Introduction

This publication highlights the rich history of the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging and the stories of older adults served through the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). We who have had the honor of working with these older adults are inspired daily by their commitment and perseverance.

For over 20 years, the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration has enabled NAPCA to serve Asian American and Pacific Islander seniors through the SCSEP program. These individuals face high barriers to employment, including language, literacy and acculturation. Ninety percent of our participants are immigrants who speak little or no English. The SCSEP program seeks to lessen the isolation of our participants, help them actively engage in their communities and provide them employable skills while they earn a part-time wage.

Our partnerships with community-based non-profit organizations and government agencies that serve as host agency training sites are key to the success of this program. While the seniors are on temporary assignment in the host agencies, they receive a wealth of learning opportunities. The skills they acquire on assignment help develop personal confidence, preparing them to find jobs elsewhere. Often it leads to employment at their host agency.

NAPCA serves over 1,200 low-income older workers annually in partnership with approximately 500 host agencies in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange County, Houston, Chicago, New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

This publication features excerpts from oral history interviews with 26 seniors who have been served by the SCSEP program.

Special thanks to Chew Communications – Ron Chew, Edward Echtle and Debbie Louie – for preparing this publication. The stories featured here remind us of the importance of NAPCA’s work and of the struggles and achievements of the seniors who often remain invisible to the society at large, even though they add so much to our lives and to the fabric of this country.

Christine Takada
President and CEO
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
ON NOVEMBER 1, 1979, a small federal grant gave birth to the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. The dream of a national organization that could serve as the official voice for the overlooked needs of Asian Pacific American (APA) seniors – a vision pursued doggedly for at least a decade by Asian American activists – had finally emerged from the shadows.

The news about the three-year $70,900 grant from the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) made its way into at least four Asian American newspapers, but there wasn’t much public fanfare otherwise. To the casual reader, it might have seemed that the grant was a one-time investment in research and policy development rather than the first step in the journey toward creating the thriving organization that exists today.
The National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA) emerged out of the Asian American movement for racial equality. Before the 1960s, public resources intended to help vulnerable populations were unavailable to Asian Pacific Americans. Policymakers saw APAs as a self-sufficient “model minority” that didn’t have problems and if they did, they preferred “taking care of their own.” This stereotype ignored the long history of discriminatory laws that had fostered a deep distrust of government. The result was that APAs created and relied on ad hoc community-based support networks which were only able to respond to a fraction of the community’s needs.

Out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the communities of color that received the greatest amount of attention and resources were African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. Their relatively larger numbers, public presence and militancy helped them garner a host of pilot programs to assist in reducing poverty and tackling urgent social needs.

But as Asian American student activists – American-born second and third generation children of the early arrivals – came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, they began to challenge the status quo. They openly discussed long-neglected APA concerns. They rallied to create ethnic studies programs on college campuses and worked on issues of poverty, lack of bilingual services, drug addiction and racism.

High on their agenda was a commitment to the APA seniors, many of whom had been languishing in substandard hotels, without access to bilingual health and other social services. The activists created community-based APA health clinics, mental health programs, tenant rights groups and elderly nutrition programs throughout the country, many of which continue to this day.

This newfound APA assertiveness took place as the APA population began to swell. In 1960, there were one million APAs in the U.S., representing one percent of the population. By 1970, the APA population had jumped to 1.5 million, aided by passage of the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, reversing nearly a century of laws aimed at preventing Asian immigration. Additionally, the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 generated a wave of Southeast Asian refugees, adding to the complexity of the already diverse APA population.

In 1965, the same year of immigration reform, the U.S. Congress also acted to address the needs of senior citizens in general by passing the Older Americans Act (OAA), creating the Administration on Aging (AoA) to support efforts to help older Americans maintain their dignity and independence.
Born in Seattle

It is appropriate that Seattle was the epicenter of the drive to create a pan-Asian Pacific American agency serving APA seniors.

Demographers recognize Seattle’s International District – or the “ID” as locals call it – as a unique community, the only pan-Asian neighborhood in the continental United States where generations of Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Southeast Asians have created a multi-ethnic home. APA political and community leaders in Seattle still showcase that fact as a badge of pride for the region.

The very early groundwork for the creation of the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging took place in an old Catholic school building in Seattle’s Central District, headquarters of the Demonstration Project for Asian Americans (DPAA). In the early 1970s, Dorothy Cordova and Donna Yee worked as co-directors of DPAA. They were hired through a 1973 HEW research and planning grant, which focused on identifying barriers preventing Asian Americans from receiving social services, and developing proposals for overcoming these barriers. The demonstration sites were in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Additionally, a research grant from the Administration on Aging, written by Sharon Fujii, was a critical building block in the creation of a national agency devoted to serving APA seniors.

Donna Yee, now CEO of the Asian Community Center in Sacramento, said the AoA was slow to develop a presence in the APA community. “Part of the movement included reaching out to elders in communities of color in the early 1970s,” she said.

The grant funded creation of the National Pacific/Asian Elderly Research Project (NP/AERP), a project Fujii directed from 1976 to 1978. The Project, based in Los Angeles, engaged in research to help in the development of new “service delivery models” for Asian and Pacific Islander elderly, gathering empirical data in Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Fujii, who now works in San Francisco as Regional Administrator for the Administration for Children and Families, said that those working on the project struggled for consensus on a research model that respected the individuality of the various APA ethnic groups. They also tried to carve out enough time to do new research, but were not always successful.

Local activist and community advocate Bob Santos, who served for many years as director of the International District Improvement Association (Inter*Im) in Seattle, recalled that he worked closely alongside Yee, who also served on the Inter*Im board.
Because they both worked in Seattle’s impoverished International District and saw first-hand the conditions faced by APA seniors, Santos said, doing basic research on local Asian Pacific American elderly was relatively easy. “All the research was done right down there in the heart of the community,” he said. Santos later served as one of the founding board members of the National Pacific/Asian Resource Center on Aging, including a stint as the agency’s board president.

**Founding NAPCA**

In 1978 and 1979, NP/AERP held conferences in California and Washington to bring together community and government stakeholders in APA elderly service delivery. The conferences solidified support for a central agency.

In 1979, the Pacific Asian Coalition (PAC), a national APA advocacy group, sponsored a proposal to the Administration on Aging to create a permanent national resource center as a successor to NP/AERP. The AoA provided $70,900 for a “Pacific/Asian Elderly Resource Center Development Project” (P/AERCDP) to run from March to October, 1979. If the project was successful, funding would be extended. The grant supported workshops in four cities with high concentrations of APA elderly: Chicago, New York, Honolulu and San Francisco.

P/AERCDP coordinators hired a three-person staff: Louise Kamikawa, director, Lillian Fabros, project coordinator, and Carol Kato, secretary. The workshops, titled “Toward Developing a National Resource Center through Community Involvement,” again reinforced what earlier studies had shown – the need for a bridge between APA elderly and the services to which they were entitled.

In November 1979, the P/AERCDP became the National Pacific/Asian Resource Center on Aging (NP/ARCA). In the first year of operation, NP/ARCA founded a home office in Seattle and opened a second office in Washington D.C. to maintain a national presence. Kamikawa traveled extensively around the country, seeking out partners in the APA community and developing cooperative agreements with service providers in the “aging network.”

At the time the agency was born, there were few APA professionals in the field of aging. Organization building and recruiting and hiring staff turned out to be more demanding than anticipated.

