

## The Power of Activity Therapy

*At On Lok PACE centers, every activity is an opportunity to move, to create, to connect, and to celebrate life.*



by Nicholas Sager, MA  
On Lok PACE Activity Therapy Clinical Specialist

More than just fun and games, activities at On Lok PACE are designed to engage the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. We take a whole-person approach to supporting our participants, addressing not just their medical and functional needs but also their emotional, cognitive, and social wellbeing.

As an integral part of each participant's care plan, Activity Therapy plays a critical role in the PACE healthcare model, using meaningful engagement to enhance quality of life, foster connections, and support overall health goals.

On Lok PACE builds activity programs around the unique needs and interests of each participant. As part of the On Lok PACE interdisciplinary care team, activity therapists provide input and receive feedback from medical providers, social workers, rehabilitation therapists, and other team members.



This ongoing collaboration ensures that activity programs are thoughtfully designed to support individual care plan goals—whether improving mobility, enhancing memory, reducing anxiety, or simply bringing more joy into daily life.

From the moment a participant enrolls in On Lok PACE, our activity therapists and leaders conduct face-to-face assessments to better understand the individual's interests, strengths, and challenges. We ask participants about their living situation, personal passions, and what makes them happy. Whether it's tai chi, painting, poetry, or karaoke, we want every experience to nurture the whole person in ways that honor their story, preferences, and abilities.

For many participants, chronic health conditions, including memory loss, can make communication difficult and worsen feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Despite the changes we all experience as we age, we believe everyone has untapped potential—what we like to call their “superpower.” By tailoring activities to the individual, we can boost their confidence, nurture their vitality, and help them find a renewed sense of purpose.

That's why our activity program goes beyond words, using music, movement, and creative expression to break through barriers. Music-based exercise and dance, for instance, can be adapted for participants who use walkers or wheelchairs. Both can serve as powerful, universal ways to connect across the languages and cultures of our diverse community. Rhythm, melody, and movement can help us create safe, inclusive spaces where all participants can express themselves and feel connected and empowered.

In celebration of Lunar New Year, for example, the On Lok PACE Activity Therapy team brought together staff, volunteers, and participants at each On Lok PACE center to experience the fun, excitement, and symbolic blessings of Lunar New Year through vibrant performances, including traditional Chinese lion dancing. The festivities combined artistic expression with movement and music, engaging participants of all abilities, evoking memories, and fostering a deep sense of community. ■



### Activities to delight and benefit every body

At their On Lok PACE center, at home, or in the community, ON LOK PACE participants can enjoy a rich variety of activities to meet their interests and needs.

Our person-centered approach discovers and connects to what is important to the individual, enhancing life satisfaction and sense of purpose at any age and despite the challenges we all experience as we get older.

#### Creativity and Self-Expression

- Art with Elders (painting and drawing)
- Ceramics
- Music therapy
- Poetry reading
- Cooking classes

#### Movement and Wellness

- Dance movement
- Yoga
- Tai chi
- Zumba

#### Social and Cultural Engagement

- Discussion groups
- Spiritual support
- Games (bingo, lotería, mahjong)
- Karaoke

#### Special Events and Cultural Celebrations

- Outings and live performances
- Activity kits and virtual groups

#### Lifelong Learning and Leadership

- Health education
- Participant Council
- And much more!





The value of making lives better for others

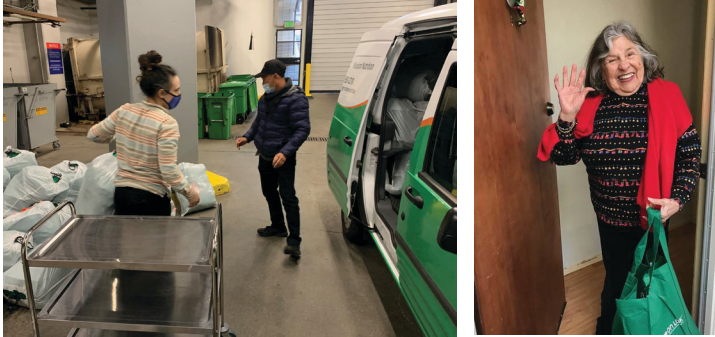
Melody and Charlie are native San Franciscan retirees who enjoy photography, quilt making, and daily walks in their hilly neighborhood.

Melody’s upbringing shaped her values and understanding of On Lok. Her parents immigrated from Hong Kong to San Francisco in the 1950s. Melody recalls her parents sharing food, shelter, and meager incomes with newly arrived relatives and friends from China. They instilled in her and her two brothers the value of making lives better for others; obstacles did not stop them from extending a helping hand.

Though Melody and Charlie had donated small amounts through the years, Melody became much more engaged with On Lok after meeting an On Lok Development Team member in 2019, in appreciation of her contributions.

