

10th Conference on Health Care of the Chinese in North America

Chinese Parent Disability Support Groups



Joyce Chang, Chairperson, Association for Chinese Families of the Disabled

I am very happy to have the honor and opportunity to meet all of you. As chairperson of the Association for Chinese Families of the Disabled, I am very anxious to get your advice and assistance in improving our services to children with special needs in Chinese families in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Twenty-five years ago in H. K., a doctor told me that my baby had Down syndrome. I did not know what this meant. Later I found out that my baby is different from other babies. She cannot learn the way other children do. She gets sick easily. We had to see a doctor almost every week. Some of my friends even told me to give her away. I wondered why I never saw this kind of children in China. I realized that parents in China hide them inside the house. They do not want people to see them. In China it is thought as a shame, a punishment. You must have done something wrong or bad, and this is the punishment you receive. This is why children as these are hidden from the outside world. Because of this, these children lose the opportunity to learn, to exercise, to progress.

Once I learned of my baby's condition, I must face it, since I could not bear to give her away. All mothers love their children no matter what the price. I quit my job and went back to college to take some courses to better understand and gain more knowledge of how to take care of this kind of children. It is not easy, especially in Chinese society. People talk behind you, give you strange look when you are out with your child. When I brought her to pre-school, the other children took her toys and food away from her, they pushed and punched her. She had no way to fight back and protect herself.

Then I heard that the United States is the best place for disabled people. It has better benefits and the people are more tolerant. My husband and I decided to immigrate to the United States because of our daughter. We wanted her to have a better life in the future. We had good jobs in Hong Kong and a more comfortable life but we had to give it up to come to this strange country. We had to start over, learning a new language, finding new jobs, and beginning life anew. We had no friends and no relatives in the United States.

After a few years in the United States, I saw that our decision was correct. Here my daughter has a better life, and she is happier. She has special education and after-school programs. After graduation, she received job training and many agencies are ready to give a helping hand, providing information and morale support. You know you are not alone. I have been in the United States for twenty years. I have experienced so much help and support from others that I feel I must provide the same to others.

With the warm support of social workers like Nancy Lim Yee, our association was established in 1989 as a non-profit organization with the sole purpose of serving Chinese

families with disabled children and people, particularly new immigrant families. Today, the Association has grown to include a mailing list of about 1,000 families. They have children with disabilities as hearing, visually or speech impaired, cerebral palsy, learning disability, autism, Down syndrome or multiple handicapped.

Parents in our association give their great love and patient care not only to their own children but also have a great desire to help other families. The disabled children bring to their families many difficulties and challenge such as finding out what kinds of services are available, understanding what their rights and responsibilities are, communicating with their teachers, dealing with medical and dental care and also transportation, education, job training and planning for the future.

The primary goals of our association are to provide bilingual information, education and emotional support to these families.

We sponsor several annual activities such as one-day parent's conference in which parents have an opportunity to learn about special education, vocational training, behavior management, social benefits, and special need trust and community resources. It also gives great opportunities for parents to get to know each other. Every summer we have bus tour field trips bringing families to Marine World, Monterey Bay Aquarium or other places. We have a pot luck party for the New Year. We have parents work shop on different topics (IEP process, welfare, and inclusion program.) Also we have a Parent support group for children with autism. We support an adult day program and after school program.

In January 1994 we opened an adult residential facility for the disabled "The house of sunshine" in Oakland. But due to problems of accessibility to the neighborhood "the house of sunshine" had to close in July. The board of directors has planned to relocate this facility in San Francisco in the future. We would like to raise funds for our own property.

The greatest difficulty facing us is the shortage of fund. In past years we have organized events as dinner dance fund-raiser parties karaoke singing contests. These were successful with the support of our community. Thank you.