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Summer 2024

AGING & independence

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

"It Gives Me the Sense of Being Involved": Using Tech to Connect

By Jennifer Bransford-Koons
Director, Aging & Independence Services

When she was working as an educator, Laura Arzave's world was full of social connection. Whether she was teaching preschoolers or elementary-aged students, there were always young people, parents, and colleagues to connect with. A few years ago, however, Laura had to stop working due to physical disabilities. She enrolled with the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program.

Laura Arzave (left) and Arlinda Jackson (right) are current participants in the IHSS: Tech2Connect program.

IHSS helps older adults and persons with disabilities living on a low income to remain living safely at home. IHSS recipients receive assistance with basic needs, such as cleaning the house, laundry, preparing meals, bathing, grooming, and getting dressed. While some IHSS recipients have robust support systems and the ability to leave their homes regularly, others are homebound and have few social connections. The COVID-19 pandemic deepened the isolation some IHSS recipients had already been experiencing.

In response, the County of San Diego created the IHSS:Tech2Connect program. The goal of Tech2Connect is to provide technology, training, and access to social engagement and mental health resources to some of the region's most vulnerable older adults and persons living with disabilities. Currently, the program is open to active IHSS recipients who live alone.

Laura was eager to become involved with Tech2Connect. She admits, "It can be very lonely. I wasn't going out as much. I wasn't socializing as much as I probably should've."

Tech2Connect is run by an AIS contractor, Sarsis Health and Technology Solutions, with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and a California Department of Aging Access to Technology (ATT) grant. This temporary program began in 2022, and to date, over 1,000 participants have received a tablet, training, and resource materials. Participants, including Laura, have reported life-changing impacts.

Although Laura had access to a cell phone, receiving a tablet opened up new opportunities. "When the teacher came, we downloaded a few apps and one of them was MeetUp. I found a couple of meetings over Zoom I now go to on a monthly basis," she explains. Laura is now able to meet with new people online who support one another with health goals. She also connects with

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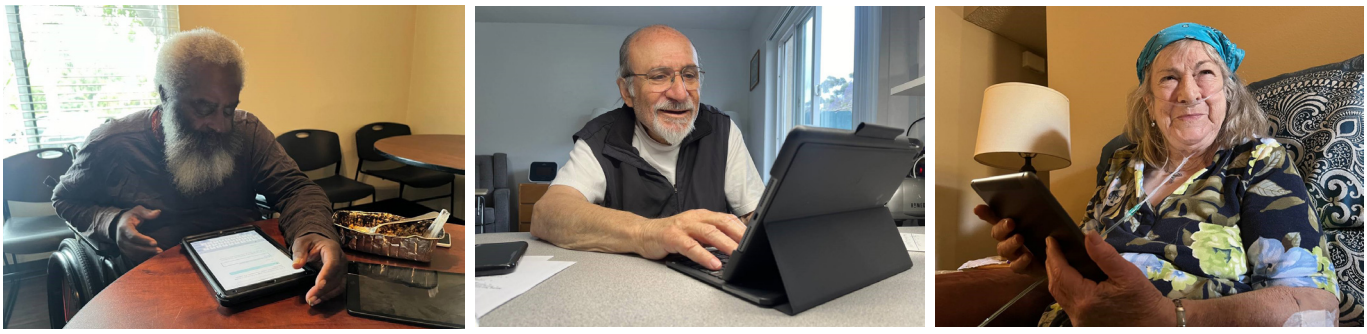

Over 1,000 participants have benefitted from the Tech2Connect program by receiving an iPad, data/internet, technology training, and/or support to access social engagement and mental wellness resources.

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neighbors through an online neighborhood group. Having an iPad also motivated Laura to go back to school. She is working toward a degree in holistic counseling through a virtual program and hopes to one day open up a private practice. The Tech2Connect instructor taught her how to access documents from "the cloud" so she can complete assignments.

