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Chinese Women's Cancer Support Group Quilt: To Nurture Self Is To Create New Life



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Chinese Americans make up the largest Asian American Group in the Bay Area; and among this population, cancer is the second leading cause of death. Yet, language and access barriers have hindered the monolingual Chinese speaking community from gaining access to education and services that are available to the general public. Cultural beliefs, fear, and isolation also hinder Chinese speaking women with cancer from facing and coping with the disease in an open manner.

No one should have to face cancer alone. In 1994, Chinatown Public Health Center initiated the first support group for Chinese speaking women with cancer in collaboration with American Cancer Society and Cancer Support Community. The group provides a safe and comfortable environment where monolingual Chinese speaking women with cancer can share needs, concerns, hopes, and fears without judgment. Eastern and Western techniques such as Tai Chi, Qi Gong, body massage, muscle relaxation, guided visualization and art therapy are used to assist them in their healing and recovery journey. In 1999, a support group called "Dr. Play" was formed for children whose family members have cancer. An art therapist who uses art, play, and sand to assist the children in self-expression leads the group. These modalities enable the children to reconcile and to transform emotional conflict about the crisis in the family.

In 1998, Ms. Sarah Chin, a member of the Chinese Women's Cancer Support Group, initiated a cancer quilt-making project for the women in the group. In Sarah's words, "The theme for this quilt is 'To Nurture Self Is To Create New Life'. We wanted the women to benefit from the process of doing art-healing and transformation from quilting." When the project was first suggested, the women said, "We can't draw, we don't know how to do this, we don't know what will look good." Through Sarah's efforts, the women began to become enthusiastic. "It became an experience of working together, being individually creative, and generating excitement and enthusiasm for something to be created. The quilt became more than just a project. It was a dream and a challenge. The results surpassed everyone's expectations. This quilt is presented to the public as a token of their courage, hope, and strength of spirit."