Even though NP/ARCA successfully negotiated the transition to becoming a permanent organization, it took many years for the agency to establish its track record among other mainstream senior advocates.
An early agency success was the effort to bolster APA representation at the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, a significant arena for the development of federal legislation and policies. A preliminary conference held in San Francisco in January marked the first time APAs had ever come together on a national scale to talk collectively about how to address issues of health care, economic security, social services, nutrition and housing.

Energized by the passion and commitment of the many APAs to the cause of seniors, Kamikawa and NP/ARCA staff and volunteers returned to Seattle with renewed vigor and explored many different ways to fulfill its mission. The agency gathered information about demographics and service providers, published detailed directories to connect APA seniors to social services, and participated in community health fairs. In 1983, NP/ARCA and the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction co-authored a grade school teaching packet, titled, “The Japanese American Internment, 1942-45: A Lesson from Recent History.”

While the U.S. government began to deal with the barriers faced by older Americans during the Civil Rights era, responsiveness to the particular needs of APA elderly took a while longer to emerge. A 1985 NP/ARCA report noted, “The Older Americans Act has traditionally serviced a largely non-poor elderly constituency although identifying for itself a priority of serving the poor and minorities.”

For many years, the participation of Asian Pacific Americans in AoA programs was nearly non-existent. According to a 1985 report, the miniscule participation had even dropped over time, raising even more questions about the effectiveness of program strategies.

As Kamikawa and NP/ARCA sought to ensure that programs serving older Americans would become accessible to APAs, they also struggled with how to create a balanced and workable vision of pan-Asian Pacific American unity. Creating a shared perspective among all the different groups – Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean and others – wasn’t easy. Some APA ethnic groups imported bitter rivalries to the U.S. from their home countries.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program

By 1991, Kamikawa had moved to Washington D.C. to work for the American Red Cross. She was succeeded by Barry Mar, a seasoned Seattle consultant who worked as interim director; Don Watanabe, a longtime community service administrator and social justice organizer in Chicago who moved to Seattle to head
up the agency from 1992 to 1996; and Clayton Fong, a long-time advocate of APA political involvement who served in several White House positions before he headed up the organization from 1996 to 2009.

Nothing did more to boost the visibility and impact of NP/ARCA than its establishment as a provider of direct training and employment services for Asian Pacific American seniors. In July of 1989, the agency started receiving funding under Title V of the Older Americans Act.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), as it is now called, was first authorized in 1965 and has evolved greatly in its 40-plus years of existence. The SCSEP program, as NAPCA operates it, targets limited- and non-English speaking seniors 55 and older, helping them get on-the-job training in non-profit organizations and government agencies and find permanent jobs. Most of the host agency training sites are Asian Pacific American community organizations.

While Native American, Latino and African American organizations received SCSEP funding since the late 1970s, NP/ARCA’s participation marked the first major training and employment funding for APA elderly.

The 1990s were a period of tremendous organizational growth and change, including adoption of a new name, NAPCA. The agency also weathered potential cutbacks to its budget. Through it all, the agency steadily built up its administrative infrastructure, hired more bilingual and bicultural staff, established a broader national presence by hosting workshops, town halls and conferences, and supported the work of local APA senior serving agencies.

By the time Don Watanabe arrived in May of 1992, the agency had successfully established SCSEP sites in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. (An earlier Portland program had been supplanted by the Seattle program.) From 1994 to 1995, under Watanabe’s leadership, NAPCA ushered in a period of incredible growth, establishing new SCSEP sites around the country. Today, NAPCA operates the SCSEP program in Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco, Orange County, Chicago, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Houston.

Watanabe recalled first “selling” the idea of greatly expanding the SCSEP program to staff and board. “My primary rationale was that we should use the additional program resources and opportunities to support the growth and further development of established APA not-for-profit, community-based agencies and organizations,” he said.
Over three decades after its founding, the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging is the leading national voice for Asian Pacific American seniors. It’s hard to imagine now – in a political environment that has yielded an African American as President – that the cause of diversity was once so easily shunted aside.

The evolution of NAPCA parallels the steady and vigorous increase of the APA population and the rising number and influence of APA seniors. From 1970 to 1980, the population of Asian Pacific Americans ballooned from 1.5 million to 3.6 million. By 1990, the population rose to 7.3 million. By 2000, the population had reached 10.2 million or 3.6 percent of the U.S. population. The current APA population is 15.2 million or 5 percent of the U.S. population. In a generation, the Asian Pacific American population, immigrant and American-born, had become too substantial, too vocal and too politically engaged to be ignored.

The budget of NAPCA has expanded from the humble inaugural three-year grant of $70,900 to an annual budget of over $17 million. Still ensconced in the same office on the ninth floor of the Melbourne Tower in downtown Seattle, NAPCA also has a large presence in nine regions of the country, serving over 1,200 seniors annually just through the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

During the recent economic recession, the agency received an additional $1.6 million infusion of federal economic stimulus dollars from the Obama Administration to expand the number of participants in its employment programs. “The mission of the organization is what keeps the employees here and is what drives us,” NAPCA President and CEO Christine Takada said. “I don’t know of another national organization that has the kind of impact in helping APA seniors.”

In addition to the SCSEP program, NAPCA administers the Senior Environmental Program (SEE) in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In 2009, NAPCA launched yet another employment program: the Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services (ACES). The program brings older workers into U.S. Department of Agriculture jobs that relate to conservation of natural resources.

In 2004, NAPCA created a National Multilingual Helpline where limited-English-speaking seniors can call to get help and other information. The program is staffed by counselors fluent in Vietnamese, Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese.
**Embracing the Future**

When NP/ARCA began its work in 1979, the Asian Pacific groups that were the principal focus of research and policy work were Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans and Korean Americans. Thirty years later, the Asian and Pacific Islander population is much more diverse and the agency now serves a rainbow of APA groups, including Southeast Asian refugees and more recent waves of South Asian, Chinese and Filipino arrivals.

“I’m inspired when I think about how many seniors NAPCA has touched during the life of the agency,” Takada said.

Norman Lee, Orange County SCSEP Project Director, recently noted that he came to the U.S. when he was young, in contrast to many of the immigrant seniors he now works with. “I could adjust myself to fit into the new working environment,” he said. “It’s hard as a senior to do so. I’m glad right now that I can help the new senior immigrants to gain working experiences through the SCSEP and share my experience with them.”

Like Takada, Eun Jeong Lee, the Los Angeles Project Director for SCSEP, is inspired by the seniors. “Our participants are my role models for the future,” Lee said. “It is just like seeing myself in the future. They learn and work regardless of their age. It is a real thrill to see their effort to do something meaningful as they adjust to their new lives here.”
Kyoo Won Lee

Born October 25, 1932, Daegu City, Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea
Arrived 1980, Los Angeles, California
Office Aide, Korean American Community Service, Inc., San Jose, California

For me, my English is much better than some others. So that was good. Living here is about the same as in Korea As my kids were growing up, and then they got jobs, my life is getting easier. By then, I am working myself. Korea was backwards at that time. It was ’60s and ’70s. It was a transient time, trying to industrialize. Korean society became too industrialized, faster than other countries. It was very hard to live there. Living in the United States is much better than living in Korea. Job situation is better here than in other countries. Also for social life.

