Coming into St. Mary’s Community Center with piano man Rodney Bell on the keys and Bill Wigfall on drums playing “Celebrate Good Times” triggers that feeling you get when the Oakland A's win and that same song fills the Coliseum to mark the victory. While some would not tie such worlds together, baseball actually mirrors many of the battles the people have faced in this room. There have been strike outs and losing seasons, but then something changed and the combination of coaching, a sense of team and not giving up has filled a void. Today, their personal battle over alcohol and drugs is being recognized in this Life Recovery Celebration and “Celebrate Good Times” gives a sense of the triumphant.

But then the mood shifts a bit as LaTanya Wolfe sings “You’ve Been Good To Me”. It starts as a prayer of gratefulness and morphs into a revival as Rodney improvises on piano and the community joins in the chorus. Still singing as she sits down, “You brought me a very long way,” sums up the journey so many know first hand.

Life Recovery Director Shirley Cheney invites Judy up to read the 12 steps and reminds the assembled guests of how Arthur would recite the steps from memory each day in group. His insistence, “I need to keep showing up for my recovery” paid rewards as he was clean and sober for seven years and re-united with his son prior to his death.

Arthur’s example is not an anomaly here. The drama troupe of seniors all have walked a similar path and their performance of Step 2 gave visual understanding to the belief that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

Then the moment so many had anticipated as the elders are called up by name and given a memento to honor their fortitude. Gripping the key chain emblazoned with St. Mary’s Center Life Recovery was more than a token. As Charleen said, “You cared for me when I didn’t care for myself.”

A seasoned veteran, Benny summed it up this way. “This is more than getting rid of an addiction. It is support for our lives and help to learn how to take care of ourselves. Recovery 55 is where we just get started.”

Indeed for many, addiction to alcohol and drugs has contributed to a downward spiral but that starts to change at St. Mary’s. Culminating the drama troupe’s production is a song that helps to capture the feeling, “When I thought my life was over, you brought the sun in.”
There are moments of anticipation easily visible in the Preschool children on their day of promotion. This year, 21 children are being promoted and will start Kindergarten in the fall - with a head start on their learning. At St. Mary's Center Preschool the focus is broader than education it is also attention to issues and resources families face that impact a child's ability to learn.

Preschool Director Lorita Riga reports that three of the children this year were referred for additional services. “Two will start speech therapy in the fall and one will receive motor development services. Although we are happy that they will be receiving services, getting the children evaluated took a very long time as the process within the Oakland Unified School District is very slow and budget cuts have reduced the staff, as well.”

As mentioned in the last newsletter, SMC’s Preschool was chosen to participate in a PBS study that focused on how children in low income neighborhoods best learn math skills. Preschool staff are quick to acknowledge that the interactive white board has been a wonderful addition to the classroom. The children are helping to inform curriculum development and staff will be able to see the value of their input on the report that is due out this October.

Riga can see how resources impacts learning yet she and her staff are well aware of the other issues that often keep children from the tools they need to be successful. “Many of our families face severe challenges. I’ve had more families come and go during the course of this year than all of the other five years combined that I have been Director! The stress that the children were experiencing was something we had to work very hard to manage in the classroom. In some cases it was because of the violence. One family had a bullet through their child’s bedroom, luckily, the boy was not in his room. They moved out of the area as a result. Another family was shuffled between relatives as a parent was incarcerated. Tough issues for young children to see and reason our program is so needed. On the up side, two families were able to find a full time job because their child was in our program.”

SMC fills a critical link in this community for families who see St. Mary’s Preschool as an important place to help kids get started. The promotion ceremony on June 13th was a good example!

The First, Second and Third grade classes from Hoover Elementary School recently paid a visit to St. Mary’s. Led by their gardener, Miss Ally, the 30+ children walked single-file to St. Mary’s, each child holding a carrot just harvested from their Hoover Garden. Once they arrived, the St. Mary’s Center Homeless Team stood at our door and cheered the mini gardeners. The students then presented the carrots and home grown potatoes to Jameisha Hood, our Food Manager. A second group of students returned bearing marigolds, and came into the Community Center and gifted our Seniors with the flowers. Afterwards, the Seniors rewarded Hoover Elementary School with a standing ovation. From small seeds, big ideas grow.

