

Current



Tomorrow's Flowers

It had finally happened. After weeks of nurturing four nursery flats of seedlings, two tiny, bright-green leaves were just beginning to peek out from the moistened soil. Standing there on that hot summer day, I gained a new respect for my parents. As a child, I had seen them plant their flower and vegetable gardens at home; they made it look so effortless. Yet, planting and nursing these seeds had taken ample amounts of time, attention, and love. And more than once, when rainstorms threatened my newly planted seedlings, I needed to run outside and pull them into the shelter of the porch.



Oddly enough, that sums up what happens at Cameron House every day. Valuable seeds of acceptance, support, and safety are planted in the hearts of the children and adults who walk through our doors seeking assistance. Those seeds are nurtured with abundant love, time, and attention – oftentimes helping to draw them to safety – so that each person can bloom and thrive.

There are other seeds that many people don't see upon first glance. These seeds are the small ideas – the little what-if questions that our Volunteers, Alumni, and Staff ask. And they, too, blossom into flowers of great beauty.

Sometimes, they bloom in ways that no one could have predicted.

The Flowering of VPA

One case in point, is our Visual Performing Arts Festival. Five years



ago, Casey Chow, Club Leader and CH Alumnus, had a small idea. Or so it seemed. As he worked with the youth, he realized they didn't have any means of developing their artistic or creative talents. Inspired by the mentoring he received at Cameron House, when he was a young, aspiring filmmaker, he wanted to give his students the same opportunities. From that one desire sprang "The Visual and Performing Arts Festival" (VPA), a venue in which youth learn a wide variety of skills and incorporate them into an expressive performance for the public. What began as five youth (and four Alumni) pooling their talents back in 2010, has now grown to 22 youth studying and practicing their crafts every weekend

for eight weeks or more. Planning and coordinating these workshops, Casey teaches the skills he developed at the Academy of Art University while bringing in other CH Alumni who have artistic expertise to share. "It has

been fulfilling," Casey says, "as I get to mix both my love for video production and youth development together." This year's workshops have been the most extensive yet, with youth learning photography, multimedia production, the culinary arts, qigong, public speaking, stage makeup, and dance. The encouragement, mentoring, and training that they receive through these

workshops enable them to unlock their creativity.

Not generally encouraged in Chinese American households, the creative arts are far more than a means of self-expression, as valuable as that is. VPA students spend months learning new skills, working together as a team, and building a solid work ethic. All on their own time. As they grow into young adults, they become comfortable facing new challenges, stepping up to the plate when a need arises, and working in tandem with others to achieve a goal.

There are other significant and long-lasting effects that bloom in the lives of the students. According to a study by the University of Maryland, adolescent



May's Corner

The Cameron House Board recently approved a new 5-year Strategic Plan, developed by a Strategic Planning Committee (composed of Board and Staff), and facilitated by Mike Wong and Doreen Der-McLeod. We are excited about the new plan, which consists of four goals. A list of outcomes under each goal will be further developed in 2016. Here is an edited preview that explains the main goals and rationale. We look forward to sharing more details on how our programs and efforts will align with this new plan.

Goal 1: Build Cameron House faith values and programming by defining program success, measuring and evaluating progress, and developing the resources and capacities needed by the Staff and Board to ensure strong faith values and programs.

Rationale: Cameron House's Faith Statement describes CH's work as "rooted in the Christian faith and our Presbyterian heritage. We believe that God calls us to be an empowering presence in the community. We provide a safe place, are a trusted friend and advocate, meet people where they are, and walk with them as they fulfill their lives. We are a resource for people to explore faith and spirituality."

The strategic planning process underscored the importance of developing measures for evaluating our program effectiveness and success in the cultivation of faith values, and other closely-held values. This goal provides CH the opportunity to develop a shared understanding of our aspiration for nurturing faith, and a common language for Board and Staff to talk about aligning our work with our value statements.

It can be challenging for Board and Staff to develop outcomes that adequately assess an individual's "faith journey". In the first year, it will be important to have a clear process for developing implementation measures as a model for future years. We understand measures need not always be quantitative, but could be qualitative, based on participants' experiences and personal narratives. The current Staff work reviewing faith values in programming using the "faith grid" can provide insights for developing such measures. Continued organizational dialogue will be valuable for further aligning the Faith Statement with CH programs and services.