Now, Korean society is much better. In the United States, you got economic problems right now. These days, not many Korean people trying to move here because their situation getting better, almost, maybe same level with the United States.

Many people say I am younger than my age. So that’s a kind of benefit I can get by working instead of retiring. Say if I were in Korea, maybe 60s is the upper age to stay in a job. Some
people 65, no more. You cannot stay over there. But here in the U.S., there’s no age
discrimination. That’s, I think, much better here than in Korea.

If I were to live in Korea now, too many handicaps over there. Thinking is
different because you’re an old man. But here in the United States, you don’t say
you’re an old man, you’re a man. Here in the United States, not much of that kind
of prejudice.

I would advise young people to work, whatever age you are. Just try something,
something you can do. Otherwise, your body is old, will be. You’ll be getting older
and older, so keep young.

When I’m passing by, trash is over there, I pick it up myself. That’s not my job,
but strengthen your arms, pick it up and throw away. That’s exercise, kind of exercise.
So I try to move around all the time. If I can do, I can help. Whatever area. Even
though it’s not my job, but I can help. I feel good.

Prepedigma “Cora” McDonnell

Born December 5, 1941, Bauang, La Union, Philippines
Arrived July 5, 1985, Seattle, Washington
Receptionist, NAPCA, Seattle

I had to make a big choice – either to further my career or to raise my son. So I
just got jobs like being a clerk at Airborne Express, staying at jobs that are easy.
And so when I get home, I could take care of him. I stayed with Airborne for 14
years, and I have a bachelor’s degree. I could have applied for more demanding jobs,
but my priority was my son.

I was getting a salary that could support both of us. And we’re staying with my
parents so I don’t have to pay a lot of money. I thought if I decided to focus on my
career, my son would suffer. But I decided to take care of him, to raise him, and I’m
thankful for that because he never gave me a problem.

There was one time I remember he said, “Thank you, Mom. Because when you
were raising me during those difficult times as a teenager, you were not holding me
too much.” How would you say – when you have a son, when you are holding an
egg, you don’t want that egg to break – because sometimes you have to hold it a little
bit tight, but not too tight so it will not break. He said, “Thank you for not being too
tight on me, but you are not too loose on me, either. Thank you for doing that.”

I was so happy. I said, “Thank you. Thank you for telling me that.” Well, after all
the sacrifices that I did, it’s kind of fulfilling for me because even if my career, it’s not
that great, I have raised a son that is going to have a future not having to deal with
drugs and some of that.

A challenging time is when he was 13. He was talking to me – he told me this,
“I know you’re trying to be both a mother and a father to me. But there are things,
Mom, that as a man, I cannot talk to you about.” “Why?” I said. “You could tell me.
I could tell you things.” “No.” And that was a challenge to me because I’m trying to
dig more on that. I cannot advise him on some issues like men issues, for instance.
Up to now, that’s still a challenge for me. There are things that I cannot tell him. I
don’t know how. I only know the feeling as a woman, not as a man. It’s hard to advise
him on those, and so I say, “Oh, my God. What do I tell him?”

I am no longer making a choice
between my son and my career. He’s 23.
With my son right now at his age and
the kind of person that I raised him to
be, I don’t have to hold back for myself
anymore. Maybe I can have a more
challenging job. NAPCA is evolving – and
who knows, one of these days, they might
say, “Oh, Cora! Front office manager or
a supervisor.” Actually, at my age, I want
to make more money for that. And who
knows what the future can bring? That’s
why I like to go to seminars. I just want to
learn. That’s what I like right now. That is
my goal for NAPCA. I hope I can have a
more challenging job.
I went to school in Guangzhou for high school and college. I speak Cantonese and Mandarin. I majored in designing parks and gardens. In 2000, I come to America. I want to have a better environment for my daughter. My daughter is studying in the United States. We came together when she was 12. Before we came here, my family was already here. My father, mother, brother and sister also here.

The language is the most difficult part. When I come here, I work in downtown, one of the restaurants. I saw the parks, the gardens there. But I cannot do it because I don't know the language here.

In November, 2004, I changed to another restaurant, fast food restaurant. I learn English in the restaurants. In 2008, I lost my job. My boss, maybe I am too old, maybe I cannot do the highly technical work. So, at that time, I layoff. Somebody found flyers, poster, about Title Five program in this agency and leave it for me. I come here to apply.

Now, I working in the resource center. I help other people, laid off people, find a job. I am very happy to help other people. I want other people also to have this opportunity. I want to contribute to society. I want to do something. I’m very happy. I feel I’m doing something for the community.

I like America. Here is better than China. I’m older, but this program is for me so I feel cared for. I feel I have something to do here. I never dreamed about when I was at the lowest point, with no job, very difficult. This program helped me.

If you stay home, your view will be very narrow. So you go outside, you have to meet different people, different things. It’s good for your mind. I earn some money so I can pay for my living, but mentally, my spirit has deep support. I feel rejuvenated.

Anything I can do, I will do it. I’m not afraid of difficulties, learning language. I’m learning it. Young people should not afraid of difficulty. They should work hard, solve problems one by one. It will help overcome the dark part of your life.
I work at the front desk. I help them pick up telephone. I talk Mandarin language in China. Now I come here, I want to learn Cantonese language. I got it. Before in Hong Kong, it’s a long time ago, I learn a little bit only. Now I talk Chinese language and Cantonese.

I work only half days now, I be there four hours. Some people meet me after work because I have the free card, catch the bus, train. I help people, go office, go downtown, too many people – because Chinese people don’t understand English. They give me money, I say, “No, no money. If you give money, I don’t help you anymore.”

For me, I go any place. I do a good job. Every place, a good job. Now, I do it here. Even if I not take one penny, I feel happy. Up to now, I’m 69 years old, I never got sick, not even the flu. Can you believe it? My God. You see my face? Why? I’m very happy! Even I drink water, no food, I still happy. I go any place, I happy, really. That is my future.

For the young people, you should teach them, “You don’t think about take. You should give.” Whole country, the young people should do that. You give first. Don’t think about what you take.
Paulino Benemerito

Born April 29, 1935, San Jose, La Libertad, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Arrived February 8, 1996, Massachusetts
Program Aide, Quincy Community Center, Quincy, Massachusetts

The primary and the elementary grades were obtained at San Jose, La Libertad. I finished the secondary education in another province called Ormoc City, Leyte Province. To widen the horizon and obtain a longer vision, I decided to obtain a higher education. I finished the degree of bachelor of law at the University of the Visayas, Cebu City, Philippines.

I filed an application with Abbott Laboratories in North Chicago, Illinois, to work as a professional medical representative. They have a branch there in the Philippines, Abbott Philippines. After the interview, I was required to report for training, to learn the parts of Abbott Laboratories, salesmanship, the principles of motivation, organization, management.

There was an intense interest of my mother-in-law for us to come to the U.S. That was the basis why we came over. Almost all my in-laws are in Massachusetts, working here in downtown Boston. They are residing in Brookline, some in Quincy. That was the first that we visited here in America. My brothers are also residing in the state of Florida, and my elder sister. After several months, we went to Florida, and I worked there for several years.

I helped my brother in the farm, citrus farm. Then after, I think, six months, I applied to a company and I was accepted. I reported to that company, November 1997, until the company filed for bankruptcy. Then, I came over to Massachusetts. I worked with another company, a gasoline convenience store, for one year.
because of the weather, I was not able to adjust right away. I went back to the state of Florida. Because of my performance here, brushing modesty aside, I had a good record at the store, and the area manager asked me if I am interested in continuing my work in the same company in the state of Florida. So, I work in the same company in Florida.

