

AGING & independence

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
AGING & INDEPENDENCE SERVICES

“I’m Out There for a Reason”: APS Workers Address Abuse, Provide Support

By **Kim Gallo**
Director, Aging & Independence Services

Shadi Garcia has built her career out of helping others, first at the San Diego Regional Center and then at the IHSS Public Authority. When she transferred to Adult Protective Services (APS) in 2012, it was a big change: “You go from people welcoming you into your home because you are a service provider to ‘Why are you knocking on my door? Why are you here?’”

Housed within Aging & Independence Services, APS investigates allegations of elder and dependent adult abuse. The program serves older adults ages 60 and over and dependent adults ages 18-59 who are harmed, or threatened with harm, to ensure their right to safety and dignity. APS accepts abuse referrals from professionals as well as concerned loved ones and community members. Referrals that fall within APS’s eligibility guidelines are assigned to an APS worker for investigation. As part of investigations, workers frequently conducted unannounced visits and privately interview the client. Last year, APS received over 20,000 abuse referrals and closed over 14,000 cases.

While working at APS isn’t easy—and workers are exposed to some very sad situations—Shadi thrives in her role. “I believe I am out there for a reason,” she says. “It is very motivating to me.” In addition to investigating and addressing the “protective issue” (i.e., the reason

someone may be at risk), Shadi takes pride in providing other services and supports that clients may need. She explains, “A lot of times the protective issue is only the

beginning of the story. I ask, ‘Is there anything else we can connect you to?’ [Some] seniors and disabled adults may not have that connection to our community. We do a full assessment.”

While the APS program has a lot to offer older adults who may be experiencing abuse or neglect, APS workers do not always get a warm welcome. Elders often fear that if they are perceived as not taking appropriate care of themselves that they will be

“put in a home.” However, APS is a voluntary program and older adults’ right to self-determination is respected. Unless a client is deemed to be “lacking capacity” (e.g., unable to make one’s own decisions due to an impairment such as advanced dementia), an older adult has the right to decline assistance from APS.

Shadi quickly works with clients to dispel their fears. “I always tell the clients, ‘My role is not to take you out of your home. My role is to keep you living at home longer, if that’s what you wish. We want you to be safe at home. How can I help? What can I do?’” Even with folks who initially state that they are not interested in services, Shadi

(Continued on page two)



As Senior Adult Protective Services Specialists, Shadi Garcia (left) and Nancy Pham (right) investigate allegations of elder and dependent adult abuse with the County’s Adult Protective Services (APS) program.



(Continued from page one)

finds that there is usually a way she can help. “I’ll say, ‘I understand you may not want anything, but what about groceries?’ That’s a beginning [and it often ends with] ‘I appreciate you having come to check on me.’”

While clients sometimes resist APS involvement, members of the public may have the opposite reaction; they wonder if APS is taking allegations seriously or doing enough to address a problem. Due to rules surrounding confidentiality, people reporting suspected abuse or neglect may never hear an update on their referral, unless a client gives APS explicit permission to share details about their case. However, all referrals that meet basic criteria, such as involving a client in the appropriate age range, are investigated. Yet, as Shadi emphasizes, APS is not a long-term program. She explains, “We are out there to mitigate the risk at the moment.” While the APS program does not provide ongoing case management, workers may assist to connect clients to longer term services, including case management, if necessary. Members of the public who continue to have ongoing concerns or who believe a situation is deteriorating are always encouraged to submit another referral so APS can take another look.

Nancy Pham is another dedicated APS worker who has spent nearly nine years with the program. Raised in part by her grandfather, Nancy has always had a “soft spot for the aging population.” Nancy has an “investigative mindset” and leverages her ability to methodically explore all facets of her assigned cases, in particular those involving financial abuse. “Financial cases have always been my cup of tea,” she shares. Nancy, along with many other talented APS workers, has helped to transform how financial abuse has been addressed, and San Diego County is now considered a leader nationwide. In most jurisdictions, financial abuse largely goes unpunished. Especially when perpetrators are not known to the victim and gain trust from a distance, it can be difficult to track them down. “In the past,” Nancy says, “it was too hard to catch people. We didn’t have the partnerships with the banks and with no evidence there was no crime.” Over the past decade, however, San Diego County has built tremendous interdisciplinary partnerships to help change this. APS now has close connections with financial institutions, law enforcement personnel, and federal officials, in addition to the long-standing relationship with the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office. Partners now have venues to meet and collaborate regularly through the San Diego Elder Justice Task Force and the Elder Protection Council.

