AGING & independence

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

"Help Make Their Life Brighter": IHSS Caregiving Brings Meaning

By Jennifer Bransford-Koons
Director, Aging & Independence Services

It may not be up there with "professional baseball player" or "ballerina" as a coveted childhood dream career, but more and more San Diego County residents are discovering that working as a professional caregiver can be a meaningful way to earn a living and help people in need. Maria del Pilar Torres is one such person who landed unexpectedly in the role as an In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) caregiver and fell in love with the profession.

Maria del Pilar Torres

IHSS is a statewide program that allows eligible older adults, persons with disabilities, and those who are blind to remain living safely in their own home and avoid out-of-home placement. IHSS recipients (also known as clients) are evaluated by a social worker and may be approved to receive assistance with the basic needs that they are not able to perform independently, such as cleaning the house, laundry, preparing meals, bathing, grooming, and getting dressed, to name a few. Through the program, IHSS recipients can select a caregiver of their choice, including family members or friends (provided they meet a few basic requirements and pass a Department of Justice background check). Professional caregivers, also known as providers, may be selected from a registry as well. Currently, over 41,800 caregivers in the county serve as IHSS caregivers.

Many IHSS caregivers initially work in other careers before discovering the caregiving field. Maria had been working as a physical therapist in Tijuana. After she and her husband relocated to San Diego, Maria's physical therapy career stalled as she would need to pursue an alternative certification to have an active license. While she took the necessary classes—and her instructors were impressed with her expertise—they suggested that she strengthen her English skills before working in a clinical setting. Soon after, in June 2022, an acquaintance approached Maria about serving as a caregiver for her father who was enrolled in IHSS and needed a caregiver.

At first, Maria wasn't sure, but her husband encouraged her to go to the interview. The client's two daughters were eager for her assistance and carefully explained their father's needs. Maria agreed to take the job. She explains, "When you see the real need of someone, you…learn that you have a part of you that is willing to help. You don't know how you will start, but you know you have to show up."

And show up she did. Maria brought her whole self to serve her client. While there was a lot to learn about her client's needs—he was unable to complete any activities of daily living on his own—she quickly discovered a "ton of satisfaction" helping to maintain his health.

Maria regularly went above and beyond, making it a

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priority to provide more than just physical care; she looked for ways to support his social and emotional needs, too, often using her own resources or personal time to improve her client's quality of life. For instance, one day her client gestured at his room and its four walls noting, "This is all I see." Maria looked for ways to bring him more mental stimulation in his environment. She hung posters on the walls to add variety to the room. In addition, she sought to keep him entertained. Maria tapped into her 20 years of Folkloric dance experience and would sing and dance for him, gently holding his hands so that he too could be a participant. When the holidays came around, Maria made arrangements with her client's family to use her own time to visit him on Christmas as well as for Día de Los Reyes on January 6. Maria explains, "You do it so you can help make their life brighter…so their life won't be [as] difficult…[or] lonely."

After her first client eventually succumbed to his illness and passed away, Maria felt the loss deeply. She admits that the hardest part of being a caregiver is "learning how to let your [terminally ill] clients go with love." After the loss, she comforted herself with the knowledge that she made a difference in his life and that her client was no longer in pain.

After work with her first client ended, Maria decided to join the IHSS Provider Registry. She also enrolled as a caregiver for the Back-Up Provider System (BUPS)—a program designed to assist IHSS recipients with urgent, short-term personal care assistance when a recipient's regular caregiver is not available to assist.

Today, Maria is happily serving another long-term client, providing approximately 40 hours of care per week. This client is able to perform some activities independently, but Maria provides support with food preparation, medication management, and some personal care and household assistance. She brings an attitude of positivity to her job and helps her client to recognize the things he still can do, such as listen to the radio, watch tv, and enjoy his meals.

