# A Legacy Continues from Ruth to Adrian

**Cover Story** 

II t was the way my doctor talked about Project Open Hand, and the things he was saying about Ruth Brinker. He told me that going there and experiencing it would be all the things I would need emotionally and physically," Executive Chef Adrian Barrow said about when his HIV specialist referred him to Project Open Hand.

"I fell in love right away."

Project Open Hand's legacy goes back nearly 40 years ago, when Ruth Brinker delivered nutritious meals from her kitchen to community members who were experiencing malnutrition while fighting HIV/AIDS symptoms.

That simple, caring act of cooking a meal for a criticallyill neighbor has had a lasting impact for many who received a life-saving meal from us. And sometimes, that impact on a client is so great that they become a part of our family and a part of the legacy of Project Open Hand.

Chef Barrow's love for cooking

culinary school in New York City, followed by internship opportunities in France and in North Eastern Italy.

Chef Barrow was a rising talent, and his skills took him west to San Francisco, where he landed a position as a sous chef at the three-Michelin star restaurant called Aqua.

"It was a lot of work, intense and amazing work and fabulous food, but all that work you put into it, you need to be able to rest, recover and have the energy to survive and go on another day...and I wasn't getting that recovery and necessary energy," Chef Adrian said.

The non-stop work began to affect Chef physically. He began to feel more sick. He was unable to control his digestive system. Meds weren't working.

"I could not continue at that level of intense cooking, performing every night for those clients who were paying an exorbitant amount of money to eat at Aqua," Chef said. "I wasn't taking care of myself. And that was a big mistake." One early morning in 2009, Chef Adrian walked into Project Open Hand with a client intake form in one hand, and his resume in another. He asked to see the Executive Chef, the late Michael Baroman-Coggins.

That afternoon, he received a phone call from Michael, who said, "We're interested in hiring a cook and it seems you would be a good fit."

In one day, Adrian became a client and an employee of Project Open Hand.

"As a client, I was now eating the same healthy meals that I was preparing at work daily for the many clients of Open Hand," he said.

Not only did his path to better health begin with improved digestion and better adherence to his medication, but his career in the kitchen continued.

"I started to feel good and healthy and, most importantly, the fact I was still working, cooking, and doing what I loved most, and not having to stress about those 14-hour days balanced my life." the guidelines for each mealtype client because we have to make sure we provide them with the right amount of nutrients and calories in each medically tailored meal

To prepare more than 2,500 meals a day in the Project Open Hand kitchen, Chef Adrian works with nearly 30 kitchen staff members including cooks and porters, and on average 35 volunteers a day.

Although Chef Adrian will have those days that might remind him of the times he was working in the kitchen of a Michelin star restaurant, the legacy of Project Open Hand is what keeps him grounded.

"Somedays are tough and busy and hard, and you think this is tough work, but I know that all that hard work I did today is going to some good food for someone in need."

"When those times come up, when you feel like you're beaten down, I think about what we're doing and what impact we have on others, it just lifts you back to

started on a small island in the Caribbean - Barbados. It was during his first year of Boy Scouts that he was introduced to the joys of preparing meals while he was camping along the countryside, cooking meals on the campfires.

When he turned 16, his family decided to move to New York. In high school, his passion for cooking blossomed during home economics classes. He learned everything from choosing ingredients and knife skills to seasonings and making sauces.

After Adrian graduated high school, he went to

Chef stepped down from his job, and his doctor referred him to Project Open Hand to receive services. But he also encouraged him to check out what opportunities they had in the kitchen.

"I was ready to retire, find something somewhere different so I can have my energy, and just get on with my life. But my doctor said 'Project Open Hand has great food, and it has volunteers in the kitchen where you can spend some time in the kitchen. You can't be sitting around and not doing anything." For over 13 years, Chef has held many positions including special diet chef where he created different meals for wellness clients leading to his current position of Executive Chef.

But unlike his previous culinary jobs, the process of creating a meal is truly a team effort involving multiple departments.

"It involves quite a few of us. registered dietitian nutritionists, kitchen operations, chefs and volunteers," Barrow said. "Our recipes have to be right for our clients. It's important to follow that place."

Nearly 40 years ago, Ruth Brinker might have experienced moments of hardship like Chef Adrian. But her dedication to make sure her neighbors in need were cared for with a lifesaving meal kept her going.

And that legacy continues decades later through the hands and work of Chef Adrian, a former client and now Executive Chef at Project Open Hand.

And we are extremely grateful, because you make that possible.

by Marcus Tolero, Marketing and Communications Manager

## Paul's Letter

## A Special Message From Paul Hepfer

#### Dear Friend,

Can you believe it was nearly 40 years ago when Ruth Brinker, a San Francisco grandmother and retired food-service worker, witnessed a close friend with AIDS suffering from malnutrition during the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s?

As you know, her mission at that point was to set out and make sure her neighbors not only received life-saving nutrition, but also emotional support during their times of need.