Nancy is thrilled by the engagement and support APS receives from prosecutors and law enforcement partners. This, she explains, helps cases get to the next level and creates legal consequences for those involved in elder abuse. “We find that these cases lead to large, organized crime networks that also deal with drugs and money laundering,” Nancy explains. In addition to the satisfaction of criminals being brought to justice, across-agency collaboration has led to some of the most rewarding moments of Nancy’s career—when victims are able to recover assets. On one occasion, \$75,000 was returned to a victim and \$1.5 million was prevented from being taken from another victim’s bank account.

In recognition of the trail blazing work of the County’s APS program and the region’s unique interdisciplinary partnerships, Nancy was invited this past September to testify at the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging in Washington DC. Her testimony underscored the urgency of the problem and provided a model for other jurisdictions looking to increase collaboration to combat financial abuse more effectively.

The more people are aware of the scourge of elder abuse, the more we, as a society, can address it. Nancy notes that if someone is a victim of abuse, it is important to speak up—otherwise there is no way to get help or to potentially stop an abuser from impacting others. “There is no shame,” Nancy insists. “You are not the only one. Your voice is the most powerful evidence and can help others.” Older adults from all walks of life can be victims of elder abuse. Many victims fear that others will question their judgment. It is important to remember, however, that many perpetrators are sophisticated criminals. Anyone can fall for their crimes.

While investigating and prosecuting abuse more effectively is essential, it is true that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Both Shadi and Nancy have a variety of tips for older adults to stay safe. Shadi notes that older adults who take care of their medical and mental health needs tend to be connected to community resources. Professionals, such as primary care physicians, keep an eye on how their patients are doing, including monitoring diet, medication management, and any other concerning changes that could indicate abuse or neglect. “Health care is a preventative measure,” Shadi explains.

Nancy warns that social isolation and loneliness can make a person susceptible to elder abuse, especially romance

(Continued on page three)

ELDER ABUSE

(Continued from page two)

scams. Genuine social connection is important for people of all ages, but caution is in order, especially in the early stages of a friendship. “A lot of people in the 75-85 year old age group are pretty tech savvy,” Nancy notes. “They may go online to seek friendship and courtship.” She urges older adults who are looking to connect with others not to share personal information over the phone or online. Never send cash or gift cards to a new “friend” whom you don’t really know. If participating in online dating or other social sites, be sure to meet someone of interest in a public place early in the process to ensure that they are who they appear to be. “Move forward slowly and with caution,” she says. Meeting people the old-fashioned way—in person and gradually through shared activities and interests—is usually a safer approach.

Friends, families, and neighbors play a crucial role in preventing abuse too. Nancy urges, “Be proactive in elderly family members’ lives. Be involved... we are in a fast paced society, and we don’t [always] check in with loved ones. Have hard conversations and make the time.”

We all have a role in addressing elder abuse in our community. If you have concerns about an older or dependent adult, contact the AIS Call Center at **(800) 339-4661**. A Call Center Specialist can help you make an APS report or provide information on programs and services. For more information about elder abuse and signs of abuse, refer to the box below.

ELDER ABUSE: A CLOSER LOOK

TYPES OF ABUSE

APS investigates reports of elder and dependent adult abuse. Some of the more common types of abuse include:

Physical: Direct beatings, lack of medical care or over-medication, sexual exploitation

Abandonment: Desertion or willful forsaking by anyone having responsibility for care

Isolation: Preventing an elder from receiving mail, telephone calls, visitors

Financial: Theft, misuse of funds, extortion, fraud

Neglect: Denial of food, clothing, shelter, health care, or unable to provide basic needs

Self-neglect: Malnutrition, being unkempt, unmet medical needs, unpaid bills

Mental suffering: Verbal assaults, threats, fear

WARNING SIGNS OF ABUSE

If you observe any of the following warning signs of abuse, consider alerting APS.