Goal 2: Work on community and social justice issues with participants, clients, and community members.

Rationale: Social justice is embedded in the CH faith values, e.g., empowerment of community, stewardship, justice for all. These values were underscored throughout the strategic planning discussions, with the mention of racial justice, respect for the environment, immigrant rights, housing, and domestic violence. This is an opportunity for CH to be intentional in its support and involvement in issues affecting the community and the people we serve.

Social justice can be actuated through education, advocacy, mobilization, and organizing. Other organizations may have greater capacity and experience in these areas. With this goal, CH should take on the activities and actions to which it is best suited to advance social justice. It will be important to assess what CH is already doing, and has capacity to take on, as well as what is

going on in the community. With this, CH can best determine its contributions to this work.

Goal 3: Build and retain strong, effective Staff and Board capacity, experience, and talent needed to serve the community.

Rationale: Building the capacity of the Board and Staff of any non-profit agency is necessary for the health and longevity of the organization. A strong Board and Staff, mutually aligned with the agency's mission, will work together to make sure programs meet the needs of the community that CH has committed to serve. Building capacity for Board members to understand and fulfill their dual role of governance and support is important. Developing long-range strategies for recruitment, retention, support and development of Staff will include review and adjustments to Staff salaries, and opportunities for training to help Staff grow professionally.

Goal 4: Support and sustain Cameron House programs and infrastructure, and plan for future needs and growth.

Rationale: Cameron House's long-term future rests with having a strong organization – its people, infrastructure and funding sustainability to ensure a bright future.

A "strong organization goal" should balance the needs of the community, and grow the organization's services and programs, with the realistic resources of CH. There should be long-range strategies for maintaining and improving the building and facilities needed to support CH's participants, clients and Staff needs.

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students who study the arts “are significantly more optimistic about their chances to attend college than non-arts students,” and by the time they are in their late twenties through early thirties, they are “29% more likely than former non-arts students” to obtain a four-year degree.¹ Other studies indicate that youth who participate in the arts are more self-confident and have a greater sense of control over their lives.

Any way you look at it, Casey’s small ‘seed’ has grown into a program that will impact our youth for decades.

Family Day Blossoms

Another example of growth is Family Day. Started in 1997 as a way of helping Cantonese-speaking families strengthen their relationships through healthy inter-generational activities, the day is planned attentively by our Social Services Ministry (SSM) team.

This year’s theme was “Eating Well with Style.” The idea came from Friends of Cameron House members who were part of the Be My Guest Program at last year’s annual Gala. Not born or raised in America, they were confused with the many spoons, forks, and different drinking glasses at each setting. That confusion created a hesitancy in using the utensils.

This is a microcosm of what many Chinese immigrants experience on a daily basis. Whenever they leave the confines of Chinatown, they are faced with a culture they do not understand. If new situations are presented to them, they are hesitant to get involved simply because no one has explained the unspoken rules of their new environment. And that is where we step in.

Enter into the picture our SSM staff, with Ming Quan Chang coordinating the entire day. Yvonne Liang, from Chinese Hospital, was asked to speak

about nutrition and healthy eating, and our own Norma Fong Chan (CH Staff) was asked to talk about table manners and etiquette.

Norma, in turn, reached out to some of our PCC (Presbyterian Church in Chinatown) family to see if they would like to help. With a resounding ‘yes,’ their excitement over the project was contagious. A huge band of volunteers came forth with joyful hearts to help prepare, cook, serve, and host at this event. While Norma and Ming were not originally planning to serve a full meal, the event blossomed into a wonderful feast (prepared by Jon Hee).

Imagine twelve tables in Culbertson Hall, each decorated elaborately with table cloths, napkins, and formal place settings (thanks to CH Foundation Board Member, Beverly Yip). With about 100 people participating, we needed a small army of volunteers to make the day a success. Every table had a volunteer attendant, who served the meal one course at a time, and a volunteer host who demonstrated how to build a place setting.

