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David's Meals Keep Him Nourished and Safe as He Lives with Dual Diagnoses

By [Ileana Cerpa](#), Communications Associate

When David first moved to New York City in 1982, his eyes were wide open. After dreaming of moving to the city since he was a young boy, he was instantly captivated by the diverse people and opportunities the city had to offer. But as he adjusted to his new, fast-paced life in Manhattan, the AIDS epidemic hit.

By the mid-80s, David began to dedicate his time to improving the lives of those impacted by HIV. He became deeply involved in [GMHC](#), an organization dedicated to ending the AIDS epidemic and uplifting all those affected by it.

“This AIDS crisis was unbelievably scary and difficult, but there was also an aspect of it that was exciting for all of us who were immersed in HIV advocacy. We were meeting interesting people and we had the opportunity to do hands-on, impactful HIV volunteer work. We were doing things that we knew were truly making a difference. So many of us had never done that before.”

When David was diagnosed with HIV in the late 80s, he panicked. His mind raced with thoughts of some of the most severe cases he had heard about in the news and directly in his community. But on the way to a doctor's appointment one afternoon, David had a revelation.

“My lover at the time, Tom, prompted me to stop and look at the tulips on Park Avenue. In that moment we decided that this diagnosis was not going to be the center of our life. I promised that I would take care of myself as best I could, but HIV was not going to dictate who we are.”

In the mid-90s David volunteered with God’s Love We Deliver. Twenty years later, he didn’t know that he would be on the receiving end of some of these services. In 2015 during a routine visit to get new glasses, the optometrist informed David that they detected something unusual. After being bounced around from doctor to doctor, David was diagnosed with an inherited eye disorder that leads to progressive vision loss. Over time, David realized he would no longer be able to use the stove and other kitchen tools safely.

David’s case manager at [SAGE](#), Matthew Alvarez, first suggested he reach out to God’s Love and pushed him to follow through. As a self-proclaimed stubborn man, it took several days for David to gather the nerve to call God’s Love and ask for assistance. As he mustered up the strength to ask for help, he was comforted by his memory of how kind the God’s Love staff was when he worked as a volunteer years ago.

“When I finally picked up the phone, I admitted, ‘This is new to me, I don’t even know what questions to ask or how to do this, but I think I need help.’ The intake staff and nutritionists I spoke to were so warm and walked me through every step of the process. They were able to pinpoint some of my dietary needs before setting me up to receive meals.” -David

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During his nutrition assessment, our Registered Dietitian Nutritionists noticed David was not consuming enough fruits and vegetables. Considering David’s HIV diagnosis, these nutrient-dense foods are critical to help boost his immune system. Our meals provide a balance of protein, carbs, and fats, that give him the tools and energy to function optimally.

While David appreciates the nutritional benefits of the meals, he has also been impacted by the empathy and care that has been shown to him along the way. His delivery driver, Ronnie, is the perfect example of this. David looks forward to Ronnie’s positive energy and infectious laugh every Friday on delivery day. David has a message for Ronnie and for all volunteers and staff at God’s Love.

“I feel so honored that there are volunteers out there who care enough to contribute something so essential like food to my life. You all bring so much compassion and trust to your work, same as I used to do when working with GMHC, God’s Love, and as a volunteer teacher. To the staff and volunteers at God’s Love, you are so tremendously vital in helping maintain independence, safety, and security. I feel very strongly that God’s Love is in my corner.”

Make a gift today to ensure that our clients, like David, continue to receive meals filled with love. Thank you for your support!

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