A Sense of Belonging Inspires Us All

“OHI is the family you get to choose for yourself.”
Meet Jana Peterson, p3.

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Belonging to a Community Is What Unites Us All

Warm autumn greetings to you, our OHI community.

I love this verse because it says so much about what we are doing here at OHI. People come here seeking a new healthy and healing lifestyle, and then while here they find a community to which they can belong. They no longer feel alone because they have bonded with others in a way that transcends the week or weeks they spend here.

You may recall that in our Spring newsletter, I mentioned that the OHI Community is the one place I’ve experienced where people truly work to love their neighbors as themselves. A sacred practice which many major religions espouse. Then in the Summer newsletter, I touched on the idea that community is so important to human beings that it is in our DNA. In his famous hierarchy of human needs, Abraham Maslow put “Belonging” at the third level. It includes needs such as acceptance, feeling supported and understood, having relationships and friendships. When these needs aren’t being met, we feel rejected, neglected, and lonely.

It is this need to belong, that I want to expand on here.

The Need to Belong Is a Primal Force

For our ancestors, it was the difference between living and dying. Belonging to a community was integral to survival. That hasn’t changed all that much since then. Of course, we are no longer threatened by saber tooth tigers, but our mental health is wholly dependent on belonging. It’s easy in today’s busy society to miss opportunities to connect with our fellow humans. Then, if or when, we run into some difficulty, perhaps we suffer a loss or find ourselves stressed at work, we don’t have that support person we need. Suffering alone seems to make any problem worse, and if it continues it can even be harmful to our health.

According to the July 2012 Journal of the American Medical Association, living alone increases your risk of heart disease by 24%. (1) This is true because people who lack a social support group are more susceptible to the effects of stress. And, being alone can lead to loneliness which in turn can lead to depression. Belonging can defeat depression. A study in 2009 at Colorado State University found that mild to moderate depression can be alleviated more effectively by social interaction than by a prescription antidepressant. (2)

Making Genuine Connections Is the First Step in Belonging

What we need is more one-on-one, in-person communication. When I was young, a wise older man told me, “You need to have a belly-to-belly conversation if you want true talk.” At the time, I thought he was just trying to be funny, but it turns out that science supports his approach. It’s called the Belly Button Rule. According to Dr. Albert Mehrabian, professor Emeritus of Psychology at UCLA, when you are engaged in a conversation with someone and the two of you are genuinely interested in the topic and each other, you will point your navels at each other. Observe people talking in public sometime, and you’ll see that this is true. You’ll see people facing each other, even making eye contact, but their hips will be turned away from each other. Those people are not really interested in the other person or what they are saying. Here at OHI, I see lot people leaning in to each other having genuine conversations.

‘Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.’ Romans 15:7
Belonging begins with acceptance. Accepting others, as well as, being accepted. According to Karyn Hall, PhD in Psychology Today, “One of the best ways to communicate acceptance is through validation. Validation builds a sense of belonging and strengthens relationships.”

How Belonging to the OHI Community Begins

Guests who have gone through our program many times described to me how the belonging process occurs. They say that it’s a learning journey of coming into wellness and wholeness. You start out on a path that is both a collective effort but with individualized objectives. It begins with detoxing, fasting and following a strict diet, with a wonderfully supportive group around you.

You find yourself sharing things that are more intimate than anything you’ve ever shared before. I’ve told complete strangers here at OHI more about myself than I’ve told my loved ones.

People even say, “I can’t believe I’m telling you this.” It’s an emotional outlet that enables people to feel and share their emotions.

