



VIP's at Greater Opportunities' Open House

Fifty people celebrated the opening of the new Day Program/Adult Development and Activity Center on October 2. From left to right: Tom Biagini, Board Chair; Mark Stone, Assemblyman and Chairman of the State Assembly Committee on Human Services; Sam Liccardo, Councilman and Mayor-Elect of San Jose; Anthony Rowe, Director of Operations; Renee Brose, Day Program Coordinator; Craig King, Executive Director.



Andrew, Debbie and Phillip On the Job

The Day Program placed Andrew, Debbie and Phillip at [BJ's Restaurant and Brew House](#) in San Jose. They went through the online [Basic Food Handler's Course](#) and all achieved their Certificate of Completion through eFoodHandlers. Cynthia Plascencia, the Manager at BJ's, states, "We love working with Andrew, Debbie and Phillip because they follow instructions

well and do a great job." Our consumers get so much more than just a paycheck for their work: they get a sense of responsibility, purpose, and the satisfaction of a job well done!

Upcoming Events

December 11: Holiday Party, American Legion Hall, Santa Clara

January 31, 2015: Wine Tasting Social/Fundraising Event with Music and Dancing, Grand Hotel, Sunnyvale

For more information about Greater Opportunities Programs and Services, please visit www.GreaterOpportunities.org or call (408) 248-4464.



GREATER OPPORTUNITIES
900 LAFAYETTE STREET, SUITE 700
SANTA CLARA, CA 95050

Serving Persons with Developmental Disabilities



Greater Opportunities

Fall 2014

www.GreaterOpportunities.org



Milestones on the Path to Independence



Ernie Loves the GO Day Program

"The people are wonderful. I feel very blessed to come to a place where it feels like family. I can openly discuss things with people, and don't have to keep it inside if I need to talk."

In early 1985, Ernie Strassman joined a program in San Mateo at the Poplar Center. He began taking ILS skill classes and was there for a few months when funding ran out. He then heard about a program at the Mountain View Center for Independent Living and was invited to join in September 1986. The Executive Director at the time wanted to change the name of the organization, and picked Ernie and another consumer to help pick a new name for the organization. While watching TV one night, a Toyota commercial came on and said that it was a great opportunity to buy a new car, and after some discussion, the name Greater Opportunities was created!

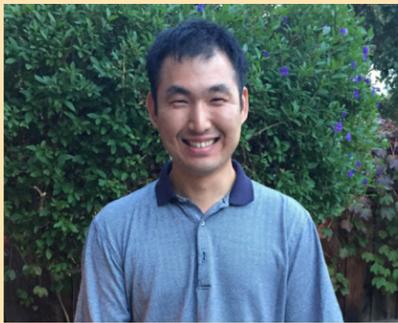
In the early days of GO, the organization operated out of a home in Mt. View. Seven people lived in the home together and more folks came every day to take classes. In 1988, GO bought a 6-plex in Sunnyvale and Ernie was the first consumer to move in. He lived at the [Cortez Apartments](#) for about 6 months, graduated from the program and then moved into his own apartment in 1989.

Ernie continues to be heavily involved with GO. He visits the [Day Program](#) every day, has volunteered many hours of his time through GO at the Library and thrift store, as well as assisting with group activities. He has worked in GO's office answering phones, and he has

also been a part of the crew that helps when consumers are moving. It's obvious when speaking to Ernie that GO is a very special place for him. When asked about one of his favorite memories through GO, he told me about an extraordinary experience back in 1987. The Executive Director wanted everyone to take a trip together, so they started planning and saving for their trip in March. In December, 27 consumers and 7 or 8 staff members all took a week-long trip together to Honolulu, HI, and had a simply wonderful time.

When asked what his favorite part of GO is, Ernie replied, "The people are wonderful. I feel very blessed to come to a place where it feels like family. I can openly discuss things with people, and don't have to keep it inside if I need to talk." Ernie has been a fixture of GO since the very beginning, and really is a testament to what GO is all about. Through GO, Ernie has learned to live independently, he helps others, he has created and maintained meaningful relationships. We couldn't imagine GO without Ernie Strassman, and we are so glad that he is a part of the GO family!





Jin - Living independently and learning happily at the Cortez program

After previously living in group homes, Jin moved into Greater Opportunities' Cortez Apartments Semi-Independent Living Program in May of this year. This is his first time living independently. He attends the daily on-site classes, which include, Budgeting, Housekeeping, Health and Safety, Anger Management, Sexuality, Cooking, and Nutrition. Jin's favorite class is the Cooking class. He also, enjoys the social events.

During the day, Jin attends Access Community Day Program. While at the day program, he enjoys outside activities. He also visits his parents nearly every day. When Jin is at home he enjoys cooking, listening to music, and playing video games. Jin is currently looking for a job and is looking forward to working. He is currently trying to save money to buy a laptop. He would also like to learn to drive. We are very proud of Jin's motivation to be fully independent. He is a joy to have at Cortez.

Halloween Fun at Greater Opportunities! Bewitching Lindsay, Snow White Renee, and Superhero John



Give a Gift of Opportunity This Holiday Season

People with developmental disabilities – and the programs that serve them - are **struggling to survive** in Silicon Valley. Generous support from donors like you is critical to meeting the needs of our consumers.

- Our consumers' average SSI payment is a mere \$830 per month – for food, clothing, and shelter. The local average rental cost for a one bedroom apartment is over \$2,000. Not surprisingly, many of our consumers run out of money for food. So in partnership with a local food bank, every week we distribute a bag of groceries to our consumers. We help them find affordable housing – an increasing challenge as government housing subsidies continually decline.
- State funding rates for disability services like ours have been frozen for over a decade, while the cost of living has increased over 37%. Closing this ever-growing funding gap means we must step up our fundraising efforts.

Everybody knows someone who has a developmental disability like autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation. Many times that someone is a member of our immediate or extended family, a friend's or neighbor's family. Like all of us, **people with disabilities want to live in their own homes as active, productive and included members of the community, with dignity and independence.**

The stories about Ernie, Jin and Alysun exemplify the hopes and dreams of all the individuals we serve at Greater Opportunities. You can help make their hope for dignity and independence a reality, by supporting our services. Make a significant gift of opportunity - \$50, \$100, or more - whatever you can afford to share during this holiday season.

We invite you to join our family at Greater Opportunities as together every day, we **make a huge difference in the quality of life** for people with disabilities.

About Greater Opportunities

Greater Opportunities is a private, non-profit 501(C)(3) organization founded in 1983 by parents of daughters and sons with developmental disabilities to provide a variety of independent living support services. Today, we support over 110 individuals to live independently in their own homes throughout Santa Clara County. We value excellence and innovation in providing services that meet our consumers' needs and preferences. Services are provided at no cost to consumers and their families.

Our Mission... Is to empower persons with developmental disabilities to achieve greater self-sufficiency and lead richer lives.

Our Vision... People with disabilities are able to live with dignity and independence in their own homes.

Our Core Service Values...

- Dignity
- Choice
- Opportunity for individual growth
- Integration, independence, and inclusion

- We train folks in skills of independent living, like cooking, shopping and money management, communication skills, sexuality, health and safety
- We provide direct support to consumers in their homes
- We provide affordable housing and onsite classroom training to residents at our Cortez apartments (charging only \$400 per month rent)
- Our Day Services bring participants into the community every day for paid and volunteer work and to cultural and recreational sites, while also providing a wide array of fun and enriching skill-building activities at the Adult Development and Activity Center.

Just like in your family, we work hard to stretch our limited resources. Fully 88% of our budget goes directly to program services - **only 12% of our budget is spent on administration and fundraising.** Yet it costs ever more to do what we do - while the gap between State funding and the actual costs of service continue to grow wider.

That's why we need your help, by making a generous donation to Greater Opportunities - to maintain and to grow our services ... the kind of caring, quality services that you would wish for your own family member.

To create the best quality services possible, we are **constantly innovating and investing.** We upgraded program services over the past year, including moving our Day Program from an old warehouse space to a beautiful new, state-of-the-art facility that includes an art studio, music room, respite room, kitchen, and a fully equipped computer lab for the digital generation. With **volunteer help** from Rebuilding Together Peninsula, we renovated the Cortez apartment building with a new classroom and fully-equipped kitchen to train consumers in cooking and other independent living skills. We added two additional, lightly-used wheelchair lift-equipped buses to our Day Program transportation fleet to promote community integration with daily outings. And lots more!

Make an investment in our services at Greater Opportunities. **Help us create new opportunities for people with disabilities to live with dignity and independence.** Here are some ways you can help:

- \$50 fills a day with skill-building activities for a consumer in our Adult Development and Activity Center
- \$100 pays for cooking class and learning how to make healthy, low-cost meals
- \$200 trains seven consumers in Independent Living Skills through a 3-hour class at our Cortez program
- \$500 covers seven nights of in-home support services to keep a consumer healthy and safe in their home
- \$1,000 pays our monthly transportation and program supplies costs at the Adult Development and Activity Center
- \$2,500 enables twenty consumers to attend summer camp for a week at Del Valle Regional Park
- \$5,000 sponsors our annual Holiday Party with awards, dinner and dancing enjoyed by all our consumers, staff and families

Happy Holidays to you and your family! We appreciate our donors and volunteers!



Alysun - Living independently and reaching for the stars at the Cortez program

Alysun joined Greater Opportunities' Cortez Apartments Semi-Independent Living Program in April of this year, after moving from Canada in July of 2012. This is her first time living independently. Alysun attends daily on-site classes including Anger Management, Health and Safety, Housekeeping, Budgeting, Cooking, Nutrition, and Sexuality. Alysun always participates in class, and is always prepared with a kind and encouraging word for her fellow classmates.

In Alysun's spare time she enjoys drawing, and she has even entered her art into competitions. Alysun enjoys writing, and she manages her own blog where she posts her stories. Alysun loves researching King Arthur and Robin Hood, and loves writing stories including them. She always adds new twists to her stories. Alysun attends her gym regularly, and she loves nothing more than having time to get in a good cardio work out.

Alysun helps her dad at his medical clinic while she pursues a part time job. She also sells essential oils, which she enjoys. Alysun dreams of eventually working at the Winchester Mystery House. She would also love to learn how to drive, and she hopes to begin learning very soon. We are very proud of Alysun's hard work and determination for success!