Thank you, Hoover Elementary School and Miss Ally for this wonderful idea; we look forward to the future where you can come and participate in one of our Garden Frescoes.

More than J Walking

J-Walking is the short version for Justice Walking, a program initiated by students at St. Joan of Arc parish in San Ramon. It's intent is to start a dialog with people not many miles away yet worlds apart in terms of age and circumstance. The four week program gave a forum for the young women and elders to get to know each other and hear stories often silenced. While the elders have experienced homelessness, they spoke about feeling privileged due to rich life experience, and yet the difficulty of facing stigmas and stereotypes. The students had a chance to ask detailed questions of the seniors to better understand their lives. The seniors appreciated the exchange and felt gratitude to be able to “give back” to the younger generation by offering history and wisdom.
Transforming Lives

Behold, I stand at the door and knock
Breaking Down the Doors of Injustice

David Fobroy is invited to present at a Human Rights Celebration sponsored by Church Women United this August. To prepare for this honor, David wrote a personal statement for their program.

My name is David L. Fobroy. I am 65 years old and I live in Oakland. I was asked to give a talk about Mental Health and Basic Human Rights. A few years ago, I was given an award for my advocacy work on this subject by the Alameda County Mental Health Association. I am on SSI (Supplementary Security Income, which means I receive $854 each month to live on.) I am mentally ill myself. In my 20’s, I spent 3 years in a mental hospital. Since then I was hospitalized 8 times at John George.

I am a client of St. Mary’s Center and have been part of St. Mary’s community for the past 11 years. St. Mary’s is a Senior Center with all kinds of help for seniors. When I came to St. Mary’s I was homeless and now I have a place to live. For the last 8 years I have not been homeless. At St. Mary’s I see a psychiatrist and I have a case manager. I see both of them on a regular basis. St. Mary’s also helps me with my money and makes sure my rent is paid. At the present time my life is full. I hope you enjoy the talk about mental illness and that it is informative to you.

Restore Rebuild Refund

Since 2008, Californians living in poverty have increased from 6 million to more than 8.7 million people, including 2.2 million children. During the same time period from 2008 until now, the state’s safety net has been reduced by more than 15 billion dollars. These draconian cuts have contributed to the highest poverty rate in the nation.

Speaking up about a different set of priorities is part of the work of St. Mary’s Center (SMC). Vernon Andrews of SMC spoke on the need to refund many social services that threaten vulnerable members of the community, especially funding for In Home Support Services. Vernon is well aware of the economy and the programs needed in such times. “I was in a shelter for the first time. I never had to live in under these conditions but I made the best of it. Being at St. Mary’s gave me an opportunity to address issues. We are a family.”

Congratulations to KTVU!

Winning the Edward R. Murrow Award is a mark of excellence in broadcast news. Recently KTVU photographer Tony Hodrick and editor Dina Munsch won this prestigious award for a video on homelessness that features Jay Fernandes of St. Mary’s Center. Jay is a poet and author of A Real Poem. Thank you Jay, Tony & Dina for calling attention to the needs and hopes of people without a place to call home. http://www.ktvu.com/videos/news/ktvu-wins-edward-r-murrow-award-for-real-poem/vyQNy/
June 12th marks an important day for Filipino people around the globe. As a day of independence, Rebecca Hufana and the people of St. Mary’s Center put together a program to honor the people who have contributed to their independence and celebrate a rich culture through dance, music and food.

One hundred people gathered in the community center to pay special tribute to nine Filipino veterans who served in World War II, a significant time in their history as it was only after the war that the United States recognized an independence that had been secured in 1898.

At that time on June 12, 1898, Emilio Aguinaldo (a Filipino General and later President of the Country) declared independence from Spain but the U.S. acquired the Philippine Islands after they defeated Spain in the Battle of Manila Bay. It was not until after World War II, that the U.S. honored the Philippine’s independence.

The Veterans honored at the celebration remember with pride that important day. While happy to be living in the United States and serving in war, they are proud of their homeland and a heritage rich in music, dance and community. Being at St. Mary’s Center emulates so many of these values and is reason this is a central gathering point for resources and celebrations.

