



# Asian Immigrant Women Advocates

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PROGRAM REPORT 2011

AIWA Senior Trainer Chi MeiYeung introduces researchers to the ergonomic modifications she helped implement at her workplace.

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Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) is a community-based organization dedicated to developing the collective leadership of low-income immigrant women and youth to bring about positive changes in their living and working conditions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2** ..... **From The Executive Director**
- 3** ..... **Context of AIWA's Work**
- 4** ..... **Education Highlights**
- 6** ..... **Leadership Development Highlights**
- 8** ..... **Sharing Our Experience**
- 10** ..... **Working Together for Social Justice**
- 12** ..... **Numbers At A Glance**
- 13** ..... **Expanding Our Circle**

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

Throughout 2011, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) continued its 28-year commitment to promoting the leadership of immigrant women and youth by providing the training and tools they need to voice their concerns, organize their peers to participate in their own community and the broader society, and advocate for better working and living conditions.

AIWA's educational and leadership programs were successfully planned, taught, conducted and organized by Peer Organizers, Peer Teachers and Peer Coordinators with support from AIWA's dedicated staff and volunteers. These programs and activities protected the health and safety of low wage immigrant women workers and increased their understanding of health care reform and workers rights to demand better working conditions. Immigrant women and youth also advocated for themselves at varied events such as a community forum, a workers' rights hearing, and campus presentations.

AIWA's programs and activities are continually strengthened by using the Community Transformational Organizing Strategy (CTOS) leadership paradigm we have developed. Based on the qualitative and quantitative research findings from focus groups, interviews, CTOS database and on our 28 years of experience working in the community, AIWA is developing a tool for sharing the CTOS process with other community-based groups to strengthen their grassroots leadership development efforts.

The following overview of AIWA's accomplishments in 2011 illustrates how AIWA women and youth leaders reached out, educated, trained and engaged in collective actions to strengthen the community and contribute toward a more just, peaceful and inclusive world.

Thank you for your support!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Young Shin', written in a cursive style.

**Young Shin**  
Executive Director

# AIWA'S LEADERSHIP IN CONTEXT



The Chinese and Korean Peer Trainers pictured here in April 2011 represent a broad spectrum of both veteran and new leaders

## Since its founding in 1983, AIWA has established a strong history of developing leadership of low-income Asian immigrant women and youth. But who are they and how do they come to AIWA?

A demographic profile of our women members from the first half of 2011 indicates that a majority of members are in their 50's with a middle school education at most. Even though they are working up to 9 hours a day and sometimes 6 days a week, the reported family income for a majority of these women is less than \$15,000 per year, which indicates that deeply entrenched workplace injustices are still the norm for these low-wage workers. Women typically first come to AIWA to take English or computer classes. Approximately 70% of the women enrolled in those classes are new to AIWA and recent immigrants (within 2-3 years of arriving in US). At AIWA, they learn about their rights in classes and build their confidence through leadership trainings and opportunities.

As women progress through AIWA's leadership model, their working hours become more standard and they are more likely to earn minimum wage for their work. Yet the biggest change in their lives as a result of AIWA's leadership programs is their sense of empowerment. Over and over, the women and youth

have repeatedly credited the leadership trainings with giving them a feeling of hope as well as the tools and courage to make changes in their living and working conditions, and in the broader community.

So how does AIWA transform lives? While there are many leadership programs available, AIWA's programs are groundbreaking in that our emphasis is on developing both the individual and collective capacity of grassroots members to transform their lives and create healthier and more equitable communities. We are proud that our programs provide a clear path for immigrant women and youth and are tailored to provide opportunities and support especially to the most disenfranchised of our members. Whether they are representing AIWA at a conference, planning and evaluating programs, changing conditions in their workplaces and lives, or working with other organizations, the women and youth at AIWA bring a fresh perspective to the concept of "leadership" and together they are forging a path to a more just society.

# EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS



Peer Teacher Hui Zhen Yu encourages students to recognize both the class material and also their leadership potential.

## **With an emphasis on leadership skills and civic engagement, AIWA's educational classes provide an important basis for growth and wider community involvement.**

Workplace literacy and computer literacy classes are key features of AIWA's program work, providing crucial knowledge and skills to help immigrant women improve their own lives and the lives of their families. In 2011, a total of 257 immigrant women enrolled in AIWA's educational programs. Approximately 115 women participate in these classes each semester, but the need is great, and there were long waiting lists for all of our classes.

Demand is also high for our computer courses. We accommodate up to 20 women each semester sharing the use of our 7 computers. Although the classroom is crowded, the energy level is always high as the students learn to use technology to spark their engagement with the broader society, expanding their information and referral networks while advancing basic computer skills.

