

Current



GUIDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS TO HEALING

An Interview with a Domestic Violence Case Manager on How Their Work Changes Lives

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Domestic violence affects everyone, impacting lives across the boundaries of race, gender, and class. For some people, the issue of domestic violence can raise feelings of discomfort and discourage further dialog when this topic arises in a conversation. Unfortunately, when shame, stigma, or fear silence conversations about domestic violence, this issue becomes invisible and unspoken despite its pervasiveness in our society. To continue the conversation and learn more about this complex and challenging topic, we interviewed one of our case managers who works on the front lines serving survivors of domestic violence.

CH: What are some of the causes of domestic violence?

Case Manager: Well, most of the survivors I work with are immigrants. Living in a new country, there's a lot of economic stress, there's a lot of anger, and there's often a lack of communication in families. If they don't have an advanced education, it's really hard for



Survivors of domestic violence depend on Cameron House for case management. *Photo dramatization.*

them to find a job and raise their kids. On top of that, beating up the wife, beating up the kids might be accepted in the culture

they come from. So for women, they feel they have to live with it because it's normal.

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A MESSAGE FROM MICHAEL LEE

By Executive Director Michael Lee

My first 60 days as the new executive director of Cameron House has been a joyful whirlwind of introductions, meetings, and orientation. My priority has been to initiate relationships, build rapport, listen, and learn. I feel warmly welcomed, delighted, and humbled by so many among you who personally have made my arrival so special.

Your heart-filled stories – over 150 so far – bring to life my appreciation for Cameron House’s lasting impact on the life trajectories of you and your loved ones, as well as your faith-in-action that strengthens our community with compassion, inspires soaring dreams, and champions a socially just society.

I’ve experienced how the Cameron House community demonstrates its faith-in-action in another powerful way – through its leadership in ensuring financial resources to advance academic achievement, servant leadership, and social justice outcomes. This year, with the dollar-for-dollar match from the Eustace-Kwan Family Foundation, our benefactors surpassed the historical record for our annual Big Give Campaign, raising \$230,000! Thank you, all!

I’ve worked side-by-side with our volunteers, immersed myself in our staff’s work and operations, and initiated collaborative working relationships with our board, holding one-on-one

meetings with each director and working with our committees and foundation. I’ve observed Friday Night Club, afterschool and summer programs, and participated at Westminster Woods camp.



Michael Lee making community connections during a visit to Eastern Bakery (720 Grant Ave.) on his first day of work in July 2019.

I’ve entered these hallowed doors of Cameron House and immersed myself in the legacy of Margaret Culbertson, Donaldina Cameron, Lorna Logan, Tien Fuh Wu, and so many others. The September 21st panel featuring the Rev. Harry Chuck; Catherine Cameron, grandniece of Donaldina Cameron; Doreen Der-McCleod; and Julia Flynn Siler, author of *The White Devil’s Daughters*, as well as the documentary film *Chinatown Rising* by Josh and Rev. Harry Chuck have illuminated the compelling social justice legacy of Cameron House.

I’ve toured Chinatown and begun working with our neighborhood agency collaborators and partners: Commission on the Status of Women; San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium; Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development; Presbyterian Church in Chinatown; NICOS Chinese Health Coalition;

Chinese for Affirmative Action; Asian Pacific Islander Council; Neighborhood Centers Together; Community Youth Center; Chinese Historical Society of America; Gum Moon Women’s Residence; Asian Women’s Resource Center; eBay Foundation; San Francisco Police Department; San Francisco-Marin Food Bank; Chinatown Community Development Center; Self-Help for the Elderly; and Wu Yee among them.

In the coming months the scope of my work will shift to a strategic focus. I’ll analyze our current business model, assess our programmatic and financial performance, take stock of our leadership and management capacity and systems, and work closely with our board leadership in establishing a governance agenda. My principal outcome over the next year is to engage key stakeholders – internal, external, current partners, investors, funders, and potential supporters to explore strategic opportunities that will inform a powerful shared vision, one that presents our best opportunity for renewal and deep, powerful community benefit and impact.