One of the invited guests noted, “I loved the Filipino dancing; clothing, music, stories, food, and special acknowledgements given to the older senior men who served during World War II. Thanks to you and the staff at St. Mary’s for doing a good job and making the quality of life for seniors a good one.”

Belinda Llaguno Area Agency on Aging

Arthritis is the greatest single cause of chronic pain and disability among Americans. And while some live with the pain, elders at St. Mary’s Center are finding “Step-step! Clap-Clap!” to be a fun exercise program that brings relief. Resources for the Third Age are combining the education and the expertise of Jade Sanchez a RN from Cal State University East Bay (CSUEB) School of Nursing with Baltazar Martinez, an intern from CSUEB, to help teach clients about Arthritis.

The class on Thursday mornings provided time for seniors to hear facts, watch videos, ask questions and do exercise. Organized in the community center to happen just before lunch added to the appeal. At the first session there were 30 seniors and by the last one there were 50!

Karla explains July will hold a different look to this exercise program offering “Urban Movement”, a chair and movement exercise with a touch of soul. “We are seeking ways to engage people in their health, the exercises are just one of the things we offer to help keep elders strong and healthy. Our Tai Chi classes, medication monitoring are also primary”.

Seniors are seeing the difference. Y.Y. is a 79 year old Asian male who participates in weekly Tai-Chi exercise class and also completed the Medication Monitoring program to learn more about his health. His Advocate reviewed his medications then ran a report on www.drugs.com and found that some of the medications had major interactions. Submitting this information to Y.Y.’s doctor and a follow-up conversation between the two is why his Doctor changed the medication to reduce the side-effects. Y. Y. is noticing the difference after a twelve week monitoring period. “Thank you for helping me with my medication, now my doctor changed it and I feel better, no more tiredness, I have energy.”

Resources for a Third Age offer regular programs in our Community Center and are also going to satellite sites so seniors benefit from education on medication misuse and the potentially harmful consequences of taking medication with alcohol. Currently, Karla and her team are also providing service at St. Mary’s Gardens, Oak Center Towers, Northgate, Oak Grove North, Valdez Plaza, Park Blvd, St. Patrick’s Terrace, Glen Brook, St. Andrew’s Manor, Posada de Colores, Palo Vista Garden’s, and Merritt Crossings.
This fall 21 children will enter Kindergarten ready to learn with the educational and social skills needed to be successful. Their families are most grateful for this chance to beat the odds. "St Mary's Center in Oakland is a great resource and has assisted the Parolee Reentry Court (PRC) in the past with difficult 55+ clients. St. Mary's Social Worker, Reese Craighead personally appeared in Court on behalf of our client and reported on services that the client was receiving as well as plans for addressing his many needs (housing, substance abuse, medical, mental health, cognitive behavior skills and financial management)." Gavin O’Neill  Drug Court Manager Superior Court of Alameda County

"It is good to have all of the staff together in a group to say thank you. When I first came here I didn’t want to open up. The first day I felt welcomed, I thought I would feel ashamed because I was punishing myself. I don’t know where you get your staff. I was a truck driver going through weather, time zones - it was a hard job but nothing like this. This takes such patience and understanding. I had never been in a shelter before, in a group of strangers. I had to swallow my pride. I have learned to do art and work together. I have found that creating art has been personally liberating and given me energy to work on my vision. I’ve been able to get up and get dressed and go out back into the world and feel alive again.” Bruce

"I have been here three or four days. Grateful for what brought me here and joy to all. I was one of the guys across the street doing dope. I would see guys coming here. I didn’t want to. But when I did Sister Mary said something ~ ‘I work for you’ ~ this touched me. No one knows the tunnel back to life from prison.” Roderick

"Living in the shelter was a learning experience for me. Your heart here is wide. I learned so much about Angela and how to hold up my head to it all.” Angela

"This is not a shelter, it is a family. I didn’t understand the wellness meetings and why I had to attend, But now I see, I wasn’t ready to be housed. Now I am. Whatever you are doing reach your goal - sometimes it doesn’t go as you think but if you keep with it - it will.” Keith

The connection that binds us to each other and the planet is not a new thought at St. Mary’s Center. Yet on Earth Day there was special attention as organizer Jean Toney describes “it was a beautiful, sensual and educational experience.”

