



Whitney Rose is program manager for Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County.

Whitney Rose believes ‘no act is too small’ when it comes to making a difference

When Whitney Rose joined Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County as a staff member three years ago, something clicked right away.

“It was a perfect fit,” she said.

With a background in nutrition and sociology, Whitney is a registered nutrition and dietetic technician. Helping people feel better has always been important to her, and food is one way to do that.

“Food and nutrition are the bridge to community connection,” she said.

She started as a program associate, gaining experience across every part of the program, from kitchen prep to working at the dining sites and interacting with program participants. Her commitment, compassion, and dedication quickly earned her a promotion to program manager after one year.

She appreciates that her job gives her an opportunity to interact with so many people from the community and hear their experiences.

“It gives me a good window into what aging is like and what our community is going through,” she said. “It’s important to hear from them, because the older population is the fastest-growing population in Santa Cruz County and growing by the day.”

As a program manager, Whitney manages a team of people who work across a wide range of roles, including doing the assessments for people who want to receive home-delivered meals, reassessments for existing participants, prepping meals, and coordinating volunteers for home deliveries. Whitney gladly fills in wherever additional help might be needed on any given day.

One of her favorite roles to step into is connecting directly with older adults for assessments and reassessments. The opportunity always “fills my heart with joy and a glimpse into the lives of those we serve,” Whitney said.

“I see a lot of gratitude,” she added. Every program participant is so welcoming, and it is clear they build deep connections and community with the volunteers who bring them meals. The volunteers look out for participants and let program staff know if anyone could use additional support.

There is a trend of increased need right now, Whitney said. Meals on Wheels is receiving more and more applications as reduced food benefits and rising grocery prices strain fixed incomes. Unfortunately, Meals on Wheels recently had to implement its first waitlist in 50 years due to lack of funding. Volunteers help bridge the gap between funding and need by offering their time and compassion and ensuring we can be most effective with the resources we have.

“Anybody can make a difference,” Whitney said. “It is just putting yourself out there and making connections. No act is too small.”

New survey results highlight our impact



Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County ensures local seniors can thrive.

Every year, we ask for feedback from Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County participants about how we’re doing and how the program impacts their lives. The theme from the latest survey is clear: Meals on Wheels is more needed and appreciated than ever.

Across the 500 meals delivered to homes each day and the more than 200 meals served daily across our dining sites, the feedback we received is a reminder of the many ways Meals on Wheels improves the lives of older adults in our community.

It is about so much more than nutrition — it is about safety, companionship, and dignity.

People who receive meals at home shared their struggles with cooking or even getting out of the house to get groceries. Knowing nutritious meals will arrive on a regular basis is reassuring, as one participant said.

“I cannot assemble or cook food for myself consistently. It is the consistency of Meals on Wheels that matters most to me,” they added.

Home-delivered meals “are a great help in eating healthy,” and make a large impact on nutrition and overall health, another participant said.

For people who receive home-delivered meals, the program is clearly a lifeline:

- 97% are satisfied or very satisfied with the home-delivered meal service.
- 99% said the meals they receive help them stay in their home.
- 93% said the meals from Meals on Wheels are their main source of nutrition.
- 76% noted they are unable to go to a food pantry, soup kitchen, or local food distribution site.
- 84% said the meals help them eat healthier, and 75% said the meals help improve their overall health.

People who enjoy meals and companionship at dining sites also shared how vital the service is:

- 97% said they are satisfied or very satisfied with the meals at the dining site.
- 90% said eating at a dining site helps them feel less isolated.
- 83% said the meals from Meals on Wheels are their main source of nutrition.
- 94% said the meals help them eat healthier, and 93% said the meals help improve their overall health.

Dining site participants commented on the delicious meals, friendly spirit, and good company.

“This is a very nice place for community and meeting people. I very much appreciate the meals,” one person said.

The nutritious meals help them “stay focused on healthy eating,” another person noted.

We are humbled to be able to play such an important part in the lives of people across our community. We extend our deep thanks to everyone — staff, volunteers, and supporters alike — who makes this program and its profound impact possible.

News and Notes

We’re looking for volunteer drivers to help deliver meals and support local seniors. If you’ve been thinking about making a difference in your community, now is the perfect time to get involved.

[CLICK HERE](#) to apply today and start changing lives!

In the Press
Click the headlines below to read local and national news affecting county residents.

[Elderday needs 60 more people: The need exists, but the healthcare system isn’t connecting them](#)

[The Aging of Santa Cruz: The county has the fastest-growing senior citizen population in the state](#)

[Santa Cruz County jobs rebound, but housing costs, aging population remain challenges](#)

[California allocates record spending for Medi-Cal, CalFresh](#)



Make a quick sunshine salad

Oranges help brighten this tasty veggie salad. It is quick and easy to make. Top it off with your favorite vinaigrette.

Makes 5 servings.

Ingredients

- 5 cups spinach leaves (packed, washed, and dried well)
- 1/2 red onion (sliced thin)
- 1/2 red pepper (sliced)
- 1 cucumber (whole, sliced)
- 2 orange (peeled and chopped into bite-size pieces)
- 1/3 cup vinaigrette dressing

Instructions

Toss all ingredients together in a large bowl. Add dressing and toss again. Serve immediately.

Recipe from [USDA's MyPlate Kitchen](#).

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