

**Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization
Asian Family Center Oral History Project**

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Interviewee: Lee Po Cha

Interviewer: Natalia Fernández

Transcriber: Avery Sorensen

[00:00:00]

NF: Natalia Fernández

LC: Lee Po Cha

[?]: The word or phrase was unintelligible and not transcribed.

NF: My name is Natalia Fernandez, and I am the Oregon Multicultural librarian at Oregon State University's Oregon Multicultural Archives, and today's date is September 18th, 2014. We are here at the Asian Family Center to conduct an oral history interview with Mr. Lee. To get started, if you could state your name and spell it out-loud.

LC: Sure. My name is Lee Cha.

NF: Could you please tell us your birthdate and your birthplace.

LC: I was born in Laos on July 11th, 1963.

NF: And, do you identify yourself as Lao-American? Or how would you identify yourself?

LC: Certainly. I identify myself as Laotian American Hmong American. Ethnically Hmong, and nationality-wise, I'm Laotian.

NF: Okay.

LC: Yes.

NF: Could you talk to us a little bit about when and where your parents were born?

LC: Well. They were both also born in Laos. Let's see, they were born in the [?] province which is the town or the state where there used to be the royal Lao family residency.

And, we have been moving around but I actually was not born in that province. I, let's see, I was born in a tiny little province called Xayaburi, Laos.

NF: And is that where you grew up? Or did you move after you were born?

LC: Well, actually, I did, a little bit, grow up there. I left—my family left Laos in 1975—late '75, early '76. I was probably about, maybe I'll say, around 14 years old at that time. So, I can say that I grew up in that part of the world a little bit.

NF: And where did you move to?

LC: And then we migrated to Thailand. My family stayed there for about three years and then we came to Oregon in, let's see, 1978. Exactly.

NF: Just specifically to Portland or to somewhere else in Oregon?

LC: Exactly, to Portland, yes.

NF: Could you talk to us a little bit about why you chose Portland, Oregon,--why your family decided to move here?

LC: Well, I didn't have a choice; but, you know, rather by design, it's by default. So, during those days, it just depends on where your family would be sponsored. And it depends on, you know, who will sponsor you and what state they reside in. And so we're very fortunate to be sponsored by the metropolitan Baptist church here; it's in Portland, Oregon, here, so we were very fortunate to be resettled in Portland. We like the weather here, so we stayed the whole time.

NF: And was that connection with the church made in Thailand?

LC: That is, I believe that is not made in Thailand. This is part of the resettlement process that just depends on who the sponsor agency for us--it's Catholic charity. I think they're probably just going through a, basically, we probably have gone through a lottery, you know, pick. So there's no real—I think the process there is, it just depends on who sponsors your family and what organization—the, you know, State Department as well as the United Nations High Commission and Refugee, all those department agencies found who will be your sponsor agency and that's how you got picked and resettled.

NF: So how about how old were you when you moved here?

LC: Well, I was about to go to high school, right. So that was good. Then I went on to college here.

NF: At Portland State University?

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LC: Yes, Portland State and, also, I've gone to [?].

NF: And what did you study?

LC: Business Administration, yeah.

NF: When you were younger studying business administration, did you have an idea of what you wanted to pursue in your career?

LC: Well, to say the very least, you know, when you were in a foreign land, not necessarily by choice or by economic desire, and when you were a refugee, survival and safety is all you have in mind. And so, to be very frank, I hadn't thought much about it. But just, be grateful for whatever opportunity that's in front of you. I think for the most part, the most important thing is how to survive and how to be safe – safety and survival are the top during those times. So, it was good that we were able to resettle in the United States partly because my parents were involved, you know, in the U.S. government during the Vietnam conflict. So that's part of the process where we got picked and selected to be resettled in the United States. In terms of career opportunities, I had not thought much about it, but, rather, just pick up on whatever opportunity there is right in front of me. I knew that I have a very – I have a passion for human services, and also very passionate about humanitarian issues around the globe – probably because of my own, you know, personal experience as a refugee and the struggle that our family has gone through.

NF: Right. So when you and your family moved here, did your family feel that there were adequate services to assist them in the transition process and settling here?