Based on an interest survey of last year's literacy class participants, AIWA developed a new curriculum in 2011 focused on employment and workplace issues. The new curriculum is based on interviews with immigrant women workers who participate in AIWA's programs, using their real life stories. In 2011 classes learned about experiences of homecare, factory and food service workers. Centering the class learning on the women's experiences in the workplace has led to very engaged discussions and extremely positive feedback.

Peer Coordinators and Peer Teachers conduct the literacy classes in partnership with our dedicated volunteers. Educational classes are often an opportunity for women to work collaboratively with local volunteers. One volunteer remarked, "It feels good to make a difference in someone's life. AIWA empowers the women in a bigger way than we can ever imagine."



Shirley has been volunteering at AIWA for nearly 10 years. She has watched and supported her mom who is now the Peer Coordinator of the Workplace Literacy Program. This is what she has to say about why AIWA is important for her mom: “It gives her an opportunity for developing her leadership skills. At work she doesn’t have this kind of opportunity.”

**MORE ONLINE**  
Volunteer information available at: [www.aiwa.org/volunteer.php](http://www.aiwa.org/volunteer.php)



“As an American born Chinese, I am extremely grateful for organizations like AIWA. I’m glad to be able to support their work.”  
—Justin, AIWA volunteer teacher

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS



Women leadership development training participants



Youth leadership training retreat participants

**At AIWA, leadership development for low-income immigrant women and youth means building knowledge, confidence and skills to advocate for change at their workplaces, schools and in the broader community.**

## **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

At the very heart of AIWA's work is the development of low-income immigrant women workers into community leaders, empowering them to make changes in their workplaces and communities to improve their lives. AIWA provides the opportunity for women to acquire leadership knowledge and experience as they become Peer Teachers, Peer Leaders and Peer Trainers. Women who come to AIWA as students in the Workplace Literacy and Computer Literacy classes become more deeply engaged in planning and implementing classes and programs for their peers. They develop skills and confidence as they take on increasing responsibilities as leaders within the organization and, ultimately, within the wider community and the broader society.

In 2011, a team of AIWA's Peer Leaders planned and implemented four series of the Introductory Leadership Training Sessions, successfully training 42 limited English speaking immigrant women on issues related to the immigrant and civil rights movement, language rights, community organizing and civic participation.

In March, two Senior Peer Trainers had the opportunity to share their real world knowledge and experience as guest lecturers for a class of 27 students in UC Berkeley's Asian American Studies program, demonstrating confidence in their public speaking skills.

Two of AIWA's women leaders also participated in the Equal Voice Leadership Academy meetings with grassroots leaders from other organizations including Parent Voices, San Francisco Chinatown Community Development Center, and LifeTime. The leaders jointly organized a community forum on March 26, 2011, to voice their concerns on jobs, child care, and education issues in order to seek public support and propose solutions to local elected officials. At the forum, a home care aide from AIWA made a presentation on her precarious working conditions and appealed for support from the audience so she and other home care aides can prevent workplace injuries, have better job protections from the highly discretionary whims of their employers and enjoy full time work with regular working hours.

**MORE ONLINE**

Read about her speech at:  
[www.aiwa.org/publications.php](http://www.aiwa.org/publications.php)



### YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

AIWA's Youth Build Immigrant Power (YBIP) project empowers low-income immigrant youth to advocate for change on issues that affect their daily lives. This year, YBIP focused on strengthening Asian Youth United (AYU), which is a 16-week leadership development program for Asian immigrant youth in Oakland. Youth leaders researched and increased their knowledge of training topics, planned and prepared the materials and curricula and practiced their training skills.

A highlight of the spring semester was a leadership training retreat held in March, 2011. Thirty-six youth participated in the weekend-long retreat which was facilitated by youth Core Leaders. The intensive retreat allowed the youth to bond well as a working group, and gave them more time to cover complex social justice concepts such as gender/racial inequality and homophobia.

### ERGONOMIC HEALTH TRAINING

In 2011, AIWA continued its focus on efforts to train immigrant women to recognize repetitive motion hazards, prevent workplace injuries, and to improve occupational health conditions in low-wage industries where immigrant women workers are concentrated. AIWA developed new ergonomic training materials in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Labor Occupational Health Project (LOHP) that are specific to electronics

assembly industry workers. The electronics assembly industry has seen explosive growth worldwide, yet almost no ergonomic worker safety materials are available, much less translated into languages that can easily be understood by a limited English-speaking workforce.

