

## THE ASIAN OUTREACH PROGRAM Opening the Door to Treatment

*A recent immigrant from Fujian Province is a victim of domestic violence...how does she protect herself and her child from her husband's terrifying behavior? A college student is arrested for DWI...how does she tell her Korean-born parents that she is*



*being treated for alcohol abuse? A Bombay-born small business owner loses his lease; his American-born son is in a gang and drinking after school with his gang member "friends." Who can he turn to, worried about how to keep his family safe when his children flaunt his authority and live in a new world with new problems he doesn't understand?*

The Asian Outreach Program (AOP) is a place with solutions for New York City's Asian community, the most ethnically diverse in the nation. Its approach is culturally nuanced and based on education and outreach that combats the

*In this issue, we look at the programs and services of our Asian Outreach Program and the remarkable transformations taking place every day as a result of its work.*

stigma still surrounding mental health treatment in traditional Asian cultures. Last year, the AOP worked with more than 1,400 adults and children from more than a dozen countries, speaking more than 20 different languages.

All the therapists have experienced the traumas of immigration. As new immigrants themselves, they are steeped in the culture and languages of their clients.



Clinic director Dr. Agnelo Dias, who arrived from Goa, India in 1981 to establish a career using his expertise to help his peer commu-

nity, brings great patience and persistence to his job supervising dozens of therapists and case managers. His first task, he believes, is to take care of his staff. "If I take care of them," he says, "they will take care of our clients."

Over the course of its 16 years in operation, the program has brought healing to new immigrants dealing with the psychosocial hardships of adjusting to new



customs, language and economic structure. Its two clinics—in Elmhurst and Flushing, two hubs of pan-Asian population—nurture families suffering the isolations brought on by relocation and protracted separation from family back home. They ease the sense that problems have to be kept hidden from "outsiders"... that treatment will somehow have an adverse impact on a family's reputation.

**The Child Center of NY serves more than 15,000 at-risk children annually from birth through early adulthood.**

**Our programs empower children to make good decisions... help parents build skills to become better providers and nurturers...**

**...and create connections to the mainstream through family intervention, child and youth development, counseling and home visiting to prevent psychiatric hospitalization.**



## A SNAPSHOT OF THE ASIAN COMMUNITIES SERVED AT THE ASIAN OUTREACH PROGRAM (AOP)

### A Day in the Life of Project Director Christina Lam

9:15 AM: Meet with 80 elderly Cantonese speakers for a Mother's Day workshop on how to communicate with more respect and in a less traditional 'authoritarian' way with their American-born children and grandchildren.

11:30 PM: Complete paperwork that summarizes sessions and how they relate to patients' progress toward achieving treatment goals (i.e., achieving and maintaining sobriety).

1:30 PM: Serve as translator for Chinese patient undergoing psychiatric evaluation regarding substance abuse and domestic violence.

2 PM: See patients: one who is dealing with the psychosocial stresses of losing his job and living with cancer. Meet with him and team of dietitian and psychiatrist to find ways for him to feel less isolated and combat medical symptoms.

4PM: Answer phone calls from police, schools and hospitals making referrals for treatment. May and June is particularly busy as schools will close soon and referrals increase for students in need of immediate help, including those with thoughts of suicide.

5:30 PM: Meet with staff to plan a drug forum presentation for the Korean community.

6 PM: Run court-mandated psycho-education group for Cantonese and Mandarin speaking men who have been arrested on DWI charges. The workshop helps them begin to acknowledge their addictions, understand the consequences of their alcohol use and teaches them how to modify their self-destructive behaviors.

### CHRISTINA LAM, The Chinese Community

Christina Lam, the chemical dependency unit project director at AOP, is a woman on the move. She uses words energetically, and punctuates them with laughs and smiles as she talks about her non-stop schedule providing education and therapy to a community that has long resisted mental health treatment as being too "public" and "stigmatizing."

Lam has been with the AOP from the beginning—over 16 years. She is a woman who wears many hats as she journeys through her packed days. Fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and Hakka, Lam believes in easing patients into treatment. "Getting the patient to acknowledge that they have a substance dependency issue is the foundation, and can be particularly challenging

among my patients," she says. "We try to show them how their behaviors create ripple destructive patterns in their children's lives. Something they may not easily acknowledge when 'respect for your elders' masks



AOP staff presenters host a drug abuse forum.

dysfunctional and destructive behaviors." In the last year, with the financial downturn, Lam sees more and more domestic violence associated with substance abuse. Her goal, now more than ever, is to educate patients on the consequences of chemical dependencies before therapeutic sessions become court-mandated.

### Over the last ten years, The AOP has:

- Received 4,500 referrals for therapy
- Served over 3,000 children and adults in our clinics
- Seen an additional 2,200 family members to ensure that the whole family supports the child or adult experiencing problems
- Counseled 2,500 children in 35 New York City public schools
- Outreached to 7,000 people in the community
- Conducted over 1,000 workshops in multiple Asian languages and 300 media presentations to create awareness about mental illness and substance abuse



## SHERRY SHOKOUI, The Afghan Community

Therapist Sherry Shokouhi has learned a new dialect of Dari, the language she spoke growing up in her native Iran, through her work over the last four years with the Afghan refugee community served by the AOP. The women she works with—most of whom are war widows—have had prolonged exposure to war and have vivid, recurring memories of bombings, torture and other atrocities. Many come from well-

to-do backgrounds, and are contending with crushing poverty for the first time in their lives.