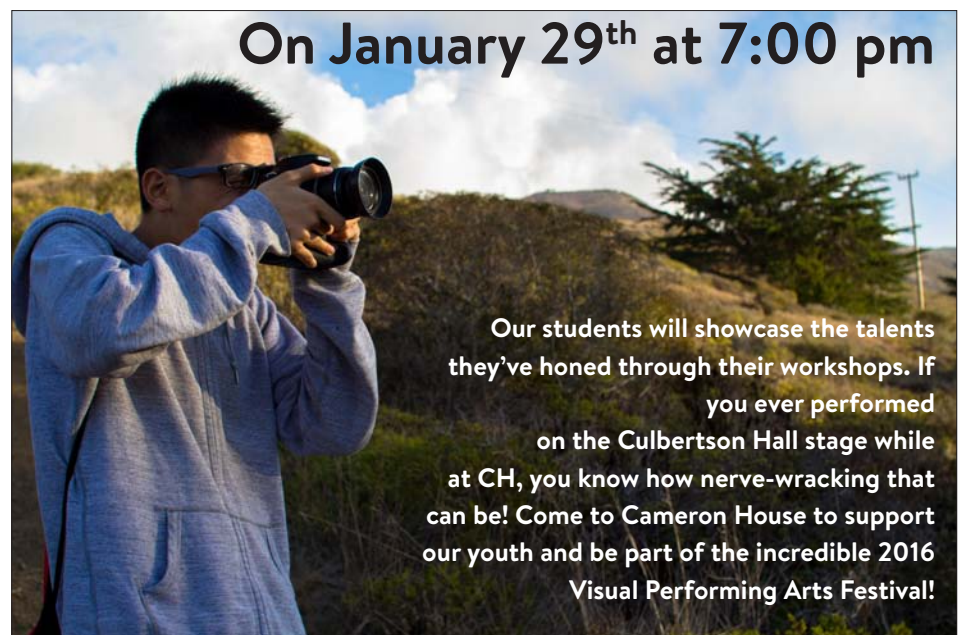
The participants were happily engaged, eager to learn and experience some-

thing new. It was heartwarming to see everyone having fun, cheering one another with grape juice-filled wine glasses, and enjoying the delectable meal. They commented that they now understood the mystery of American dining.

Downstairs, the children were engaged in the same subjects, but with a youthful twist. CH Board Member Jojo Woo and Eunice Bejar-Lee were at the helm with other SSM and PCC volunteers, teaching the youth how to properly wash their hands, make a table setting place mat, and prepare pizza, salad, and deviled eggs. At the table, they put down their cellphones and electronics so that they could connect with one another in a more meaningful way and enjoy their meal. At the end of the day, they received donated gift bags filled with goodies (generously donated by Eunice and Gilbert Lee).

“Anything is possible at Cameron House,” said Ming exuberantly, as she observed how one small idea blossomed into a remarkable event with numerous volunteers – young and old – lending a helping hand. CH Staff, PCC and Friday Night Club members, Alumni, and

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On January 29th at 7:00 pm

Our students will showcase the talents they’ve honed through their workshops. If you ever performed on the Culbertson Hall stage while at CH, you know how nerve-wracking that can be! Come to Cameron House to support our youth and be part of the incredible 2016 Visual Performing Arts Festival!

Working Together As One



left to right: Michelle, Kelly, and Vienna

My name is Kelly Chen, and I was one of the participants in this September's backpacking trip at Saddlebag Lake, just outside Yosemite. This was my second time backpacking with Cameron House and I had nothing but excitement when Cody (a CH Staff member) asked if I would like to join this trip.

“It wasn't just a group of nine individuals, but a group working together as one, relying on each other.”

This trip was extremely memorable for me because it was an all-girls trip. Even though today's views of women are changing, the ideas of men being superior are still lingering. But during this trip, it was just simply us girls having the best time of our lives. It wasn't just a group of nine individuals, but a group working together as one, relying on each other. This trip was way harder than last year's backpacking trip on Angel Island. Walking up the

side of a mountain with a thirty pound backpack at 10,000 feet above sea level was anything but easy. Even though this was tough there were no tears, no whining, nor any way of backing out. This trip was filled with laughter, encouragement, and the sound of rapid breathing due to the high altitude.