Perhaps most importantly, the program has helped Laura feel closer to her family. "I'm the 8th of nine children and have 27 nieces and nephews," she explains. "I downloaded the Facebook and Instagram apps [so] I'm able to be up to date on what's going on with the family. It gives me the sense of being involved." One of her greatest pleasures has been reading to her two-year-old great nephew over FaceTime (a video-calling app). While Laura admits that navigating life with a disability remains challenging, she appreciates how the Tech2Connect program has helped make life a little bit easier. Like Laura, numerous other participants have reported that Tech2Connect greatly enhances their lives.

Arlinda Jackson, 76, knows full well that life can be full of unexpected twists and turns. After a productive career, first at SDG&E and then as a parent-child counselor at a residential treatment facility for children with behavioral health needs, she was forced into retirement due to health issues. Arlinda eventually had to give up her car due to the high costs of insurance and registration. For awhile she would go out on walks in her neighborhood, but eventually it felt unsafe. "My walking slowed down and the drivers sped up. I have pretty much become homebound," she explains.

While grateful to have a roof over her head after experiencing "a few seconds of homelessness," the small studio where she lays her head doesn't quite feel like home. "I never envisioned [this life] for myself. I miss who I am."

Yet, Arlinda is bright and resilient. When she learned about Tech2Connect, she was eager to enroll. The program has added a dose of optimism into her life. As an avid reader, Arlinda had found that the print inside books had become too small to read. "When I was offered the iPad, that just…gave me the world of reading back. I got my library card again and got introduced to the world of audiobooks and e-books."

Arlinda has also been using the iPad to search for a greater sense of community. "I keep looking to be connected with seniors who are full of life." Although her initial efforts have not yet resulted in the depth of connection she hopes for, Arlinda isn't giving up. "I believe things happen to you for your growth," she explains.

While the physical space surrounding Arlinda may have gotten smaller—at least for now—with the help of the iPad, the internet, and the power of her own mind, she is expanding her horizons and working to create a brighter future for herself. "It is a way to be connected to life," she shares. "I use the iPad every day. I know the beauty of technology and I embrace it. I just hope that others let it open up their world."

If you are a current IHSS recipient who lives alone and are in need of an up-to-date tablet, data/internet, and/or in-home technology training, call the Tech2Connect information line at **(858) 505-6972** to learn more about the program and determine if you are eligible. Please note that funding is limited. The Tech2Connect program currently runs through September 30, 2024.

In the COMMUNITY

MESSAGE FROM NEW AIS DIRECTOR, JENNIFER BRANSFORD-KOONS

AIS Director Jennifer Bransford-Koons

Happy Summer! I am so happy to be back with Aging & Independence Services (AIS) as the Director. I have spent the majority of my 30-plus-year County career working within AIS in many programs. I am passionate about the important programs and activities that AIS provides for the community. If you ask me "what fills my bucket," I would say that serving our aging population and helping residents with disabilities to live their best lives is definitely my calling. But I also love supporting staff. Of all my positions in my career, I have always found special enjoyment overseeing operations and supporting staff to help the community and help each other.

My most recent assignment as the Director for the Office of Equitable Communities in the Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities afforded me an outstanding opportunity to embrace our new County focus of community engagement. I oversaw community engagement programs and outreach efforts in partnership with the community to ensure resources are available and accessible to all, and in ways that are culturally sensitive, trauma informed, and welcoming.

Throughout my career, I've been blessed to work with diverse populations and have championed protective and safety net services for vulnerable older adults, children, and families. I look forward to continuing to support our amazing communities!

COOL ZONES FOR HOT DAYS

Each summer, older adults are encouraged to beat the heat by visiting Cool Zones throughout the county. These air-conditioned sites welcome older adults and persons with disabilities free of charge. Some offer social opportunities or other resources. The effects of heat can be greater on older adults and their bodies may not provide the same warning signs as they did at younger ages. Visit www.CoolZones.org or call **2-1-1** to locate a Cool Zone near you.