- Injury that is inconsistent with the stated cause
- The elder has recently become confused or disoriented
- The caregiver shows anger, indifference, aggressive behavior toward the person
- Personal belongings, papers, credit cards are missing
- Hesitation from the elder to talk openly
- The caregiver has a history of substance abuse, mental illness, criminal behavior, or family violence
- Lack of necessities, such as food, water, utilities, medications, and/or medical care
- Another person’s name added to the client’s bank account or important documents

REPORTING ABUSE

To report suspected elder or dependent adult abuse, including self-neglect, call **800-339-4661**. Call **9-1-1** if a life-threatening situation is in progress. Mandated reporters may submit online referrals at **www.AISwebreferral.org**.

MORE INFORMATION

For additional details on Adult Protective Services, as well as other resources for older adults, visit **www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov**.

VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Susan “Sue” Streeper from Meals on Wheels East County Service Center-El Cajon is the Senior Volunteers in Action Volunteer of the Month for January/February 2023. She was nominated by the Tim Ray, Director of the East County Service Center. Sue began volunteering with Meals on Wheels at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, when Meals on Wheels was especially in need of volunteers due to the sizeable reduction in their volunteer force. Since November of 2020, Sue has contributed 216 hours of volunteer service. Every Friday for three hours, Sue delivers healthy meals and provides safety checks for older adults and disabled veterans.

Sue has a heart of gold and is very attentive, always making sure the clients are healthy and safe. She also ensures that the routes are filled with enough volunteers to deliver daily meals to clients. Sue is a team player who always picks up extra shifts when Meals on Wheels is struggling to find volunteers to cover vacant routes.

Sue’s favorite part of volunteering with Meals on Wheels is the opportunity to interact with the clients on her delivery route. She lets them know they are valued and helps to put a smile on their face during these trying and often isolating times. The clients look forward to seeing Sue every Friday and one recently expressed to the Meals on Wheels office how much she appreciates Sue’s visits.

Sue’s caring and compassionate nature is very much appreciated by Meals on Wheels staff. Tim Ray shares, “Sue Streeper is a rock star! Sue personifies the positive values and character of an ideal volunteer and friend. Sue is the eyes, ears, face, and heart of Meals on Wheels. We are truly blessed to have Sue as one of our volunteers. We appreciate you, Sue!”

Thank you, Sue, for being a “rock star” to Meals on Wheels volunteers, clients, and all of the people who serve. Your service has ensured nutritious meals and smiles to many people in the East County. Congratulations, and thank you for serving your community!



Sue Streeper



LIVE THE ADVENTURE-VOLUNTEER AT THE USS MIDWAY MUSEUM



Join the USS Midway Museum’s dynamic team to support this exciting and historical visitor destination! There are several meaningful assignments to choose from on the aircraft carrier museum for veterans and civilians alike. Opportunities include: serving as a docent; working on the safety team, knot team, or with guest services; providing exhibit support or data entry; and assisting with aircraft or ship restoration and maintenance. If you’re a “people person,” this is a great opportunity to share in the passion of having fun, while building a greater sense of community through an enriching and engaging volunteer experience.

Current volunteers rave about their time on the Midway: “It is an honor to serve as a volunteer with this group of individuals,” said one Midway volunteer. Another shared, “Working with the Midway crew has been a life-changing experience.”

If you have questions, contact the USS Midway Museum volunteer coordinator at **(619) 398-8289** or volunteering@midway.org. For volunteer opportunities with dozens of other community organizations, contact the AIS Senior Volunteer Programs office at **(858) 505-6399**.



LOVE HEART

Week of Action

February 11-19, 2023

February is American Heart Month, a time when all people can focus on cardiovascular health. Here are a few steps you can take to be heart-healthy.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS: Know your heart health numbers to screen and control for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. These numbers include your blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and glucose and A1c levels. Talk to your doctor about getting checked. Visit www.heart.org/HBP to learn more about how to “know your numbers.”

GET ACTIVE AND REDUCE STRESS: Perform moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes five days a week (you can also conduct three 10-minute sessions daily)—and make it fun! Try organizing a walking club with your friends and family. Get outside and enjoy the many beautiful trails and parks we have in San Diego County. Visit www.sdparks.org or call (858) 694-3030 for more information.

EAT HEART-HEALTHY FOODS: Eat fresh fruits and vegetables whenever possible – at least 5 servings each day, low-fat or non-fat dairy, and foods high in fiber. Avoid foods high in sodium, saturated and trans fats, and sugar. Visit www.heart.org/nutrition for healthy eating ideas.