Even though I usually consider confidence to be one of my weaknesses, I felt empowered when the other girls were asking me how I managed to walk up those hills so fast. I felt like I could turn my weaknesses into strengths because the group was like my anchor that reminded me I can do this, and they'll push me back on my feet when I fall down. I'm not going to lie, there were many times I gave up but decided to get back on my feet because I knew I wasn't alone. This might simply just be a backpacking trip to many, but this trip to me was something way, way more. It taught me the value of relationships, and to take a break once in a while and slow down to examine my surroundings. And most of all, backpacking reminded me that we girls are strong, confident, and can do anything.

Holidays Around the Table

Our Annual Harvest Home Fundraiser created the perfect opportunity to partner with our wonderful family of supporters! Youth Ministries, Social Services Ministry, the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown (PCC), the Mikados and Marauders Commissions, and residents of the Richmond District pulled together to raise over \$4,000, which provided 200 bags of groceries for our families! The Friday Night Club youth spent an entire Friday night collecting donations in the Richmond District; the Mikados and Marauders Commissions donated the funds they collected at their reunion; the Social Services Ministry Staff handpicked the culturally appropriate food items; and the Friends of Cameron House packed the bags for distribution. Thanks to everyone who helped give families a chance to celebrate the holidays in the best way we know how: around the dinner table!



Packing bags of holiday food


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Staff at other nonprofit organizations stepped in wholeheartedly to help make the day a huge success.

“Oftentimes, with large community events involving presentations and audience participation, there is chattering among small groups,” said Diana Wong (from Chinatown Child Development Center), “However, during this particular event, I noticed most of the participants were paying attention, especially to the nutrition segment presented by Yvonne and the ‘practicing the table manners’ segment (by Norma). I was a table server and had received positive comments from the participants sitting at the table.”

The entire day fostered a sense of community and solidarity, as people came together to connect, learn about, and appreciate one another.

Yes, small ideas, like tiny seeds, can flourish into remarkable occasions of love and generosity. Indeed, Cameron House itself is a perfect example of this. Sprouting from a small idea to help young, Chinese immigrant girls who had been smuggled into the United States and forced into slavery or prostitution, we have flowered into a comprehensive family service organization. Through our programs, services, leadership development, and partnerships with other nonprofits, we help our children and clients learn some of the unspoken rules of a new culture. We give them opportunities to step into new situations with confidence instead of hesitancy. We help them plant roots so that they can bloom and thrive.

 Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.
~ Robert Louis Stevenson

1 <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Maryland.pdf>
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#traditionofleadershipandstyle

#modeldebut

CHYA night out

On Friday, November 27th, Cameron House Young Adults (CHYA) had a night out on the town! Everyone had a fantastic time reconnecting, meeting new friends, and raising money for youth to experience the California wilderness. Together, we raised over \$1,200 for future outdoor excursions. Food, drinks, raffle, music, and, of course, the fashion show, titled: “Cameron House x Leonora Grace”!



#Justwonabaycruise

#who'scomingwithme?



#notgonnalosethisdancecontest

#betUcantdothis



#Reunion #Shrtou #Laurenwalkedtherunway

Feeling More Confident

Written by Gina Zhou, a former teacher in China (translated into English)

In the past, when I heard seniors talk about taking English classes, especially those who have already passed their citizenship tests, I would think, “Why bother taking an English class if you are already a citizen?” It was as if the only reason to learn English was to pass the citizenship test. Once we became citizens and got voting rights and retirement funds, there was nothing else to worry about. Also, living in Chinatown, we don’t have many chances to use English.

This year is my ninth year living at my senior home. I like listening to the workers speak in English. English is a polite and expressive language through which one can clearly convey their message. Once in the past, when I spoke with my daughter on the phone, she told me I had hurt my sixteen year old granddaughter’s feelings after complaining about her bad Chinese. After I thought about it, I feel it’s unfair to my granddaughter that I criticize her Chinese when she has never complained about my poor English. I had hurt her self-esteem without even knowing it. It made me think of my

6-month-old great granddaughter. I wonder if she would speak Chinese to me when she grows up.

“
Now I feel more confident and learn as much as I can to improve myself and enrich my life.
”

After taking English for 10 weeks here, I finally felt that I was part of the English speaking world. Before, I wasn’t used to English, I worried that I would forget everything when I speak. Now I feel more confident and learn as much as I can to improve myself and enrich my life. My neighbor told me that I am going to school for seniors. I replied, “Yes! When I graduate, I will invite you.”