Everyone is exuding this positive energy. This release of energy helps you transform. You feel, “I don’t want to leave this place” because there is a sense of safety while at OHI. And, the people you meet - many will become lifelong friends. You build friendships that last for years because you let your guard down and felt free to share your most intimate concerns. The next time you feel stressed, you might want to pick up the phone and call one of your OHI friends. A study conducted at UCLA in May of 2000 by Shelley Taylor (3) uncovered a third response to stress (after fight or flight). The researchers called this response Tending and Befriending. Tending is any nurturing activity that protects someone and makes them feel safe. The act of sharing what’s going on with you will have a calming effect.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

Each week when people attend our program there is a great balance in the community as some people return for a second, third, or fourth week. These returning guests help the newer up-and-comers by sharing helpful tips and how-to’s that enable them to quickly assimilate into the OHI culture and community. Veteran guests understand - physically and emotionally - what the first weekers are experiencing and, by giving them a hand up, help them achieve their goals and their sense of belonging even faster.

I have found that when you have a sense of belonging, you want to give back or pay it forward. It’s not only lending a helping hand but also a sharing of wealth. So, as you enjoy your Autumn, and refine your sense of community and belonging, we ask that you remember us when you plan your year-end donations.

Yours in prayer,

Robert P. Nees, Jr.,
Senior Pastor and Chairman
Optimum Health Institute of
San Diego and Austin

Stay Connected with your OHI cohort, share contact info before you leave:

Join OHI Facebook pages for San Diego and Austin.

Start a Facebook Group Page for your cohort.

Share food videos.

Keep writing “Daily Gratiutudes.”

Pledge to support your “Buddies.”

As your transformation grows arrange to return to OHI with your friends from your cohort.
Missionary Heals Her Past, Embraces Her Future

Jana Peterson first learned about OHI in 1992, when her Godfather returned from a 2-week stay, “Thirty pounds lighter in body and about a million times lighter in spirit,” Jana said. He never regained the weight, and frequently credited his spiritual experience at OHI San Diego mission for having a transformational impact. When she was dealing with systemic candida a decade ago, she decided to try OHI’s holistic healing program for herself. It worked beautifully, Jana said, but a string of traumas and stresses in the intervening years triggered the symptoms all over again, along with leaky gut, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and chronic fatigue. “I was ‘life paralyzed’ my brain stopped working, and I couldn’t process or leave the house,” Jana said. “The prospect of brushing my teeth seemed akin to climbing Mount Everest, and I was completely out of resources.”

It was at that point her landlord, a frequent OHI guest, became concerned. He suggested she consider applying for the 3-month missionary program, and told her he would even let her out of her lease if she was accepted. Jana immediately applied, and was approved. She sold her car and took her 22-lb Maine Coon cat, Mongo, to stay with her best friend. The healing transformations began for her body, mind and spirit.

Jana said that the bonds missionaries develop with guests are extraordinary. “It’s everything,” she said. “There is this unexplainable kind of sacred intimacy, a real trust and love that transpires between people in a week’s time and it’s totally authentic. I have shared things with people here I have never shared with another living soul. “People who find themselves in a physical, emotional or spiritual crisis can turn to OHI. Everything in the program works in conjunction, and I don’t know how it would be possible to find better community than what we share at OHI.”

“This is the happiest and most at peace I have ever been,” she said, “and if it were not for my OHI community, I would not be here. It’s natural to look at someone who is always smiling and assume they are the happiest person ever. But some of the kindest people hold the most pain.”

“I had cut myself off from a world that just seemed too unbearable, and I lost all sense of connection and community. I also lost sight of how thoughtful and beautiful people can really be. My OHI community constantly reminds me of this with their unflinching support, love and validation. OHI is the family you get to choose for yourself.”

“My every waking moment has purpose,” Jana said.

It’s not just the mental, emotional and spiritual parts of her that are coming into balance.

“I have lost a considerable amount of inflammation in my body,” Jana continued. “My joints are starting to heal and I am gaining flexibility. My stomach no longer feels like I ate a steady diet of shrapnel. I feel safe. I can remember things. The only tears I cry here and often are tears of gratitude and joy.”