AVOID TOBACCO: If you are a smoker, get support to help you quit! Call the California Smokers Helpline at (800) NO BUTTS (800-662-8887) or visit www.smokefreesandiego.org.

Additional information, resources, and tips can be found at the LoveYourHeart@Home section of www.LoveYourHeartSD.org.



MEDICARE ADVANTAGE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Many Medicare enrollees know about the Annual Enrollment Period in the fall, but did you know about the Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period in January, February, and March each year? Medicare Advantage enrollees can change coverage one time during this period. The Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Program (HICAP) provides free and unbiased help comparing Medicare coverage options. Call **(800) 434-0222**, Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

TAI CHI FOR ARTHRITIS AND FALL PREVENTION

In partnership with the City of San Diego, Aging & Independence Services will be offering free *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention* classes at Nobel Recreation Center (8810 Judicial Dr, San Diego 92122) on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30-10:30 a.m. starting February 7th. This evidence-based falls prevention program has been shown to improve movement, balance, strength, and flexibility; offer relaxation; and decrease pain and falls. The program is appropriate for adults with or without arthritis.

To register, please visit **www.SDRecConnect.com** and use Activity Code 104278. Walk-ins are also accepted. For questions, email **HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov** or call **(858) 495-5500**. To learn about additional Tai Chi classes held throughout the county, visit **www.healthierlivingsd.org**.

COVID-19 VACCINATION

COVID-19 cases are currently decreasing across San Diego County, but County health officials continue to urge people to get the primary vaccine series and the bivalent boosters. The virus is still widespread, and vaccinations protect against serious illness, and even death.

Vaccinations and treatment remain widely available throughout the region. Vaccines are available at local pharmacies, medical providers' offices, and County vaccination sites. Visit **www.coronavirus-sd.com** for additional information.

TOOL TO LOCATE QUALITY ASSISTED LIVING

Accepting that a loved one can no longer be safely cared for at home can be difficult. For those who are looking to identify quality assisted living facilities, Choose Well may be able to help.



Choose Well is a free, innovative, web-based tool sponsored by the County of San Diego that helps older adults and their families make informed decisions when selecting assisted living facilities. Visit **www.choosewellsandiego.org** to discover specially evaluated Choose Well facilities that have voluntarily agreed to be scored on 11 measures of quality.

CARE MANAGEMENT: MULTI-PURPOSE SENIOR SERVICE PROGRAM

Sometimes staying independent in one's home means getting help. That extra help with bill paying, shopping, laundry, and other tasks can keep someone from needing to live in a nursing home. If you or a loved one are age 65+, eligible for Medi-Cal, and need assistance to continue living safely at home, consider applying for the Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP). MSSP care managers work with the client, family members, and medical team to find and coordinate services in the home. Through the timely use of services, MSSP protects frail older adults and helps them live at home for longer.



Care management services include: a comprehensive health and psychosocial assessment; care planning with the client and family; arrangement of services; coordination of care with other community agencies; some limited payment of in-home services; monthly phone contact; quarterly home visits; and ongoing monitoring/phone contacts as needed.

For more information on MSSP or to apply, contact the AIS Call Center at **(800) 339-4661** M-F from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Please note: To ensure a timely and relevant calendar, the online and printed versions of this calendar may vary.

FEBRUARY 14, TUESDAY 10-11:30 A.M.

A free virtual class, *Healthy Living for Your Body and Brain & Love Your Heart-Protect Your Brain*, will be hosted by the Alzheimer's Association. Learn about research in the areas of diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity and social engagement, and use hands-on tools to help you incorporate recommendations into a plan for healthy aging. In addition, certified health and nutrition coach Sonia Cervantes will discuss how loving our hearts helps us to protect our brains. To RSVP, visit www.alz.org/events and click on "Educational Programs" or call (800) 272-3900.

FEBRUARY 15, WEDNESDAY 12-1:30 P.M.

A free *Sharp Health Education Workshop: Aging for All* will be offered by Sharp in partnership with the County of San Diego at the Pt. Loma Community Presbyterian Church, 2128 Chatsworth Blvd., San Diego 92107. At this interactive workshop, presenters will review the County's Age Well action plan. Participants will have a chance to discuss and share their experiences to assist the County in developing a more age-friendly community. Light refreshments. RSVP not required. For details, visit www.sharp.com/classes or call (800) 827-4277.

FEBRUARY 20, MONDAY 8:30-9:30 A.M.

