

Reframing Aging â?? Leadership never gets old: Retired youth counselor helped families overcome â??disconnectednessâ??

Description

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Mario Martinez is not a lonely man. Heâ??s married and has four daughters, four sons-in-law and nine grandchildren. Yet the 65-year-old retired family therapist talks and thinks about loneliness quite a bit.

â??Sometimes isolation is forced upon us by health concerns, but a lot of times isolation is a choice,â?• he said. â??And if you can choose to not be alone by giving of yourself â?? whether itâ??s at a senior center or a volunteer position â?? thatâ??s a counter to aloneness.â?•

Martinez has spent years helping others. His most recent job was with the San Francisco Health Department, counseling delinquent youths and their families. â??I loved it. It was a chance to see people make positive changes.â?• Itâ??s especially gratifying, he says, when people he treated years ago recognize him on the street and tell him that their lives are now on track.


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Mario Martinez (Photo by Bill Snyder)

The scores of youths he worked with had been arrested on charges ranging from misdemeanor shoplifting to felony assault. His emphasis was on the family, teaching the parents new ways to approach their children. Helping families move into positive social relationships and getting beyond feelings of isolation and â??disconnectednessâ?• was a big part of the therapy he practiced, said Martinez, one of the five older adults featured in the cityâ??s Reframing Aging campaign.

Reframing Aging: Read the whole series.

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He retired last May and is working through the inevitable rough spots that older adults encounter when their careers end. Work, he said, offered multiple connections that need to be replaced. Shifting into retirement is especially difficult for people who have few interests beyond their work. â??Develop a life not associated with your work identity,â?• Martinez advises.

Aging does not equal loneliness

Aging should not be confused with being lonely, he said. â??I would argue that folks â?? not just the oldâ??are lonely.â?•

Like many in fitness-obsessed San Francisco, Martinez keeps track of how much he walks every day, setting a goal of 10,000 steps. Exercise is part of his commitment to self-care, but the daily regimen also fits right into his anti-loneliness focus. On a recent walk, he ducked into a Mission District donut shop to use the bathroom and quickly struck up a conversation with the owner. Now they chat regularly. â??Itâ??s another connection,â?• he said.

San Francisco can seem like a large and lonely place, but â??we make the city small by developing community,â?• Martinez said. Camping and traveling with family and neighbors is another way to establish connections. He likens social connections to a tapestry, with the individual connections, or threads, visible on the back.

Martinez said he has found a spiritual home in the City Church of San Francisco. He meets regularly with other church members and finds the companionship and willingness to help each other sustaining. â??We meet and shape and feed each other. Faith helps me build who I am.â?•

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1. All Posts

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