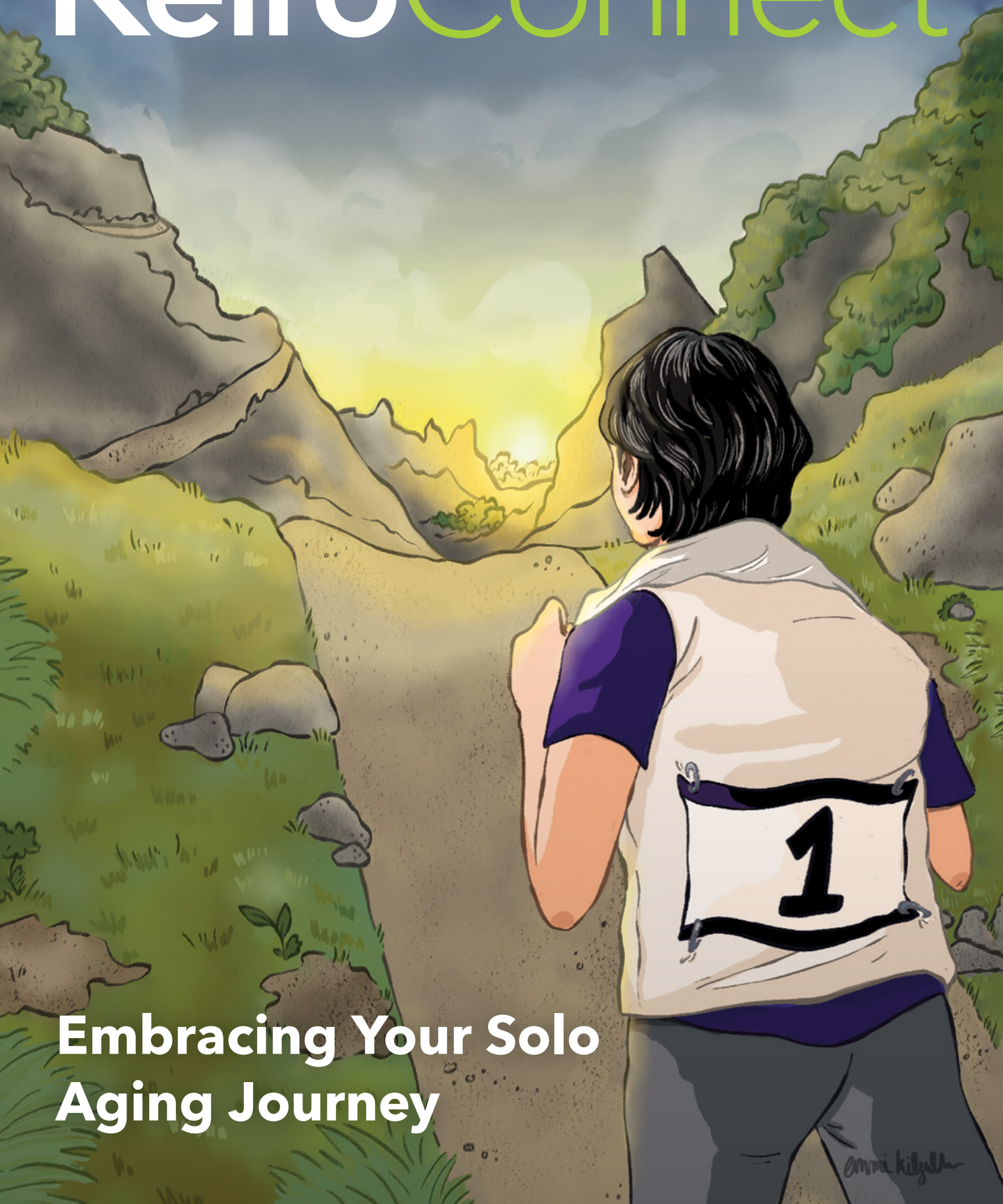


KeiroConnect



**Embracing Your Solo
Aging Journey**

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Keiro President & CEO

Welcome!