The *Feeling Fit Club* is held

virtually and in-person on Mondays and Wednesdays at the Rancho San Diego Branch Library, 11555 Via Rancho San Diego, El Cajon, 92019. This no-cost functional fitness program is designed for older adults of all abilities. The classes include four main components: strength (upper body, lower body, and core), balance, aerobic endurance, and flexibility. The classes also foster social interaction and help to build self-esteem. For more information on virtual class offerings, please call (858) 495-5500. To see current class schedules at sites around the county, visit www.healthierlivingsd.org.

FEBRUARY 21, TUESDAY 11:45 A.M.-12:30 P.M.

Chair Yoga is held on Tuesdays at the Serra Mesa/Kearny Mesa Library, 9005 Aero Dr., San Diego 92123. Participate to your own ability. Work on your flexibility, strength building and quieting your mind with functional movement practice. Wear flexible clothing and bring any preferred yoga equipment. Chairs provided. Suitable for adults of all ages. No RSVP required. For details, email smstaff@sandiego.gov or call (858) 573-1396.

FEBRUARY 28, TUESDAY 12:30-2 P.M.

African American Artists (Course #543) will be hosted by San Diego Oasis at the University Community Branch Library, 4155 Governor Dr., San Diego 92122. This lecture will take a look at African American artists from 1792 to the present. As artists, they were quite prolific, but were mostly ignored by the art historical canon. We will explore

the works of artists such as Robert Duncanson, Edmonia Lewis, Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence and Faith Ringgold and many more. Free. Visit www.SanDiegoOasis.org or call (619) 881-6262 to RSVP.

MARCH 8, WEDNESDAY 2-3:30 P.M.

A free workshop, *Dementia 101*, will be hosted by Alzheimer's San Diego at One Safe Place, Library, 1122 Broadway Unit 200, San Diego 92101. An introduction to mild cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease, and other dementias. Learn information about risk factors, common symptoms, and resources for help. To RSVP, visit www.alzsd.org/services/education or call (858) 492-4400.

MARCH 27, MONDAY 4-5:30 P.M.

A free *Health Care Planning Class: Communicating What Matters Most* will be offered by Sharp HospiceCare, 8881 Fletcher Parkway, Ste. 340, La Mesa 91942. This fast-paced class will help you consider what gives your life meaning and what matters most to you when planning for your future. You will receive resources to help you better understand your values and beliefs and learn how advance planning can empower you to express your wishes to your health care providers. To RSVP, visit www.sharp.com/classes or call (800) 827-4277.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

We welcome your contributions to this monthly calendar. Email sarah.jackson@sdcounty.ca.gov.



FIRST CLASS MAIL
PRESORTED
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
SAN DIEGO, CA
PERMIT No. 571

AGING & INDEPENDENCE SERVICES

P.O. Box 23217
San Diego, CA 92193-3217
(800) 339-4661

Return Service Requested

▪ INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ▪ PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY ▪



When You Don't Know Where To Turn Turn To Us!



Whether the need is for assessment, service referrals, or follow-up, with just one phone call, you or a loved one can receive help for:

- Seniors
- Disabled adults
- Abused adults
- Those requiring home-based care to prevent institutionalization

As a public agency, we provide comprehensive information and impartial assistance free of charge to county residents. Since 1974, people have been turning to us at Aging & Independence Services. You can too.



Call Toll Free: **(800) 339-4661**
www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov



COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT ▪ HEALTH INDEPENDENCE SERVICES

HOME-BASED SERVICES ▪ INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

▪ INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ▪ PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY ▪



Aging & Independence™ is published monthly by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Aging & Independence Services. The purpose is to inform and recognize older adults, volunteers, and community partners.

Chief Administrative Officer
Helen Robbins-Meyer

Director, Health & Human Services Agency
Nick Macchione

Director, Aging and Adult Services
Aging & Independence Services
Kimberly Gallo

Editor, Sarah "Sally" Jackson
sarah.jackson@sdccounty.ca.gov

Calendar information is welcome and must be submitted before the 1st of the month preceding the issue date. Submit to: Editor *Aging & Independence*, P.O. Box 23217, San Diego, CA 92193. Or, submit by email to: sarah.jackson@sdccounty.ca.gov

Special permission is not needed to reproduce any information contained in this publication with credits to *Aging & Independence*™