The thing that I like here is the financial aspect, financial support of the government. If you are laid off, if you are separated from the company, you can file unemployment claim, for six months, and sometimes the President will extend up to nine, sometimes, the maximum to 12. Well, except in isolated cases, we don't have that in the Philippines.

We are only blessed with two children, one a daughter in Miami, and one a son in Cebu City, Philippines. Our daughter is employed by my nephew, who has a business of phone cards, Balikbayan, money transfer, like that, moneygram. Our son is a bank manager. I always advise him not to go with drug addicts and always welcome the powerful and influential, the intelligent peoples, for building the sound and intelligent ideas.

My resources and income – very limited. We are living in an apartment, we are only paying $259. My only source is this $700 a month. That's why I made this decision to work. I'm still mentally and physically healthy. I'm ready and willing to handle any situation that may arise.
I was in Saigon. I have a small shop, café. Café and orange juice. Just a small business on my own. In Vietnam, before Communists come, we okay. When Communists come, no more. So I come to America. First, I come to Oklahoma City. At that time, I don't have job yet because I have a little boy. He seven, eight years old. I lived there one year and then I move here.

When I come to Seattle, my first job is candy factory. My supervisor good, my manager good. I liked that job. Candy chocolate very good. Sometimes we have to test the candy and make sure before we package it, they have peanut inside enough. Sometimes when we not sure, we have to test that. Candy factory lay off me because they moved to Kent. It’s very far. I don't have car. So I go by bus and I cannot go.

Second job is Salvation Army. I work there sorting clothes and hanging clothes. Put the price, how much – like that. I worked there for two years.

A lot of Americans in there. They have two Vietnamese only. So English I talk every day. No Vietnamese. If I find something
I don’t understand, I say, “Okay, you write.” Then they write for me and I go home and look in dictionary so I know what that means. The next day, I come back to work and I say, “I know what that means. I know why you say that.” That’s how I learned a lot.

I never be shy. Even I talk wrong, I don’t be shy. They teach me. That’s why I learn a lot when I work in Salvation Army.

I start work in this kitchen April, 2008. I help Alice cook, cut some vegetables, meat. I help her cook and clean the kitchen, wash the dishes. Alice is so nice. Here they have Korea food, Japanese food, Vietnamese food, Lao, Thailand. Have a lot of food. I love that job very much. I love to do it.

My son is 27 already. He is very good. He finished college. Now he work in the bank. He already married. And he got a house in Auburn. But he and his wife come to see me every week. Saturday, sometimes Sundays. Sometimes we go out and eat. Sometimes I don’t want to go out and he buy something eat and we stay home. We sing karaoke. Mother and son and daughter sing together. We laugh and we be happy – very, very, very happy.

Hyon Ju Lee

Born 1936, Seoul, South Korea
Arrived October, 2005, Los Angeles, California
Assistant Clerk, Koreatown Multi-Purpose Senior Center, Los Angeles

I love the American culture and I have had a lot of American friends here in the United States. Back in 1950-something, I first met an American soldier, a captain, when the Korean conflict started. He wanted me to come to America, but my parents denied, refused to send me out. Since then, I have a lot of chances to contact the American people, especially in the business area.

I started my business in 1962, a trade business – factory, importing. Right after the Korean conflict, there were many miserable areas in Korea. All destroyed, nothing
left but ashes. So I made up my mind: I must be the very one who participates in the construction of this destroyed area. That’s why I studied foreign language.

I have a lot of friends in Korea. Sometimes, I think of them. But I have a philosophy: God made this earth. So, wherever, whenever I may be, I’m going to devote myself to become familiar with the local people. If I have community knowledge or experience, I have to return it to this society. This is my philosophy. I’m very, very happy to be here.

This agency is a Christianity-oriented center. That’s why I like it very much. Since I was assigned here, there were so many things to do. These amazing people have been teaching me or training me. I do data input for citizenship and petitions, and also translation at the immigration office. When they arrive from Korea, they cannot speak English like me. They need my help sometimes. So my job is the translation, putting the data into computer, writing, typing, a lot of things. I love that, too.

I do appreciate and extend my thankfulness to the American people and the government of the United States of America for their participation in the Korean War. That’s why I’m standing right in front of you, so that we can share our talk like this. Without your government, your people’s help at the time, I couldn’t be here.
Ka Kit “Richard” Ng

Born February 23, 1953, Shantou, Guangdong, China
Arrived June 26, 2008, San Francisco, California
Senior Housing Tenancy Service Assistant, Junipero Serra House, Mercy Housing, San Francisco

I’m just a newcomer actually. I came here since last year – June 26 of 2008. I came directly with my family, my wife and my daughter. I had been visiting to the States several times. I just love the weather here. I love it. Because in Hong Kong, wet and hot. I just don’t feel comfortable.

In Hong Kong, I am working as a shop owner for a locksmith company. This kind of business depends very much on the property market. In the past 10 years, I think, my business maybe not very good. It’s not very stable. And then, at that time, I find out I can immigrate to the States. Then I feel, oh, that may be a good chance. Then make me closing down the shop and then immigrate to here, just like that.

I just worry about maybe difficult for me to get a job because in Hong Kong, we are not speak English often. I hire about 10 locksmiths. The locksmiths, most of them, they don’t know English. I can speak some English because all my customers, they are employees from overseas. Most of my customers is foreigner. So I have to communicate with them so I can get business.

When I arrived to the States, I feel completely different, from the English, even speaking. It’s really different than Hong Kong English. Maybe our English is England English. Sometimes, even a simple word, I cannot understand. Maybe they talking too fast. I don’t understand. I’m really scared of that, you see? So when I arrived, I thinking, “How can I get a job?” The English is not so good, and then I have no skills to do something. Even change a lock in Hong Kong, I’m not the one to do it. I just can talk – I cannot do it.
One of my friends tell me that Self-Help for the Elderly have this training program. So I will try. I’m lucky. You know why? Because I’m just 55 years old. If, otherwise, I’m not qualified to join this program, right? I’m 55 years old, so I can, I can! So I will try, just like that.

I am assisting the property manager at Mercy Housing. They move in, move out, annual recertification, to maintain the work order, to collect the rent – actually, it’s quite a lot. I enjoy it. I keep learning. They train me for the paperwork. I’m in the training in Mercy Housing one year. They teach me. I learn quite a lot.

I think here it’s a big country. For me, I just feel very comfortable, satisfied. In this country, maybe give us more freedom. But since I’m new, I cannot explain too many things because I’m still looking. I’m still looking.

I won’t be going back. I will stay here. That is my last choice. I love it, I love it. Since now, I get a job, that is an extra bonus. At this moment, I feel happy. Sometimes you need to know what is your situation. If you really want to get a job to support your living and people give you a chance, you must catch it. You must learn. You must work very hard. You must use your whole heart to do your training. Otherwise, no people can help you.

Qiao Yan Zhao

Born June 2, 1947, Toisan, Guangdong, China
Arrived September 20, 1982, Puerto Rico
Office Assistant, South Cove Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts

I was born in China, June 2nd, 1947. I’m from China, Guangdong Province, Toisan. I go to the high school, all study in Chinese, but little bit English. I go to visit my father in United States. But I only here one year. My father can speak English and he can speak Spanish. He go to Cuba. In Cuba, my father work at Hilton Hotel. He was a waiter. Then, in San Francisco and Puerto Rico, he work in sales. I move to Puerto Rico in 1982.

