjoys them: "I feel satisfied with Project Open Hand meals - and I feel very thankful and lucky to be able to

by Kimberly Kollwitz,
Manager, Marketing and Communications



Paul's Letter

The Power of Community Support

Dear Friend,

As you know, many things have changed and shifted since the pandemic - but one thing remains constant: Your continued support. I am always amazed by your continued support, the recognition, and generosity from others in the community who help provide *meals with love* day in, day out, to Project Open Hand.

March marked my fifth year as CEO of Project Open Hand. Coming from a background in community health and wellness, I was honored to lead an organization as well-respected and well-known as Project Open Hand. However, one year into my time at Project Open Hand the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down.

While we had to make a number of changes to our operations, we were able to meet the increased demand for services to our clients

because of the support from this special community.

We continue to see this support come through in various ways. Last year, we were thrilled to be voted as the 'Best LGBTQ Nonprofit' in the Bay Area by thousands of *Bay Area Reporter* readers. And recently, we were selected for another amazing opportunity as the featured nonprofit partner of Bruce Springsteen's Chase Center concerts.

For each city Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band play in, they select a local anti-hunger organization to feature at the concert. For his Chase Center shows, Bruce and his team selected Project Open Hand, introducing us to thousands of people and encouraging them to get involved!

Like many of our team and volunteers, I spent my evening at Chase Center talking about who we are, how we help clients eat healthier, and how people can support our work to other

folks. You won't believe how proud I felt when volunteers told me that a number of people came up to them to tell them how much they love our organization and what we do! I was reminded how much of a staple Project Open Hand is in our community.

We wouldn't be where we are today without the enormous support from you and our volunteers.

Over the next few months, you'll find a number of exciting events and opportunities for you to get involved with. I personally always look forward to Ruth Brinker Month in May, where we celebrate Project Open Hand's founding and the growth we have experienced since then. I hope that you'll join us at a few of these special events.

Paul Hepfer,
Chief Executive Officer



Upcoming Events

Learn more about each of these events on our website at www.openhand.org/events



April: Volunteer Appreciation Month

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month. Although we celebrate our amazing Project Open Hand volunteers all year long, throughout April we'll be hosting special events to thank them for helping us to provide more meals with love.



May: Ruth Brinker Month

Throughout the month of May, celebrate our founder Ruth Brinker's birthday. Events, promotions, and more will be available to celebrate with us. Stay tuned for more.



June 29 - June 30: San Francisco Pride Weekend

Join us for the 54th Annual San Francisco Pride Parade and Festival! Stop by Project Open Hand's booth during the Civic Center Celebration on Saturday, June 29 or join us as we boogie down Market Street for the Pride Parade on Sunday, June 30.



July 14: The Richmond/Ermet Aid Foundation's 30th Anniversary (REAF)

Get ready for "Help is on the Way XXX: Broadway & Beyond," one of San Francisco's longest-running benefit concerts. This iconic event, presented by the Richmond/Ermet Aid Foundation, will benefit Project Open Hand and REAF's Small Emergency Grants Program.



September 26: Save the Date for Dining Out For Life!

Dining Out For Life East Bay will return on Thursday, September 26! Dine out at participating restaurants on this special day and a portion of your bill will go towards providing nutritious meals with love for Project Open Hand clients.



More Produce Options in Oakland Grocery Center

Thanks to a grant from StopWaste, our clients who visit the Oakland Grocery Center now get to pick their own produce! The StopWaste grant allowed us to purchase a new refrigerator, as well as supported the Oakland renovations last May that created enough space for clients to shop in.

Now, clients who visit us in Oakland can more easily see and reach the fruits and vegetables in our center. The new refrigerator also created more cold storage to increase the variety and volume of produce that we can offer to clients through our GusNIP program. For more information, go to our blog at openhand.org/blog.

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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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FOOD = LOVE



Community

Volunteer Spotlight: Making a Difference Every Sunday for 31 Years

For the last 31 years, Lisa Erdos has been a staple in the Project Open Hand kitchen. Every Sunday, she joins a group of regular volunteers to chop vegetables, package food, and lend a hand wherever needed in the kitchen. To date, she has volunteered over 2,400 hours!

"I started volunteering for Project Open Hand in 1993 after a close friend in my apartment building died of AIDS," says Lisa. "Many of us in the building helped him out by cooking his favorite meals as he got weaker and was unable to cook for himself."

After her neighbor passed away, Lisa searched for an organization in the Bay Area that served people living with HIV/AIDS, hoping to donate to that organization in her neighbor's name as a way to commemorate him. That's when she found Project Open Hand.

Not knowing a lot about the organization, Lisa decided to volunteer at Project Open Hand first and see if our services aligned with the kinds of programs she wanted to donate to. She started out by delivering meals, and then eventually switched to working in the kitchen.

"I was hooked!" She says. "Working with all the chefs and other volunteers throughout the years has



Lisa wearing her Project Open Hand beanie, apron, and tote



Lisa with her Sunday volunteer group (Left to right: Lisa Erdos, Jim Horstman, Jerry Garrida, and Liz Hom)

"I started volunteering for Project Open Hand in 1993 after a close friend in my apartment building died of AIDS."

been super fun and allows me to make a difference in my community."

Lisa, a retired chemist who enjoys gardening, hiking, kayaking, and other outdoor activities in her free time, says that it's the joy of working with her Sunday volunteer group that keeps her coming back to volunteer - she knows the work she is doing is desperately needed.

It's a regular occurrence when Lisa wears her Project Open Hand t-shirt or hat on her way to or from volunteering that someone stops her because they know our organization.

"It's quite incredible," she says, "to be wearing my shirt or hat and someone will say something like, 'Hey! My partner got meals from Project Open Hand,' or 'Do you work there?'" and then share their story

of how they were going through chemotherapy and Project Open Hand provided meals for them when they needed it.

Most of all, Lisa says she has seen Project Open Hand grow and develop over the years to continue to serve the needs of our community. She shares how impressed she is by how we have continued to expand our client base. And in all that time, she says, Project Open Hand has always stayed true to its mission of providing meals with love to the people who need it most.

"Since 1993, I have watched Project Open Hand adapt to changing times and add new groups to your mission of providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable," says Lisa. "It is so impressive."

Each year, Project Open Hand is supported by hundreds of volunteers who help us to provide meals with love to people who are suffering from critical illnesses. To learn more about volunteering opportunities for individuals, community or corporate groups, visit www.openhand.org/volunteer

by Kimberly Kollwitz,
Manager, Marketing and Communications



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 October 01, 2023 through December 31, 2023. 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, visit: openhand.org/give/supper-club.



From Our Kitchen to Yours

Tofu Chorizo

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- Ground black pepper to taste
- 1 block of firm tofu, drained
- 1/2 tablespoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon cider vinegar
- Chopped cilantro and scallions for garnish

Instructions

1. Put oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, and pepper. Cook until vegetables soften (about 3 to 5 minutes).
2. Use hands to crumble tofu into the pan. Cook, stir, and scrape the bottom of the skillet until tofu browns (about 10 to 30 minutes).
3. Add chili powder, cumin, and cinnamon. Stir and cook for 1 to 2 minutes.
4. Stir in the vinegar.
5. Garnish with cilantro and scallions and serve with tortillas, rice, or eggs.

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Cover Story
A Real Blessing

Volunteer Spotlight:
Making a Difference Every
Sunday for 31 Years | PAGE 3

Tofu Chorizo | PAGE 4