A MESSAGE FROM KEIRO PRESIDENT & CEO

In this newsletter, we are highlighting “solo agers.” Contrary to common perceptions, research shows that nearly half of all solo agers feel optimistic about their quality of life and cite the freedom of making their own decisions as the best thing about living alone.

During our lifetimes, there may be circumstances where we suddenly become solo agers, or there are many people who choose the solo aging path. We can best navigate this journey by preparing in advance and cultivating a social network of support – remembering that friends, neighbors, and the community at large can all be the circle of family that you get to choose.

As we celebrate the independence and autonomy that comes with solo aging, we also recognize the potential challenges of not having a defined social unit, such as feelings of loneliness, or fears about declining health or end-of-life care. Keiro is committed to sustaining a community-wide network of support to promote aging with confidence regardless.

I hope you draw inspiration from these featured articles and take steps to be prepared. Thank you for connecting with Keiro!

今回のニュースレターでは「ソロエイジング」に焦点を当てています。一般的な認識とは異なり、調査によると、1人で老後を過ごすほぼ半数の方が自分の生活の質について楽観的であり、1人で生活することの最良の点として、自分の意思で決定できる自由を挙げています。

人生の中で、突然独りでの老後になる状況が生じることもあれば、独りでの老後を自ら選ぶ人も多くいます。ソロエイジングには、事前に準備をし、支えとなる社会的ネットワークを築くことが重要です。友人、隣人、そしてコミュニティ全体が、自身が選択できる家族の輪であることを忘れないことが大切だと考えます。

独りでの老後に伴う独立性と自立性の一方で、定義された社会的単位がないことによる潜在的な課題、たとえば孤独感、健康の低下や終末期のケアに対する不安なども考慮する必要があります。Keiroは、どのような方も、自信を持って年齢を重ねられるよう、コミュニティ全体の支援ネットワークの維持に尽力して参ります。

特集記事から何かを感じ取り、準備を進めるきっかけになれば幸いです。Keiroとつながっていただき、ありがとうございます。

ベバリ・イトウ
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What is a Solo Ager?

There have always been older adults aging on their own, without a family and/or community support system. With the growing older population and shifts in traditional family structures, more attention has been paid to this group in recent years – who have come to be known as “solo agers.”



The definition of a solo ager varies depending on who you ask. It can be objective, typically based on an absence of family or other support. On the other hand, it can also be subjective, based on the individual’s perception of support. Or it can be a mix of both.

Most commonly, a solo ager is defined as an individual who lives alone, is not married or in a long-term relationship, and has no children.

However, this definition is not limited to someone who has never married or had children. People who previously had strong family support systems can become solo agers later in life by being divorced or widowed, or having estranged children.

As syndicated columnist, author, and expert on aging and the new retirement, Helen Dennis, explained, older adults should also be asked if they have anyone they can depend on or if they feel like they are alone at this stage of life. They may have family but are living alone and feel like they cannot rely on their relatives or ask for help.

Despite the lack of a single definition of solo aging, their needs continue to grow. According to AARP, solo agers make up anywhere from one in ten to one in four adults age 50 and older. That number is expected to increase in the coming years, necessitating the need for greater awareness and stronger community support networks.

An Act of Kindness to NOT Delay

Preparing for the future is often a daunting process. According to research, despite knowing the negative impact of not preparing, only one in three older adults in the U.S. have completed any advance care planning documents.

Keiro interviewed two aging experts: Helen Dennis, syndicated columnist, author, and expert on aging and the new retirement, and Dr. Sara Zeff Geber, a professional speaker and author specializing in retirement, aging, and solo agers.

Advance Care Planning 101

Advance care planning is the process of conversing, understanding, and documenting what your choices are should you no longer be able to make your own decisions.