The OHI missionary program is a volunteer extension program for those who have graduated from the OHI holistic healing program and desire to continue on a spiritual path to heal themselves and others. Missionaries immerse themselves in the healing process 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We encourage those with a heart for service to apply.
Staff Spotlight

Meet Alaina Gallegos, Facilitator OHI San Diego

Q: Tell me how you found out about OHI and became involved.
My favorite aunt, Evangeline, runs the spa. She is calming to be around, and I noticed that OHI had a peaceful feeling. I got a Masters degree in Public Health, and I worked in clinical settings but it wasn’t satisfying. Then one day I saw an ad for OHI and was attracted to working here. Facilitating across week 1, 2 and 3 is inspiring.

Q: Tell me about your most memorable experience working at OHI.
Each week during testimonials, guests open up, and share their vulnerable side. I see a transformation within them, and a light shining through them that is amazing.

Q: What does community mean to you?
Community to me is a group of people with whom you can be your true genuine self.

Q: What inspires you?
Outside of OHI, what inspires me is traveling, living abroad, living creatively, and not necessarily doing what society tells me. Inside of OHI, I find inspiration every day. People are bold about their health. We have many talented people that have challenged their limits, and created something out of visualization and living intentionally. I’m inspired by the faith that people have; how they are connecting with their spirituality; the trust they put in God, and that God is going to heal them.

Q: What creates the feeling of belonging among guests at OHI?
Guests often state that they feel at home when they are here, which means they are free to be themselves without judgment, to let their guard down. People from all walks of life form bonds with each other.

Q: Tell me about some of the classes you teach here, and what makes them important.
Focus 1 and 2 is a two part class. What we do is create balance for people when they leave here. How they can make changes in their day. How to prioritize one or two things from the program that they can implement at home. They share their goals with each other, and they feel inspired. It’s an emotional time, and a bond is formed among them because they’re sharing their most intimate desires.

Pray Eat Live, is one of our food prep classes. It really brings everything together from our food program. Guests learn recipes for a maintenance lifestyle. This class is like a party, it’s a celebration of health with lots of laughter and fun.

Q: How do you see the OHI program becoming integrated across body-mind-spirit?”
A lot of guests, before their first time here, mostly think about the physical, but once they are here, they discover the emotional and spiritual blocks that can impede their healing. When feeling connected is not met, we turn to toxic foods and relationships. Here guests have time to reflect and find the root cause which is emotional. They realize they can’t get over these blocks on their own until they connect to spirit. Guests let go of deep anger and past hurt in our Release Ceremony. They realize with God the impossible becomes possible.

Q: How does the program help people in everyday life?
People leave here with renewed sense of hope. They have control of their health and life. They know their life is dictated by their decisions. They learn to question their relationships, and how they are spending their time and with whom. It helps with their thoughts, not going down that negative cycle. They have control of their lives. We remind people to pray daily and have gratitude. These tools make a big difference.

Q: What are your favorite parts of San Diego?
I’m a surfer, so my first inclination is to say the beach. There are also amazing hiking trails. Any place I can connect to nature like Cowles Mountain.

Alaina Gallegos

“Guests let go of deep anger and past hurt in our Release Ceremony.”
Power of Community

Science Says: How Belonging to Community Helps

There is great value in belonging to something greater than yourself, no matter whether you define “community” as your friends, your church group, your book club, or your PTA. At OHI, we strive to build a culture of inclusivity and acceptance. We have always believed that a supportive sense of community has tangible health benefits, and now science is validating that theory.

So how is a community created? In a recent NY Times Article titled “We Aren’t Built to Live in the Moment,” authors Martin E.P. Seligman and John Tierney postulate that the one thing that sets humans apart from animals is our ability to contemplate the future. It is that forward thinking that allows us to build communities together. (1) “It is increasingly clear,” write Seligman and Tierney, “that the mind is mainly drawn to the future, not driven by the past. We learn not by storing static records, but by continually retouching memories and imagining future possibilities.” Perhaps the most remarkable supporting evidence of this theory comes from recent brain imaging research. When recalling a past event, the hippocampus (a major brain component) must combine three distinct pieces of information — what happened, when it happened, and where it happened — that are each stored in a different part of the brain. Researchers have found that the same circuitry is activated when people imagine a future possibility. It is this ability to envision a positive community that sets us on a path to create it.