After developing the training materials, 16 Peer Trainers participated in a two-day 'Training for Trainers' retreat. Trainers reviewed and learned about the new electronics and general ergonomic training materials and practiced training delivery techniques to prepare them to train immigrant women workers in the garment, electronics, food service, packaging, home health care and other low wage industries. Peer Trainers appreciated the time they spent together to learn, review and practice in a focused environment away from home. One trainer commented, "It was very valuable for me to learn how to be a trainer and the retreat strengthened our friendship so we can support each other."

The 16 Peer Trainers trained 226 participants in 2011 and the session evaluations offered praise for both the training material and the training delivery. One participant commented, "I have not paid attention to muscle pain and discomfort. But this training helped me understand what causes them." Another stated, "I learned a lot. This training will help me improve my working environment and make me careful about how I do my work."



## SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE



Participants discuss how the CTOS model can be adapted for use within ally organizations.

### **CTOS captures AIWA's leadership development experience in hopes that similar grassroots organizations can benefit from it.**

The Community Transformational Organization Strategy (CTOS) model describes AIWA's approach to developing the leadership abilities of limited English-speaking, low-income, immigrant women through gradually increasing levels of responsibility for program planning, coordination, instruction and campaign implementation. As women move through the process to become Peer Teachers, Peer Coordinators and Peer Leaders within AIWA and then on to becoming leaders in the broader community, they gain knowledge, confidence and skills which empower them to improve their lives, their workplaces, their communities and the broader society.

Over the past year, AIWA has opened a new chapter in sharing the CTOS model with other groups to help build sustainable leadership within their constituencies and further their organizing goals. As a first step, AIWA developed a survey which helped identify organizations similar to AIWA, in that they serve limited English-speaking, immigrant worker constituencies, have a leadership development focus and make use of an existing database. Three of the identified groups – Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) from the Bay Area,

Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) from Los Angeles, and Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC) from New York - were then invited to participate in a CTOS sharing convening on Oct 23 to 25, 2011. Through presentations, facilitated discussions and group activities, representatives of the three ally organizations and AIWA shared information about their leadership development efforts and AIWA's CTOS process. All participants benefitted greatly from the exchange of ideas and information. The four organizations agreed on the importance of highlighting the crucial role of grassroots leadership development in empowering and improving the lives of immigrant communities.

AIWA will incorporate the discussions, critiques and feedback from the October session into compiling a CTOS manual to share with other groups. In the next five years, AIWA would like to see more groups incorporating elements of the CTOS grassroots leadership model into their organizational priorities and more grassroots leaders exercising leadership skills and knowledge to leverage opportunities for better working/living conditions and meaningful civic engagements.

### ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS CTOS RESEARCH

In addition to developing a CTOS tool to share with other groups, AIWA is continuing to work with research partners to assess, revise and improve its leadership program and activities. In her article "Living Outside the Cup," Professor J. Chun used interviews and focus groups with core AIWA members to explore the effectiveness of the CTOS grassroots leadership model. In her analysis of AIWA's CTOS model she finds that CTOS "provides opportunities to live a life outside the everyday isolation and marginalization that overdetermines the lives of many Asian immigrant women workers."



#### MORE ONLINE

Read the full article at:  
[www.aiwa.org/publications.php](http://www.aiwa.org/publications.php)

**"Overcoming the many barriers that prevent low-income and limited English-speaking immigrant women from actively participating in civic and political life may seem daunting, but AIWA has developed a model of change to guide this process. CTOS outlines a concrete path for disenfranchised immigrant women to become empowered agents of change. This 7-step approach combines political education with hands-on skills development and capacity training at every stage of the campaign process. CTOS provides immigrant women with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience to directly participate in collective efforts to improve workplace conditions and change public policy, regardless of one's language ability, education, status or income."**

—From *Living Outside the Cup* by J. J. Chun

Senior Trainer Hai Yan Wu describes how CTOS has impacted her life.

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



An immigrant woman marches to demand justice and corporate responsibility at a Garment Workers Justice Campaign Rally in 1992.

## Continuing to demand corporate responsibility, two decades after the Garment Workers' Justice Campaign.

Since AIWA began the historic Garment Workers Justice Campaign almost 20 years ago, the demand for corporate, employer and government accountability have been core demands for immigrant women and youth, to bring equity and justice to low-wage immigrants and improve working conditions for vulnerable workers.

In 2011 there was a worldwide surge of viral public support for emerging grassroots movements which echoed those courageous garment workers' demands for justice and greater accountability. AIWA's women and youth leaders were astonished to witness their ever-present core demands sparking a renewed public interest and igniting new movements around the globe. They were also pleased to see the issues of inequality become more broadly discussed and recognized.

