



## **AN UPDATE FROM SENIOR CONCERNS ON OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE**

From its inception, Senior Concerns was established to support the needs of people in community as they age in place. We support seniors' nutritional needs with Meals On Wheels and family caregivers with our Caregiver Resource Center and Adult Day Program. We have Legal and Financial Pro Bono Services, as well as Senior Advocacy, to ensure seniors have a trusted place to turn when they need resources or have questions about where to go for help.

From the moment Governor Newsom issued the state-wide Stay At Home order, Senior Concerns had to quickly pivot from some of our traditional programs to new and expanded services to address emerging needs. Older adults and people with chronic health conditions are at highest risk for complications and death from COVID-19. Following our mission, we knew we had to provide those services to meet the needs of homebound seniors.

Your support is vitally important and greatly appreciated. Here is a brief synopsis of the changes we have made to address emerging needs at this unprecedented time.

### **Expanding Our Meals On Wheels Program**

We have expanded our Meals On Wheels Program. Normally, we serve adults over age 60 who are homebound. Now suddenly, everyone over the age of 60 should be homebound to reduce the risk of contracting the virus.

Within the last number of weeks, Senior Concerns has experienced a much higher need for Meals On Wheels. We are preparing 30% more meals than a month ago, and that number is rising each week. We deliver freshly made hot meals and light dinner to the homes of seniors in Thousand Oaks and Newbury Park, as well as additional meals to Westlake Village residents. Because of the demand for home delivered meals, we have outgrown our current kitchen at Los Robles Hospital. To handle the overflow, we have partnered with Country

Harvest Restaurant in Newbury Park to prepare meals. Our new partnership with Island Restaurants in Newbury Park and Agoura Hills has also helped us to expand the depth and variety of meals we deliver.

### **Establishing a Pantry at Senior Concerns**

As all food pantries in our community do not have a delivery program, to further meet the emergent needs of homebound low-income seniors we have established a pantry of nonperishable and household items from which we deliver to homebound seniors. Our building at 401 Hodencamp, is usually filled with Adult Day Program participants. However, now it sits empty as we cannot open the program until the social distancing guidelines have been lifted. So, we transformed the Center into a full pantry with community members donating food and supplies. We are then able to provide these items (canned goods and other shelf stable foods, cleaning supplies, personal care items, paper products) at no cost to seniors in need. Our team of volunteers deliver directly to seniors' homes. One volunteer is assigned to delivering to a specific senior so that both develop a relationship of trust and support through this trying time.

### **Providing Shopping, Errands and Friendly Check In Calls for Seniors**

For seniors who want to stay at home, and can afford groceries, we have also launched a shopping and errand service. With a team of 90 community volunteers, we are assisting seniors with grocery shopping and other errands. We match volunteers to seniors in need. The volunteer calls the senior, obtains their grocery list, and does the shopping. The volunteer then calls the senior to let them know the cost of the groceries. The senior writes a check and leaves it under the mat. The volunteer brings the groceries, leaves them at the front door, calls the senior to let them know the groceries are delivered with a no contact drop off. What is unique about this program, like the pantry program, is that the volunteer follows that senior and calls them weekly to check in, and to see if they need more groceries. With both programs, we are creating a new community for these seniors so that they are not alone for the duration of this crisis. We are fulfilling a physical need for food and household goods, but also an emotional need for caring and companionship.

Social isolation is the #1 indicator for negative health and wellbeing status in a senior. We are also matching volunteers with seniors to provide friendly check in phone calls and phone visitation to homebound seniors in the community. As part of this effort, we have school groups and children who are writing letters and drawing pictures for seniors. These are delivered every time a Meals On Wheels meal or a bag of pantry items are delivered, and help brighten a senior's day, and to show them someone is thinking of them.

### **Supporting Family Caregivers**

Family caregivers are going through an especially difficult time because most of

them are unable to access the respite break they used to have. We are talking with caregivers who used to utilize Senior Concerns' Adult Day Program as their respite and are now home 24/7 with their loved one with dementia. Not only is this putting extra stress and burden on the family caregiver, it is also impacting the senior with dementia who is used to attending the Adult Day Program and maintaining a certain schedule. Caregivers are telling us their care receivers (loved ones with cognitive impairment) are exhibiting more difficult behaviors because of the disruption in their day to day schedule.

We are doing several things to support family caregivers at home.

We have provided our Adult Day families with a gift bag filled with activities to keep the senior busy and engaged. We are providing, via email, tips and ideas on how to keep the senior's day structured while at home, like the structure of the day program. We are also setting up Zoom-based activities led by our staff and volunteers.

Our Case Manager, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, is on the phone every day talking with family caregivers about their unique situations and helping to support them and provide them with the tools they need to continue their caregiving tasks. We have launched a Zoom-based caregiver support group, held weekly. It is vitally important, especially now, that family caregivers have a space like the support group to share and talk with each other, and to know they are not alone.

### **Creating Community Partnerships**

At the core of Senior Concerns' success through the years has been our partnerships in the community. During this pandemic, Senior Concerns has been partnering with Manna, Many Mansions, the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging, the Goebel Adult Community Center, Islands Restaurants and Country Harvest Restaurant. Through these partnerships we are ensuring homebound seniors have access to the food and supplies they need.

### **Making a Difference**

It is overwhelming to hear the reactions from the seniors being served by Senior Concerns during this time. By fulfilling the physical needs seniors have for food and supplies, we are satisfying an emotional need and providing a sense of security and reducing their sense of isolation. As an example, we are assisting a woman in her 70s who is caring for her 96-year-old mother. When she learned about our Shopping and Errand service, she broke down in tears. She said every time she went to the grocery store, she felt she was putting her mother's life at risk. Knowing Senior Concerns could do the shopping for her, and help ensure her mother's health, was of immense comfort and reduced significant stress.

We are talking daily with seniors who are feeling isolated and fearful. Knowing they have a resource to turn to, and a volunteer who will follow them through this

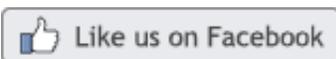
crisis, helps them to feel not so alone. The volunteers have become a lifeline for our seniors.

While volunteers are critical to Senior Concern's ability to meet the surging needs of seniors at this time, behind the scenes our Senior Concerns' staff is managing the Meals On Wheels Program, responding to calls for meals and adding new clients, developing new routes, bringing a new meal provider online and vetting new drivers. Other staff are managing the pantry service, soliciting donations, stocking the pantry, picking items for a senior's delivery and matching volunteers to deliver the items. In addition, our staff are taking calls for shopping and errand services, vetting more volunteers, and matching them to seniors to do weekly shopping. Our social worker team is responding to calls from seniors with questions and caregivers dealing with unique situations. And finally, our fundraising staff is applying for emergency grants and donations, and our finance team is applying for government, and paycheck loans.

All this work would not be possible without your support. Thank you for stepping up during this unprecedented time to help ensure Senior Concerns can meet the needs of our senior community. We are extremely grateful for your partnership. Our plan is to continue to respond to emergency needs as this situation unfolds. You can count on Senior Concerns to be there.

If you have any questions about our current work, please feel free to contact Janet Young, Director of Development, at [jyoung@seniorconcerns.org](mailto:jyoung@seniorconcerns.org) or via cell at 805-217-9069. You may also reach out to Andrea Gallagher, President, at [agallagher@seniorconcerns.org](mailto:agallagher@seniorconcerns.org) or via phone at 805-497-0189.

***Stay connected for all of the latest updates!***



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