



# Phoenix

New York Asian Women's Center

Admin: 212-732-0054 Hotline: 1-888-888-7702 Website: [www.nyawc.org](http://www.nyawc.org)

Summer  
2007

## Now and Then

**Pat Eng, founder of the New York Asian Women's Center, reveals some thoughts on the past and present of the Center.**

*by Charlene Khoo, Volunteer*

In 1982, the resources for victims of domestic violence in New York City were few and far between, and those for Asian women even scarcer. "Domestic violence was still quite a hidden problem in society in general, not just in the Asian community," Pat Eng, founder of NYAWC, explains. On discovering this huge gap in available resources for Asian victims of violence, Pat, then a graduate student at Hunter College School of Social Work, developed the foundation for the Center as her field placement for her Master's Degree.

At a time when no other organization of its kind existed on the East Coast, Pat was extremely aware that the time to address the needs of Asian women was here. "Of all the issues that impacted women, violence against women was clearly the one that had to be dealt with first."

Pat and other early volunteers faced much skepticism when the idea of beginning the Center was broached. They found that members of the Asian and non-Asian communities equally denied the widespread existence of violence in Asian families. When plans for the hotline were unveiled, the public's response was highly pessimistic. "You'll never get any women to call you," more than one naysayer warned Pat.

But the team pressed on. To this group of determined pioneers, establishing the Center was as much about assisting these women as it was about initiating a new way of thinking about domestic

violence in the larger community. After all, it is almost impossible to separate this denial from the suffering the victims endure. Pat recalls some conversations with their first few clients, "We asked them why they had never told anybody about being abused. They said, 'No one ever asked.'"

In the 25 years since then, the NYAWC received over 3000 calls each year seeking our help via the hotline. The numbers reflect the role the Center has played for the women in our community who have needed it most. "I think we've finally gotten the message to the community that it's okay to ask for help. I think we've gotten out the message that violence is not acceptable," muses Pat.

"The Center was created for those impacted by violence, but I believe it's also become a vehicle for Asian women's activism; for the hundreds of women who have been trained as staff and volunteers. It's a vehicle for social change," Pat adds, reiterating her vision to educate not just victims of domestic violence but all members of the Asian community about the problem.

With close to a thousand volunteers trained over the years to join the 60 permanent staff members committed to addressing the problems facing these women, and now with more centers in existence across the country like the New York Asian Women's Center, it is clear that Pat Eng's hope for a progressive institution leading the way for change and awareness of Asian women's rights is being realized.

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**Save the Date!**

**25th Anniversary  
Benefit Gala**

**When:**

**Wednesday, October 10, 2007**

**Where:**

**Tribeca Rooftop  
2 Desbrosses Street  
New York, NY 10013**

Join us to celebrate NYAWC's 25 years of empowering women and children to live free of violence.

For more information visit  
[www.nyawc.org/events](http://www.nyawc.org/events) or contact  
Vicki Shu Smolin, our Benefit  
Coordinator at 646-263-6044 or  
[vicki\\_shu@yahoo.com](mailto:vicki_shu@yahoo.com)

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## Conversations with our new Interim Co-Executive Directors

### Leading the Charge with Angela Lee

*by Elizabeth Cho, Volunteer*

Angela Lee has been working for the New York Asian Women's Center since October 1989. In her 18 years of service, she has served the Center in many ways. Starting



Angela Lee

as a volunteer, she became the third full-time hired staff member and eventually moved on to her current position as Interim Co-Executive

Director. During her tenure,

Angela has seen the center blossom from a volunteer run organization to a 60-person agency. Angela smiled as she reminisced, "When introducing the NYAWC at a community outreach event, I used to say, 'We're a small DV center.' Now I can't say that anymore."

With her fluency in Mandarin, Cantonese and Toishanese, Angela has served as the community outreach spokesperson, speaking to news media as well as community groups. She has also trained police officers, judges, and the District Attorney's Office on how to work with Asian clients.

Angela feels that it is very important to fight the misconception that the Asian community is a model minority, one without domestic violence issues. "We must let the larger community know that there are problems in the Asian community. We must educate them so that we may receive help. We need to prevent cases of women being hurt because they weren't aware of the available resources," Angela noted.

As Angela recalled some of the highlights of her services to

NYAWC, she grew thoughtful. She fondly recalled the implementation of Survival English classes for women and their children. The class was designed to teach survival skills for women who spoke little or no English, and the program was very hands-on.

Angela together with the volunteer tutors brought the women to the supermarket, McDonalds, and even used payphones to teach them how to conduct their daily lives in English. "It's important to enable women," Angela added. Since its inception in 1991, the program has flourished into a mentoring program which involves volunteer student-teachers at a local college.

### Looking Ahead with Nisha Shah Tanwar

*by Joe Lu, Volunteer*

Nisha Shah Tanwar, interim Co-Executive Director of the New York Asian Women's Center, has come to oversee NYAWC's services and projects after fully realizing the need to give back to her community, which suffers a dire gap in social services. Many of the NYAWC's clients, who are mostly Asian women and children, occupy a distinct cultural position which leaves them at a severe disadvantage after suffering domestic violence. But Nisha doesn't hesitate to point out that domestic abuse can and does occur in all sectors of society and the problems it produces are common to all its victims.

"The NYAWC has served a significant and unique role in the community by providing direct services to women affected by domestic violence," Nisha says. In addition

to providing counseling and a 24-hour hotline for women, NYAWC facilitates clients' transition from conflict settings to stable homes, conducts training to various personnel such as social-welfare workers and law-enforcement officers, and coordinates lobbyists to influence legislation related to women and domestic violence.