For many, the driving force in their lives had been getting to America. Once here, however, Shokouhi says, depression and other symptoms begin to spike. Although the women are safe, they don't feel safe because they are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Many have never gotten on the subway or left the block

where they live. Gradually, Shokouhi has begun to see more small successes. One patient was able to start a small business with her sister; another got past the stigma of working a pushcart, and has since moved into better housing.

"It is an incredible honor to bear witness to these terrible and incredible stories. I know what I do helps a little. I can do it and so I have to do it."

## HERNANDO HORMILOSA, The Filipino Community

Hormilosa was working for a master's degree in social work at Fordham University when he noticed a job listing for a Tagalog-speaking therapist at The Child Center. "This is heaven," he thought. He had worked as a chemical engineer in industrial marketing in Manila but, before emigrating in 1994, had already transitioned into a non-profit that brought volunteer

consultants to the Philippines to advise struggling small business owners. "My passion became serving the community," he says. Today he continues to work largely with the Filipino community in his new city, earning what he calls a "psychic income."

Hormilosa sees a lot of issues arising from conflict between parents and offspring. Parents, many brought up in the Marcos era,

often do not feel equipped to deal with the new free society taken for granted by their children.

Historically, Filipino culture is a mix of Spanish and Asian. On the outside, Hormilosa says, Filipinos are adept at learning a new language and fitting into a new culture, but underneath the veneer, there is often deep angst, especially among young people searching for a new identity in a new city.

## RESHMA SHAH, The South Asian Community

Mental health project director Shah has sometimes been known to hail cabs in the Flushing/Elmhurst area just so she can hand out Asian Outreach information to the South Asian taxicab drivers, known as the ears of the community. She also calls at local hair salons, doctors' offices and delis to "leaflet" the neighborhood. Shah, a native of Bombay, speaks Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Gujarati—languages that allow her to work with recent immigrants from all over India.

Many of her patients, like other new Asian immigrants served by the AOP, have gone through severe

"The stigma attached to going to a 'third person' means the problems are often rampant by the time patients come in. That's why we continue to focus on outreach: to combat myths and ensure that people knock at our door before there's an emergency."

traumas in their native countries; some come from areas considered terrorist strongholds. When they come to this country, those experiences make it more difficult to deal with the expected stresses of immigration.

Every Friday morning, Shah is at P.S. 7 in Elmhurst, counseling children and making referrals for kids with more intensive needs. With the increased stresses families are facing, hit by sudden job losses, those cases have reached new highs recently with incidents of domestic homicides, child abuse and chronic chemical dependency. Almost three years ago, the AOP began offering Saturday hours to keep the burgeoning waiting list in check.

To read about the AOP's Korean group, featured in our May e-newsletter, please follow this link: <http://www.childcenterny.org/publications.htm>



Sandra Hagan, executive director of The Child Center of NY with Margaret Berger, executive director of Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC)-NY Tri-State Area below a portrait of the late Ira Meyer at the Ira Meyer Children's Center (IMCC) of The Child Center of NY. RMHC is a longtime contributor to the IMCC's enrichment programs.



The Beacon Center at Parsons celebrated its 10th anniversary with 650 attendees at a carnival on Saturday, June 6th.



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## A Passionate Philanthropist Passes the Torch

I was still a carpenter working for my father's construction company when he asked me to do some basic renovation work for the Flushing Clinic at The Child Center. I didn't register that I was doing volunteer work...I was simply helping because my father was helping. With the construction we did for upscale clients it hit a chord for him that he could

help those less fortunate by doing renovation work. He was struck by the fact that contributions to The Child Center went directly to help children, and that staff worked in very modest settings.

My dad Ray was passionate about golf so his involvement with the golf fundraiser was a natural evolution. He always said, 'Do something you love and have it be beneficial to other people.' When my father passed away four years ago, I was asked to step in and co-chair the annual golf event. I didn't really know what I was getting into...I was looking for some way I could help honor his memory and make a difference. As I sat and listened, (I did a lot of that in the first few meetings), I realized how much time and effort was put into the event and how important it was that we reach out to friends and colleagues to support it.



John and Ray Cook at Ray's 60th birthday party in 2002

The Ray Cook Golf Outing, named in memory of John's father, who supported The Child Center for more than 20 years, takes place this year on Monday, September 21st at the Old Westbury Golf Course. For more information, please contact Linda Henley at 718-651-7770 X210 or [lin-dahenley@childcenterny.org](mailto:lin-dahenley@childcenterny.org).

If my involvement can help even a little bit, that's what my father had in mind. This year the big issue is how do we get the most from the outing with the economy the way it is.

### SPONSOR A CHILD TODAY...

#### and make an impact on tomorrow

With a \$250 contribution you will help treat a child suffering abuse at the hands of a chemically dependent parent. You will help get an American-born child from an immigrant family off drugs. You will help teach a family non-violent ways to deal with stress through weekly home visits by a social worker. You will help close the gap between what we receive in government funding and the actual cost of intervening with one child who greatly needs our help.

We often ask what one person, one family, one classroom, one neighborhood can do. The problems can seem insurmountable. This is our city; these are our children. Their futures represent our futures. What affects them, ultimately affects us all.

If you can, sponsor more than one child, or, join with others to make a group sponsorship contribution. Please use the attached envelope or go to <http://www.childcenterny.org/sponsorachild.html>.

Your help is greatly appreciated.