Food as Medicine: Improving Lives One Plate at a Time

Quick! You’ve got 40 hard-working, hungry people coming for lunch. It may be today’s only hot meal for some of your guests. You want to whip up a healthy, stick-to-the-ribs lunch, but what’s in your kitchen? Thanks to donations from Second Harvest Food Bank and local stores and restaurants, you have some basic foods with which to start, and you’re immensely grateful for these gifts. But each day brings a different assortment, and some are loaded with unhealthy salt and fat. How do you prepare a nutritious, appetizing meal?

Alejandro Aguirre stepped up to this challenge, volunteering to work with the Day Worker Center’s cooks to design healthier, more nutrient-dense meals. “What you put into your body affects your health,” he explains. “Food can be the answer to a lot of metabolic and cardiovascular diseases, which strike the poor in much higher numbers.”

Now a second-year medical student at Stanford University, the Vallejo native is passionate about improving health in under-served populations. Collaborating with the cooks and their vast experience preparing meals, Alejandro teaches them how to spread less-healthy ingredients throughout the week and incorporate seasonal vegetables from the Center’s garden to provide nutrition-packed, appetizing meals that are culturally appropriate.

Two years ago, as an undergraduate on track for a career in a medical lab, Alejandro would not have expected to find himself in the Center’s kitchen. But a summer volunteering at a nonprofit transformed his life when he saw that as a physician he could have a much bigger impact on people’s health. A volunteer fellowship with Stanford’s Community Health Advocacy office led him to the Day Worker Center.

Alejandro talks excitedly about how healthy meals nourish the soul as well as the body. “Meals build community. When people sit and talk, they’re calmer and more jovial,” he says. “[The Center’s] new kitchen is a big win for the emotional and mental health of the workers.”

In the kitchen and between nutrition classes for workers, Alejandro listens to their stories and learns more about the challenges they face. “Not all workers are immigrants,” Alejandro recalls. “Many are homeless.

Workers learn about healthier eating options.

HOUSING CHAMPION

When Francisco Mendoza saw fellow workers being priced out of Bay Area rental housing, he became a passionate advocate for Mountain View’s Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act. Better known as Measure V, the law enacted in 2017 places limits on sky-rocketing rents.

Low-wage earners are particularly impacted by out-of-control rents in the Bay Area. Those who can’t flee to less-priceworthy areas are forced to share cramped, overcrowded apartments. Worse, many cannot even hope to afford a place to live.

Beyond the personal toll of unaffordable housing, the Bay Area cannot survive without people such as carpenters, janitors, nurses, store clerks, and police officers — all of whom are being priced out of the area. Measure V places a cap on how much and how often rent can be raised.

“Being able to plan for a rent increase, knowing there will be a reasonable 5% max, has an enormous impact on a person’s economic stability and emotional health,” says Alejandro Aguirre.

see Housing, page 3

see Medicine, page 3
When asked about his favorite memory from Ecuador, Victor Villacis replies without a second’s hesitation: “My children’s smiles!” That visual processing comes in handy with Victor’s internship at local TV station KMVT–15 where he and other Day Worker Center compañer@s go behind the scenes to produce, direct and edit videos. Workers learn all of the production roles, from audio and camera to floor manager and director. Victor has no favorites among the roles; he loves them all. But his most thrilling assignment yet was operating KMVT’s camera at a football game at Mountain View High School — “an experience beyond words!” he proclaims.

Victor would eventually like to produce a documentary film of his own. Meanwhile, he’s using his new skills to film a half-hour show about the Day Worker Center, where he has been finding work since arriving in the U.S. in 2016. Previously, in Ecuador, Victor was a sales representative. At the Center, he specializes in gardening.

“I’m so grateful for the Day Worker Center!” Victor proclaims. “It’s an indispensable part of my life.” Victor enjoys sharing meals with other workers where stories and jokes help ease the longing for home. Most of all, he appreciates the many possibilities for personal growth offered at the Day Worker Center. While waiting for gardening jobs, Victor brushes up on ESL and attends other classes, learning such skills as how to stay safe on the job. Asked which class he enjoys most, this visually driven artist answers without missing a beat: “Painting!”

When he’s not working, spending time with friends, or painting, you’ll find Victor reading or riding a mountain bike on local trails. Someday, we’ll be able to watch that documentary he dreams about.

Learning the Ropes

... An experience beyond words!

– Victor Villacis

Check out the first episode of Day Worker Center of Mountain View starring TV and radio celebrity Celina Rodriguez and our own Maria Marroquin, airing 7–7:30 on Monday nights on KMVT–15.