LC: Well, I think we were very grateful for whatever resources we had. Indeed, for the first couple of years we had gone through some public assistance to begin with, right, because at that time you have nothing. I mean, you came to this country with, basically, just nothing, right. I remember my dad talked about having 20 dollars in his pocket and so that was it. But, we had no fears, you know. And again, it's all about safety and trying to survive. We, I think, were here and then my dad had to work immediately after that, as well as my mom, to make ends meet. The other thing about me is that even though I was a young man, I believe that I didn't have much time to be a teenager, you know, enjoying social life and being a kid because of the language and the culture

barriers; I had to take the responsibility of being the translator and interpreter of my family so, that way, we could get around, so, that way, I could help them with adaptations to, you know, the new life and to our new life in America. Because of that, you know, I remember that our phone which was ringing off the hook – evenings or early morning--when they know that I'm still home, when they know that it was at a time that they could catch me; the phone was just ringing off the hook. That's how I remember my young days or teenage years.

NF: Did they, your parents, continue working for the United States' government once they moved here?

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LC: No, unfortunately, because of the language barrier. They both had to work in a factory – manufacturing jobs, production jobs. Even though my dad used to serve in the, you know, CIA effort of rescuing the downed U.S. pilot during the Vietnam War, or stopping the rapid growth of the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the conflicts, and having to gather intelligence information for that operation. But over here, because of the English language, that made it hard for him to work for the government that way. So, no, he no longer worked for the government, but rather worked in just production lines as a, you know, private citizen.

NF: Did you have siblings?

LC: I do have siblings. I do have a brother and three sisters.

NF: Were you the oldest?

LC: No, I'm not the oldest. I am the third child, so I have an older brother and an older sister. Yes, and then two younger sisters.

NF: Did they stay in the state as well or did they end up moving to different parts of the country?

LC: One of my sisters lives in Montana and the rest are in the state. So, we're very fortunate.

NF: How did you become involved with IRCO and with AFC specifically?

LC: I, let's see, I began working for IRCO way back in '81; that is when I first started, you know, my college, you know, here. I am part of the, you know, founding members of the Asian Family Center and that is way back in 1994, is when we started the Asian Family Center.

NF: So what did you start doing when you started working for IRCO in 1981?

LC: Wow. That was a long time ago, right. I started – my very first job with IRCO--at that time, IRCO was not called IRCO, it's called Indo-Chinese Cultural and Service Center, and then later it become the International Refugee Center of Oregon. And not until the recent year that it got changed to the Immigrants and Refugee Community Organization, though the acronym is still IRCO. My first job with them is a youth counselor, right. And then, later on, I became an employment specialist and then--gosh, I've been all over. You know, I've probably been through most of the IRCO programs except the economic development program that I have not been working in there. So, over the years, I've been working in different programs, whether or not they're a youth program, family services, employment and training, interpretation, translation, our, you know, youth programing or the more, you know, homeless, I mean, anti-poverty program which basically is a program that helps to prevent homelessness at the early stage, and/or people who are losing, you know, their homes or at risk of losing their home and having to need rent assistance or mortgage assistance, or those kind of things. Even domestic violence programs, right. So I've been in all of those different programs. And, let's see, I became the Asian Family Center director shortly after it was found, and then also I became the associate director of IRCO since, I'll say, 2006 – yeah, beginning 2006, yeah, yeah about that time.

NF: And were you initially recruited to work for the organization or did you seek it out because you were interested in the services that it provided? This was back in 1981 when you first began.

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LC: Well, actually both. You know, I was seeked out, and then at the same – well, during those days we--during the large influx of the Indo-Chinese refugees after the Vietnam War, you know, during those days, we had very few people that had the proficiency in the English language among our community. I can remember, you know, a community of, you know, six or seven thousand and there were only four or five of us. So, you know, it's a – I could say that during those times, you know, let alone those who have, you know, a college education, but just the people who can master the English language, it was, you know, difficult enough and very limited during those times.

NF: So, what was the process of founding the AFC? So, what were the conversations that were happening in terms of the need for the Asian Family Center? And, how did that come about and your involvement in that?