In the ten short weeks, I learned a lot of practical conversational English. Our ESL teacher, Ms. Cheung, teaches in Cantonese and English. My classmates and I wrote a Thank You card to Ms. Cheung at the end of the course and commented, “Your bilingual ability is your wealth.” Indeed! There’s a feeling

So at the start of 2015, I went to a couple of ESL schools - some teachers spoke only English, some had classes during inconvenient times, or their curriculum was not right for me. Then I found Cameron House’s ESL class.

of intimidation in ESL classes taught only in English, but in a bilingual classroom, we can use our mother tongue to help us understand English. There were 15 students at different levels in our class, but Ms. Cheung was able to grasp and attend to the needs of every student at the same time. Some topics covered in class included: how to introduce yourself, simple greetings, conversations between teachers and parents, how to communicate with flight attendants on board a flight, go through customs, and how to ask for directions.

In the past, I let others order for me when I ate at an American restaurant and I relied on hand gestures when giving directions. Things will change when I encounter these situations again in the future. Ms. Cheung is lively and her class is fun. She includes group activities, activities for holidays, and volunteer opportunities at the Cameron House Carnival into the class. On the last day of class, we went on a fieldtrip to practice speaking English. We went to Fort Point to practice English and learn about American history.

Cameron House’s ESL Class is really helpful. My classmates and I are looking forward to the next course!



Save the Date: Saturday, February 27, 2016 *Home, Soul & Elegance*

Our Gala planning team has been hard at work preparing a celebration that everyone can enjoy. Come and reconnect with old friends, meet new people who share our beliefs, and learn about our program highlights.

We’ve heard your feedback about what you would like the Gala to be and are focusing this year’s event on the things that are most important: enjoying our time together and, of course, dancing the night away!

Our Summer Branches Youth Program gave students and their families a unique opportunity to bloom. Focusing on family and history, the students researched their family's cultures, traditions, and festivals; conducted interviews with family members using questions they developed; drew pictures reflecting what they had learned; created timelines and family trees; and then wrote essays. At our end-of-the summer Family Night, three students presented their essays to a packed Culbertson Hall. Below is the moving story of Monique and her mother:



The person I interviewed was my mom. Her name is Erika, and she is from El Salvador. Growing up, my mom read part of a dictionary every day. The reason is because she wanted to learn English. Before she moved to America, she had a lot of friends in El Salvador so when she came to America she had to start over.

My mom came to America with my grandma and my aunts because they wanted to keep safe from the war. My mom wanted a better future for her and her siblings. My grandma wanted to give a better life for her kids. Which, led to me having a better life and I wanted to thank my mom and grandma for this opportunity.

Growing up I had more things than my mother, such as toys, activities, games, electronics, and a safer life and freedom. When my mom was a child she didn't have all these electronics and toys although she went to private school. It was not safe to go out because there was a war going on.

What I learned through my interview report was how her life was in her country and how difficult it was. I also learned how unfair it was compared to ours. Even though we had a war going on when I was growing up, it was not in the U.S., so it did not affect my education or outdoor activities. Another thing I learned was that there was no freedom, and she didn't have the option to choose what she wanted to do. Lastly, I learned to not take things for granted because there are a lot of people and kids out there that have it harder than me, so I appreciate everything that I have.

monique's debut at family night



Monique reading her essay at Family Night

Tributes & Memorials

from: Oct. 1, 2014 – Sept. 30, 2015

A complete list of donors will be in our Annual Report; scheduled for print in 2016.

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upcoming
events

- Jan. 29, 2016** 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm Visual Performing Arts Festival, Culbertson Hall
- Feb. 27, 2016** 5:30 pm doors open Home, Soul & Elegance Gala
South San Francisco Convention Center
- May 7, 2016** 11:00 am - 7:00 pm 68th Cameron Carnival

Thank You...

to everyone who donated to our Phone-a-Thon! Because of your generosity, we raised over \$220,000 to continue providing vital programs for our community! Special thanks goes to the Eustace-Kwan Family Foundation and Keira Chu for their considerable matching funds!

Reducing Postage

Beginning this year, in an effort to reduce postage costs and conserve resources, we will only be mailing annual donation summary letters **by request**. If you would like to receive one, please contact Annie Luu at annie@cameronhouse.org or 415-781-0401 x123, and we will gladly send one to you in January, 2016.