Dr. Geber mentions that 70% of the population will need care at some point in their lives. She shared that advance care planning is “doing the uncomfortable work of putting yourself into that situation and finding a way to feel comfortable about your later years.”

Advance care planning can include financial, health care, and end-of-life decisions.



Unique Factors to Consider for Solo Agers

The key challenge for solo agers is figuring out who will be their medical and fiduciary proxy to make decisions on their behalf.

For those who are solo agers or anyone who is uncomfortable putting their family members as a proxy, Dr. Geber recommends professional licensed fiduciaries, who are professionals hired to be the mediators to make decisions based on the documents completed.

Helen also added the importance of having a solid network of friends and a financial plan to think about what resources they would need to continue aging in a manner of speaking.

The Best Gift to Give

Dr. Geber and Helen said preparing and having these conversations is the best gift you can give to those left behind. Helen concluded that with such a dynamic environment where things are uncertain and unpredictable on a societal level, getting these documents in place is one way we can take more control and initiative in our lives. “You’ll never have control over your mortality, but you have a high degree of influence, and there IS a way to take charge.”

To read the full article, visit keiro.org/news.

ADVANCE CARE PLANNING CHECKLIST

Here are a few documents for you to start planning. Check off the ones you have completed:

- Advance Health Care Directive
- Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)
- Living Trust
- Last Will and Testament
- Beneficiary Designations
- Durable Financial Power of Attorney
- Durable Medical Power of Attorney
- Funeral Plan

How many did you check off? For the documents you did not complete, consider taking the steps to finalize your plans.

Keiro is starting a **NEW SERIES** to encourage everyone to talk about advance care planning.



If you are interested in receiving updates about the launch of this series, sign up for our monthly email newsletter at keiro.org/newsletter.



Disclaimer: The following article follows Lori who was male assigned at birth but is transitioning to be female. Lori has asked to use she/her pronouns and her chosen name.

The Rainbow Road of Solo Aging

Solo aging can be difficult for anyone who does not have the right support system, but being a member of the queer community can pose a different set of challenges. Lori is part of the LGBTQAIAP+ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual Pansexual) community and also embraces her Japanese American heritage.

Before transitioning to female, Lori was a plumber for the city, had a wife, and lived as a man. As the years went on, the thought of being queer became more vibrant. “The first time I cross-dressed was when I was married to my then-wife. It felt comfortable and so natural.”

A New Beginning

About seven years ago, Lori posted on Facebook that she is queer. “I was just so nervous about what the reaction would be. It turns out I got nothing but support, especially from some of my close friends that I talked to.” A friend then recommended that Lori attend a meeting at Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute hosted by *Okaeri*, a Japanese-American LGBTQAIAP+ group, which was one of the best decisions she has made.

Freedom of Expression

Lori was able to connect with both her Japanese American heritage and the queer community through *Okaeri*. She eventually became a member of the Alhambra chapter of *PFLAG*, which is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, their families, and allies. “Retirement was the best thing that ever happened. I’m a whole different person. I was putting up a brave front for years, but inside I was super pissed. But that’s all gone now.” Being a solo ager and a person who identifies as queer is a difficult journey, but with the right support and people around, it might feel more like home than before.

To read the full article, visit keiro.org/news.



Solo Ager Support Through Iyashi Care

Disclaimer: Model in photo is not an Iyashi Care patient

One of the common demographics that the Iyashi Team serves is solo agers. Keiro spoke with Yuichi Edwin Yanami, MD, and Kanako Fukuyama, LCSW, MSW, to gain insight on how Iyashi Care can support solo agers as they navigate serious or chronic illness.

Common Situations of Iyashi Care Solo Agers

Although most solo ager Iyashi Care patients are not truly alone, many of them lack a traditional support system. Much of their extended family lives a significant distance away, in other states, or even in Japan, which means they cannot necessarily support the patient in ways that are needed. “Solo agers in our program reach out to us because they’re worried about their future, especially because many of them want to stay at home as long as possible. I would say they’re more aware that they’re on their own, and they are worried about what might happen to them,” Kanako explained.