Later, I come to the United States, I see my father again. I really want to live in
the United States. I’m very happy, but I don’t speak English. I don’t know how to buy things. I don’t drive. I don’t know how to get around.

I study English at Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center. I study there for one year – four semesters. I also study in Chinese church.

After I finish school, I can drive. I can speak a little bit. I can write information. If you want to learn English, you must try very hard. Sometimes, I listen to people talking. I hear something interesting, I go home and ask my daughter.

I can speak Spanish. If there is a document in Spanish and English and I don’t understand the English, I look at the Spanish. Then I can understand.

Before, I don’t know computer. Just turn on, turn off, I don’t know. I know a little now. I can type, put in information. I like the opportunity in America. I can learn English. I can learn computer skills. I can continue to work.

I know enough English now. I can speak and help on the phone. My goal in the next couple years is keep working. I’m very happy. I am healthy. I have everything I need. I have three children, two sons and one daughter. We live together. Happy family.
Hyderabad is a city of 10 million population and 12 universities. The city has the prominence of housing the National University for English and Foreign Languages. Its students are from all over the country – Indian country. Not only that, but from Pakistan, Bangladesh and adjoining countries also can seek admission in that University. Hyderabad is the capital city of Andhra Pradesh state, which hold some 80 million population.

In India, families in Hyderabad are so strong. In the late ’60s, my sisters started coming here. They did not think that my coming over here will be a problem for me. Out of my five sisters and brothers, I was the most Americanized. My sisters also are graduates, and their husbands are engineers, chemists, American qualifications. They retired recently, after completing 30 years of service, at the age of 62 years.

I came in the month November, ’99. I’ve been here since that time. This Indo-American Center, where I work presently, this is an Indian organization meant for helping South Asian community. They liked me. The community officer called me for interview. I simply visited. Then, she said, “Come on. You come to our organization. It will make use of your talents at the Center.” I liked that job.

We conducted Indo-American weekend classes for citizenship examination. There will be an interview for citizenship. You have to pass in that one. So then they ended up in ESL, that is, English as a Second Language. English, being an international language, is different from place to place. American English is different from the England English and the English of Canada. Indian English is also different. They told me, you being Indian, your services are welcome.

By the grace of God, from my date of birth, I have completed 70. But I have the zeal to work more. That is good for health, also. Whatever we have learned in the life so far, that could be of some use to this younger generation. In that way, we will be helping humanity, our own community. There is no financial incentive, by the way. I’m not greedy, nor do I want to work hard. And as long as I live healthy, I want to just work.
Min Ja Cho

Born February 27, 1953, Daejeon, South Korea
Arrived August 3, 1999, Florida
Childcare Assistant, Denise Louie Education Center, Seattle, Washington

I would have stayed in Korea if my husband did not pass away. But after he passed away, my parents lived in Florida, so that’s why I came. To help my children, I worked. My son was a freshman in high school and my daughter was a freshman in college. I needed money to support them even though they got scholarships for their schools. My brother owned a cleaner – dry cleaner, so I worked and helped there – cashier, bagging, everything.

Living in America was okay, but the problem was when I started to work at the cleaner, I could not understand what the customer said and I could not respond as fast as I wanted to. But later I was accustomed to both hearing and speaking.

I like everything here. I like the freedom. If I lived in Korea, my children compare who lives in a bigger house and smaller house. Friends and even family members can be judgmental. But here, no interference at all. Free from all those kind of criticisms and comparisons like that.

I worked for hospice, two years. I’m a caregiver who is a talking companion. And also I cooked according to their taste. I selected clothes matching their preference.

If you do your job in a genuine manner, from the heart, they immediately notice it. I always thought that we all go in the end eventually – so I tell them not to be sad, but live joyfully every day, encourage them. That is good, I think.
Now at Denise Louie, I read books to the children, help them with crafts, make things, clean the place, arrange the table settings, take care of children when they play outside, keep an eye on them.

There are special needs children. The teachers ask me to keep an eye on them. I once had a student who didn’t move, who didn’t speak at all. He was less than four. But I helped him to walk, step by step. I noticed his eyes changed whenever he saw toy cars. So since I knew that was his favorite, I brought cars and let him draw and also let him touch those cars. I caught what his best interest was. That was the key. And after four weeks, he even waved a hand as he left.

I like this job so much so I want to do this type of childcare job and maybe volunteer later. I can do different work, but this childcare job is the most satisfying job for me.

These days, young people tend to go faster. I want to go step by step. Money can’t buy happiness. All material things cannot bring happiness. I know that, so I tell my children, even in searching for their jobs, “Do whatever you like. Do whatever you want to because that will bring you happiness.” That’s what I say.

Geronimo F. “Gerry” Ignacio

Born July 31, 1940, Makati City, Philippines
Arrived May 26, 2007, Los Angeles, California
Receptionist/Office Support, Filipino American Service Group, Los Angeles

We arrived by May 26. The first week of June, I immediately got my green card. The second week, I got my Social Security. By July, I started applying to different companies here, trying my luck. If I were a manager in the Philippines, I’ll be in maintenance here. If I were in marketing manager in the Philippines, I’ll be just an ordinary person here. I need a job. So I try to apply at Target, Macy’s, those different kind of malls, you know, and some different offices here. I’ve been waiting for the calls. Maybe it’s not yet time. So July, August, September, trying to apply every day.
I don’t know where to go. I applied, applied. So I talked to a lady and she told me, “Hey Gerry, I need you here at the Filipino American Service Group because I know you got a lot of experiences back in the Philippines as I’m reading your resume. So go to NAPCA.”

One of my responsibilities is that, aside from answering the phone, aside from taking intake for those homeless applying here, aside from entertaining guests, aside from filing, faxing, keeping some important documents, I have to do some computer works. A simple event program, I can do it – let’s say Thanksgiving Day, come and join us! Things like that. I’m able to do that on the computer now.

I was enrolled 2007, November, and my wife was enrolled 2008, March. Both of us work in NAPCA! So NAPCA really helps me a lot now, paying the bills in the house, paying for my car, paying some of my debt, credit and things like that. Without NAPCA, how can we handle this one? Me and my wife.

I have prostrate cancer. This is my 13th year of survival. They gave me up to two years. But I don’t believe in that. So our pastor told me, “Nobody knows when you’re going to leave.” It’s only the one up above can claim your life. So don’t weigh too much on what the doctor is going to tell you. Just believe in God and, you know, he’s healing you right now.

If I can still work, I like to help those people, this community, those veterans, those seniors. I don’t like staying at home. I like helping people as long as I can. I want to show my family that they will be proud of me.
My name is Zhi Xiang Ye. I was born in Shanghai, China. 1938, sixth month, 15th day. My father and mother are worker. Factory worker. Textile factory. Shanghai, I learned at university. Electrical engineering. I graduated, 1962. I work in telecommunications office in Shanghai, 37 years.

In 1998, I come here to Seattle with my wife because my daughter work here. She working at Everett clinic. My daughter is clinical worker. I have two children. One daughter, one son. Daughter 42 age. Son 45, in Shanghai, government work.

