

How a Microwave, a Meal, and a Mattress Changed One Client's Life

When Iona social worker Liza Chapkosvky first met Parivash "Pari" Amirshahi, Pari was isolated in her apartment, surviving on little food and company. She had no bed, and she was sleeping on her small couch. "I could never straighten my legs," says Pari, 79. Two years later, her life looks completely different, thanks to Iona.



"She's a beautiful painter," says Iona social worker Liza Chapkosvky (left) about her client Parivash "Pari" Amirshahi. Pictured above, Liza and Pari share a laugh together in front of one of Pari's home murals.

Pari was first connected to Iona in October 2014, after her building manager — concerned about Pari's living environment — made a call to our Information & Referral Helpline. "Her building manager had been helping out for a while — things like driving Pari to appointments, or helping to pay bills," says Liza. "But, it was clear the manager had reached a point where she was in over her head and needed support." Liza set up a home visit, which revealed Pari had almost no food.

Iona's response was immediate. First, Liza worked with our Home Delivered Meals Coordinator Jakia Muhammad so that Pari would regularly receive meals at her home. She also secured a microwave and hot plate for Pari to be able to reheat meals.

Then, she introduced Pari to Iona's Active Wellness Program at St. Alban's, which provides a delicious free lunch and fun conversation in the company of friends every weekday. Since then, Pari has been participating nearly every day. "I had no idea St. Alban's existed or that you could get free food," says Pari. "I was hungry all the time. And then Liza brought me here. Now I have hot food and coffee and tea."

In addition to a nutritious hot lunch every weekday, Iona's Active Wellness Program has also broadened Pari's once-shrinking community. "At St. Alban's I have met many nice people," says Pari. "I found out that there are many elderly people besides me in this world."

"Iona is the best place for elderly people because we know we have a home here, and that somebody is taking care of us."

—Pari Amirshahi, Iona client

Pari could not have imagined anyone providing the support she has received from Iona. Now, she feels differently. "Iona is the best place for elderly people because we know we have a home here, and that somebody is taking care of us. I am glad that I could find Iona and that you wanted to help."

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How to Help Your Older Neighbors

In extreme weather conditions, it's important to reach out and make sure those around you, especially your older neighbors who might live alone, have the resources they need to stay healthy and be safe. "In many cases, an older adult may not reach out for help, even when they most need it," says Iona Nurse Care Manager Fiona Drury. "They might be embarrassed or not want to bother someone. But, we all need to be looking out for one another. It's like what they say, 'It takes a village!'"

1. Start a conversation.



Sometimes it's not easy knowing who or how to help. By simply introducing yourself and chatting to your neighbor when you pass them on the street — or knocking on their door and saying hello — you establish yourself as a friendly and approachable neighbor they can turn to for help.

2. Offer useful help.

Have you noticed your older neighbor lives alone, rarely leaves the house or hosts visitors, or has mobility challenges? Ask them if they need any help with simple tasks such as grocery shopping, taking in trash cans, changing lightbulbs, or collecting mail.

3. Share a meal.

Older individuals sometimes need a hand cooking meals themselves, especially if they are struggling with vision or memory loss, or mobility challenges. It's also common for older



individuals to be isolated if friends or family have passed away or no longer live nearby. A delicious home-cooked meal can lift spirits and build friendships (and provide many nutritional benefits).

4. Watch the weather forecast.



If inclement weather is predicted, check on your neighbor to ensure they have enough food, bottled water, and prescription medicine to last them through the storm, as well as flashlights and batteries. After the storm, you can also shovel for them.

5. Pay attention.

Do the lights come on at night? Have the trashcans been left on the curb for several days? Are the newspapers and mail piling up? These signs might indicate your neighbor needs help. Knock on the door to check that they are all right or call them. If they don't respond, you might consider requesting a wellness check by calling your local non-emergency police department's phone number.

6. Connect them to Iona.

If you are no longer able to provide the support your neighbor needs, have questions about their health, public benefits, or access to food, or are simply worried about their well-being, it's time to call Iona! Our Helpline specialists are available Monday – Friday from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM to answer your questions and provide resources. Call (202) 895-9448 and ask for our Helpline or email info@iona.org. 



Changing Lives (continued from page 1)

Today, Pari is safe, well-fed, and content with the many new friendships in her life. She's received cataract surgery and visited a specialist to help with her breathing. She enrolled in MetroAccess, and soon will have a home health aide to help with errands around her home, food preparation, and transportation to medical appointments.

To Pari, her connection with Liza, and Iona's larger

community, has been a true gift — and one, in her eyes, that was destined to be. "Liza is from Russia, and I am from Iran. All this time, only the Caspian Sea was between us," she jokes.

