

Hi Susan,

Thank you so much for reaching out and asking about On Lok. I really appreciate it.

Here is a paragraph summarizing how the funds were used, please let me know if I can add anything to help contextualize the work:

The Foundation grant enabled On Lok Senior Center staff to send nearly 2,000 New Year card mailings to members across the Delaware Valley region in order to provide encouragement to maintain mental and physical wellness during the pandemic period. The mailings included cards with artwork created by a 95-year old On Lok senior, bok choy seed packets enclosed in a lucky red envelope, and an invitation to participate in a "picture pal" snail mail program hosted by a local arts and culture organization. Over 2 months, the project became a large-scale volunteer effort, involving residents from On Lok House, local community organizations, and staff from the adjacent church helping to stuff envelopes, prepare cards for printing, and deliver batches of mail to nearby senior housing. Many seniors called to express their appreciation. Although most members of the senior center were vaccinated during the spring season, many continue to shelter in place due to fear of COVID-19 as well as rising anti-Asian sentiment which have led to verbal and physical attacks across the country, including in Philadelphia. As a result, due to the lack of technological capacity, limited English proficiency and also lack of literacy for some individuals, many seniors continue to limit their social contact and physical activity. Efforts such as the New Year cards help reassure them in difficult times and also strengthen the broader community, who affirm their commitment to the seniors.

In Philadelphia, the city has ended most COVID-19 capacity and masking restrictions, and there is a sense that residents are resuming their pre-pandemic routines. However, I notice that when I go to Chinatown, everyone still masks on the sidewalk, while in other neighborhoods, that practice is now very rare. To me, that is a symptom of the fear and distrust in the Chinese immigrant community around the efficacy of the vaccine, which affects their ability to plan for the future and keeps them in crisis mode. For seniors, as we've talked about, the fear of anti-Asian attacks has exacerbated that sense of crisis. There were reports that Asian seniors were particular targets. One of the staff told me that there was a rumor circulating that someone made a bet that for every Asian senior someone slapped, they would award some amount of money. I don't know if that's true but that is the kind of fear that is debilitating for seniors. My own conversations with my parents and in-laws now end with warnings to keep safe and be careful, which breaks my heart. While the center's programs are officially starting up again soon, according to the staff, they do not expect many people to show up.

The board is meeting tonight and I will ask them how our seniors can best be supported through this time. I will let them know that applications for the next grant cycle are coming up for the Foundation.

Sarah