After that initial contact, Melody introduced On Lok’s Director of Development Jessica Chang-Greenman to the Lincoln Park Quilters. That year, the group, including Melody, created 57 tote bags and pillowcases filled with essential goods and eight quilts for the On Lok Mission Nutrition home-delivered meals program. Since then, Lincoln Park Quilters have donated 445 totes and 23 quilts, delighted that stitching fabrics together can touch the lives of strangers.

Melody and Charlie’s monetary support of On Lok has continued monthly for the last several years. “We feel monthly donations have an impact,” they said. “We don’t need to wait until the end of the year to give to On Lok and other worthy causes that provide warm hearts and hot meals to those who are less fortunate, or even just lonely.” ■



Make a lasting difference for community seniors. Become a monthly donor today!

The benefits of donating monthly include:

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With small payments spread out month to month, becoming a monthly donor can fit any budget. Even small amounts can make a big impact.

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**Impact all year long**  
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To become a monthly donor, please visit <https://bit.ly/OnLokdonation> and choose "Monthly" under the Contribution Frequency.

For additional information, please contact Karen Gordon, Philanthropy Officer, at 628-208-8425 or [karen.gordon@onlok.org](mailto:karen.gordon@onlok.org).

Top row: Charlie and Melody. Middle row: Quilted gift bags created by Lincoln Park Quilters for On Lok. Bottom row: Gift bags are loaded on our vans for home-delivery to community seniors.

Body Dynamics fosters healing and community



see my health improving after I started Tanako’s Body Dynamics class,” said Arlene Diaz. “She covers everything: stretching, weights, balance, aerobics. Her energy and passion inspire me, and I love being outdoors with others.”

Bari Ness said the class is more than just a fitness routine for her: “It’s really helped me get in better shape and heal from surgery. The exercise is just the right level for me, and the sense of community is incredible,” she said.

Long before fitness became mainstream and research confirmed its role in longevity, Tanako Hagiwara was already teaching older adults the power of movement. Her Body Dynamics class originally started as a popular senior course at City College of San Francisco (CCSF). When CCSF discontinued its older adult program, On Lok 30th Street Senior Center began to offer Tanako’s class as part of its activities, and today it is still a big hit with seniors.

A lifelong advocate for physical activity, Tanako started teaching at CCSF in 1967 and earned her PhD in Exercise Physiology, Kinesiology, Motor Learning and Higher Education from UC Berkeley in 1973. Now at 86, she remains a dedicated instructor, leading seniors in movement and exercise every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., in the senior center’s garden.

Many participants joined the class after experiencing health setbacks and while recovering from surgeries, strokes or other conditions affecting their mobility—and they credit it with transforming their lives. “I could

Ana Rivera and her husband, Irving, can personally attest to the program’s impact. “Tanako is more than a teacher—she’s our mentor and our salvation,” Ana said. “After a motorcycle accident left me in a wheelchair for a year, doctors said I’d never walk unaided again. Thanks to Tanako’s guidance, not only did I regain my mobility, but today my husband and I lead our own Zumba class at the senior center. We’ve seen so many others recover just like we did. The best gift we can give our bodies is to keep moving and stay healthy.”

Beyond physical recovery, the class is an opportunity to connect with others and make new friends. “I’ve watched participants come out of their shells socially, just as I have seen people transition from walkers to canes, and from canes to walking freely. The energy I receive from this group is incredible, and we all feel it,” said Tanako. What is the secret of her own vitality? “Exercise, good nutrition, staying engaged, and being together. Most of all, I love what I do, and I guess it shows.”

To learn more about Body Dynamics, contact 415-550-2219 or [kzamorahidalgo@onlok.org](mailto:kzamorahidalgo@onlok.org). ■

On Lok 30th Street Senior Center expands its impact

Seniors served in 2024  
5,325 participants,  
a 38% increase from 2023



On Lok Mission Nutrition served 365,700 community and home-delivered meals.



HEALTH PROMOTION

On Lok Always Active provided high-quality senior fitness and fall prevention programming, with 1,781 classes serving 900+ older adults.



Healthier Living, Diabetes Education and Empowerment Program, and Chronic Pain Management held 49 workshops with 741 participants.

Tai Chi for Arthritis served 425 participants.

SOCIAL SERVICES

2,406 social service hours connecting seniors to community, programs, and wellness calls



Bilingual community case management assisted 111 clients.

Adult & Disability Resource Center fulfilled 5,279 requests for information, translation, and referrals.

These programs for the community are partially funded by the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services and by donors like you. Thank you!

Thank you for your support.

On Lok gratefully acknowledges the significant contributions of our 2024 donors.

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On Lok PACEpartners empowers PACE growth across the nation

Whether they are exploring the feasibility of a PACE program in their community, preparing their PACE provider application, or facing a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services audit, PACE organizations have the On Lok PACEpartners team in their corner.