People in San Diego County unable to get to a Cool Zone location without transportation assistance, such as older adults and people with disabilities, can call **2-1-1** to be connected to a transportation or rideshare service at no cost.

Homebound individuals may not be able to take advantage of traditional Cool Zone sites. To help community members who are unable to leave home to beat the heat, the County of San Diego, in partnership with SDG&E, provides free electric fans to those who are 60 years of age and older, or disabled, living on limited incomes. Please be advised it is not recommended to rely on electric fans for cooling if temperatures exceed 90 degrees. To fill out an eligibility survey, visit www.CoolZones.org.

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. Members receive a $50 monthly stipend. For more information, please visit: https://sdihsspa.com/advisorycmte/ or contact Gilberto Contreras-Morales at **Gilberto.Contreras-Morales@sdcounty.ca.gov** or **(619) 694-3412**.

VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER

Nadine Armenta is the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program's (RSVP) volunteer of the quarter. She serves with Ronald McDonald House Charities of San Diego, an organization that provides a "home-away-from-home" for families with children being treated for severe, often life-threatening conditions at local hospitals. Malorie De Witt, Volunteer Service Manager, nominated Nadine for this honor.

Nadine Armenta

A front desk volunteer, Nadine is the face everyone sees as they check into the house for the day to receive services. Nadine has been serving in this role every Sunday for five hours over the past five years, accumulating 593 hours of service. The staff at the Ronald McDonald House can always count on Nadine to be punctual, reliable, and ready to lend a hand when extra volunteers are needed for special events. Nadine's kind nature brings comfort to guests during some of their most difficult times. She always remains calm and helpful.

Malorie notes, "Nadine cares about our guests and shows obvious care and respect for staff...it is apparent that Nadine loves to give back and is kind-hearted."

Ronald McDonald House Charities® San Diego

A smile and a warm welcome to a place of refuge and care can change someone's whole day. Nadine is a key member of the Ronald McDonald House Charities team that works to alleviate the stress of families with critically ill children. Ronald McDonald House Charities is deeply appreciative for Nadine's unwavering dedication to comforting others and brightening their spirits. Congratulations, Nadine, and thank you for your service to our community!

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Phil Eakin was honored by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors at the 2024 Annual County Volunteer Recognition Event on April 30, 2024.

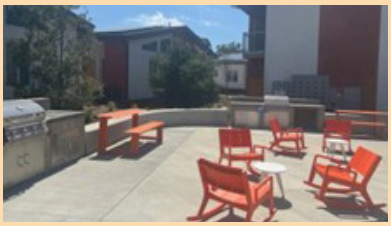
Phil Eakin (center) is honored by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

Phil is part of the RSVP program and volunteers at the USS Midway Museum. He has been a volunteer for more than 14 years and has contributed over 20,000 hours. Phil does exceptional work supporting the USS Midway Museum's volunteer office and working as Lead Librarian for the Midway's extensive naval aviation library. Phil has superb analytical skills that have enabled him to build various databases to support library objectives. He also leads a team of volunteers that manages the awards program recognizing volunteers ship-wide.

Phil supports the Curatorial Department as Senior Librarian. He acts as lead for a United States Naval Institute (USNI) *Proceedings* magazine project, his most ambitious contribution to date. As USNI *Proceedings* project lead, Phil is coordinating the efforts to design and digitize a system to view and research all contents of the magazine since it was first published in the 19th century. Congratulations, Phil, and thank you for your many contributions to the USS Midway and our local community!

HOUSING for OLDER ADULTS

County Celebrates Opening of New Senior Housing Development



Wakeland Housing and Development Corporation, in partnership with San Diego Kind, celebrated the grand opening of 127 new affordable homes on May 30, 2024. Located in Linda Vista, Levant Senior Cottages is the first affordable housing development to be built on excess County of San Diego land.

