Growing and Learning at Cameron House

Elizabeth “Liz” Poong Mark was first introduced to Cameron House in 1971 when her older sister, Carol, brought her to the annual community event, Cameron Carnival. Little did she know, it would be her first of many Carnivals to come. Even though she did not know anyone at that time, she was welcomed by the “huge building, filled with fun, laughter and activities.” Liz fondly remembers meeting one of her closest lifetime friends, Angela Jeong, at Friday Night Club.

At 15, Liz became a regular Friday Night Club participant where she enjoyed meeting students from different schools. During the summer, she became an orange-scarf-clad Day Camp leader for lst graders and a Best Day of the Week Saturday program leader. She also taught Sunday school for one summer at the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown. As a high school senior, Liz was asked to take on the role as a Friday Night Club leader for the middle school girls group who would later become the Club group “The Ephesians”.

Liz recollects mentors and leaders who became role models to her, instilling leadership skills, the meaning of community, and the act of serving others. Some of her mentors/leaders were: Harry Chuck, the late Gordie Lam, the late Sherman Mo, Barbara Fong, Keith Choy, and Jeanine Lim. Many of her high school and college commission members, the Eirenikos, stay in touch and have held a couple reunions since their graduation.

A fair amount of the group have gone on to pursue careers in helping others such as physicians, lawyers, occupational and physical therapists, nurses, teachers and public health workers.

During her time at Cameron House, Liz learned more about what it meant to be a Christian. She joined the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown congregation in 1974 after being asked to help teach Sunday School.

After high school graduation, Liz went on to study nursing and held a career as a registered nurse for 40 years at UCSF. Many years passed, and Liz lost touch with Cameron House while she lived in Alameda raising two children who are now in their 30s. In 2012, Liz moved back to San Francisco and joined the Rotary Club of SF Chinatown. This Rotary connection brought Liz back to Cameron House.

One of the Rotary projects included painting and furnishing two rooms – this critical funding has not only fueled the tireless efforts of our staff and volunteers to deliver essential services, but our most vulnerable, but also allowed us to expand access to mental health counseling and support for parents and families.

We’ve seized the moment of this pandemic to engage in strategic planning with two consulting groups that facilitated important conversations about how we can best meet the complex and dynamic needs of our community. The Cameron House board will soon approve an exciting set of strategic priorities and roadmap for the next several years. This is especially resonant as we approach the auspicious date of our 150-year anniversary in 2024. Our emerging priorities focus on the strategies of financial sustainability, programmatic focus, organizational culture and community outcomes.

Our mission to strengthen, build and empower our community are shared acts of collective passion, faith and compassion. We thank you for trusting and supporting our work with your hearts, your minds, your voices and your financial stewardship.
Tommy Lim would be the first to tell you that Cameron House changed his life. He was introduced to Cameron House his junior year of high school. The time he spent as a 3rd grade Day Camp leader at the age of 18 was a powerful experience. From that role he eventually became a Friday Night Club leader for the Apostles. He is most proud of the fact that many of the original members of that club group grew up to hold key leadership roles at Cameron House and the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown.

Tommy is married with two adult children. He was an optometrist that started his own practice, and retired in 2020. Even though he has lived in San Jose since 1977, San Francisco has always been special to him, especially Chinatown. He has served on the board of the Chinatown Community Development Center and currently worships at the First Chinese Baptist Church, having served on their Deacons Board. Now on the Cameron House Board, he looks forward to serving the organization that has most impacted his life.

Dylan Chow grew up at Cameron House starting in first grade in the Ventures Day Camp program. He eventually volunteered as a Day Camp leader and attended Friday Night Club until he graduated high school in 2012. Some of his fondest memories include Westminster Woods, Cameron Carnival, a mission trip to New Mexico, and foggy summer days in Golden Gate Park.

Dylan joined the Cameron House Board to give back to the community that taught him so many invaluable lessons growing up. Dylan currently works at Google Fiber, where he helps deliver high-speed internet solutions to businesses and properties across the Bay Area. In his free time you can find him reading a book or staying active by running or hiking.

Harry Wong was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the United States in 2016. He attended San Francisco State University where he earned a BA in Psychology with a minor in Counseling. When Harry learned about the opportunity to work with Cameron House he was excited about putting his skills to work for the community.

