

Current



The Heritage Apprentices

Story on page 4

that Made Summer Possible





LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hi there, Cameron House Friends!

We're pleased to highlight the joyous work of our volunteers, staff, board and donors that contribute to make our mission come alive in the work of strengthening our community every day.

Since the last edition of the Current we've bid a few people farewell – with gratitude for their service – and welcomed new people to our team. We thank outgoing board members Scott Barlow, Mary Lam, Liz Mark and Kimball Wong and welcome Dylan Chow, Letitia Eng, and Rev. Dr. Leslie Veen to the Board of Directors. We thank staffers Chris Cheuk (Information Technology) and Lauren Mark (Out-of-School Time Director) who left to pursue new professional paths.

We're grateful to Laurene Chan, who officially ended her role as Director of Youth Ministries in September and agreed to a transitional role through December. We welcome Julie Cai (Administrative Assistant/ Receptionist) and Troy Wilson (Director of Development) to our team!

Our work continues with our community's most vulnerable – in building social capital and literacy, facilitating healing and counseling, connecting people to employment, housing and legal support, and keeping people food secure. Our terrific Bilingual Afterschool Program team is in full swing with 70 elementary and middle school youth, building academic proficiency, facilitating enrichment, nurturing social development, and driving equity.

Board and staff are implementing our 4 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES...

- 1. Building Organizational Culture**
- 2. Sustainability**
- 3. Transitioning our services to a Family-Centered Approach**
- 4. Developing Capacity to Eliminate Poverty**

These priorities reflect the changing needs of our community and present a unique opportunity for Cameron House to lead.

Strengthening the board's capacity to help actualize our key strategic priorities is the focus of a governance action plan led by Robert Lim, President of the Board.

The widening gaps in learning loss of our youth, especially in math and reading, and the decline in their social-emotional health, worsened during the pandemic. The Mayor's Children and Families Recovery Plan signals the concern for the City's children and families. We see an opportunity to leverage a family-centered approach in our services toward mutual, shared outcomes in developing effective partnerships with schools, community agencies and families.

This summer a consultant helped us identify evidence-based frameworks and approaches that will inform our work to strengthen families. The benefits of deploying a family-centered approach yields greater, synergistic benefits working with children and parents together and holistically than with parents or children separately. The Two-generation (2Gen) framework supports and empowers families jointly; its premise is to build a family legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next.

The Protective Factors Framework of Strengthening Families model addresses 5 key areas: concrete supports; parental resilience; parental understanding of child development; social supports; and social-emotional competence in children. The Family Hui empowerment model facilitates families to learn from one another, peer-to-peer, from a strengths-based orientation.

These approaches offer us the tools to grow, expand our practice, and structure Cameron House to drive key measurable outcomes for families. We're excited about the potential to develop resilience and empower families and in serving the community more deeply. We thank you for believing and supporting this strategy!

Our Rekindle, Reconnect & Rediscover events this year welcome you – our alumni, donors, volunteers and friends – back to Cameron House after a long COVID period. Our kickoff event in July was a wonderful success and we hope you'll join us in the coming months and year ahead!

Cheers!



Michael Lee



Meet Legacy Member Dorothy “Polka Dot” G. Chow Quock

Dorothy “Polka Dot” G. Chow Quock grew up in Chinatown single room occupancy housings with seven other siblings and her two immigrant, illiterate parents. They shared communal bathrooms down one end of the hall and kitchens at the other with neighboring tenants. The building lacked heating, which meant all their water used for cooking or bathing needed to be boiled.

From a young age, Polka Dot attended Sunday School at the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Chinatown (now PCC), where she learned about a place called Donaldina Cameron House. In response to the growing number of families needing support and a safe place away from the racism of greater San Francisco, Cameron House began expanding its services to offer faith-based programs for youth in addition to social services for women. “We were on welfare and Cameron House’s social services helped with translating forms and supplying our needs. I remember some of the social workers like Lorna Logan, Tien Fuh Wu, and Mae Wong who knew my mother and our single-parent family’s situation.” In 1947, when Polka Dot was 13, she joined Cameron House’s youth program.

As a youth participant, Polka Dot learned a lot about herself. She attended the Friday Night Club program a part of the “Jadettes”, and on Sunday mornings she would attend worship service at PCC. “I taught Sunday School with the children who were sometimes hosted at Cameron House. I was a club leader and of course that transitioned into the summer leadership program.” Another thing

that kept Polka Dot coming to church was her desire to play the piano. Flora Hubbard was the pianist and organist at PCC and offered her free lessons. She would spend half an hour after church and took a summer’s worth of piano lessons.