Building Trust and Providing Support

In the initial visit with an Iyashi Care doctor, the team establishes a relationship of trust with the patient by asking questions about their medical history, support system, and more. Based on this, the team will help identify areas that the patient can work on to improve their quality of life.

Getting Creative with Your Support System

Additionally, the Iyashi Care team can help patients with defining their support system and connecting with others. Dr. Yanami said, “No matter what we may believe, we should not be ending our lives alone... A lot of patients say that they don’t want to be *meiwaku* [bothersome or trouble]. However, I tell them, ‘I’m sure you’ve helped many people in the past, and now it’s time for you to receive help.’ And Iyashi Care is here to help provide that support.”

To read the full article, visit keiro.org/news.



For more information about Iyashi Care, contact us at **213.873.5791** or programs@keiro.org.

John's Take: A Conversation with a Nikkei Widower

"Til Death Do Us Part" – Words that most people have heard or have said themselves when exchanging a vow with their loved ones. But as we age with our partner, the conversation of what will happen when one of us passes looms over our shoulders.

In this episode of *John's Take*, a podcast by Keiro, John spoke to Warren, a member of the Japanese American support group, *Continuing Education for the Nikkei Widowed*.



Disclaimer: The following article talks about terminal illness, death, and grief. Although Warren does not fit the definition of a solo ager, he lives his life independently without help.

"When we joined the cancer support group, that really helped. Talking to other people who are experiencing the same thing really helps."

- Warren



Battle with Cancer

John: Where did you meet your wife?

Warren: I started working at a start-up company in Anaheim and that is where I met her. But she came down with lung cancer in 2016. After we got married, we were planning to do our honeymoon in Taiwan. We planned it but never got to do it.

John: So she was diagnosed and it was very rapid?

Warren: It was a routine check-up and this time they decided to do a chest x-ray. If they didn't do the x-ray, then we would not have known.

John: How did you cope with it?

Warren: We went to a support group and she also did immunotherapy. That worked for a couple of years, but in her last year, it didn't work anymore. She was about to do this clinical trial but she didn't feel good. Friday she went in and Saturday she said she didn't feel right. Sunday she became paralyzed.

New Journey as a Solo Ager

John: So after your wife passed, how was that transition of being on your own?

Warren: Grief didn't affect me that badly compared to other people. Torrance Memorial was pretty good. I thought that it was good that they had that support.

John: When did you get involved with *Continuing Education for the Nikkei Widowed*?

Warren: A year after my wife's passing, my cousin asked, "Why don't you come and join the group?" We meet once a month and there is good fellowship and we get together, eat, and tell stories. It has helped.

John: What advice do you have for someone who may be experiencing what you have gone through?

Warren: I would say to join a support group. When we joined the cancer support group, that really helped. Talking to other people who are experiencing the same thing really helps.

To listen to Warren's full story, visit keiro.org/news.

Embracing Purpose as a Retired Solo Ager

With the curveballs of his career plus being a solo ager and key member of the Little Tokyo community, Mike Okamura has led a unique and impactful life journey embracing purpose. In reflection, Mike shared that he's "living in the moment and enjoying every day. A new day is not guaranteed, so I embrace it as a gift."



Finding New Purpose

After working in banking for 41 years, Mike felt that his life's purpose was not being fulfilled and decided to retire in 2021.

He continued volunteering at Japanese American National Museum (JANM), became president of the Little Tokyo Historical Society, and also volunteered at the 2024 Keiro no Hi Festival. Along with his vast community involvement, Mike explored other hobbies, and started to work at a local restaurant, Azay.