Harry would like to become a social worker in the future. He regularly visits, cares, and distributes essential services through his church to Chinese residents who need help around San Francisco’s Chinatown, Richmond, and Sunset districts. During his free time, he likes to ride his road bike, cook, and play the guitar at his church.

Abbi Leong was born and raised in San Francisco and has joined the Cameron House Youth Ministries team to support summer programming, the Bilingual After school Program, and Friday Night Club. She came to Cameron House because she wants to serve the Bay Area community.

Abbi earned a BA in psychology from Biola University which has helped her become a better communicator in this role. Outside of work, she loves spending time with family and friends, as well as arranging medleys and covers of popular songs on the piano. She is thrilled to join the Youth Ministries team!
Cantonese Zoom Computer Class

Free ESL/Computer Class

October 20, 2021 – November 19, 2021

Wednesdays & Fridays from 10:30 AM to 12 PM

"After attending the Cameron House ESL/Computer Class, you can keep in touch with your family, friends, and the community through Zoom. You can also enhance your skills, be active, and keep your mind sharp!"

To register, please contact Flora Lok at (415) 781-0401 extension 130
Email: flora@cameronhouse.org

Legacy Event

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, December 11, 2021
12:00 - 1:30 pm / Cameron House lower deck

Legacy Society members will be invited to the annual “members only” luncheon at Cameron House in December. The socially distanced event will be held outdoors, and guests will be asked to sign a vaccination verification waiver.

The Legacy Society at Cameron House is composed of a group of visionary alumni and friends who have chosen to include Cameron House in their estate plans. To learn more, please visit our website cameronhouse.org/give/planned-giving

Volunteer Spotlight

Howard Lai

Food Pantry Volunteer

How did you first get involved with the food pantry?

I've been volunteering at Cameron House's Food Pantry since 2018. Jeanine Lim-Chan, one of my best friends and former college roommate, invited me to join her as she knew that I had some extra time on my hands.

What is your history with Cameron House?

My mother was a new immigrant when she was invited to Cameron House for English and Citizenship classes. As a child I attended youth programs here, and later I was employed by Cameron House to run youth programs. My sister and I participated in the year-round weekend Best Day of the Week program for Chinatown youth. We attended Day Camp every summer, went to Westminster Woods, and participated in the Friday Night Club program, Carnival, and multiple mini caravan trips.

As a young adult, I was provided with leadership opportunities such as Cabin Crew and Day Camp Director. Immediately after receiving my graduate degree, then Cameron House Director, Rev. Harry Chuck offered me a job on the staff of Cameron House to work on developing an after school program for immigrant youth. I was the Director of Bilingual After school Program (BAP) before becoming the Children's Program Director in the late '70s.

To further understand the immigrant experience and language, I spent two years working in Hong Kong through the Presbyterian Church's Volunteers in Mission program before returning to the states in the early '80s. I subsequently worked with youth in East Bay schools before ultimately landing in a job working with the elderly for the remainder of my career.

What keeps you coming back to the food pantry?

My history with Cameron House? What is your history with Cameron House?

I know it will have a direct impact and result in a tangible benefit for the elderly in Chinatown. I enjoy the conversation and camaraderie with other volunteers and the opportunity to interact with the seniors in Chinese. Also, assembling bags of food can be a rigorous workout which can be a way to get in some exercise.

What are your hopes for the food pantry and Cameron House community?

Food insecurity is a very real prospect that seniors and low-income families face every day. I hope the services that Food Pantry offers helps to alleviate some of that uncertainty and stress.

Being a part of the Food Pantry crew that distributes food to feed the elderly in my home community is a “full circle” opportunity for me to continue in service and to have an occasional chance to maintain my language skills. Working alongside with younger volunteers makes for lively conversation and exchange of ideas, keeping me young at heart while having fun doing something that hopefully makes a difference in the lives of the people we are serving.

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Our Big Give campaign has begun! Support of our annual fundraiser is your chance to help provide critical services the Chinese American community in the Bay Area.

Visit our website at [cameronhouse.org/give/donate](http://cameronhouse.org/give/donate) to learn more!

You can also join over 40 volunteers who help spread the word on social media. Last year we raised over $40,000 through social networking efforts towards our goal of $125,000, with the help of our volunteers! This two-week social media campaign will begin on November 15 and lead up to Giving Tuesday on November 30.

Please email communications@cameronhouse.org today to join our volunteer group.