And as for her couch? A few months ago, Liza was able to provide a donated queen-sized mattress. "It's a good mattress," Pari says, grinning. "I can stretch my legs and I'm sleeping better. I really enjoy it." 

Your Gift Cards “Like Gold” for Vulnerable Clients

The holidays came early at Iona when representatives from our philanthropic partner Options for Senior America generously donated CVS gift cards for Iona social workers to distribute to low-income clients in need. Gift cards ensure that our clients can continue to lead independent lifestyles and make choices for themselves. Additionally, gift cards help free up money for other needs. Below, you’ll find just two of the many examples of how donated gift cards make a huge difference in the lives of your older neighbors.

Meet Joseph

An 81-year-old veteran, Joseph works hard to stretch his final \$100 from his Social Security check each month after paying his monthly rent. But even though he eats a simple diet of eggs (purchased only on sale), yams, and tuna fish, he still often runs out of the limited funds before the month’s end. For Joseph, gift cards to CVS — where he is able to buy food and essentials, like paper towels and toilet paper — are a true blessing.

“Gift cards are a real lifeline for our cash-strapped seniors and even \$20 worth per month makes a huge difference,” says Iona social worker Randy Smith.

Meet Russ

Russ, a 77-year-old living with congestive heart failure, was often down to his last \$30 by mid-month, after paying his rent. Not surprising, his tight budget was impacting his nutritional health. He was often so low on funds that he literally did not have enough money to buy food, especially when his limited funds went to other necessities like medicine or toilet paper. In fact, in just six months Russ had lost more than 60 pounds in weight.

Fortunately, after connecting with Iona, today he has a steady weight, a community of friends, and a good level of energy and functioning. With help from Iona’s social workers and nutritional team, Russ was enrolled in our home delivered meals program, where he regularly receives meals and liquid nutrition supplements delivered to his home. Additionally, his



Iona social worker Randy Smith (middle) poses with Delores Athey and Jorge Rivera from Options for Senior America. Last December, they surprised Iona with a generous donation of 10 CVS gift cards for Iona social workers to distribute to clients.

social worker restored his \$18.00 per month SNAP (food stamp) benefit, got free dental work on his crowns and bridges, and takes him regular deliveries from Iona’s food pantry of shelf-stable food items. Plus, with CVS gift cards, Russ no longer has to choose between spending cash on food or household items. These gift cards have also helped to free up money for bus fare so that Russ can regularly enjoy lively and enriching activities and a nutritious lunch with friends at Iona’s Active Wellness Program at St. Alban’s. ✓

Your Gift Card Donation Can Go a Long Way

Iona always welcomes gift card donations of any amount to drug and grocery stores like CVS and Giant. To donate a gift card, please bring any gift cards to Iona at 4125 Albemarle Street NW, Washington, DC 20016, where you will be asked to fill out our donation form at the front desk. If you have any questions, please call Development Manager Ann Keeler at (202) 895-9416.

“I’d Be Lost without Your Great Service”

Iona client leaves heartwarming message of thanks that will bring a smile to your face. Read it below!

In December, Iona’s Home Delivered Meals Coordinator Jakia Muhammad received a beautiful message of gratitude on her voicemail from a home delivered meals client. We were so touched by his voicemail, and wanted to share his kind words with you. He said:

“Good morning, Jakia. I’m sorry to call you so early. It’s 8:30 AM on Monday, the 12th of December. This is one of the grateful recipients of Iona’s meals. You people do such great work. I just wanted to thank you for the meals that I receive four times a week. They are delicious and nutritious, and I’m so grateful to you.

I have arthritis in both hands. I can’t do any shopping anymore because I am 95. I have heart disease, diabetes, prostate cancer, and I’m blind in my left eye. I have fallen quite a few times. I don’t know

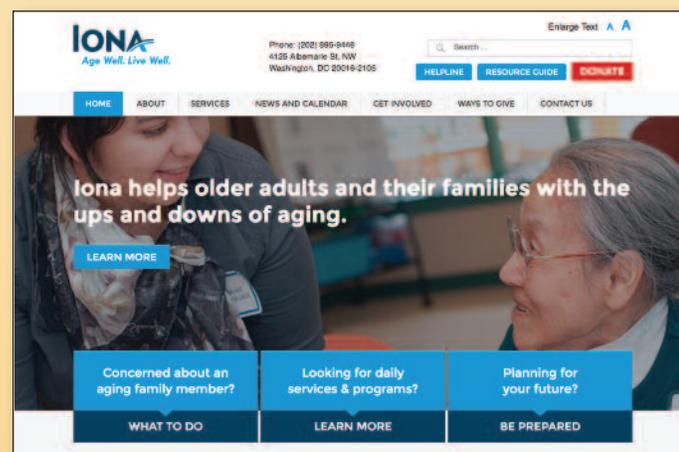


Iona staff members Ashlea Steiner and Reggie Hutchinson snap a photo before delivering meals to homebound older adults last winter. We recently received a beautiful voicemail from a client thanking us for this life-saving service.

what I would do without your meals. I want to thank you for your service, four times a week. I’d be lost without your great service and your delicious and nutritious meals. **May God continue to bless all of you. You’re wonderful, and I’m grateful to you.** Thank you so much.” 