LC: Well, I can say that during those times it has--I think, two strategies has been emerged at that time. One, is in totally IRCO at that point; there's a team of us that have been thinking about being on refugee resettlement because the need of our community is beyond resettlement services because, mainly, resettlement services during those times were just, you know, case management, support services, employment and training. So, you know, we realized that the need for our community, it's gone beyond that. So, the other effort is that a community effort that was also established, or came together. First it began with a problem among our children, refugee children, that at that time, the youth gang phenomenon - it's really begun with the Asian population in the city of Portland at that time. And so, not only that, but we also had a disproportionate Asian youth who are in the correction system. So at that time, when we talk about, you know, minority overrepresentation in the correction system, we're talking about Asian and African-American. But today, we're talking about that then we're talking about our African-American and our Latino community. So during the late, or you know, the '80s and the '90s, the youth gang problem for Asian communities is really bad. Not only that our young people are getting into this behavior, you know, organized crime, but, you know, violence among our community in regard to youth gangs, it's really really bad. I remember we have to deal with extortion, business extortion, home-invasion, robbery, and gun violence – my god, it was bad. Not only that, but, you know, most of our kids...I mean, later on, many of our kids were committed to a major life in crime. And so, because of that, a community effort also came together at that point. So, interestingly enough, it was led by Congressman Ron Wyden then. You know, he actually designated one of his staff to work with us trying to, you know, organize our community to plan and think about, you know, the different, you know, strategies of how we could address to this, you know, social problem. And then, you know, later on came [?], who became Multnomah County Chair. And so, she took on, you know, this initiative and really then helping us to put the Asian Family Center concept forward as part of the county Youth and Family Center system then. The Asian Family Center become the very first culturally-specific center in Multnomah County Youth and Family Center's system.

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So, you know, to begin with, we have our, at that point we called it the level seven which is, you know, a program that also had the relationship to the state and protective services. Level seven is basically kids who may not be...who are high-risk but have not been adjudicated yet. The emphasis there is to prevent them from further going into, you know, the state or, you know, juvenile justice system. So, that is one of the programs that we begun to implement along with the youth gang prevention and intervention program, and then later on expand to the early childhood programs as well as the, you know, homeless prevention or anti-poverty programs. And then, our

program just grew from then on to domestic violence services to much more so into youth and family and health education and community development programs. Later on, when this system became the SUN Service System, we are also part of that new initiative. That's how, you know, it, the Asian Family Center, become a reality for the Asian Pacific Islander community.

NF: Wonderful. What did – what were some of your duties as the director of the Asian Family Center? What were some of the things that you did and what was your mission, your vision for the AFC when you first started?

LC: Well, originally – I think, as a director, there are multiple roles that I have to play, not only providing the leadership necessary to continue to develop programs and trying to respond to the needs of the community. You know, as a director, I've been providing the leadership necessary to continue to develop and grow the organization as one. The other piece is the management role where you need to oversee a lot of the day-to-day operation. That means that you have to have a very good, you know, management team with you, a very good business team with you. And so, that means that I need to be able to function effectively at all those different levels because, I mean, being a director you need to provide the vision, you need to also make sure that there is a, you know, strong infrastructure to manage your programs and manage your resources and manage your, you know, personnel – you name it. I mean, it's just very complex when it comes to managing a, you know, full-bloom non-profit organization. I think one good thing is that having the background of business administration, you know, it's really helped to prepare me, not only to provide good vision for the organization but, you know, also for the implementations and management and administrative side of things too. That has been a very rewarding experience for me. So....

NF: And, as a director, how do you work with the board for AFC? What's your relationship with the board in how you interact with them, in what you need from them, what they need from you? Can you talk a little bit about that relationship?

LC: Yeah. You know, the relationship there is a little bit different from your – because the Asian Family Center is technically a program of IRCO. So even though we look so independent, but, you know, they're our parent-organization. Originally – going back a little bit, originally when the Asian Family Center was founded, we have three agencies that are, you know, coming together to implement the Asian Family Center.

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So IRCO was the lead agency, and then we also have Catholic Charity as well as Lutheran Family Services. Originally when the Asian Family Center was founded, because we wanted to be able to draw the different service expertise and/or program expertise to the table so that way we could begin implementing this program right away. IRCO has unique experience in different kinds of programing, and also Catholic also has different kinds of programs, and our Lutheran Family Services. I think for example, I think, Catholic Charity may have much more experience in terms of, maybe, the more counselling services, more therapeutic experience, rather than you know IRCO's. Or, you know, at that time, I would probably say that Lutheran Family Services probably had much more experience in children programs - things like that. That's how that first stage of formation of the Asian Family Center had begun. Later on, on our second phase of development, I think that is where, you know, Asian Family Center then just became a program of IRCO at that point. The other two partner agencies have dropped out. Then, we continue to develop the different, you know, programs after that.