The homes are available for older adults 55 and older, earning between 25 percent and 50 percent of the Area Median Income, and include access to onsite services tailored to the needs of the residents. While all of the units are currently spoken for, this project is the first of eleven affordable housing communities planned for County of San Diego excess land. Visit www.wakelandhdc.com/levantseniorcottages.html for additional information.

Upcoming Affordable Housing Developments

Rendering of Kettner Crossing (Upper Left); Messina (Upper Right), Santa Fe Senior Village (Lower Right); La Sabila (Lower Left)

The following affordable senior housing developments are currently under construction: Kettner Crossing near downtown San Diego will have 64 units; La Sabila in Vista will have 85 units; Messina in the Clairemont neighborhood of San Diego will have 79 units; and Santa Fe Senior Villages in Vista will have 54 units. Visit the developer or project websites referenced above for more information, including to sign up for email updates or to apply to be on an interest list. The interest list for Santa Fe Senior Villages will open on **Thursday, August 29 at 7:30 a.m.** To apply, visit www.sdhcd.org, call **(858) 694-4801**, or visit Housing and Community Development Services at 3989 Ruffin Rd., San Diego 92123.

Regional Housing Resource Information:

The County of San Diego Housing and Community Development Services (HCDS) works to help families find safe, affordable housing and works with property owners to increase the supply of quality, economical places to live. HCDS serves as one of six Housing Authorities for San Diego County. HCDS provides rental assistance through the Section 8 Voucher program, works to increase the supply of affordable housing, and provides resources and information, such as the County of San Diego affordable housing directory: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/sdhcd/housing-directory.html. To contact HCDS, call **(877) 478-5478**.

Some additional local housing resources include:

- **San Diego Housing Commission affordable rentals website** (includes a resource guide and a search tool for affordable rentals within the city of San Diego): https://sdhc.org/housing-opportunities/affordable-rentals/
- **Serving Seniors Housing Programs**: https://servingseniors.org/what-we-do/programs-services/housing.html

HOW TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY BRAIN

Improving your brain health has many positive health outcomes, including reducing your risk of Alzheimer's disease. It can also improve health outcomes for those currently living with the disease. A combination of social activities and healthy habits, when done together, can help preserve and protect brain health. According to the California Department of Public Health's Take on ALZ public awareness campaign, here are some ways to improve brain health:

- **Exercise Regularly:** Daily cardiovascular exercise increases blood flow to the brain and body, which helps maintain overall health.
- **Quit Smoking:** Cigarette smoking is associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia in older adults.
- **Eat a Balanced Diet:** High blood sugar and a high-fat diet can increase your risk for cognitive decline.
- **Keep Your Heart Healthy:** Risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke — obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes — can negatively impact your cognitive health.
- **Protect Your Brain:** Brain injury can raise your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Wear a seat belt, use a helmet when playing contact sports or riding a bike, and take steps to prevent falls.
- **Get Enough Rest:** Not getting enough sleep due to conditions like insomnia or sleep apnea may result in problems with memory and thinking.
- **Mental Health is Tied to Brain Health:** Some studies link a history of depression with an increased risk of cognitive decline, so seek treatment if you have symptoms.
- **Stay Social:** Interact with family and friends. Volunteer or join a community group.
- **Keep on Learning:** Keeping an active mind through continuous education, reading, or other stimulating activities can help reduce cognitive decline.
- **Continue to Challenge Your Mind:** Activities that help you think strategically, such as puzzles and games, are a great way to exercise your brain.
- Visit www.TakeOnAlz.com for more information.

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION: BUILDING STRONG SUPPORT FOR ELDERS

When we come together, we can prevent elder abuse from happening and 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. There are many ways to strengthen our social supports through policies, services, and programs that keep us 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.
- 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.

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. For 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**.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

AUGUST 29, THURSDAY 2-2:45 P.M.