Have you seen Iona’s new website?

You may have noticed that Iona’s website (www.iona.org) is looking different. That’s because on October 14, we launched a newly redesigned site. In addition to a new look, our digital front door has fresh content, a new navigation, and added features to ensure you and other visitors to our site can get the help you need.



As part of the new site, we are also thrilled to share Iona’s new blog. Featuring original articles written by Iona staff and other experts from our community, the blog serves as a community space to share resources, strategies, and personal stories on caregiving and aging. Read our latest posts on healthy aging, planning for your future, and more at www.iona.org/blog.

Want to Submit a Guest Post to Iona’s Blog?

Do you have practical tips on aging or caregiving, professional experience, or a personal anecdote that you would like to share with Iona blog readers? We welcome guest submissions to our blog.

Contact Communications & Marketing Manager Rosie Aquila at raqvila@iona.org to discuss your article ideas and learn more about our editorial process. 

The Lois and Richard England Gallery at Iona: Meet Our Artists!

Guest Artists Lauren Kingsland, textiles, and Liz Lescault, ceramics, share their inspiration and creative processes. Enjoy their artworks on display in the Gallery at Iona through May 23.

Q: Tell me a little about your background. When did you first start creating art?

Lauren: I have been sewing since I was a very small child. But at that point in history, it really wasn't something that could be a professional activity, especially as it was considered a traditionally-female activity. It just didn't get a lot of respect. Later in life, I saw a painting by Frank Stella. I looked at the design and the colors, and I could imagine it being sewn. I thought to myself, "If he can get in the museum for doing this kind of composition, there is no reason in the world that a quilt couldn't be in a museum." Seeing this piece encouraged me to finally see my own work as an art medium.



Kaleidoscope Quilt by Lauren Kingsland

Liz: I've been creating art as long as I can remember. As a child, I enjoyed painting and drawing. I did not pursue art as a college undergraduate, but when my husband went to graduate school at Cornell University, where they had a pottery shop, I spent most of my time hanging out at the shop developing my skills on the wheel. Working with clay soon became a passion for me.

Q: Where do you draw your inspiration?

Lauren: A trip to South India introduced me to Kolam, a women's geometrical drawing technique. I'm very interested in the intersection of body and spirit, and seeing these contemplative drawings really stuck with me. I have also been inspired by kaleidoscope, nature, and architecture.

Liz: As a child, I loved the Eskimo sculpture and Native American pottery. With my current biomorphic sculptures, I draw my inspiration primarily from the organic world. My pieces draw from coral reefs, larva, electron microscope scans, flora and fauna.

Q: Has your process changed as you've aged?

Lauren: As I've become older, I am more

comfortable not knowing how a piece is going to turn out. I let it unfold as it does. That's one of the great things of aging, you sort of let go.

Liz: I've become more playful as I've gotten older. I find myself able to be more exploratory in my life and not feel that I have to achieve certain goals, or that I have to meet certain expectations.



Helicoid by Liz Lescault

Q: What does "creative aging" mean to you?

Lauren: Creative aging is being aware that life is short, so that what I do on any given day does matter, and how I do it on any given day does matter. I've learned that creativity is not only painting, quilting, and drawing. It's how you live your life.

Liz: When I think about creative aging, I want to be able to laugh, to play, to feel good about myself. I want to accept the wrinkles.

Want to hear more from our featured artists?

Join us at Iona for these upcoming events.

Legacy Quilt Hands-on Lecture with Lauren Kingsland

Wednesday, March 22, 3:00-5:00 pm
Saturday, April 22, 10:00 am-12:00 pm
The cost of these workshops is \$25.

Meet the Artists Reception

Friday, April 7, 5:00-7:00 pm
Free. Featuring live music and delicious refreshments.

Special thanks to Sunrise on Connecticut Avenue for supporting our art events.

RSVP for any of these upcoming events by calling (202) 895-9407 or emailing pdubroof@iona.org.



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Your monthly donation helps ensure a guaranteed source of income for Iona, and for our community, to lean on for supportive and often life-saving services. It's also the best way to show Iona has your ongoing support.

With your monthly donation of \$10, \$20, or more, Iona will be able to sustain and expand our safety-net services for vulnerable older adults and caregivers in need of respite. To make a monthly donation, please visit our website at www.iona.org/donate-now and check the "Make this a monthly gift" option under Recurring Gift.

We thank you for your continued support!