In order to fulfill its objectives, NYAWC has worked with many other organizations. Nisha emphasizes the need to efficiently address the issue of



Nisha Shah Tanwar

domestic violence in the Asian community, stating that it is important to constantly collaborate with other organizations so that services are not duplicated. This entrepreneurial sense of community service underlies the philosophy that drives the work that Nisha and others like her at NYAWC do on a day-to-day basis.

Currently, NYAWC is working on providing grassroots and policy support for undocumented Asian women who do not qualify for the city's housing services under current legislation. In order for this project, and all the other continually expanding projects that NYAWC undertakes to be successful, NYAWC always appreciates support for its efforts.

In the long term, Nisha projects that the NYAWC's role will expand internationally, encompassing women affected by domestic violence not only in the United States, but also India, China, Korea, Japan, and other countries in the region. With the Asian population in the world rapidly growing, this ambition is certainly realistic. As always, at the foundation of NYAWC's operations lies the desire to address a unique social issue that is often overlooked by others in the community.

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money goes to NYAWC.

## How did NYAWC Children's Program Start?

Children are often the forgotten victims of domestic violence. Children of battered women are at a high risk for developing emotional, academic and behavioral problems, and for repeating the cycle of violence as adults. Recognizing this fact, the NYAWC established our Children's Program in 1995 to provide services tailored to the unique needs of Asian child victims of domestic violence.

Asian children are often taught at an early age to keep silent about family problems and not to share their feelings with outsiders. The Children's Program was started to address the lack of services geared towards this population.



Child client's artwork

## Success Stories from the Children's Program

Kazu, a 5 year old boy of Japanese descent, and his mother, Keiko, became clients of the New York Asian Women's Center about 2 years ago. Keiko had suffered 4 years of emotional, physical, verbal and economic abuse from her husband. He controlled every aspect of her life, even forcing her to help him in his illegal drug business.

Finally Keiko called NYAWC for help. By this time, her self-esteem and self-respect had greatly suffered. After one month of phone counseling sessions, Keiko was able to leave her abuser, moving into one of our shelters with Kazu. Four months later they found permanent housing for themselves, though Keiko continues to receive counseling at NYAWC.

*According to a study of over 900 children at various battered women's shelters...*

**70% of the children are also victims of physical abuse**  
**5% were hospitalized due to abuse**

About a year ago, Keiko began getting calls from Kazu's teachers who complained that Kazu was starting fights with his classmates in school. School officials felt he was doing this for attention and recommended that he get evaluated for counseling. Keiko decided to bring Kazu for counseling sessions at the newly opened OurSpace Kids Drop-In Center.

When Kazu first began his weekly sessions with his counselor he exhibited signs of anger and frustration which he was unable to verbally express. He acted out at his counselor by pushing her, throwing and grabbing things, slamming doors, and refusing to leave the counseling room after his session. Volunteers assisting Kazu with his homework also noticed that he had difficulty concentrating, and was generally uninterested in his work.

Over the course of his counseling, a clear shift in Kazu's behavior became apparent. He is now able to verbally express his frustrations, rather than physically acting out. For instance, he now tells his counselor at the end of the session that he wishes he could see her more instead of refusing to leave the counseling room and slamming the door. His school reports that Kazu is doing better in assignments, gets along well with staff and classmates, and has even made new friends. Keiko has noticed the change in her son's behavior since coming to the Drop-In Center, saying, "Kazu seems happy to get attention from adults when he comes here."

## Farewell to a Dedicated Volunteer

*by Charlene Khoo, Volunteer*

After five years in New York City, volunteer Jun Lim is ready to return to her hometown of Portland, Oregon to get started on becoming a lawyer. Her time on the East Coast has been nothing short of busy, from her editorial position at Rosen, to publishing her first book. Despite this packed schedule, Jun has been a familiar face at our Center.

As a weekly tutor and ESL teacher, Jun has constantly moved beyond the call of duty, often staying past OurSpace's opening hours for students who need extra time. She has seen many of her students progress over her 2 years as a tutor, not only in terms of English, but in self-confidence and independence. One client Jun worked with for over a year had a shy and introverted 9-year old, who was eventually won over by Jun's continued patience. Witnessing the girl visibly gain confidence was a moving experience for Jun.

It is clear that Jun's compassion has won over many clients, who will miss her sorely when she leaves. While Jun admits that "It's always challenging to show you care while still being professional," her students would probably beg to differ, as many have nothing but praise for her. Even after months of working with her students, many continue thanking Jun constantly for her help, which keeps her feeling humbled.

Although it is hard for Jun to leave the clients and staff of NYAWC after such a long and emotional relationship, she has faith in the organization. "I don't know if I've made a difference. I hope so. My philosophy-and I think this is true of the Center-is that no individuals run this organization. I just hope that I was one part of this greater machine that does make a difference."





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#### What is the significance of the Phoenix?

The Phoenix is a mythological bird reborn from fire and ashes. The New York Asian Women's Center chose the phoenix as its logo to symbolize the strength of the women who have experienced abuse at home.

☐ **Yes!** I want to help women and children live a life free of abuse.  
Please add me to the **NYAWC** mailing list.



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### Volunteer!

Enrich the lives of women and children with our dedicated group of volunteers. For more info visit [www.nyawc.org](http://www.nyawc.org)

### Donate!

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*Your contributions will help provide emergency shelter, counseling, advocacy, and other crucial services to battered women and their children.*