



Special DELIVERY



SEPTEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

While many of us are easing into some form of normal, there is still great uncertainty as we navigate the Covid-19 landscape. Sadly, for many of the seniors we serve every day at Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, their lives will never be the same because of the pandemic. This new uncertainty just adds to the increasing problems they face from hunger and isolation.

Covid-19 has put our organization to the test over the last eighteen months and will continue to as we go forward. It required us to be creative so we could deliver to 40% more clients. This need will not decrease but will continue to grow. The pandemic demonstrated both the unmet needs seniors face and the fragile nature of their support system. Because we are the only Meals on Wheels that delivers meals and services directly to clients, we recognize the importance of developing new programs to meet those needs.

In this edition of *Special Delivery*, you'll learn about a new collaboration that will help seniors in East Contra Costa County access the services they need. We'll introduce you to volunteers who have used the opportunity to share a special experience together and meet clients who bonded over loss and found friendship and strength both physically and emotionally from our exercise classes.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of *Special Delivery* and feel free to share it with others!

Sincerely,

Caitlin Sly
Executive Director

FILLING AN UNMET NEED

Finding community services can be a challenge if you don't know where to go and is even more difficult if you don't have easy access to the internet. This is a problem many seniors in East Contra Costa face every day. In order to help seniors navigate this difficult process, Meals on Wheels Diablo Region has partnered with community organizations to coordinate the East Contra Costa Senior Resource Initiative and has hired Lidia Gutierrez as the Older Adult Support Specialist.

The program reaches out to underserved seniors and helps bring resources to them so they can easily access services no matter which provider they initially contact. The goal is to have "no wrong door" to reduce barriers for elders. In her role, Gutierrez will work to overcome these barriers and coordinate senior resource delivery for those in need in East Contra Costa County. "I came to this country from Mexico when I was just 16," says Gutierrez. "Everything was new to me and I had to figure things out on my own. I wasn't even aware that there were services available to assist me. I understand how hard it can be for seniors. My job is to help them understand the available resources and assist them in filling out applications."

The Area Agency on Aging estimates there will be 30,000 additional seniors in Contra Costa County by 2033. According to Gutierrez, without increased attention and strategic planning, seniors in East Contra Costa County will be unable to access services which will create inequities that can impact their health and lives. "This program will have a positive impact on the lives of seniors in East Contra Costa County."

The East Contra Costa Senior Resource Initiative is a partnership of Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, Choice in Aging, Contra Costa Senior Legal Services, Diablo Valley Foundation for the Aging, and Empowered Aging. The project has been made possible by a generous grant from the John Muir Community Health Foundation.

To learn more about the East Contra Costa Senior Resource Initiative, contact Lidia Gutierrez at 925.482.8752 or email her at lgutierrez@mowdr.org.



*Lidia Gutierrez,
Older Adult Support Specialist*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is your time. It can be a challenge, but Sara Turns saw an opportunity to share experiences with her daughter, Allie, while they were making a difference in the community.

Sara and Allie are members of the National Charity League, a multi-generational organization of mothers and daughters who work to build relationships through a commitment to philanthropy, culture, and leadership in the community. "We decided to choose Meals on Wheels Diablo Region as our charity of choice because I wanted Allie to see first-hand what life is like for a vulnerable senior," explains Sara.

MOW Diablo Region delivers meals and services to seniors who don't drive or are too frail to navigate the supermarket, can't prepare a meal or in some cases, can't afford food. Many of these seniors are isolated and lonely. Sara and Allie went on their first delivery with a seven-year veteran volunteer. "He showed us the ropes," says Sara. "It takes time to build relationships with the seniors, but after delivering meals for about two months, Allie and I both enjoy interacting with the clients. We always try to stay a few extra minutes to chat with them."

This isn't the first time Sara and Allie have contributed to MOW Diablo Region. They have spent many afternoons together preparing birthday bags for seniors and even made 150 silicone oven mitts to go along with the meals.

Contributing your time builds self-esteem and a sense of identity for volunteers of every age. For Sara and Allie, it has formed a strong mother-daughter bond that will last a lifetime: "Delivering meals made us appreciate what we have and understand how difficult getting food can be for a senior," says Sara. "It also gave us a chance to learn about our community together."



Sara Turns and her daughter, Allie

WALKING IN THE SAME SHOES



Every Tuesday, 85-year-old Zita Sanchez laces up her shoes and heads out the door. It's a 25-minute walk for her from the BART station to Baldwin Park in Concord, where she meets her friend Maria Gomez, 66, for Meals on Wheels Diablo Region's Walk with Ease class.

The two met on a bus and immediately formed a special bond. "Maria's husband passed away recently. I lost my husband last year and know how hard it can be," says Zita.

As we age, one of the most difficult challenges is loneliness, especially after the loss of a loved one. Many seniors battle depression, isolation, and malaise that can lead to other health problems like dementia and

cognitive and physical decline. Zita recognized that Maria was dealing with her loss, so she suggested Maria join her at our Walk with Ease class which Zita has been attending for a few years. "I love to move my arms and legs! I also enjoy dancing and Tai Chi," says Zita.

Maria thought the classes might be fun and it gave her an opportunity to spend time with her new friend, so she joined. "I've really enjoyed the class and getting to meet the instructor and other walkers has been uplifting," says Maria.

The Walk with Ease class is led by Meals on Wheels Diablo Region's staff member, Eileen Stephens. "These two ladies are absolutely sensational," says Stephens. "Their positive attitudes really inspire me and others in the class."

True friendship can have a healing power, and those relationships become even more important as we age. "I'm happy that we have one another," shares Zita.



MEALS ON WHEELS
DIABLO REGION

1300 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

WITH HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Did you know that MOW Diablo Region has:



Friendly Visitors who are matched with isolated seniors for in-person companionship.



Friendly Helpers who will pick up prescriptions or run errands.



Friendly Callers who will call weekly to keep in touch.



Anyone age 60 and over is eligible.

You do not have to be receiving delivered meals to get some help from our Friends!
Call today **925-239-2484** or email **cblack@mowdr.org** to sign up for services or to volunteer!