WHO’S WHO at the DAY WORKER CENTER

STAFF
Executive Director: Maria Marroquin
Office Manager: Ana Cruz
Programs Manager: Carla Dardon

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
President: Bill Lambert, intellectual property attorney
Vice President: Laura Casas, president of Foothill-DeAnza Community College District’s Board of Trustees
Secretary: Laura Macias, Mtn. View mayor & council member (former)
Treasurer: Steve Olson, senior associate dean of Stanford’s School of Humanities & Sciences

MEMBERS AT LARGE
Josefina Bailon, day laborer
Marco Antonio Cedillo, cashier
Armando Espitia, Mtn. View police officer
Marcos Leyva, day laborer
Francisco Mendoza, day laborer
Father Bob Moran, Catholic priest (retired)
Craig Sherod, owner of Craig Sherod Photography
David Wolff, information technology manager

PHOTOGRAPHY
Jack Owicki - http://www.ProBonoPhoto.org
and other photographers

WRITING & DESIGN
Laura Corbett - LMCorbett@Comcast.net
explains Francisco. “It’s a tremendous relief to know you won’t be driven from your home by a rent bump of $500 per month.”

For Measure V, Francisco took a leadership role in educating people, organizing meetings, and canvassing. In the ten months it has been in effect, Francisco has seen dramatic results, with people staying in their homes and able to rest easy about future increases.

As a side-effect of the successful Measure V campaign, Francisco sees more compañeros willing to get involved in advocacy work.

Francisco’s next advocacy project will be representing workers’ concerns on the Day Worker Center’s Board of Directors. Between classes and over lunch while they’re waiting for jobs, workers have a chance to get to know each other and share their hopes and dreams. Francisco particularly enjoys these times.

Of his newest role, Francisco says he anticipates being a “messenger of the desires and needs of my compañeras and compañeros.” He continues, “I look forward to taking part in the Center’s decisions, as well as expressing my perspective and enriching the conversation.”

When he’s not working or advocating for workers, you’ll find Francisco cooking for extended family (including five grandkids), reading, or watching movies. In his home country of Venezuela — which he still dearly misses — Francisco was a cinematographer and lighting specialist who produced TV ads and serial programs. Since becoming a part of the Day Worker Center in 2008, he specializes in roof repair, carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work.

Francisco reflects, “NEVER in my life did I think I could learn and work on those things!” But, he adds, “learning — education and training — are key to a successful life.”

But shared meals at the Day Worker Center are now healthier, thanks to Alejandro. Of his experience, he says, “It’s been an immensely satisfying, learning experience. I feel very humbled to be a part of it.”

As Alejandro says, “a little help goes a long way!” We are always looking for volunteers to teach classes such as ESL, construction skills, and crafts. Do you have talents to offer? Call María at 650.903.4102.

Workers Reach Out to Disaster Victims

“Donating to victims of disasters is important — even when it is not a lot of money,” says compañero Carmen Lopez. “It is a way to show we care about them, that they are not alone.”

During weekly worker meetings, laborers collect as much as $75 out of their hard-earned wages to help victims of disasters — a princely sum for people who earn so little. Once a month, the workers decide where their gift can help the most. Past beneficiaries have included victims of hurricanes Katrina and Sandy as well as the Japanese tsunami. This year, workers sent donations to hurricane-devastated southern U.S. and earthquake-ravaged Oaxaca.

LEARNING, CONNECTING

In August, eleven of our Center representatives attended the National Day Laborer Organizing Network’s annual assembly, held this year in Santa Clara. NDLON’s mission is to expand the rights of day workers.

For two days, the group networked with staff and laborers from day worker centers across the nation, sharing strategies, techniques, and best practices. Classes and “train-the-trainer” sessions included such topics as English as a second language, OSHA regulations, and human rights.

“For our own survival,” explains Executive Director María Marroquín, “it’s more important than ever to network with organizations that do what we do.”

Due to unforeseeable financial problems or natural disasters. It’s one thing to teach someone to eat well,” he continues, “but when they have nowhere to cook….”

As Alejandro says, “a little help goes a long way!” We are always looking for volunteers to teach classes such as ESL, construction skills, and crafts. Do you have talents to offer? Call María at 650.903.4102.
WE’VE “COME OF AGE” – 21 THIS YEAR!

To celebrate 21 years of service to the Mountain View community, the Day Worker Center hosted a festive gala in November.

While founders, local celebrities, supporters, and past and present volunteers dined on the spectacular feast cooked up by wonder workers in the Center’s kitchen, other talented compañer@s entertained the crowd with song and dance.

The yearly birthday party has become a treasured Day Worker Center tradition.

Executive Director María Marroquín explains that, particularly in today’s political climate, it’s especially important to celebrate the organization’s continued survival and growth. “Every single year is a huge milestone,” she says. “It’s amazing that we are striving and working together — really something to celebrate!”

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

WE’VE “COME OF AGE” – 21 THIS YEAR!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.

HIRE YOUR OWN HERO!

Is your home ready for holiday guests? Need help hanging decorations? Yard ready for the winter? Get help with these chores and many more! Call 650.903.4102 today.