As a cornerstone organization in developing grassroots leadership, AIWA has worked for over a quarter century to empower low-income families to improve their economic opportunities and working conditions. Women who have been through AIWA's leadership trainings and activities are working to level the playing field in their workplaces, communities and broader society. Most importantly, many immigrant women and youth have come to regard themselves as community leaders with a right to voice their concerns and a responsibility to work for justice to leave a better legacy for the next generation.



A youth leader continues to defend the rights of immigrant women workers in 2011.

The YBIP and AYU youth enthusiastically chose to join the California Nurses Association on an Oakland hospital picket line in April. At a discussion at their spring Leadership Training Program, these young people were struck by the injustice of hospital nurses being unable to afford health insurance for themselves and for their children, and felt compelled to voice their support.



Youth leaders walk a picket line in Oakland.

**“There is a big gap between the rich and poor. The rich become richer, the poor become poorer and many social safety net programs are affected. We peacefully protest the unfairness to demand our basic rights!”**

—Chinese Senior Trainers



An AIWA contingent of women and youth joined the Jobs Not Cuts March in solidarity with Alameda County and Oakland City elected officials, students, labor unions and activists.

# NUMBERS AT A GLANCE



## OUTREACH & AIWA EVENTS

- 360 people attended the year end annual community event; *December 2011*
- 1 staff member spoke about outreach strategies to reach low-wage workers at the Dept of Labor's AAPI Workers Summit in San Francisco, commemorating the 40th anniversary of OSHA; *May 2011*

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

- 257 literacy program participants in 2011
- 50 youth participated in the general meeting; *September 2011*



## LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

- 226 immigrant women attended ergonomic safety trainings
- 16 women participated in a Train the Trainer retreat; *March 2011*
- 42 immigrant women completed the introductory leadership training series
- 18 youth participated in the AYU leadership training program; *Spring 2011*
- 36 youth participated in a leadership retreat; *March 2011*



## PEER LEADERSHIP IN AIWA

- 20 women took part in Peer Leadership opportunities at AIWA as Senior Trainers, Peer Coordinators, Peer Organizers, Peer Teachers, Peer Trainers and Membership Board members
- 22 youth Peer Leadership opportunities were provided to AIWA's youth Peer Trainers, Core Interns and Core Leaders



## LEADERSHIP IN BROADER SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

### Presentations & Publicity

- 2 women made presentations to a class at UC Berkeley; *February 2011*
- 2 women introduced the CTOS leadership model to 15 staff members of a local service organization; *February 2011*
- 2 women introduced university researchers to working conditions in garment shops; *July 2011*
- 1 woman described her leadership transformation which impacted her living and working conditions, with ally organizations and researchers at the CTOS Sharing Convening; *October 2011*

### Coalitions

- 2 women helped organize the Equal Voice community forum in Oakland in March 2011. They mobilized 50 women and youth to attend the event and 1 woman made a speech.

### Solidarity Actions

- 9 women and youth demonstrated solidarity at the "Jobs Not Cuts" rally; *October 2011*
- 30 youth walked the CNA picket line at an Oakland hospital; *May 2011*
- 1 immigrant woman toured the Occupy Oakland camp; *November 2011*



# EXPANDING OUR CIRCLE



**In order to support AIWA's much-needed and sought-after programs and activities for low-income immigrant women and youth, we rely on support from our generous donors and volunteers.**

House parties by our supporters were a fundraising highlight this year. A former board member teamed up with long-time AIWA supporter and author Lora Jo Foo, and organized a house party featuring a book reading and signing event. Ms. Foo read from her new book, *Earth Passages*, and testified of the hardships of growing up in a low-income immigrant community.

A former staff member and a volunteer-supporter also organized house parties to give their friends a chance to meet some of AIWA's women and youth leaders and learn more about AIWA's work. The women and youth were happy to meet new and continuing AIWA supporters and talk about their roles and accomplishments at AIWA.

In other highlights, AIWA members diligently and enthusiastically conducted grassroots fundraising and organized a successful Year-End event for the community in December. Women and youth secured support from local businesses, restaurants and community associations to give children's toys, trays of fried rice and groceries to hand out at the event. In addition to a toy give away, a delicious dinner and wonderful

performances, attendees were treated to a slideshow put together by computer class students, about the year's activities and accomplishments. The women and youth once again did a masterful job of organizing and conducting this festive annual event.

The generous commitment of these and other women leaders, volunteers and supporters have sustained and energized AIWA to continue to expand our individual giving circles of support.



**For the last three decades, AIWA has been ensuring the voices of immigrant women and youth are heard in their demands for fair and just working and living conditions for all communities. That's why I support AIWA!**

—Stacy Kono, AIWA supporter



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