Polka Dot went above and beyond in her volunteer roles at Cameron House. Her mother asked her frequently why she didn’t just move her bed over to Cameron House. Polka Dot was deeply involved in programs like Prayer Group, Bible Study, the annual Cameron Carnival, and Women’s/ Mothers’ study groups on weekday mornings which Lois Wichman facilitated. Lois’ husband, Dick, was Cameron House’s Executive Director, whose first secretary (around 1947-48) was named Dorothy Choy. Whenever Dick hollered, “Dorothy, Dorothy”, needing her for dictation, both Dorothys would show up. When it happened several times, he finally said, “You are ‘Polka Dot’, and she is ‘Giant Dot’.”

Polka Dot identifies herself as an activist and says that her activism became more relevant with the influence of Cameron House, where she learned to better herself and in turn better the world.

“At Cameron House I learned the phrase ‘do unto others what I would want done unto me’ and it touched every area of my being.”

Forty years ago when Polka Dot began working on her will, she had to decide where her assets had to go, and Cameron House was one of the first places that came to mind.

“Cameron House was one of the main organizations that gave me a foundation, along with the people that influenced me, to find my own identity. I felt like I will just be paying it back. Giving to the organizations that helped you can help someone who needs it, like I did.”

To learn more about including Cameron House in your will or trust, please visit cameronhouse.org/give/plannedgiving or contact Bill Vigna, Director of Finance and Operations, at bill@cameronhouse.org.



Polka Dot is honored at Cameron House’s 2020 Soul & Elegance Gala. She is presented a scroll by Executive Director, Michael Lee, and former Board President, Scott Barlow

A Summer Retrospective

by Corey Chan

Six weeks of program. 17 high school apprentices. Five days of training prior to prime time with the kids. 24 possible hours during the summer to work with the kids to prepare them for a culminating family showcase night. One all-encompassing goal.

It was a summer of crazy numbers.

For example, the number too (not a typo). Too as in too many overtime hours to equip the apprentices and the kids to succeed in their objectives. But succeed they did. Against every predictor of what could be accomplished, they pulled off a daring, nonsensical, unachievable objective. In the mornings, they learned the distillation of over 40 years of training in youth work, dragon dance, and Chinese martial arts (without a written manual). In the afternoons, they were asked to teach what they learned that morning to scores of 1st through 8th graders with varying degrees of focus and interest. Good thing most of the apprentices had very little prior experience with the curriculum and intense youth work. They didn't realize they were being asked to do something nearly impossible.

This is their story.



Typical Days (Anything But)

The “typical” day for the apprentices started off with casual conversation. Around 9:30 am, they were usually taken to the main yard. Their training began with games or songs sometimes, but serious bonding happened when they were taken out of their comfort zones with salsa, cha cha, and bachata lessons. The initial results were silly and comical, but they gradually grew to expect these lessons in social etiquette and supporting different partners with grace. It wasn't about learning to dance well. The purpose was to build their team spirit and expand their confidence in what they could do despite feelings of awkwardness.

“I have learned to step out of my comfort zone because of you. You taught me things that I wouldn't have ever thought I could learn. Thank you for this amazing opportunity.”

Things got really awkward when they had their first lessons in the Chinese martial arts known as *wushu* and *taijiquan*. These were challenging exercises—exercises in humility because any one of these physical exercises requires years to master. The apprentices were asked to learn foreign, complex physical movement sequences in the morning, then turn around and teach what they learned after 90 minutes. Even the youngest kids would see through the facade and pounce like hungry wolves if the apprentices did not project leadership qualities.

We broke for daily planning sessions and lunch after the physical training. The apprentices were thrown into the deep water when it was time to be with the kids from 1:00 to 5:30/5:45. The long hours probably seem like business as usual for veteran daycamp leaders and directors. However, the heritage program has never been implemented before in CH's history. This was different. Nevertheless, the apprentices and their classroom staff co-workers destroyed our original expectations of what level they could bring the kids to.

Expecting the Unexpected

Every now and then the apprentices faced the unexpected. Of course—because it's youth work! However, they learned to expect that from their supervisor too because never knowing when they were going on an improvised remote training kept them off balance and focused. They were trained to use various techniques like this during the summer to keep their kids on task. Better to be the bell than the dog, right? Thanks Pavlov.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears

One of the main job requirements was the willingness to work hard. The apprentices were told point blank at their job interviews and on Day One that the job would often be difficult—sometimes to the point of tears. The team collectively dripped blood, sweat, and tears at some point during the summer. No doubt. The work was hard and the hours long, but they remembered from our first training meeting that the harder they worked, the more tears they were likely to shed at the end of the summer. Only these would be tears of joy and sadness at the end of a fantastic experience—not tears of frustration.

“Thank you for this incredible opportunity this summer. I am truly thankful for the unforgettable memories and life skills. From leadership, improvisation, and interpersonal skills, to getting to know each other and every child through conversations and games... This is my first official CH program and I thank you for making me feel welcomed. This community is really like no other.”