I am but one and this path is long. I welcome your engagement and your big ideas. Will you join and forge this path with me?



Michael Lee
Executive Director

I have some clients who met their husband for the first time when they arrived in the United States. They thought that they could have the American dream, that it would be a new life. But once they're here, they meet their husband who is 60 or 70, much older than they thought. And because the husband is a citizen, he has the power to say, "I gave you the green card that lets you stay here so you have to listen to me." So because of that power difference, there's a lot of abuse happening.

CH: Do you ever categorize your cases?

CM: Even though we don't want to, we sometimes have to put the abuse into levels. So the starting level could be verbal abuse like yelling or name calling, and then it goes up to emotional abuse. They will control you by not allowing you to go to work, have friends, or have a bank account. They also might threaten you with taking away your green card so you will get deported. The most intense are physical and sexual abuse. The reality of our work is that we need these levels to create priorities for deciding which survivors to connect with the limited resources out there. For instance, legal support is really, really hard to find for our clients because of the lack of legal staff, and we don't have access to any attorneys who can speak Chinese either.

CH: How do you support survivors?

CM: People sometimes call us



Case managers provide emotional support and resource navigation to survivors. Photo dramatization.

the "everything person" because we provide case management, which includes accompanying survivors to court hearings, to the attorney's office, and to resources for legal support, shelter, and counseling. We also provide a lot of emotional support.

We have to partner with many different agencies to provide all these resources. I will refer clients to a shelter or legal support, but sometimes the shelter is full or there's no attorney. So there's no place to go. I sometimes have to be the translator at the attorney's office because no one there speaks Chinese. I spend most of the time keeping track of the process.

CH: What is different about working with the Chinese American immigrant community?

CM: It's different because Chinese culture involves saving face. When talking about abuse, people will avoid using that word because they think it's shameful. If there's abuse happening in the family some will try to hide it and

not let outsiders know.

I remember asking a client, "Have you thought about divorce?" She reacted by blaming everything on herself, thinking if she divorced it would be her fault for separating the family. So that requires some consideration. It might take a long time for them to decide to leave the abuser. So I have to be patient and give them space, because it can be tough for them to open up even to a professional about something so personal.

CH: How do you help survivors heal?

CM: Developing a trusting relationship is really important since the clients put their trust in us as professionals. So whatever we say they take very seriously. I always tell them that it's okay to feel sad. It's okay to feel angry. It's okay to think that it's not fair.

I'm there to help them talk it out, and to help them identify different emotions. A lot of my clients have a hard time talking about emotions, but talking things through with them is

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A CAMP TRADITION OF EMPOWERMENT CONTINUES

Since time immemorial, Cameron House kids have eagerly awaited the final week of summer for one reason: Westminster Woods. For the uninitiated, Westminster Woods (also referred to simply as “West”) is a bucolic sleepaway camp located in the redwood forests outside Occidental, CA. Time-honored and much-loved traditions include swimming at night during the “chocolate” swim, learning to square dance on the grass field, and watching cabin leaders perform outrageous stunts at the evening campfire (have you ever seen someone eat shrimp-flavored ramen topped with ... powdered Kool-Aid?). However, the true heart and soul of West is much deeper, wider, and longer-lasting than any one campfire stunt. West is a training ground where generations of young people have gained role models, learned life lessons, and found inspiration to give back.

Without role models, the West experience would not be possible. They take the form of cabin and family group leaders, many of whom were once campers themselves. These leaders form the emotional bedrock upon which the West experience stands. Leaders coach, comfort, encourage, and (sometimes literally) carry their campers to get through the week. Leaders provide an indispensable pillar of support, and also provide campers with examples of adults they can both look up to and go to for support.

Additionally, West provides a laboratory for young people to safely experiment with new activities that can teach them valuable life lessons. For instance, learning to shoot a bow and arrow can teach campers about safety, responsibility, and focus. A camper might overcome shyness and gain self-confidence with the help



Top: Archers take aim at the range.

Center: Tenth graders hold candles during a night hike up to the camp cross.