While Maria didn't envision her career path would lead her to caregiving, she is "so happy" in her current role. Maria encourages caring people who enjoy helping others to consider serving as an IHSS caregiver. She shares, "Sometimes you have to give a lot of yourself, so the people you are taking care of don't suffer and can be the best they can be…but you can also have this amazing connection with a client."

For more information on becoming an IHSS caregiver, please see the orange box below.

BECOME A PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVER

PUBLIC AUTHORITY
In-Home Supportive Services
San Diego County

Help older adults and disabled individuals who receive In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) by pursuing a rewarding career as a caregiver! Earn extra income and enjoy a flexible schedule while helping people to live independently in their homes. No experience is necessary. The San Diego IHSS Public Authority will assist you with training. Apply by calling **(866) 351-7722** or visiting www.sdihsspa.com/regapp. For more information, visit www.sdihsspa.com.

IHSS RECIPIENT OR CAREGIVER? JOIN THE IHSS/PUBLIC AUTHORITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Current or past In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) recipients and caregivers (individual providers) are needed to join the IHSS/Public Authority Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee provides advice and recommendations to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and other persons or entities related to the delivery of IHSS services. Meetings are currently held in person or via Zoom on the 2nd Friday of each month at 12:45 p.m. Serving committee members receive a $50 monthly stipend. For more information, please visit: https://sdihsspa.com/advisorycmte/ or contact Gilberto Contreras-Morales at **(858) 694-3412** or **Gilberto.Contreras-Morales@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

In the COMMUNITY

AREA PLAN PUBLIC HEARING

At the regularly scheduled AIS Advisory Council meeting at the County Operations Center, located at 5560 Overland Avenue, 3rd floor, San Diego, CA 92123 on Monday, April 14, 2025, at 12:00 p.m. (noon), attendees will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2025-26 Area Plan Update. The Area Plan contains AIS's goals and objectives for services to support older adults and persons with disabilities. To join by phone, call (619) 343-2539, (Meeting passcode: 402 109 836#), or visit the Advisory Council website to join by TEAMS video conference, (Meeting ID: 224 849 240 117; Meeting passcode: eq7c5wR2).

DEMENTIA SKILLS & RESOURCE FAIR

A ***Dementia Skills & Resource Fair*** will be held on **Saturday, May 3 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.** at St. Paul's Clinic Chula Vista, 630 L St., Chula Vista 91910. Attend informative presentations, participate in workshops, and visit resources tables. Refreshments will be provided by St. Paul's PACE. This event is open to care partners, family members, professional caregivers, service providers, and anyone looking to enhance their skills in engaging, supporting and caring for persons living with dementia. To register, visit www.bit.ly/dementiaskills24. For more information, email **HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov** or call **(858) 495-5500**.

SAN DIEGO SCAM JAM TOUR

AARP California, in collaboration with the County of San Diego, is hosting the San Diego Scam Jam Tour with FREE Fraud Presentations, Shred Events, and Cybersecurity Workshops throughout the county in May, June, and July! Expert speakers at the Fraud Presentations will share how to recognize, avoid, and report scams before they happen to you or your loved ones. You'll also learn about the top scams in San Diego, practice identifying red flags, how to protect yourself from identity theft, and receive free resources and tools. Keep your personal and financial information safe and secure by attending a community Shred Event where your paper documents will be shredded on-site at no charge. Cybersecurity Workshops will teach you how to stay safe online and on all of your devices – including phones, laptops, and tablets. If you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam!

You don't need to be an AARP member to participate, but registration is required. Learn more and sign up for events at: www.aarp.org/sandiegoscamjam.

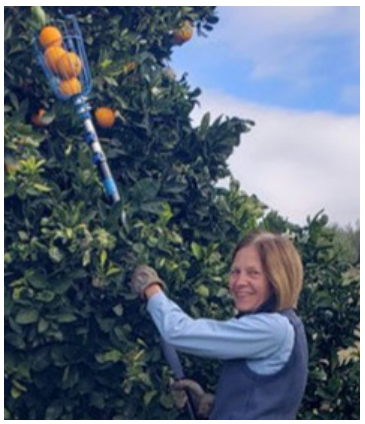
APPLY FOR MONTHLY NUTRITION (CALFRESH) BENEFITS

Older adults, including those who receive income from SSI/SSP, may be eligible for monthly nutrition benefit assistance through CalFresh! CalFresh recipients receive extra money for nutritious food each month. There are also other benefits, such as reduced cost access to museums, discounted Amazon Prime membership, and more! To learn more about CalFresh, including eligibility, visit www.getcalfresh.org. You may also call **2-1-1** to apply.

Would you like some extra support with completing your application? AIS Outreach & Education staff are available to assist you! Please contact Beatrice Lömer at **Beatrice.Lomer@sdcounty.ca.gov** or **(619) 904-2365**.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is proud to announce **Cheri Gabler** as the January 2025 Volunteer of the Month. Nominated by Lisa Lingren from Senior Gleaners of San Diego County, Cheri has volunteered for nine years, contributing over 1,491 service hours. After retiring from a 30-year education career, Cheri joined Senior Gleaners as a fruit picker and eventually became a district lead. She has served on the board of directors since 2018 and assumed the role of board secretary in 2021, for which she maintains meeting minutes, organizes mail distribution, and assists with financial management. Cheri has attended 335 gleaning events, dedicating 832 hours to food recovery. She manages volunteers and schedules picking sessions, ensuring food reaches non-profits, churches, and food banks. When needed, she personally picks and delivers fruit. Cheri's commitment ensures that thousands of pounds of fresh produce reach those in need. Her humility and cheerful spirit inspire others to join the mission. Thank you, Cheri, for your years of dedication and the impact you make in our community.


Cheri Gabler

Tom Griffiths

Thomas "Tom" K. Griffiths is the RSVP Volunteer of the Month for February 2025. He was nominated by Bill Simon, Assistant Administrator of the Volunteer Sheriff's Patrol at the North Coastal Station. Tom has volunteered since 2003, contributing over 21 years and 10,255 hours of invaluable service. Tom has served as patrol leader for over 15 years and an assistant administrator for the past six years. He dedicates fifteen hours weekly to patrol duties, which include leading vacation checks for residents who are out of town and YANA (You Are Not Alone) visits to isolated and homebound individuals. Tom is reliable, volunteering for extra patrols, such as DUI checkpoints. He is also responsible for taking minutes at the monthly meetings. His generous spirit and leadership skills inspire new recruits, and he takes great pride in the patrol's positive impacts on the community. Thank you, Tom, for over 21 years of dedicated service!

Jeanne Hoey is the RSVP volunteer for March 2025. Until recently, she volunteered at the Aging & Independence Services office, assisting senior volunteer program staff. Jeanne was an integral part of the team for over 11 years. Her skill with technology and her attention to detail were essential to the smooth running of the RSVP program. Jeanne loved finding solutions to challenging situations and created the perfect spreadsheet for any occasion. She assisted with volunteer recognition celebrations over the years, helping with registration, table set up, and mailing lists for invitations. After a long run with the team, Jeanne decided to retire from her volunteer position to allow more time for travel and fun with her husband, along with hobbies such as gardening (especially plumerias), cooking, and sharing fun stories about her grand-dog, Tuna. Jeanne has been not only a respected member of the team, but also a good friend. Congratulations, and thank you for everything. You will be missed!

Jeanne Hoey

VOLUNTEER DOCENT TRAINING

A docent training will be held on the USS Midway. Learn how to engage with guests from around the world on this aircraft carrier museum. Make new friends and stay active with meaningful work. The eight-week training begins in early June. Application and screening required. Both civilians and veterans are encouraged to apply for this and other fun volunteer opportunities. For more information, visit: www.midway.org/contact/volunteer-opportunities.

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION: BUILDING STRONG SUPPORT FOR ELDERS

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations (UN) launched the first World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15, 2006 in an effort to unite communities around the world in raising awareness about elder abuse.

When we come together, we can prevent elder abuse from happening and also put supportive services in place to address elder abuse. California law defines elder abuse as physical abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, abandonment, isolation, abduction, or other treatment resulting in harm, pain, or mental suffering to an adult 60 years or older. Every year an estimated 1 in 10 older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. We can increase social supports for older adults through services, programs, and policies that keep people integrated into our communities as we age.

TAKE ACTION!

- Keep in contact and talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives frequently. Ask questions and listen. Be aware and alert for the possibility of abuse.
- Make a commitment to volunteer this year! Help older adults in your community. Consider participating in a friendly caller/visitor program or send cards and letters to nursing homes or socially isolated adults in the community.
- Give a caregiver a respite break.
- Ask your church or organization to add information about elder abuse in their newsletters or during a service.
- Share elder abuse prevention and awareness information via social media with your friends and family.
- Be alert for scams and share scam prevention information. The ***Don't Get Hooked*** scam prevention booklet is available on the Adult Protective Services page of the AIS website in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, Vietnamese, Farsi, Korean, Mandarin, and Somali. Share this important information with others!

SEEK HELP

If you have concerns about an older adult, or suspect possible elder abuse, call the AIS Call Center at **(800) 339-4661**. If you are an older adult, one of the best ways to avoid becoming a victim of elder abuse is to stay connected to others. Explore the Get Connected Guide for social engagement ideas. For more information about opportunities to stay connected through health promotion and volunteer programs, access to transportation, or phone call reassurance programs, visit www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov or call **(800) 339-4661**.

NEW TAI CHI CLASSES

Aging & Independence Services offers **free in-person** and **virtual** Tai Chi classes. These evidence-based falls prevention programs have been shown to improve movement, balance, strength, and flexibility; offer relaxation; and decrease pain and falls. Classes are appropriate for adults with or without arthritis, rheumatic diseases, or related musculoskeletal conditions. Classes are now offered at the following locations:

Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance:

St. John's Episcopal Church, 760 1st Ave, Chula Vista, 91910. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3 p.m.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention:

Virtual*, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6-7 p.m. *Visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CF9LRHB to register. Participants must have access to an internet-connected device with video capabilities.

Park Avenue Community Center *ENGLISH, 210 East Park Ave, Escondido 92025. Tuesdays, 9:15-10:15 a.m.

Park Avenue Community Center *SPANISH, 210 East Park Ave, Escondido 92025. Thursdays, 9:15-10:15 a.m.

Pine Avenue Park, 3209 Harding St, Carlsbad 92008, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Carlsbad City Library "Dove Library," 1775 Dove Lane, Carlsbad 92011. Wednesdays and Fridays, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

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.

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

One in five Americans experience a mental health condition each year. It can happen to any one of us: forty-six percent (46%) of U.S. adults meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition in their lifetime. In a world where mental health challenges affect millions, awareness is just the beginning. This year's theme for May is Mental Health month is "Turn Awareness into Action." You have the power to take charge of your own mental health. By taking actions to help yourself, you can create a ripple effect, inspiring others and contributing to a society where mental health is prioritized and supported. Try these ways to take action today:

1. Start with Self-Care: Take a quick, anonymous test at mhascreening.org to check on your mental health. Try different types of self-care: take a walk, try art or another creative activity, or start a meditation practice.
2. Seek professional help for your mental health when self-help efforts aren't working. Doing so is a sign of strength, not weakness. You don't have to go through struggles alone.
3. Engage Your Community. Share your story with other people.
4. Advocate for Change. Educate others about the importance of mental health care in your community. Contact your elected officials to support legislation increase mental health services, expands access to treatment, and protects the rights of people with mental health conditions.

For local resources and additional tips to support mental health, visit https://up2sd.org/topics/mental-health. Additional information on mental health can be found at mhanational.org/may If you or someone you care about is in crisis or would like behavioral health resources or support, please call the San Diego Access and Crisis line at **(888) 724-7240** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Calls are answered by experienced counselors, with assistance available in over 150 languages.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

APRIL 18, TUESDAY
2 – 3 PM

Oasis San Diego presents ***San Diego History Through Music*** at the San Carlos Library, 7265 Jackson Dr., San Diego 92119. Hear a historical soundtrack of San Diego, starting with the traditional music of our region's Native Americans. You'll also hear music from Spanish and English explorers, followed by music of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. For details, contact David at **DEge@sandiego.gov** or **(619) 527-3430**.

APRIL 19, SATURDAY
9 AM –1 PM

San Diego County Fire will host ***The 4-Phases of a Disaster: The Resident's Role*** at the Alpine Library, 1752 Alpine Blvd., Alpine 91901. Learn strategies to protect your family and pets, fire prevention steps, evacuation planning, and the role of local assistance centers. Each attendee will receive a personal disaster plan. To register, call/text Teresa at **(619) 857-8050** or email **Teresa.Greenhalgh@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

MAY 5, MONDAY
1:30 – 3 PM

UC San Diego Health presents ***Grow Your Wellbeing & Resilience: Simple, Effective Tools*** at the Imperial Beach Library, 810 Imperial Beach Blvd., Imperial Beach 91932. This is part of UCSD's Healthy Living Series. For more details, email **traumainjuryprevention@health.ucsd.edu** or call **(619) 543-1957.**

MAY 7, WEDNESDAY
2 – 3:30 PM

A webinar, ***How Medicare Works***, will be presented by Sharp HealthCare. If you're turning 65, or you're still working and planning to retire soon, it's time to start thinking about Medicare and your coverage options. Attend this free educational event to learn about Medicare in clear, easy-to-understand language. To RSVP, call **(800) 827-4277** or visit www.sharp.com/classes.

MAY 9, FRIDAY
11 AM – 12:30 PM

A free workshop on ***Advanced Health Care Planning*** will be held at the Rancho Bernardo Library, 17110 Bernardo Center Dr. San Diego 92128. Learn to designate a surrogate decision maker and make your wishes known should you become sick or injured, by completing an advanced healthcare directive. The *Compassion and Choices Toolkit* will be provided. RSVP to **advancedcareplanning4us@gmail.com**.

MAY 15, THURSDAY
2-3 PM

A ***Scam Prevention Workshop*** hosted by AARP will be held at the San Diego Tierrasanta Seventh-day Adventist Church, 11260 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., San Diego 92124. Expert speakers will share how to recognize, avoid, and report scams before they happen to you or your loved ones. Attendees will learn about the top scams in San Diego, practice identifying red flags, and receive free resources and tools. Visit www.aarp.org/sandiegoscamjam to register.

MAY 31, SATURDAY
10 AM – 12 PM

A ***Composting Workshop*** will be hosted at the Lakeside Library, 12428 Woodside Ave., Lakeside 92040. Learn about composting and ways to keep the environment healthy from the Solana Center. For details, call Paige at **(619) 443-1811** or email **lakesidelibrary@sdcounty.ca.gov.**

JUNE 10, TUESDAY
12–3 PM

A class on ***Ikebana Floral Design*** will start at the Mission Valley Library, 2123 Fenton Pkwy., San Diego 92108. Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement, is a disciplined art form that harmonizes elements of nature and humanity. Learn how to create art pieces for every day and special occasions. Email Professor Takeya at **mtakeya@sdccd.edu** for details. Cost: Free. You can register upon arrival.

JUNE 17, TUESDAY
11 AM-12 PM

The Alzheimer's Association presents ***Healthy Living for Your Brain and Body*** at the Carlsbad Senior Center, 799 Pine Ave., Carlsbad 92008. Learn about research on diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity, and social engagement, and use hands-on tools to help you develop a plan for healthy aging. To RSVP, call **(800) 272-3900** or visit www.alz.org/events.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

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

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Aging & Independence ™ is published quarterly 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.

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