Family Engagement

In their own words, these are a few of the thoughts and feelings expressed by the 2022 Heritage School Summer Apprentices and some of their parents:

“Thank you so very much for giving me the opportunity to do this job, to gain experience, and to make so many new friends. Everything you told us, from beginning to end, was so important, and we will always cherish it forever... I hope to come back to have a new and memorable experience next summer.”

“At the beginning of the summer, heritage meant traditions. Things that are passed down from generation to generation in families. I was a passive recipient. Now after seven weeks of this program, I realize that I'm an active part of passing down some traditions. I'm a caretaker of these traditions.”

introducing new staff

Julie Cai

Administrative Assistant and Receptionist

Julie was introduced to Cameron House through her sister, who was formally enrolled in the Bilingual After school Program, her sister still volunteers with Cameron House. Julie's days usually consist of answering calls, greeting people at the front desk, translating and calling parents for Youth Ministries, and some admin work. Julie's first language is Cantonese; when she was four her family immigrated to California where English became her second language. She learned Taishanese from her grandpa, who immigrated to the states before she was born, he didn't want her to lose her own village's language. In Julie's free time she likes to read and relax with a nice cup of tea, try new food, or find a nice cup of coffee.

“Thus far one of my favorite memories at Cameron House has been the summer. A lot was thrown at me and it was fun, it was nice to absorb the quiet while it lasted now that BAP has started.”



Troy Wilson

Director of Development



After considering many qualified and interesting candidates we are delighted to share the news that Troy Wilson will serve as the next Cameron House Director of Development.

Troy's professional and personal life has been devoted to social justice mission work through advocacy, philanthropy, and serving those in need. He brings 25 years of fundraising, net-

working, starting a non-profit, management/team-building, client relations, and sales experience to Cameron House. Troy is a licensed realtor, ordained pastor and a seasoned volunteer in addressing poverty, immigration status, homelessness, drug addiction, and mental illness. He served on executive boards for San Francisco Road Runners Club and Galileo High School PTSA (as a consultant).

Troy's skills and experience will dovetail nicely with strategic roadmap priorities, particularly in diversifying, expansion and growth our funding streams – that will facilitate the work of deepening and expanding our mission impact with our most vulnerable.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

PAULINE CHIN *food pantry volunteer*



How did you get involved volunteering at Cameron House?

Food pantry is my first volunteer activity with Cameron House. Three years ago I started helping with the food pantry because my two sisters were very involved in Cameron House since high school and they encouraged me to support the pantry. My sister Elizabeth Mark was recently on the Cameron House Board. I am also a member of the Chinatown Rotary Club of San Francisco and we have made it our mission to support Cameron House. I have also donated knitted caps to the Cancer Support Group. The Chinatown Rotary Club of SF also provided funds to plant and support a small garden on Sacramento Street outside of Cameron House. Each week before or after the food pantry, we weed and water the garden.

What's your history with Cameron House?

Other than my sisters, Carol and Liz Poong, I have not previously been involved with Cameron House. While they were involved with camp programs and leadership activities, I

volunteered at the Chinatown YMCA as a club leader and participated in several Chinese New Year Parades.

What changes have you noticed since the transition to a contact-less pick up process?

I appreciated the transition to an outdoor food pantry program. Since we assemble food bags in advance of the food pantry in the Cameron House Parking Lot, we don't have exposure to the food pantry participants.

The advantages of our contact-less pick up process is that it decreases our risk of exposure to potential infections such as COVID, colds, flu etc. Although the food pantry volunteers are outside, our temperature is checked and we wear masks and gloves to protect ourselves and others.

The challenge of the food pantry process is that it's a bit more physically demanding since we are filling and moving the bags instead of the participants coming around to each food station. I also acknowledge that we don't give the participants a

choice to refuse an item so there's a chance that there could be waste if they toss out an item they don't want.

What keeps you coming back to the food pantry?

The Chinatown Rotary Club of SF has pledged to support the Cameron House Food Pantry every week and it is rewarding to participate. I appreciate the devotion of the people who volunteer. Nolan Chow does a great job as food pantry facilitator and leader.

What are your hopes for the people you help serve?

I'm a retired UCSF nurse. My hope is that the people I serve remain healthy, safe, and lead good lives.

I'm grateful that Cameron House is demonstrating resilience during these challenging times. Cameron House is a pillar of the community and provides an essential service for the community. We should all do our best to support this essential organization.



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YOU'RE INVITED TO

Rekindle, Reconnect, Rediscover

Cameron House

920 Sacramento Street, San Francisco
Saturday, November 5, 2022
4:00 - 6:00 PM

Wine and hors d'oeuvres will be served
Outdoor event | Masks optional
Dress business casual
Sponsorship options available
\$75 ticketed event

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EMBARK ON OUR
STRATEGIC ROADMAP AND
WELCOME YOU BACK TO
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