I love it here. Difficult just at the start because of the language. Later, I learned language, English language. Slow start. Broadway college, learning ESL. One year, six months. I just learn English and learn computer.

The Millionair Club Charity help me learn technology. Every day, I do kitchen help. But I slowly learn cooking technology. I cook food. I can make hamburger, sandwich, spaghetti and sea bass. First oil, then sea bass, then sea bass cooking, put it in the oven. I very much like work, learn technology.


With my daughter living together, then maybe sometime think of my son. Every year, go to China one time.
I was born in China. After I was born, we moved to Hong Kong. I was little at that time. I’m only one-and-a-half, something like that. Almost all my life, I was in Hong Kong. And then, we moved to Chicago because my mom was here. She only had one daughter so I had no choice. I need to move to take care of her. My son was 10 months old.

America is not that different, just the same, like I’m in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, we still have English, but not much like here. We have classes in Chinese, and then we have classes in English. We have both. So my English is just a little bit, not much.

When I moved to Chicago, I start working. Before working at NAPCA, I working always in the fashion industry as a cutter. You need decide how to figure out how to make a shirt, estimate, and how put in the right way to do it. Right now, most of the companies, they bring the work back to China. They put everything together. They said it’s cheaper than here, hiring people to work.

You know, fashion is really funny. Sometimes, the fashion is coming out, then it’s really busy. Then they slowing down, and then they will tell people to go home or take off for a while, and then come back. I come to work here. That’s when they took everything back to China. So after that, they cut down on a couple lines. That’s why I got laid off, too.

My job now is helping them make copies for the timesheet and follow the timesheet. Office work, you know. I really like it. I learned a lot of things. Sometimes, I don’t understand. They teach me English skills. Office work is only conversation, a different kind of job. It’s totally different.

I talk to my son, tell him always behave yourself – what is the way to go. What is the wrong way, you cannot do it. That’s what all my life I told him. So right now, he’s going to be a father. He is 33. I still told him, with your kid, you need to do the
I was an officer for the old government in South Vietnam. After the War, I was in jail for seven years. When I got out, the new government still followed my every step. I just can go to the field, bring rice, and live by the food from the field for myself and my family. And I just worked that very hard life until I got a chance to go to the United States. I applied and I came in 1995.

It’s a very good change for me to get out of Vietnam. I feel very happy with the freedom and chance for work. The most important thing to me is freedom.

At first, I got help from the U.S. government. After one year, I tried to work. I found time to take care of the family and drive my daughters back and forth to school. Then I worked in a sewing shop. I priced clothes, made the clothes to be beautiful before showing to customers. I worked very hard with a lot of hours, low salary.

I worked there until I got the chance to know about NAPCA. I learned about it from

Nghia Ngo

Born July 5, 1929, Nghe An, Vietnam
Arrived May 21, 1995, Westminster, California
Office Assistant, Vietnamese Community of Orange County, Santa Ana, California

I was an officer for the old government in South Vietnam. After the War, I was in jail for seven years. When I got out, the new government still followed my every step. I just can go to the field, bring rice, and live by the food from the field for myself and my family. And I just worked that very hard life until I got a chance to go to the United States. I applied and I came in 1995.

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I worked there until I got the chance to know about NAPCA. I learned about it from
Born December 4, 1941, Daegu, South Korea
Office Assistant, Hanul Family Alliance, Chicago

I thought that America was the best in many areas including education. I have one son and one daughter. They studied and graduated from colleges in the U.S. We came to Chicago at first, but now my son is in New York. My daughter is in Chicago. My daughter majored in design and is working for LG Phillips. My son majored in photography at Columbia University, but he is studying further to pursue his career as a TV producer.

I miss the cemetery where my parents are buried. I miss beautiful sceneries of Korea and friends. In a sense, this country is comfortable to live in. But the language barrier is a big problem for the older people especially. Getting jobs is more difficult.
for seniors. I think that I am a marginal person. There is a limitation on what I can do. I am taking ESL night classes. In Korea, I owned and ran a factory which manufactured auto parts for Hyundai Motors. All kinds of wire-spring products. I sold them to Walmart, too.

When I came here, I did totally mixed works, like dry cleaners, beauty supply. I couldn't do anything that I wanted to. There is a saying, “Your future in America depends on who comes to pick you up at O’Hare Airport.” Now I understand what it means.

I think that people are getting more aged if they do not work. We must move our bodies and minds as long as we can, regardless of having money or not. If I were young, I would have goals, but I don’t have any particular goals like running my own businesses. I would like to travel and see more of America with my wife before I have difficulty moving around physically.

There are many people who estimate America without knowing America well. One must evaluate America with wider, deeper and further perspective.
Xin Yue Huang

Born June 13, 1946, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China
Arrived August, 2006, San Francisco, California
Teacher’s Aide, Kai Ming Head Start, San Francisco

I started from the age of six, elementary school, and then all the way up to high school. At that time, too much going on with communism and I had no chance of going to university or college because of the Cultural Revolution. After I graduated from high school in 1964, I worked in a printing company. After 10 years, I changed my job to teaching preschool, kindergarten, children two to five years old.

After these experiences, I decided to go back to school for two years, to a university. My major was financial management. After I graduated, I quit teaching and then went into accounting and financial administration work at a construction-related government agency. I was an assistant manager of the accounting department. I handled payroll, general accounting.

I worked until I was 60. Then, in 2006, I came to the U.S. My son was studying at UC Berkeley, so I had a chance to come over. I wanted to see if I could adapt to life in the U.S.

I was more comfortable living in China. I had a lot of respect because of my education, but in the U.S., I became just a student. I felt kind of isolated. Over there, I had all kinds of friends and relatives. Over here, only one son, nobody else. It’s lonely, but I don’t regret coming to America.

One day, I was reading a Chinese newspaper and saw an ad. Age 55 and above, a chance to train as an assistant, contact NAPCA. I thought that may be good for me.

I was assigned as a teacher’s aide at a preschool called Kai Ming Head Start. I went to China for a visit, and when I came back, the headmaster offered me a job. I’m now the teacher’s assistant.

I want to continue working as long as I can. Most Chinese think the same way.
As long as I can still do it, I will continue, because that is my hobby. There’s no such thing as retirement.

I cannot be a good accountant here because I need a lot of English. But I can teach young kids because of my background in China. I will try to open a nursery school. I also want to teach young kids and adults to speak Mandarin.

I am very interested in computers. I use email to talk with my relatives in China. Every day, I’m learning English from the computer. I listen to how they pronounce and talk, learn it that way. It’s a program about the U.S. I want to learn more about Americans.

Sun Chao “Lawrence” Yang

Born June 6, 1943, Nanjing, China
Arrived June 27, 2005, Anaheim, California
Senior Recreation Trainee, Santa Ana Senior Center, Santa Ana, California

I’m from Nanjing City. I immigrated to the United States with my wife in 2005. I am a permanent resident. I’m not an American citizen. Maybe one of us or two will apply for American citizenship and we keep the Chinese passports. We have to think it over.

My first difficulty was at the Anaheim Public Library, where I have trained. I fix the books, treat with the barcode, and also the self-check machine. By the end, they almost hired me. I put in my resume, and they had applied to the City human resources office. They wanted to hire me, but unfortunately, they don’t have the budget. So I failed to get the job there.