Bottom: Campers reflect on life's bigger questions. Each day had a main theme including success and failure, mistakes and forgiveness, love and heartbreak, and life and death.

of a supportive audience at the campfire talent show. And most profoundly, campers learn about participating in a community of sharing, caring, and vulnerability during vespers, a special evening program of prayer and reflection.

But perhaps most important of all, the experience of West inspires campers to give back. Everyone contributes according to their ability, and first-timers may give simply by participating in each activity, clearing their plate after meals, and learning the names of their bunk mates. But as campers grow, their contributions increase as well. They perform music during singspiration. They lead the group in prayer and reflection. They become cabin and family group leaders. They teach classes and workshops. Ultimately, West inspires campers to give back the gifts they themselves were given.

West is a week filled with firsts. A first week away from home (and their cell phones). A first night spent gazing at the stars. A first friend they can share their fears and aspirations with. We hope that the friendships, skills, and inspiration gained from these experiences will linger with each camper long after they've returned home, washed the funk from their hair, and allowed their mosquito bites to heal. We hope their time at West inspires them to bring the same joy, the same friendship, the same adventure, and the same openness to every day of their life and to every person they meet. This is the magic of West.

SNAPSHOTS FROM WESTMINSTER WOODS SUMMER CAMP

This year's trip to West was filled with growth and new experiences. We hope to see you there next year!



A camper builds a fire without the use of matches or a lighter during a wilderness survival class.



Campers divided into family groups compete in the family olympics. Their objective is to use a leaky can to move as much water as possible.



Campers tired of hot dogs and spaghetti with red sauce stuff dumplings during a culinary class.



A camper keeps her friend afloat during the "chocolate swim" nighttime pool party.



A camper applies a temporary tattoo using henna paste to another camper's forearm.



Corey Chan leads martial arts and self-defense exercises in the tranquil stillness of the early morning.



Camp leaders spin their partner round and round during a square dance lesson.

a really good way to provide healing. Also sometimes they will talk about how religion has helped them to get out of the situation. If the clients want me to pray for them, I do offer prayers since Cameron House is a faith-based organization.

CH: How has your work impacted your clients?

CM: I've seen a lot of people start a new life after they get a divorce and leave their abuser. A new life without fear of going home or having to be constantly aware of the reactions of their abuser. Some of them have no connections here, no friends or family. That's why in addition to case management we also have a women's support group. We provide a space and time for them to talk about life and parenting, make new friends, and also do a lot of self-care activities. I've seen people stay in relationships where they were sad and hopeless. But then after they leave the abuser they have a chance to change, to develop a new life of their own. That's why we spend a lot of time in our survivors' support group talking about parenting style and how not to spread their anger to their kid. Even though they have survived domestic violence, the trauma is still with them. And without prevention, they will just pass their trauma onto their kids, and the pattern will keep going on.

CH: How do you keep yourself from burning out?

CM: When I started this work I

took it very seriously. Sometimes I told myself that I had to provide as much as I can to the clients because they're going through domestic violence and deserve my best work. But that caused me to burnout. Sometimes I would text with clients after work or even in the middle of the night. If they called me while I was at home I would pick up the phone, and it was really stressful and gave me anxiety. I learned that setting boundaries is really important, and that after five o'clock, I have to leave everything at the office and just go home.

CH: Is there a stigma against speaking up about domestic violence?

CM: Yes, I see people avoiding the issue of domestic violence whether it's happening to them or people around them. Many people don't know how to deal with it, and they're afraid to deal with it. They just keep everything inside and think they can deal with it in time. Sometimes they fear that by bringing up the issue, they will be seen as the one causing the problem.

Some people want to seem like everything is alright, so when domestic violence comes up they will say how it's none of their business or it's unrelated to them. There's so much fear and so many people don't want to talk about it.

CH: What about your work gives you purpose?

CM: I find a lot of meaning in helping people with the same background as me. I came to the

United States as an immigrant and had to adjust myself to the American culture, so I know how challenging it is.

