



ST. MARY'S CENTER
Everybody needs a place

Fall 2017 Newsletter



Tim: A Life in Balance

For a number of years, Tim drove a cab in San Francisco and was barely able to make ends meet. Twelve years ago, homeless in Oakland and reduced to giving plasma in exchange for cash, Tim reached out to St. Mary's Center. In the beginning he used many services at St. Mary's Center to get his life back on track, but over the years he has been able to rely more and more on services in the larger community.

Two years ago, St. Mary's Center received a grant from the Archstone Foundation to combat depression in the elderly. Working with Lifelong Medical Care and the University of Washington, St. Mary's Center helps to provide a web of supports that encompass both a medical model, offering psychiatry and primary healthcare, as well as a community-based model, offering access to food, housing, and peer relationships. This dual focus helps seniors like Tim embed themselves more fully into the community, enhancing their ability to live independent lives.

Today Tim lives at the Claridge Hotel, an SRO-style (single room occupancy) affordable housing complex in downtown Oakland. Three days a week Tim goes to Highland Mental Health to see his doctor and to engage in wellness groups and activities. Through St. Mary's Center Representative Payee Program, Tim receives help with budgeting. In his own words, he "used to be a spendthrift" but now he budgets his money to pay rent and utilities and can prioritize for unusual expenses or special treats, like breakfast at the Big Bear Diner, or a nice haircut at Moler Barber College.

Even after all this time, Tim keeps in regular contact with his senior advocate, and his social worker. When he walks through the doors of our Community Center he knows that he is truly at home.

Investing in our children

Over the past few years, St. Mary's Center Preschool has implemented a set of strategic initiatives which has made an enormous impact on our students. Children are helped to learn and grow through a combination of approaches that creates success in school.

Through the SEEDS of Learning, a program of the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, our preschool teachers are taught how to most effectively teach letters, numbers, and sound recognition. This training also emphasizes a repeat read aloud approach so that children learn how to retain information and learn definitions of words. Through this process children learn up to 15 new words each week. The goal of the program is to ensure that children can read at grade level by the third grade.



At St. Mary's Center, parents receive support and referrals from Jewish Family Services to outside specialists to help children with language delays, impulse control, and other issues that hinder learning. Overcoming these issues as early as possible can make a big difference in a child's ability to learn.

Successfully identifying trauma in children is key to creating a path for learning. Early this summer, our teachers received a multi-day training from Sr. Anne Carrabino on the widespread causes of trauma, such as loss of a parent or caregiver, domestic violence, chaotic home environments, violent neighborhoods and its long term impact.

Summer enrichment programs benefit all students, particularly low-income students who might not otherwise receive the benefits of reading, projects, and play time out of school. For the last three years, we have been the beneficiary of a gift from Charlie and Karen Couric which has made our four-week summer school possible. The students go on weekly field trips to children's art centers and museums. Parents can attend and participate with their children in hands-on art and science programs.

The Parent Education and Support Program guide young parents to better support their children in school. Using an adult education approach that integrates presentations, discussions, and hands-on projects, parents grow to understand the difference between discipline and punishment, how to interact with school authorities, the importance of good nutrition and adequate sleep in children, the value of the public library, and how to play with their children. Perhaps most critically, parents bond with each other, creating vital support structures for themselves.



Learning to Hold My Head Up to the Sky!

St. Mary's Center is a community of hope, justice and healing. We are a training site for the Cal-State East Bay nursing program. Student nurses meet seniors at St. Mary's Center and at their homes. They assess and monitor health care needs and link seniors to medical resources. Nurses also offer a health screening clinic on site and health education.

Erskine is a senior participant and one of a multitude of seniors who benefits from working with the student nurses. He has a heart disease and a nervous system injury. Erskine fears taking medications as side effects throw him off balance. Plus, a recent near death experience with an inappropriately prescribed medication led him to further distrust medication.

Juan and Victoria are two student nurses who participate in the nursing program at St. Mary's Center over a ten week period. They meet with Erskine two times a week. He finds working with them to be "fantastic."

For Erskine that means, "I have people to talk with about my health. They put forth plenty of attention. They tell me the purpose of my medications and how to take them as prescribed. They support me to meet with doctors. They are concerned how medication affects me. With their support, I have learned to take my medications regularly and on time."

Erskine feels healthier in response to the nurses'

positive and upbeat approach. "Their attention inspires my natural ability for more balance in life. They offer confidence in my ability and recognize I have knowledge. That is comforting and I admire their understanding. I enjoy learning with them - they invite me to be open-minded and I listen. They offer information and if I disagree, we discuss among ourselves. We come closer together in two-way communication."

"The nurses relate to me with honesty and I feel ignited by them. They encourage me to tell doctors exactly what I feel, even when I'm concerned how I'll be accepted. The nurses show concern for my lifestyle of foods, rest, and substance use. Though I expect to be criticized, they accept me as I am, and make it known "We're here to support you and to make life better for you!"

"Saying positive things and giving me confidence helps. I believe in myself. I believe I have the ability to get better and I am getting better. I am learning to hold my head up - to the sky!"



Taking the Time to Smell the Roses



Extremely low income and homeless seniors are exposed to cumulative environmental pressures related to living poor in the inner city including constant threat of and/or being exposed to violence, poor air quality, streets overrun with illegal dumping, graffiti and poor sidewalk conditions.

Forest and water bathing is a wellness activity helping seniors take a mental and emotional break by spending time communing in nature. Seniors are immersed in nature where and guided to practice gentle breathing, silent meditation and mindful walking. This activity helps align their sympathetic nervous system to the vibrational energy of a tree or a water source, producing a calming effect.

Seniors who have participated in Forest and Water Bathing have shared that they feel peaceful and emotionally stronger. One senior remarked on the huge impact it had on her ability to deal with her depressing living situation. Another homeless senior felt rejuvenated after spending time in the forest.



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For more information about St. Mary's Center visit www.stmaryscenter.org or contact Regan Murphy at 510-923-9600 x236 or rmurphy@stmaryscenter.org



St. Mary's Center has received Charity Navigator's highest recognition. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator and assesses the Financial Health and Accountability and Transparency of nonprofit organizations.

How You Can Help

We're always looking for help around St. Mary's Center. Here are some ways you can get involved:

- Donate an item from our Wish List: <http://bit.ly/SMCwishes>
- Host a Sunday Lunch: <http://bit.ly/2018Sundays>
- Host a Shelter Dinner: <http://bit.ly/2018Shelter>
- Volunteer: <http://bit.ly/volunteerwithSMC>
- Volunteer at Friendly Manor: <http://bit.ly/FriendlyVolunteers>
- Support us on AmazonSmile and a portion of your purchases will be donated to St. Mary's Center: <http://amzn.to/2wl9azf>



Or, call us at 510-923-9600 x222 and ask about ways you can get involved!