Now, I’m training at the Santa Ana Senior Center. My title is the Senior Recreation Trainee. All the people are nice. Most of the old people are newcomers, Chinese, Filipinos, and the Spanish-speaking people. They have dancing, singing and the recreation program. If the Chinese people receive a letter from the government or other organization and they cannot read it or they want to have a reply, they will go to the Santa Ana Senior Center. I try to read, to translate the letter for them. If
they need the reply, I try to write an English letter. Sometimes, I tell them where to
go, what people to find to solve the problem. I like my training, the position. I like it
very much. I want to help the old people.

I want to stay in the United States. I think I still have the chance to be hired by
the public library. That’s why I keep the volunteer work at the Anaheim Community
Center. And also, I still work as the volunteer in Anaheim Public Library once a
week. I have a talk sometimes with the senior center, the leader, the boss. She said,
“We really need Chinese and English speaking people because we have so many
Chinese. They don’t speak English very good.” So I thought, “Maybe I have a chance
to be hired.”

I come to the United States – I want to experience. Whether working in the
library or in the senior center, that’s also the experience. I want to talk with the
people, to understand them, to improve my English. That’s why I come to the
United States.
I have no parents when I grow up. My parents died when I was four years. I forgot the face of my mother. I remember only my mother’s hair. That is enough. My sister support me. She is married already. Maybe she is 30 plus. I remember when the War is over, this was in 1946, I go to school, grade three. And I was promoted to grade four because I am bright in math. My favorite subject is math and geography.

My husband is from Bohol. We are from neighboring towns. My husband is only a conductor of the bus. We met during the War, they evacuated my place. So we meet each other. We got married in 1949. And I have my first child in 1954. I have seven.

My husband passed away in 1964 when my older child is grade three. I have no money because I have no husband. That’s why I work hard in the rice field. I am doing labor in the rice paddy. When I have labor in the field and in the farm, my kids go to school. They are all graduated from high school.
I like to see America. In 2006, my daughter asked my cousin, “How about Mama come?” I came in 2007. When I came here, I am alone on the airplane. My sister bring me to Kent because she is living in Kent.

I always cry because I felt lonely for my children. And then I find – I have now work in Costco. I introduce the sample, the product demo. I work in Costco 10 months and I have no feeling of return to the Philippines because I have work now.

I quit because we are too busy. So I go to the food bank in Chinatown. I met a woman and I was talking, “Maybe I will go home because I have no work now.” “No, you will not go home. I will bring you to NAPCA.”

When I came to the senior center, most of the ladies love me and hug me and kiss me. I am very happy here. I enjoy when I am serving because they are happy. I set the table. I serve the table here and everything when they are eating. They will hold my hand. I always smile.

I am 78 years old last August. I still work so that I can earn money because I have no income here because I am not American citizen. I work hard so I can survive. It is also exercise, because I was a little fatter than now. And I work here, my waistline becomes small.

Hao Minh Ly

Born June 23, 1946, Kien Giang Province, Vietnam
Arrived 1986, San Jose, California
Media Assistant, Viet Museum, San Jose

The Vietnam War end in April 1975. After that, I still work with the new regime for three years. And after that, I was dismissed. We have no way to look for job in a communist country. In 1986, we escaped by boat. I was a boat person. We have a fishing boat and prepare everything and plan the escape. About 40 people. The boat, about 11 meters long. So, very narrow for all of us to have a place.

Very terrible, very difficult to have a chance to escape. We accept the danger. We go by sea and escape from Vietnam. We left very early morning. Two days and three
nights on the sea. Food is very little because we cannot bring much. We bring rice, crackers and water. We needed water – that’s very important for us.

I am very lucky because we didn’t see pirates, but we are in a storm, storm in the sea. We passed that danger and came to Pulau Bidong, and we stayed Malaysia. We stay over there about four months. And then move to Philippines. And finally, I came to America and we live in San Jose up to now.

I was writer for a newspaper, a magazine in Oakland. But in 2007, newspaper not very good because the lack of advertising, no money, no budget, so I am jobless.

I came to the Vietnam museum because first I work in Vietnamese community and I write newspaper. I was assigned to mass media section. And now I’m media assistant at the museum.

I feel very happy and lucky I stay in America. At my age now in Vietnam, I will retire and no job. The government don’t give any help to seniors.

I decided to work until I no help, no help – very strong. Because I write, I hope I can think clear, maybe that I can continue to write. I study economic policy and sometimes, I write article, send for some print newspaper. So I spend time, help my family, my children, and leisure time. I keep reading and writing.
I was born in Cambodia in 1946. I grow up there half of my life. I flee my country in 1979 and I came here on October, 1981. My sponsor was living in Utah, but I cannot stay in cold over there. Strange for me, the weather. Cambodia is hot. So I move to California in the same year, 1981. I have some relative in California.

In 1983, the idea is communism open the door for the whole world. I see a lot of opportunity to import my product from Cambodia to United States, like fish – freshwater fish. All kind of food is really cheap over there and send to America. A lot of Cambodians, they love to eat their own food. And then, not long, maybe a couple more year, I got a little trouble with FDA, and then I stop working on that.

I have intention to go back and live in Cambodia so I can help the poor. And then, actually, I divorce my former wife, and then go there. I go there for four years. I got another wife. And I have a kid, and the kid grow up, I thinking about go back to the United States because the kid – he needs to go to school. I move back to Long Beach in November, 2008 and I try to find another job. It’s very hard. I’m old, 62 years old. And the economy right now is slow.

I like it working at United Cambodian Community. I can speak my own language with them. I can help my people that don’t know English. Mostly, they fill out form from electricity, from welfare, any kind of form that they come to UCC to complete. I’m glad to help them. And mostly, I learn a lot from all kind of
paperwork, like fill out application. If they go somewhere else, they going to charge them. So they happy to come here. I’m happy to help.

My opinion is I’m in the best country. It’s a very fair country. So I’m glad that God bring me here because I flee from Cambodia. I have nowhere to go. Here, we have opportunity to learn, to learn without age. Even 60 years old, 80 years old, you can go to school. Not in Cambodia. Cambodia, only 23, 25, and no other school. So we don’t have a chance. I talking about the past, I don’t know right now.

The people here, really honest. Sometimes my English very poor and sometimes spell the wrong thing. They correct me, not look down on me. I’m very glad they correct me, to learn the right way.

I came here from zero penny. And I start here. Sometimes, I heard the people say, “All this money, have to pay a lot of tax.” I don’t blame on that because I still have money. I save money. I got a house. I got a car. I got a TV. I got everything. Compared to my country, I’m a rich man.

Right now, finance just enough for support my family. I go to take early retirement so that I only work here 18 hour a week. Not enough. My wife’s working, very low income. I think later on, I get a better job. When the time’s come, I get better job.

Bernie Tabaosare

Born August 20, 1929, Manila, Philippines
Arrived July 1, 1996, Long Beach, California
Office Staff, United Cambodian Community, Long Beach

I moved to America in 1996. I learned that America is the land of opportunity, the land of milk and honey. And I like the environment. At first, it’s really difficult because there was a change of environment. I had to adjust to it, especially the time and the weather, the climate. This was cold, cold season. You have the winter, the fall and the summer and springtime. It’s not like in the Philippines where there are only two seasons, dry and wet.
People in the Philippines are being hard up because of different typhoons coming, more typhoons. All the properties of the people, devastated. That’s why they are asking help from people who are in America, to give them whatever they have, to help those people who are hard up because of the flood, landslide, and many who are dead.