One central role of OHI’s non-judgmental community is to foster a forward-looking attitude, projecting oneself or visualizing oneself in the future. This is reinforced by the “visualization activity” in our Saturday Vision Boards class, so once you get clarity on what you want out of life, the vision boards help lead you down a path to attain it in the future.

So how do we choose whom we build our community with? Daniel Levitin, psychology professor at McGill University

“When I first came here, I was very prickly. Each week, week after week, OHI opened me up, on so many levels, especially my heart.”

“I came for a simple cleanse, and ended up staying for three weeks. After each week that I stayed, my physical and emotional release was overwhelming.”
and author of *This is Your Brian on Music*, hypothesizes that feelings of belonging and mood elevation are biologically ingrained to surface with a shared communal activity. (2) Levitin focuses on the example of singing in a choir as the ideal communal activity, and points to a wealth of neurological research that suggests our brains release oxytocin when we sing with others. “Oxytocin is believed to give rise to feelings of togetherness and friendship,” Levitin said. In addition, when singing with others the brain sees an uptick in two powerful neurotransmitters — serotonin and dopamine. Dopamine activates the brain’s pleasure center, while serotonin is commonly deployed to ward off depression.

Of course, this research doesn’t mean everyone should join a choir. At OHI, our Vocal Toning class and Friday Night Live can foster the same sense of community as singing. We’ve been ahead of the curve all along!

Now, once you’ve visualized your community and found a shared activity that brings you together, what happens to your community when life deals you a crisis? In a recent NY Times article titled “Women’s Friendships in Sickness and in Health,” author Deborah Tannen theorizes that the silver lining in the dark cloud of serious illness is the help and caring offered by friends. In her book, *You’re the Only One I Can Tell: Inside the Language of Women’s Friendships,* Tannen reminds people that a whole host of cultural influences — ethnicity, geographic region, class and family styles — all affect how we show caring. (3) “When fear of saying or doing the wrong thing tempts you to say or do nothing, it may help to remember that just reaching out can mean the world,” she says.

OHI’s non-judgmental community helps you let go of fears. Our Emotional Detox class, Focus 2 class, and Release Ceremony allow you to cleanse yourself of ideas, feelings, or worries that are holding you back from living your best life. The supportive OHI community surrounds you when you’re most vulnerable, and says, “Welcome. We’ve been waiting for you!”

Find your community at OHI. You’ll be a better person for it!


“During an Alpha, I remembered what I was like when I was 5, and realized I didn’t love myself. After 3 weeks, I learned to love myself again.”
Heard at Testimonials

The Wisdom of Our Guests

“Giving is my green light from God”
- Louise H.

“Helping others turns my wounds into wisdom”
- Charlie G.

“The more I give to others, the more there is to celebrate”
- Emerson D.

“I need my Helper’s High, so I help, help, help”
- Phyllis S.

“I can’t be always-on 24/7 and sometimes I gotta be on 24/7 unless I give 365. I’m better and balanced after I give.”
- Riley C.

“I ground myself by giving”
- Oakley C.

“Giving is my own ripple effect”
- Dave S.

“I can’t afford not to give”
- Dakota H.

“Helping others is my everyday endorphin”
- Samantha P.

“Helping others is more important than money”
- Sarah A.

“Giving for me is selfish, when I give - I just feel better”
- Sandy W.

“I try to help someone every day, so I can be happier everyday”
- Alexis F.

“Helping is my happy place”
- Barb F.

“As a third weeker, many times over, OHI has given so much to me. Me giving is me living.”
- Eden P.
When one receives a daunting health opportunity, having a strong support system is key. For Gina Klingelhoets of Phoenix, who had just been diagnosed with breast cancer, that encouragement first came from her boss. She connected Gina with a holistic wellness coach, who urged her to check out Optimum Health Institute (OHI).

A former body builder, Gina had always been conscious of what she ate. She was interested in how OHI offered her not just nutritional support, but classes and fellowship opportunities to nourish her mind, emotions and spirit.

The next wave of support came from Gina’s mother, even though the two had grown apart over the years. Her mom totally supported her OHI decision, and signed up for a week, as well. They made the 6-hour drive to OHI together, and shared a room—and a bathroom.

Her first day at OHI, Gina discovered still another support system. Initially she found the welcoming nature of the OHI community, in her words, “A little bit alarming!” Gina had been a medical researcher, which can be a pretty solitary pursuit. Finding herself in the center of a group of people who warmly welcomed her into conversations and activities at first stretched her outside her comfort zone. Being embraced by the community was a big deal for her, and she soon blossomed into really enjoying and appreciating the closeness.

Her inner “science nerd”—again, her words!—loved learning the biology of the holistic 3-week program. The classes also made her realize she had been ignoring her emotional and spiritual health.

When her application was accepted and she received the gift of the second and third week, Gina said she felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders. The extra time gave her the healing opportunity to be more forgiving with herself, and become a “recovering perfectionist.” Besides helping Gina bring a healthier balance to her life in body, mind and spirit, OHI transformed her relationship with her mom. She is SO grateful for her scholarship, and said it’s already made a huge difference in every possible way.

As a reminder OHI’s mission is to transform lives, which we do through our Scholarship Program. In many small and large ways you can help us provide more Scholarships to people like Gina, for example buying gifts for your friends through The Optimum Health Store generates proceeds for the OHI Scholarship Fund.

The Greatest Gift of Love is Giving the Gift of Healing

Scholarship Recipient Transforms Body, Mind and Spirit

Gina K’s amazing comeback over Breast Cancer

Scholarship Recipient Transforms Body, Mind and Spirit

Three Ways to Give

1. Donate by mail:
   Use the newsletter donation envelope
2. Donate online:
   www.optimumhealth.org
3. Donate by phone:
   Call (800) 993-4325

The OHI Scholarship Fund was established to help those who have a life threatening health opportunity and require financial assistance. The OHI community relies on acts of kindness and generosity to support those in need.

Thanks to your support last year, we were able to provide 94 scholarships. Our overarching goal for 2018 is to raise $500,000 in scholarship funds. You can give the gift of healing for those who are ill and in need by supporting the OHI Scholarship Fund by making a:

• One-Time Donation
• Sustainable Monthly Contribution

Optimum Health Institute is a non-profit, religious organization. Your donation is tax deductible.
We Sit with Kristi Overgaard

Kristi Overgaard

Introducing OHI guest, Kristi Overgaard. She is Chief Brand, Culture, and Awesomeness Officer at Switch Ltd. Switch designs, builds, and operates the most technologically advanced and highest-rated colocation data centers in the world. Kristi champions the initiative to ensure that the world’s extraordinary, beneficial technology advances will always serve a beautifully, human-centric and planet-friendly world.

Kristi enjoys her roles in making a difference for her immediate community as well as the community beyond Las Vegas. She is on the steering committee and serves as the marketing chair for the Downtown Las Vegas Alliance, an organization that is integral in the redevelopment of the downtown area. She is a Board Trustee and vice chair for Nevada State College. She revels in her role on the Board of Trustees for the Nevada Museum of Art located in Reno, Nevada. Finally, she is a Champion Advisor for Dazzle Africa, a nonprofit focused on wildlife conservation and education in Zambia.

Q. How did you hear about OHI?
I have an amazing life coach that recommended OHI based on some of her other clients’ experiences. I let her know that nothing was more important than my health, and it was time for a complete reset. Her response was, “OHI.”

Q. How did you feel both before and after your first visit?
Before: I felt overweight, stressed, lethargic, and exhausted. I had joint pains, and I started avoiding stairs and standing for long periods of time. I felt double my age.
After: I felt light, rested, cleansed, grateful, energized, alive, and healthy. People said I looked like I was glowing. That’s because I was!