A class, ***Google Photos App Workshop (Course #2355)***, will be hosted by San Diego Oasis at the Rancho Bernardo Lifelong Learning Center, 17170 Bernardo Center Dr., San Diego 92128. This workshop will give you tips for organizing the photos on your smartphone. Learn about all there is to Google Photos to get the most out of the App. This class is made possible by The Rancho Bernardo Community Foundation. Cost: $8. To RSVP, visit www.SanDiegoOasis.org or call **(858) 240-2880**.

SEPTEMBER 12, THURSDAY 1-4 P.M.

Intergenerational Tutor Training (Course #3101) will be held at San Diego Oasis at the Grossmont Lifelong Learning Center, 5500 Grossmont Center Dr., Ste. 269, La Mesa 91942. Do you remember the joy of learning to read? Now you can share that magic with a child! Join the Oasis tutoring program and make a life-altering impact on young learners (K-4th grade) in San Diego County. Free. To RSVP, visit www.SanDiegoOasis.org or call **(619) 881-6262**. For alternate training dates, contact **Michelle@SanDiegoOasis.org** or **(619) 881-6262**.

SEPTEMBER 18, WEDNESDAY 10-11 A.M.

A free ***Transportation Options for Seniors Class*** will be held at the Grossmont Healthcare District Conference Center, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa 91942. Attend this free class offered by Sharp Grossmont Hospital to learn about low-cost, donation-based, and reduced-fare transportation options available in San Diego and East County. To register, call **(800) 827-4277** or visit www.sharp.com/health-classes.

SEPTEMBER 22, SUNDAY 3-4 P.M.

Enjoy a ***Piano Concert*** by David Chamberlin who will play music from Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals at the Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Library, 9005 Aero Dr., San Diego 92123. This program is free and seating is first come, first served. Other concerts will also be held on October 27, November 24, and December 24. For more information, call **(858) 573-1396**.

SEPTEMBER 25, WEDNESDAY 9-11:30 A.M.

A free fall prevention event, ***Stand Tall. Prevent Falls.***, will be held at the San Marcos Senior Activity Center, 111 Richmar Ave., San Marcos 92069. The event will include brief presentations on home safety, health, and medication management; free balance and vision screenings; an exhibitor fair; resources; and an opportunity drawing. No RSVP is required unless attendees wish to stay at the center for lunch at 11:30. For more details, visit www.sandiegofallprevention.org or contact **(858) 495-5500** or **HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov**.

OCTOBER 1, TUESDAY 1-2:30 P.M.

A ***Current Events Roundtable Discussion*** is held weekly on Tuesdays at the Encinitas Community and Senior Center, 1140 Oakcrest Park Dr., Encinitas 92024. Join in for a fun and lively afternoon discussing the latest topics in the world around us. Share your thoughts and learn from others. For details or to register, call **(760) 943-2250**.

OCTOBER 12, SATURDAY 10 A.M.-12 P.M.

A free ***Dementia Skills & Resource Fair*** will be held at the Grossmont Healthcare District Library, 9001 Wakarusa St., La Mesa 91942. This event is open to care partners, professional caregivers, and anyone looking to enhance their skills in engaging with and caring for people living with dementia. For details and to register, email **HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov** or call **(858) 495-5500.**

OCTOBER 21, MONDAY 5-7 P.M.

Southern Caregiver Resource Center will host a Spanish-language caregiver workshop, ***Cuidando al cuidador: Entendiendo la enfermedad de Alzheimer y demencia***, at the Logan Heights Library, 567 S. 28th St., San Diego 92113. This free in-person workshop will provide specialized information and community resources. RSVP online at: www.caregivercenter.org/SCRCsemanabinacionaldesalud. For details, email **scrc@caregivercenter.org** or call **(858) 268-4432**.

SEND IN YOUR ITEMS

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

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

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

- Older adults
- People with disabilities
- Elders and dependent adults experiencing abuse

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) 510-2020**
www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov

If calling from an area code out of San Diego County, call: **(800) 339-4661**

▪ INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ▪ PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY ▪

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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