“As the consulting arm of On Lok, we focus on supporting PACE organizations in areas where low-income seniors have few options for care and ensure that they are aligned with the PACE mission to empower the dignity and independence of older adults,” On Lok PACEpartners Director Sandy Rodgers said.

Since pioneering the PACE model in the early 70s, On Lok has been championing PACE expansion nationwide. Today, there are 180 PACE programs serving more than 80,700 participants in 33 states and the District of Columbia, and the number of programs continues to grow.

To help prospective and established PACE organizations achieve their goals, in 2006 On Lok launched On Lok PACEpartners, offering customized consulting services backed by its unique experience operating multiple PACE centers. Over the past year alone, On Lok PACEpartners has supported the growth and success of over a dozen organizations located



across the country seeking to explore, start, or operate a program. Building on On Lok's experience in the PACE environment, the On Lok PACEpartners team brings its own real-world insights to their clients with over 95 years of combined expertise in the areas of leadership, facility and clinical operations, training, regulatory and compliance, finance, census development, and more.

“We have assisted prospective and existing PACE organizations across the nation understand the complexities of the PACE model and what

Building community through shared experiences

An important component of the On Lok model is to encourage participants in its programs to actively engage with their community as their authentic selves, sharing their talents, skills, and experiences with their own peers and across generations.

On Lok PACE participant Don Knipschild, a former reporter and editor, recently presented “Sign Language,” a collection of surprising insights about living with hearing loss, inspired by the signage that most of us come across every day, but may not normally stop and really think about.

Writing has always been an important creative outlet for Don, who has sensorineural hearing loss in both ears and wears bilateral hearing aids. He previously authored a blog, Don's Café, a trove of poems and thoughtful observations about life, composed in his unique voice.

Wanting to share his work with others, he approached Activity Therapy staff with his idea for a presentation. Activity Leader Jane Wong played a key role in the project, helping him adapt the work, originally on paper, into PowerPoint slides that could be more accessible and visually engaging to other participants.

“What you learn about yourself can be shared with others. People can make use of it by sharing their experience and articulating it,” said Don.

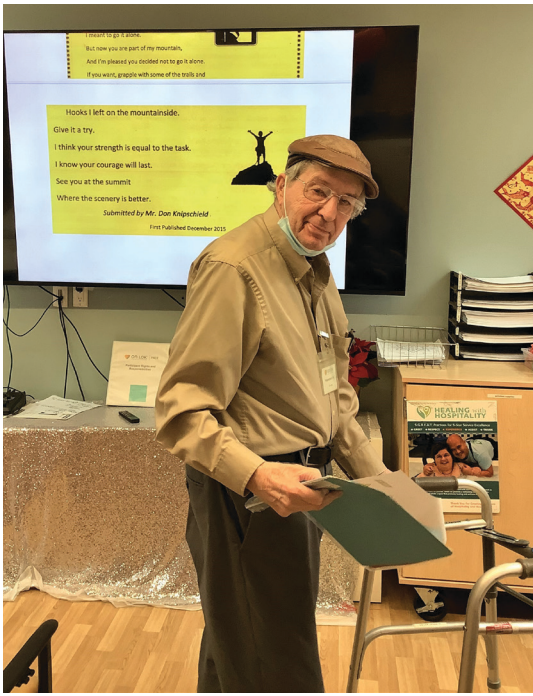
Supporting Don and other participants' self-expression is all about creating a place where people feel they can show up as their authentic selves and do what brings them joy. The goal is to foster relationships and engagement in ways that honor each person's life story and their unique contributions to the world.

is needed to develop a high-performing PACE program. Our experts have helped build PACE presence in rural communities in dire need of services and supported teams to ensure the delivery of exceptional high-touch care to PACE participants,” Sandy said. In addition to tailored strategic and technical guidance, On Lok PACEpartners offers medical records review, interdisciplinary team workshops, and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Audit Responsiveness workshops.

“The feedback we are receiving from organizations across the country is that PACE is allowing them to expand their mission to serve the frail and elderly in a way they have previously not had the opportunity to do. Our work deepens their understanding of the technical complexities of PACE and supports their journey toward operational excellence and successful growth,” Sandy said.

“This work really gets to the core of our mission as a part of On Lok, to relentlessly pursue quality of life and quality of care for older adults and their families.”

In the main photo, the On Lok PACEpartners team at the 2024 NPA Conference. L-R: Project Manager Melanie Coppel; Director Sandy Rodgers; Executive Assistant Peter La; and Director of Operational Excellence Lori Frank.



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To learn more about On Lok PACE, join us for our monthly virtual Open House.

Every 2nd Wednesday of the month @ 10 a.m. Everyone is welcome!

To access an On Lok PACE virtual Open House, visit onlopacevirtualopenhouse25.eventbrite.com.







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To relentlessly pursue quality of life and quality of care  
for older adults and their families

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