An edible altar adorned with vegetables, herbs and flowers from our garden, songs like “You Must Believe in Spring”, an Isadora Duncan dance and an invitation from our gardener to learn about what is planted and harvested. Toney summed up the special celebration, “Spring is the time the earth gives birth to a beautiful orchestration of all its provisions. The planet provides us with life and breath ~ we are called to protect it. “

St. Mary’s Center elders participated in a study with Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) and 15 other nonprofit organizations to investigate how recent bus service cuts and fare increases affect the health and well-being of transit-dependent riders. The survey reports on how these implications affect riders’ quality of trip experience, affordability, and access to destinations essential for good health. 477 transit-dependent bus riders participated in the study to help inform a key transportation decision—the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is the transportation component of Plan Bay Area, a document guiding future growth for the nine-county bay area that will be adopted by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) in July 2013. The RTP shapes how $289 billion in transportation funding from federal, state, and local sources will be distributed throughout the region over the next 25 to 30 years.
Making Change Together

Tackling social issues as a single organization ignores the potential we have when we join forces. That philosophy is evident at St. Mary’s Center as we partner with other organizations, collaborate with artists on projects, answer the call of government entities interested in improving services, or work in concert with volunteers eager to tackle a new challenge. And this year, our partnership with Abode Services ascended to a new level to help find permanent housing for shelter guests.

St. Mary’s Center is an easy point of entry for people on the street. Wellness meetings, counseling, writing group, case management, and healthy meals start to model ways to move beyond the crisis of homelessness, a situation Bettie faced since 2008.

Bettie (pictured here) is grateful, “I learned to control my attitude. The wellness classes - I always knew how to write but all my problems closed it out. People found a way to help me. I really appreciate it. Michelle (case manager) has carried me a long way. I have been approved for a housing program. God sent me here. January 7, 7am in the morning - I got here. Thank you Sr. Mary for your tolerance with me.”

Bettie’s determination and the comprehensive program that is St. Mary’s trademark is further extended by participating in Oakland Pathways Re-housing Initiative (OPRI) and partnering with Abode Services. This collaboration that also includes the Oakland Housing Authority provides Bettie with a housing voucher giving her a permanent rental subsidy.

Now with a key to her own place she is feeling more peaceful, positive and grateful! And Bettie is not alone. Working closely with Esteban Allard-Valdivieso of Abode in the OPRI collaborative, thirteen seniors in total received a rental subsidy and permanent housing. As Executive Director Carol Johnson explains, “The lack of housing for extremely low income people is a huge issue. In fact, this year we kept our shelter open into May to ensure that every guest had some place to go. This partnership with OPRI has had very positive results.”

Raymond knows what Carol is talking about. His health has been an issue for a number of years and because of extended hospitalization he ended up losing his housing. He came to St. Mary’s as so many do with no where else to turn. In a Wellness Meeting he created this mask named Boo-Dah. It is his inspiration as Raymond describes it, “I’m trying to get Peace and Solitude.” And that prospect is looking up as Raymond holds the key to his own place!

Check Cut – couldn’t make the rent.
Slept outside in snow, rain.
When I came out here my whole world fell apart.
Heart was hurt.
I didn’t have a strong foundation.
I would have died if I had not gotten help.
In normal times I would never have thought
I’d be sleeping on the sidewalk,
confused, in shock, and in the Cold. ~ Bettie

Network Nuns on the Bus

Sr. Simone Campbell SSS Network Executive Director visits with a mom and child who attended the St. Mary’s Center Nuns on the Bus event. Their message is clear: We need commonsense immigration policies that reflect our values, not our fears. Congress must act now!

St. Mary’s Center was one of the stops on the West Coast. Inspired by these women and their message, the community responded and filled every seat in the house! Executive Director Carol Johnson welcomed the group - aware their message touches the lives of many in our community especially our Preschool families. “Religious women have played a huge role here at St. Mary’s Center. They ensure we stand with our human family and really see each other so we don’t miss the opportunities to make our world a place of healing, hope and justice.”
Creating Change

Penny Wise ~ Pound Foolish

Sequester is a funny word - almost hard to say - but depending on who you are - it is easy to see its affect. Some of us will be inconvenienced with longer lines at airport security because of government cutbacks but for others the implications will be witnessed every day of their life. The thought that cuts across the board is a less painful way to experience fiscal restraint disregards our human dignity as a nation. Not to mention costing us more in the process.