Immigrants who speak limited English might hesitate from asking for help since so many service providers can only speak English. So I really want to be a bridge. I want to let them know there's always help here and that they can find someone who speaks the same language and who will be able to understand them. What they have been through in their life is really challenging, and that's why it's hard for them to talk about it. That's what gives me a sense of purpose working with domestic violence survivors.

Sometimes when I talk with clients I learn their living situation is really bad. They're living in a tiny, single room with five people. It's really hard to imagine. When you see where they're living, it makes sense why the violence is happening: there's no way out. When the husband is back and he's angry, everything would happen in that very small space. Once you've seen that, you don't take what you have for granted.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Cameron House provides case management services for survivors of domestic violence in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Vietnamese. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, please email info@cameronhouse.org, call (415) 781-0401, or visit us at 920 Sacramento Street, San Francisco and ask to speak to a domestic violence case manager.

GLOBETROTTER SETTLES DOWN IN CHINATOWN

By Front Desk Receptionist Joshua Chau

Hello everyone, I am Joshua Chau, the new receptionist at Cameron House, and I am pleased to join the Cameron House family! I was born in Hong Kong, then moved to Oakland when I was 13 and lived there for 12 years. If you ever have a chance, you must try the deep dish pizzas at Zachary's Pizza in Oakland. They are indeed one of a kind!

I got my degree in Philosophy from San Francisco State University. My favorite philosophers are David Hume, Søren Kierkegaard, and Albert

Camus. Before Cameron House, I was traveling and working at various youth hostels in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Malaysia, and San Francisco. I am a travel fanatic. To set foot on every corner of this world is one of my top life goals.

What sparks my interest for this position is community building. After many rewarding years of getting to know the traveling community, the idea of building strong bonds with a community became more and more important to me. In my short time here, I have felt the connection Cameron House's



Front desk receptionist Joshua Chau standing in front of Cameron House's famous clinker bricks.

staff have to each other and the community they serve. Therefore, I am excited to be a part of Cameron House and to learn from everyone here!

HAVE YOU PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED?

Emergency Binder Workshop, Saturday, October 19, 10:00am–1:00pm

Preparedness pays! The Cameron House Legacy Committee invites you to attend a free workshop that will help you compile and organize a binder of crucial documents and contact information for use in the case of an emergency. No one wants to leave their loved ones scrambling to find their important information in the

middle of such a crisis. Once you have this resource, you can have the peace of mind that comes with knowing that your family will be able to quickly and easily locate relatives, friends, advisors, assets, and important personal papers during an emergency.

All binder-making materials and lunch will be provided. Event will

take place at Cameron House (920 Sacramento Street, San Francisco) on Saturday, October 19 from 10:00am–1:00pm. Please RSVP to help us ensure we order enough food. To RSVP, contact Associate Director Cody Friesenborg Lee by emailing her at cody@cameronhouse.org or calling (415) 781-0401 ext. 115. We hope to see you there!





DONALDINA CAMERON HOUSE
920 Sacramento Street
San Francisco, CA 94108
www.cameronhouse.org
415-781-0401

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events

upcoming

Date	Time	Event
Oct. 5	1:00pm-2:30pm	Three Coins Book Event - Author Randall Low will speak about his book, <i>Three Coins: A Young Girl's Story of Kidnappings, Slavery, and Romance in 19th Century America</i> .
Oct. 19	10:00am-1:00pm	Emergency Binder Workshop - Are you prepared for the unexpected? Enjoy a free lunch and prepare a binder of key information for use in the event of an emergency.
Nov. 21		Harvest Home - Help us warm the holiday season! We will be preparing gift bags of special Chinese delicacies for distribution to immigrant families in our community!
Feb. 29		Soul & Elegance Gala - Save the date for our annual gala! Enjoy a silent auction, banquet dinner, and dessert dash as we celebrate this year's honorees!

STAY IN CONNECTED!

Do you want all the latest Cameron House news? Then be sure to sign up for the monthly email newsletter and update your contact information at www.cameronhouse.org/update-my-info. And don't forget to check out @CameronHouseSF on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter!