

Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council: Then and Now

Written by: Nancy Lim-Yee

One day in the early part of 1995, in the midst of my studies in the School of Social Work at San Francisco State University, a social work friend named Janice approached me with a special request. While attending the annual National Association of Social Workers (NASW) California State Conference, she noticed a paucity of Asian Pacific Islander (API) social work attendees. At the conference, Janice had an opportunity to meet and talk with Janlee Wong, executive director of the California Chapter of NASW, about her concern regarding the lack of API representation at the State Conference. Wong acknowledged her concern and offered to support any efforts to establish an API social work network. Since Janice knew that I had some experience with community organizing, her special request was for me to help organize a meeting of Bay Area API social workers.

Thus, the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council originated from a group of San Francisco Bay Area API social workers who began meeting in May 1995 over their concerns about the potentially devastating effects of the social-political climate on ALL people of color, especially socially/economically vulnerable APIs. Specific issues of concern were the Contract "on" America, immigration, affirmative action (including the "Glass Ceiling"), cultural diversity and competency, and managed care.

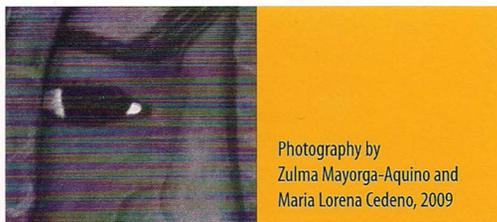
Wong was invited to that first meeting to present ideas about specific activities a coalition of API social workers could pursue to advocate for social, economic and legal justice for APIs on a local, state,

and national level. While there was already an existing Asian/Pacific Council of California NASW based in Southern California, Wong extended his support for the evolution of an API social workers group in the Bay Area. Subsequent to several meetings held in San Francisco community agencies, the group of Bay Area social workers met again with Wong in October 1995. At the meeting, the Bay Area API group voted unanimously to adopt the Asian/Pacific Council role, as part of California NASW, and to assume leadership responsibilities for Northern California.

At its first official meeting in December 1995 in San Francisco, the group decided to adopt the name of Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council and began plans to formally advocate for API concerns through the media (e.g. see Opinion, "Unsocial Services" in Asian Week, February 16, 1996).

The mission of the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council (APISWC) is to advance the social issues of Asian Pacific Islander populations through advocacy, consciousness building, education, and political action. The primary objectives and purposes of the APISWC are:

- To solidify the Asian Pacific Islander social work identity through the provision of professional and personal support;
- To promote Asian Pacific Islander issues through a collective, professional organization, including these areas of focus;
- To utilize the media and to collaborate with other organized groups to advocate for API community issues/concerns;
- To influence social policies at the local, state and national levels (e.g. elections, letter-writing campaigns);



Photography by
Zulma Mayorga-Aquino and
Maria Lorena Cedeno, 2009

"The Women's Building Mural", located on 18th Street between Guerrero and Valencia, San Francisco, CA.

- to encourage schools of social work to establish policies of recruitment (i.e. faculty, administrators, students), curriculum development, and field work opportunities that are responsive to API concerns;
- To improve and expand the delivery of culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services to the Asian Pacific Islander population; and
- To provide input to the National Association of Social Workers in order to help shape public policies.

In addition to its mission and its main goals, the APISWC has accomplished much during the past 13 years of its existence. These include:

- Sponsoring informative workshops addressing issues relating to social justice, mental health, health, cultural competency, and advocacy;
- Mentoring social work students and new social work practitioners;
- Providing a forum for the exchange of relevant information among social work practitioners, including hosting a delegation of social work administrators and dignitaries from China;
- Participating in and supporting the work of the national organization, NASW;
- Participating in legislative advocacy on the state level;
- Advocating for culturally and linguistically appropriate services in the various API communities;
- Creating the "Milestones" document which chronicles the contributions of Asian social workers during the past 100 years;

- Supporting candidates and legislation that promote the welfare of API communities; and
- Developing our very own website <http://sites.google.com/site/apiswcgroup/> to reach out to API social workers.

Then: A small handful of social workers organizing to form a group

Now: Several hundred social work practitioners and social work students making up the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." And this has indeed been the case with the formation of the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council. It started out with a small group of social workers who were committed to addressing the needs of API communities in order to create positive change. This small group has now grown to include several hundred social workers who advocate on behalf of and together with disenfranchised API populations. The Council will continue to grow and thrive as it forges on with its mission.

At one of the early Council meetings that was held, Janlee Wong listed the following approaches one can take to actively participate in social issues, ranging from the least amount of time to a great deal of time:

1. **Be aware of the issues.** NASW provides vast amounts of information through its newsletters, bulletins, and the World Wide Web.
2. **Being aware of the issues, let people know how you feel** and give them a new framework to rethink their biases that discriminate against



Nancy Lim-Yee

Nancy Lim-Yee received her M.S.W. degree from San Francisco State University in 1996. She is a licensed clinical social worker and is currently the program director at the Chinatown Child Development Center (CCDC). CCDC is a children's mental health clinic of the SF Dept. of Public Health, Community Behavioral Health Services division. She has been providing mental health services to children, youth, and their families for the past 34 years. Nancy has always been active in the community and currently serves on a number of Boards and committees. These include: First 5 San Francisco Children and Families Commission; Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Council; Kai Ming Head Start; St. Mary's Chinese Language School and Poi Yuk Foundation; Portsmouth Plaza Parking Corporation; API Health Parity Coalition; and Association for Chinese Families of the Disabled. She is the co-founder of the Association for Chinese Families of the Disabled, a parent support and advocacy organization for Chinese families who have children with disabilities. Nancy is a strong advocate for culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services to underserved communities.

and penalize the disenfranchised populations the social work profession serves (i.e. children, immigrants, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the poor).

3. **Take pen in hand, fax, or email your feelings** to your elected representatives at all levels. If you are not aware of the specific legislation or proposals, contact NASW whether you are a member or not; that's what NASW is here for. That's work you won't have to do, because NASW is doing it.
4. **Join an organization**, whether it's NASW or some other, that helps you stay in touch with the issues and provides analyses and recommendations on the issues.

If you are in an organization, NASW or some other, *volunteer for a committee or task force* that is trying to develop policy so that your group will be more effective in your advocacy.

Become a leader, in NASW or some other organization. Leaders have the ability to mobilize many people and activate them in some cause. That skill and talent is needed now more than ever.

Organize yourselves or your community. Only a few have the time, skill, energy, and knowledge to do this successfully. But it, in turn, is one of the most successful and effective ways to take action.

I am a strong believer in taking action, then and now. I hope you will take action in some way. If you would like to join us in our mission, please contact our Communications Secretary, Coleman Wong, at cmcwong@pacbell.net or by mail at 706 Sacramento Street, PMB 146, San Francisco, CA 94108.

I Will Not Let You Break Me

By Dawn M. McCarthy

Taken from Spring 1998 (Volume 8, Number 1)

SWP: "The Voices Of Social Work Students"

You can tell your lies and throw your stones

you will not bruise me

You can turn your back and walk away

I will not come chasing after you

You can kiss up to me and grovel at my feet

I will not lower myself to your level

*You can beat me with your fists and shower me with
violent words*

I will not crumble

*I have seen beyond the blue skies and brilliant rainbow
into the depths of hell*

I have felt fear, hunger, and loneliness gnawing at my soul

I have tasted death, sweet and tempting on my lips

*I have crawled to the edge of sanity and back, dragging
my feet with every step*

but I've made it

*I have risen above the incessant rage of a
tempestuous storm,*

standing tall along the way

*I have risen above the despair, above the ignorance
and anger*

I have overcome

I will not let you break me