Mark Trumbull of the Christian Science Monitor writes “The White House estimates that 100,000 formerly homeless people would lose access to shelter, 373,000 people diagnosed with mental health problems would face service cuts, and 4 million fewer “meals on wheels” would be served during the current fiscal year (which ends Sept. 30). Child-care subsidies for low-income workers would reach some 30,000 fewer children.”

Here in Oakland, we know these are not just national stories or headlines. Each spring at St. Mary’s Center, there is a rite of passage as Winter Shelter residents move into housing to further stabilize their lives. The week before the shelter closed, staff got word that housing vouchers received through funding from the federal government would not be available as promised. The reason - “the sequestration.”

Staff resisted telling the seniors such devastating news as they had already toured their new homes. Working diligently to overthrow this prospect, staff negotiated on behalf of the seniors and got confirmation the housing vouchers would be honored.

Breathing a collective sigh of relief is not an option though for the thousands of seniors who count on Meals on Wheels for a healthy meal and a caring person to break their isolation. Jessica Schieder and Patrick Lester of the Center for Effective Government point out this “cost saving measure” will likely reap opposite measures. “Overall, Meals on Wheels saves the federal taxpayers money by helping participants live at home instead of living in comparatively expensive nursing homes. The average cost to Medicaid of nursing home care per patient is approximately $57,878 annually. By contrast, the cost to Medicaid of home care is much lower, approximately $15,371 annually, or $42,507 less than nursing home care. Nationally, according to a survey by the Administration on Aging, as many as “92% [of enrollees] say Meals on Wheels means they can continue to live in their own home.”

Such a worthy result seems an easy to prioritize program - if not for the human dignity but even the dollars and sense. Yet that logic seems lost on Congress. Luckily, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors just voted to backfill the cuts affected through these Area Agencies on Aging grants so St. Mary’s Center and others are not immediately impacted.

This breaking news is a sigh of relief yet it begs the question about the logic of a sequestration for those least able to bear a burden. So when someone asks what does it mean - consider the prospect that you or someone you love already struggling might be affected. Then call your elected representative and ask for leadership.

Connecting to Ourselves

Art is an avenue at St. Mary’s Center that touches the roots of ancestors, the depths of isolation, hands unacquainted to creativity and minds and hearts that connect in color, clay and more. Referencing Frida Kahlo as an artist who realized that one’s suffering adds meaning to life, winter shelter residents explore their own journey and ability to create.

Anyman

Homeless can happen to anyone. Almost half of the work force may be two weeks from homelessness. With faith, I will work my way through!

Derrall Black

Today is very important.
Make each precious moment count. That’s my feeling today.
Past moments, can’t be changed.
They were spent as they were.
For me many valued, but most wasted.
I view my life now as, cherish each moment, to make good use, productive decisions, and good use of time to my High Power first.
So I change to productive moments in front of me now.
Thank God! I’m on the Right Path Now.

Vernon

No where to go but Forward

Wagon – “no” horse but I have ME.

Leonard Flowers
“Only 9% of the charities we rate have received at least 3 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that St. Mary’s Center outperforms most other charities in America. This “exceptional” designation from Charity Navigator differentiates St. Mary’s Center from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust.”

Ken Berger President & Chief Executive Officer for Charity Navigator

Wish List

2 Laptop Computers with Windows XP Professional:
call Mary Lou (510) 923-9600 x 230

Items for our 40th Anniversary Event:
Vacation getaway, Tickets to sporting event or theater,
Air Miles - call Amy (510) 923-9600 x 230
2 Laptop Computers with Windows XP Professional:

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20th List

3.0

For help finding and booking the best products.

This year buy your Gala tickets online. Also online is information about auction items and sponsorship opportunities. Visit www.stmaryscenter.org.

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Age Friendly Summit

On June 29th St. Mary’s Center was the host site for the Juneteenth National Freedom Day celebration. This 5th Annual Family Celebration hosted by The Black and Brown Committee was a fun festival that brought together the black and brown community. The Black and Brown Committee was a fun festival that brought together the black and brown community.

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