In February 2008, I was transferred here to the United Cambodian Community. I help with senior employment. I want to be of service, especially among seniors who are in need of our help, medical problem, housing problem, other problem regarding adjustment. So we are happy to serve those people because especially here in Cambodian community, most of the people don’t speak too much English. So we have to interpret for them and whatever they need. We accommodate them every time they come to the office.

People will always appreciate you when you are good to them. And they will always remember you when you are already perished from this world. That’s why we must always have a good relationship with our neighbor. Because life is a battle of time. We don’t live forever because from earth we come; to earth we have to return.
I was a teacher in South Vietnam. My husband, he was a soldier. It was a difficult time to stay there. In 1975, the Communists fight with South Vietnam, so they took South Vietnam. We need to think about the freedom for our children, for us. My big family, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, they all living in Texas.

We left Vietnam in 1982. We go by boat, I think about three or four days. I got the boat from my husband. That’s it. Then we shared together so we get the family, go together. About maybe 60 or 70 people in the boat. That time, I’m so nervous, I don’t know how to describe to you how I feel. We prepared the food, but not enough, especially the water. We have not enough water.

I really scared, and the boat was leaking. A lot of water in the boat. We have to take the water out. And that’s when I was really, really scared. Everybody in the boat look like we have maybe two religion – one for Buddhist and one for Catholic. Everybody pray all night, all day. Until the day we see the sun with a lot of people there and we very, very happy. We see different, dark person there. We in Indonesia, but we don’t know it. They want to stop us and take everything we have. But no, we have nothing.
I came to Boston in 2004, maybe 2005. I worked for nail salon in Acton, Massachusetts. They do hair, too, but I prefer to do nails, and waxing and facials better than I do hair. Because young people, they do hair. They do it well.

At that time, it’s really hard for my life. I became older and I couldn’t keep up, to stay long, to do hair and nails anymore. My daughter, she convince me to get out of the job. She find the senior program here. So here I am now at East Boston Neighborhood Health Center.

I try to keep a positive attitude. Even sometimes, I’m so sad, I am so depressed, I cried – maybe I just sing a song. I just get out the house and walk a little bit, and look outside and start talking to people I can see on the street. I try positive.

The happiest moment in my life is the first time I held my granddaughter. My daughter, she tried maybe five, six years, but she cannot. She doesn’t want to know, boy or girl. When I arrived with her in the hospital, she give the birth and I found out she had a girl. She just looked like me and that’s the happy thing. On January 9, 2009, at nine o’clock in the morning. I spent all day, all night with her.

Daniel Tsou

Born April 4, 1931, China
Arrived January 24, 1987, Houston, Texas
Office Assistant, Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center, Boston, Massachusetts

I was born in China, but I don’t like communism. I left Mainland China in 1949. I studied in Japan. I studied Chinese economics. But then I don’t like Japan. I changed my mind. Before I think I go to the USA for study, but the visa is difficult. Two times, it’s impossible.

I go to Europe. First stop, Spain. Then, moved to Paris. I started at Paris University for mass communication, religious communication. I love Paris. I think that for me, Paris is first, the best city. But friends, they said find the job, difficult. Language, culture is different, idea is different. I speak French. I got a master’s degree. But to work, I go to Sweden. I work at the auto factory, Saab.
I come to the U.S. in 1987. First stop is Houston, Texas. No money, no American education. I think 1987, ’88, find a job is difficult. My brother give me 5,000 U.S. dollars, buy a cafeteria in a small town. That’s in Luxemburg, Texas. But just three months, everyone’s lost money.


I think I can work, no problem. I hope to continue work. Why? Because the people, every day, every time, at home – maybe the mind has problems, no people contact. Young people always keep contact is better for old people. Their thoughts different from me. At the office, the young people is kind. Sometimes, my computer has problems. So I ask, “Hey, please tell me. I make the problems.” Quickly, the young people stop his or her work, come help me. If I ask the old people, they say, “Oh, wait a minute. I have my job to finish. I can’t help you.” Very different.
You might be in your kingdom in the Philippines. Like for example, I’m very much accomplished already. I was the national president of the Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants. In 1999, I was an awardee of outstanding CPA education and professional development. I founded the annual meeting of CPA teachers in the Philippines on a national level. So I have made a name in the Philippines. But here, I’m a cipher, a zero. And so I find that accepting that reality was difficult.

In the U.S., I didn’t have much luck getting employed in academia because of the certification requirement. I applied to different universities, but no luck. I got lucky being employed in a shadow community college accounting department. You know how? Because one of my former students in the ’80s in the Philippines is employed there, and they had a problem in accounts receivable. And so I got a short stint, about six months, temporary job. Of course, it got finished, so I’m unemployed again.

We had a house in the Philippines, our own house. I lost it because I have to be operated on, a triple bypass. And when I got to the point where I had to sell my house, we came here with nothing. We were unlucky because my wife lost her job at Starbucks because of the economic turns. We experienced being in the YWCA emergency shelter in Kent. That was the low side of my life here in the U.S., being in the emergency shelter.

Did I regret coming here? Probably at
first. Probably even up to now, there are some situations whereby you need money very much. But then you get over it and then you have to turn it around. But then looking at the plus factor, my daughter is now excelling in school. She is an A student. She only needs one unit to graduate from high school, so most of her classes are advanced placement and Running Start. And that is the most gratifying factor, I would say.

I came to NAPCA in late September, 2008. I do job searches for people, I assist in the meeting, assist people in applying for basic health, for knowing where to go for inexpensive health care.

At first I had that feeling of uselessness when I am doing nothing, and I got into NAPCA. There is that feeling that you are useful, that you are still needed, that you can do something. That’s probably why there is no resentment, remorse or, “Hey, why did we go to this country?” Because somehow I know that the things we are doing are meaningful.

I am a devoted Catholic, and I live by that. You will go into that stage when you will enjoy much material things and realize that it’s not everything that you want. It is what you can do to help others, what you can do to really matter for the lives of other people. I believe there is more in life. One is family. But then the greater family is the people around you – the community.

Shu Tzu “Judy” Yeh

Born August 17, 1948, Taiwan
Arrived November 1, 1989, Los Angeles, California
Clerical Assistant, Bruggemeyer Library, Monterey Park, California

Our children’s education is very important. My daughter just graduate from Michigan University. My son, UCLA. Right now, he just find a job, do the part-time job. At first, very hard because the language is different, food is different, culture different. But the children grow up very fast.

Before, I work in a computer company. I work maybe 10 years. I doing the
manager. Lots of things to do. I do anything. Because the economy so slow, so bad, our company close, I don’t have work. So I laid off and I need work again.

My husband, no job, too. He also work computer company. Looking for job. He old, fifty-something. So difficult and right now, economy so slow. He have a lot of experience, but no job.

When we are in retirement, we need to volunteer. I still doing the volunteer work, but I need a part-time job. The library, I do because of the computer. I search a lot of books. Next month, I will be teaching in the children department, storyteller.

My supervisor very good. My supervisor very nice. Research the book and the supervisor will give me some job doing the Chinese. I can do that. I very much like the work. I very much like the library book – a lot of books.

If they can give me a stable job, I very, very appreciate it. If I can work here, I really appreciate. If not, I need to find another job. Because this work very good for me. I can do a lot of things for library. I very happy to help them.
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