Q. What is the biggest change you’ve noticed in yourself since OHI?
I think I’ve changed in four ways: 1. I pay even closer attention to the purity of food, products, and people in my life. 2. I remember now to actually take downtime for me. 3. I dropped 18 pounds, and intend to keep it off. 4. I learned the benefit of taking a completely technology break. It is beautiful!

Q. What OHI class has had the most impact on you?
Vocal Toning was the greatest gift. The classes in Focus 1 and 2 were life changing as well. I also incorporated the daily workouts into my life outside of OHI.

Q. Did you find it difficult to open up and be vulnerable the first time you came to OHI?
No. I found it to be very freeing and engaging.

Q. How has your diet changed since you first came to OHI?
I became a vegan again, and focused on a 70% raw diet. I really love the water and raw apple cider vinegar that replaced my coffee routine. I enjoy live, fresher food, and I am mindful of combinations.

Q. What keeps you balanced and centered in a demanding job where you’re required to always be “on”?
I start every day with meditation, and connect with my purpose regularly to keep on track. I also really believe in the mission.

“Dazzle Africa” water well dedication
Q. What are your thoughts on “belonging to community,” and what positive aspects do they add to your life? How does your sense of “belonging” change with the different communities that you belong to?

I think being a part of a community is central to being a healthy human. My communities vary greatly, and provide unique values to my life. My occupational community gives me mission, acknowledgment, results, and resources. Dazzle Africa feeds my spirit, and allows me to make a difference on the planet. That means more to me than anything else. The arts and education are the two items that I want to see walk hand-in-hand to change the way we view workforce development and life-long learning. Our communities are where we design ourselves and feed ourselves. Belonging and tribal centers are cures in themselves.

Q. Did your OHI re-set take your work-related creativity to a new level?

My reset was about work-life balance, and ensuring that no matter how much I make a difference in my role at work, I still need downtime for me.

Q. Once you’ve put in the hard work to re-set at OHI, does that provide you with a clarity and a confidence back in the working world?

There was a clarity and a calm that centered me for any and all external interactions that I experienced even in the airport on the way home. The real world was not the same as our cozy OHI bubble, but I was able to navigate confidently in my new Zen swagger!

Q. What was the thing that most surprised you about OHI?

The most surprising thing was the people. I fell in love with the people, made life-long relationships, experienced deep and immediate connections, recognized soul relations. What surprised me most about myself was how ready and committed I was to be there. I was never scared or uncomfortable. I was small and silent, but open and attentive. I didn’t look at emails or texts the entire time, and I absolutely loved that part!

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“I need downtime for me.”

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Be Ready for the Holidays

Take time to reset, lose weight and glow.

**OHI San Diego:**
- Save $100 on your room and receive up to 2 free colonics (total value up to $300 per week) when you stay in one of our premium, select single-occupancy rooms (Garden rooms, Courtyard rooms, Bungalows, or Poolside Townhouse rooms).

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- Pay a flat rate of $1,555 (savings of $240 per week) when you stay in a private, single-occupancy room (Queen bed, Adjoining bath).

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Visit our weekly Open House every Sunday starting at 4:00 p.m. in San Diego and Austin. The OHI Program offers visitors, guests and adherents a personal tour of the facility, lecture, prayer circle and an all raw vegan meal. A $3 donation is appreciated, but not required.

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We’d love to hear from you. To receive special offers and updates, email us at newsletter@optimumhealth.org or call us at (800) 993-4325. For more information about the OHI Program, please visit our website at www.optimumhealth.org

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Reset, lose weight and glow.
See inside on Page 10 for details,
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We serve as a change agent for holistic healing by creating a safe and sacred space.

Core Values
Holism, Generosity, Relationship, Life-Long Learning, Stewardship and Service.

Guiding Principles
Trustworthiness, Respect, Empowerment and Alignment.