This very simple and compassionate idea to provide 'meals with love' to those with a critical illness was the beginning of Project Open Hand, and it has now transformed into providing 'meals that heal.' Today, Project Open Hand is a leader in the Food is Medicine movement

Ruth Brinker left a tremendous legacy, and it's one that we continue to build upon. Today, not only do we continue to serve HIV/AIDS clients, but we've grown Project Open Hand to provide services to clients experiencing cancer, diabetes, and heart disease in San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo Counties. In fact, we are the largest medical nutrition provider in San Francisco and Alameda Counties, and we help many live longer and healthier lives because of our work.

Ruth's legacy of caring for everyone in the community is also an important part of our foundation. Our doors are open to all ethnicities, genders, and ages because while we provide our clients with an important nutritional service, we also provide them with a space where they are respected and welcome.

All of these values make up Project Open Hand and they are exactly the reasons why our legacy resonates with so many and why they want to be a part of the mission set forth by our founder.

In our cover story, Executive Chef Adrian Barrow details how he first came to Project Open Hand as a client. He mentions how the story of Ruth encouraged him to not only get healthier but continue her good work through his love of cooking. And in our Spotlight Story, former client and now Donor Services Associate Ana Rivera shares how finding a community of support is all you need to "get back on your feet."

There are countless more stories that speak to the impactful legacy of Ruth Brinker and Project Open Hand. From our volunteers and staff to our community leaders and partners, all play a role in making sure meals with love continues today, tomorrow, and beyond. You make that possible.

You are part of this legacy. Thank you!

Sude

Paul Hepfer Chief Executive Officer

P.S. To support our legacy, please go to www.openhand.org/donate. Thank you again.

### Will You Consider a Special Gift?

As you're seeing in your own monthly bills, groceries and gas have become much more expensive. We're seeing this as well. And yet, more clients depend on us than ever before. We cannot let them down. Donate at openhand.org/donate

## **Upcoming Events**

There's always something cooking with events. Here's what's on tap.

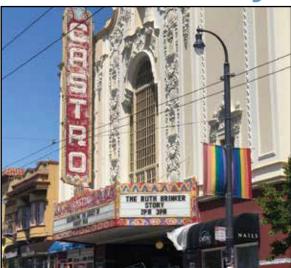
San Franisco Pride, June 25-26 (Sat. - Sun.) Dining Out for Life East Bay, September 29 (Thurs.) Hand to Hand, December 9 (Fri.)

Contact events@openhand.org for more information.

## The Ruth Brinker Story Premiere



Former Exec. Chef Fernando Castillo and



The Historic Castro Theatre



(Left to Right): CEO Paul Hepfer, Former Exec. Director Tom

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and VP of Development and Community Affairs Amor Santiago

Supporters and moviegoers gathered at the historic Castro Theatre on May 22nd for the premiere of "The Ruth Brinker Story." The day included multiple screenings of the short documentary highlighted by a red-carpet premiere in the evening that featured a panel discussion with the filmmaker Apo Bazidi and after party. Thank you to Burn A Light Productions for the amazing film and event sponsors Fort Point Brewery Co., Hot Cookie, and Tito's Handmade Vodka.

### Quarterly News from Project Open Hand | Published Since 1989



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.

Project Open Hand

EDITOR/WRITER: Marcus Tolero, Manager, Marketing and Communications FOUNDER:

**Ruth Brinker** 

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## Community

# Spotlight: Your Gifts Come Full Circle

very day Donor Services Associate Ana Rivera sees gifts of support come in.

Some of the gifts come from longtime donors who supported Project Open Hand from the very beginning when Ruth was serving Meals with Love out of her kitchen or new donors who are seeing the benefits that Meals that Heal have on the community.

The amounts vary from a few dollars to the thousands! And usually, with every donation, there's a message of support attached.

"I see messages of people that give \$5 to \$10 dollars just wishing they could give more. What they don't realize is that \$5 to \$10 means a lot. I've been on the other end and I know how much it means to give \$5."

The donations that arrive, no matter how big or small, are all in support of Project Open Hand's legacy of helping community members lead longer and healthier lives. For Ana, every gift in support of this legacy has a deeper meaning – she was a client in need long before she became a staff member.

Ana was born in Tijuana, Mexico, but she grew up in different cities in Los Angeles County including Re Alto, Pomona, and San Bernardino.

Growing up was challenging for Ana. She grew up in foster care. She experienced homelessness and depended on friends and shelters to remain off the streets. And as a trans woman of color, she dealt with the emotional trauma associated with unfair and unjust prejudices against the transgender community.

On top of all these challenges, at the age of 19 she tested positive for AIDS.

"I had a lot of emotional trauma for a long time that I didn't deal with. I was scared, but at the same time being a trans woman I thought this was God's way of punishing me," Ana said. "For me, for a long time I thought I was destined to die of AIDS. I didn't know that I could have a life, and I didn't know that I deserved to have a good life."

Ana had the fight in her to want to live a good life.

In search of better support services for both her diagnosis and her mental health, she moved to San Francisco at the age of 21. In 2003, she was referred to Project Open Hand by a sister organization within our building on 730 Polk Street. "I was really sick," Ana said. "Also, I didn't have a relationship with food. I was eating junk food all the time and I was bed ridden for a long time. That's when I found out about Project Open Hand."