Change in Plans

Shortly after retiring, Mike put his plans and hobbies on hold to take care of his parents. Mike's family was able to hire an in-home caregiver for his father, and his mother was also able to utilize Iyashi Care. After both of his parents passed away, Mike continued to attend Keiro's annual Caregiver Conference and currently leads an informal caregiver support group that he started at JANM for volunteers and staff.

The Solo Ager Journey

Mike has built a strong support system for himself with his church community, members of the caregiver support group, and other solo agers. One of Mike's biggest concerns as a solo ager is being able to pass on his family stories, but he is grateful he can share his family heritage with his nephews and family.

The Next Steps

Mike always had his eye on temporarily moving back to Japan, and now that he has more time, he is working on making that dream come true. "There are all these doors in front of me that I can go through and try out... I want to experience things that I will enjoy."

To read the full article, visit keiro.org/news.

"A new day is not guaranteed, so I embrace it as a gift."

- Mike Okamura

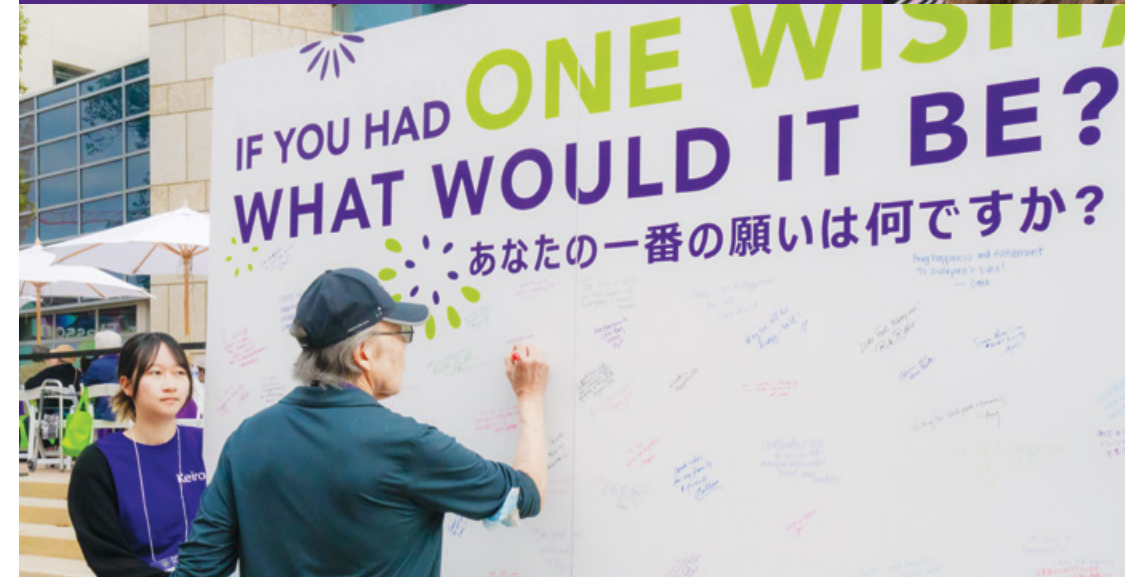


SEPTEMBER 21, 2024

KEIRO NO HI FESTIVAL

Keiro hosted its seventh Annual Keiro no Hi Festival at the Japanese American National Museum in Little Tokyo. Over 600 attendees and volunteers enjoyed live entertainment, a bento lunch, wishing wall, polaroid photobooth, and reconnecting with others.

To view more highlights of the festival visit keiro.org/news.



Support Keiro Today!

Keiro provides a variety of culturally-sensitive services and programs and is adapting to meet the current community needs. However, we cannot do it alone! Your contribution supports much-needed services and resources for older adults and caregivers.

Make a gift today by visiting keiro.org/support or by using the envelope provided in this publication.





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Saturday, March 15, 2025

East San Gabriel Valley Japanese Community Center (ESGVJCC)

Registration opens Monday, January 6, 2025

More information: keiro.org/CC25

Caregiver Conference South Bay - Coming Fall 2025