She eventually replaced her diet of sugary drinks and junk food, items easy to come by. Because as she put it, she was in "survival mode" and would eat whatever was available. Over time, her new Project Open Hand recommended diet of veggies and proteins improved her digestion and adherence to medications. It also gave her a better understanding of what was good for her.

> "I feel like (Project Open Hand) created a space for me to get nutritious food in an environment where I didn't feel judged or pressured; I felt comfortable and safe enough to eventually become healthy and get back on my feet," she said.

> > And she did get back on her feet.

She picked up jobs in the clerical field. She worked the frontlines as an HIV tester, and she worked at multiple Bay Area non-profits in case management helping queer youth of color.

She eventually landed a position in gift entry after volunteering at Project Open Hand for a year.

"Being a part of Project Open Hand and seeing the ins and outs of how much thought was going into my frozen meals gave me much more appreciation for them - I never realized how much thought went into the frozen meals and who was making them. It gave me perspective.

"Again, I feel like for many years food was being provided to me without any questions in an environment that felt safe, where I was allowed to be myself. It feels amazing to be able to work with everyone at Project Open Hand to make sure that the next person like myself has a similar experience."

With almost every donation she sees come into Project Open Hand, Ana reads the messages of support from donors. But what most people don't know is that the acknowledgment/thank you letters sent to donors thanking them for their donations come from Ana. "I feel complete gratitude. I live a blessed life now," she said.

And she thanks you for helping her get there.

by Marcus Tolero, Marketing and Communications Manager

## Project Open Hand Plate Clubs

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Your gift makes a difference. MealTimes offers special acknowledgment to Project Open Hand supporters who have made gifts totaling \$1,000 or more from November 20, 2021 through March 31, 2022. If you have questions about this list, please contact donations@openhand.org or 415-447-2300.

DIAMOND PLATE CLUB \$100,000 AND OVER

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Anonymous (1) Google Orr-Lederer Charitable Gift Fund Mary and Michael Osborn Roger D. Reading The Abe & Kathryn Selsky Foundation Elizabeth H. Shattuck Tito's Handmade Vodka WIZARD487 Fund BRONZE PLATE CLUB \$5,000 - \$9,999

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## Cheese Ravioli

Servings: 4 Prep Time: 20 minutes Ready in: 40 minutes

### Ingredients

- 2 cups chopped, ripe tomatoes
- 1/4 cup (packed) chopped, fresh basil leaves
- 4 teaspoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Dash of freshly grated lemon peel

1 bag (8 ounces) frozen cheese ravioli

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Parmesan cheese

### Instructions

1. In a large bowl, combine tomatoes, basil, olive oil, lemon peel, dash of salt, dash of pepper. Let stand at room temperature at least 15 minutes or up to 30 minutes to blend flavors.

2. At the same time, cook ravioli as directed on label.

3. Add hot pasta to sauce and toss to coat. Sprinkle with Parmesan to serve.

## **Nutrition Facts**

- Calories 259 Total Fat 8 g Saturated Fat 4g
- Trans Fat 0g Cholesterol 48g Sodium 152mg Total Carbohydrate 34g

Dietary Fiber 1.5g Sugars 1.7g Protein 11g

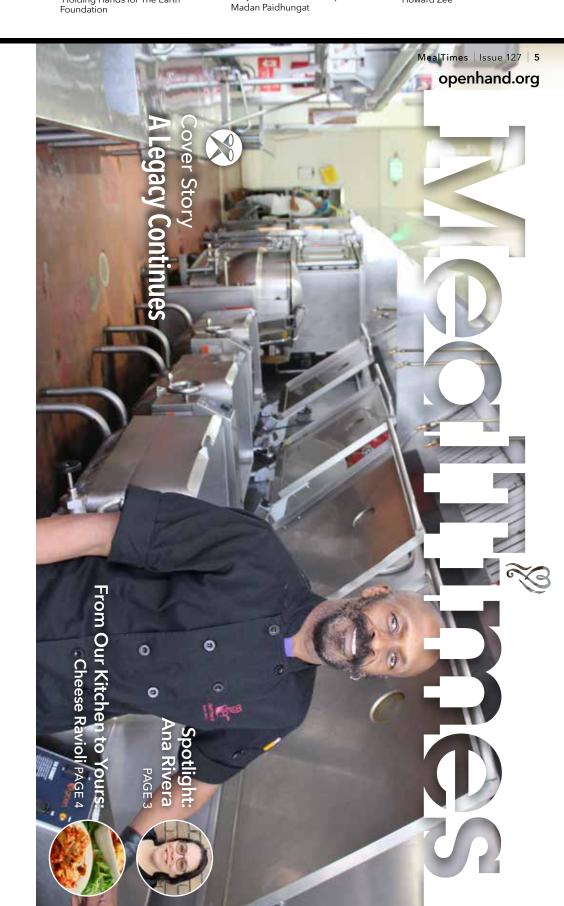
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