NF: So, what do you see as the AFC's main role within Oregon's immigrant and refugee community in terms of the services you provide? And you provide a lot of services, so there's a breadth of services there, so can you talk about how you see the AFC assisting the community? And, based on needs assessments, what are the main issues facing the community?

LC: Well. As a strategy, our agency continues to--in every two to three years, we will conduct a community needs-assessment to make sure that our agency reflects the needs of the community and/or addressing to the trends of the environment of our community. That is one way for us to make sure that we reflect, you know, all API communities. You know, the Asian Pacific Islander community is very diverse, so do our needs. Even though we have a lot of common challenges and concern, but still, we have our needs vary from community to community. Example: Economically some of our communities are doing much better than the others. Or, you know, academically some of our communities are doing much, much better than the others. So, it just depends on what community we're talking about. Things like that is where we want to make sure we reflect our community well in terms of continuations of development or, you know, having programs that are able to address to the challenge of our community. Whether or not, it's development or whether or not it's operation, we wanted to make sure that it reflects all of our communities. To come back to how is our board work; the Asian Family Center board are not your typical governing board. So, because we are a program of IRCO structurally, the governing boards are the IRCO governing boards. But the Asian Family Center, we have an advisory board.

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So basically, the advisory board are the board leadership that work with me and our senior manager as well as Sokhom who is the current director, executive director, of IRCO to make sure that we lead the organization legally and properly as well as providing, you know, advice and recommendations of leadership to make sure that we're accountable, make sure that we are responsible and conduct the business the way that it should be. Their function is a little bit different than the governing board; so even though we're meeting regularly and they provide a lot of leadership--whether or not its fundraising, whether or not it's how to promote organizations, how to make sure that management and operation are running well and running legally and properly – that is how we operate and how we work with the advisory board. Basically, technically legally, they are the advisory board even though they provide a lot of sound, you know, leadership and support to make sure that their organization is running successfully, but their role has been limited to advising and making recommendations. One way that they also work is that we do make sure that we have a certain number of advisory boards that [are] also sitting on the IRCO governing board, so that way, it's a much more stronger link in terms of how Asian Family Center should be represented and should be marketed and should be run.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about your role, your current role, as an associate director of IRCO and how that's different from being the director at the AFC, how it's the same, what that means in terms of your position?

LC: Sure. Some of my main roles and responsibilities as an associate director of IRCO is – I have two critical functions. One is to assist the executive director on government relations. That means I would be the key person to represent the agency on a lot of those governmental relationships and initiatives. The other critical role that I play is to make sure that all program operations are, you know, running smoothly. So, one is, you know, taking on programs and ensuring that all those programs are, you know, operating it properly, operating it successfully. And then the other piece is, like I mentioned, the government relations. With that, I mean, you know, I would work with our, you know, fiscal office, I would work with our HR office. And, you know, quite often, with all of the business that needed to be done--whether its contract, whether or not it's reporting and make sure that we're staying compliant, make sure that we are operating all of our programs accordingly to contracts, and goals and objectives are met. Those are the two functions that I play as, you know, associate director, you know, for IRCO.

NF: And your government relations, does that tend to be just Multnomah County or do you work on the state-level as well?

LC: The state-level as well. That state-level as well. But, for us, the majority of our, you know, relationships with the state--one core area there, is the refugee resettlement programs in which we have to work very closely with the state refugee resettlement, you know, office and/or DHS, for that matter. Yeah.

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NF: So, some of the programs that you do with AFC in terms of fundraising, can you talk a little bit about your role in that and how that works with community outreach? It can be very complex; I'm interested to hear your thoughts on that.

LC: Yes. The one thing about fundraising is that the Asian Family Center, we're not--the way that I describe it -- we're not a very high-constituency-driven organization. In other words, you know, fundraising, it does not work like you have a good constituency or memberships, or, you know, like hospitals or college institutions where you have much, much stronger institutions, I mean, constituency. So, I would say that we very much live and breathe on grant. So when you live and breathe on grant, it's much harder, it's much more intense when it comes to your development. We have done some non-grant fundraising with our community, with, you know, just people that we work with who have established relationships and those who are compassionate and passionate about, you know, our cause and what we do. So I'll say that our organization at this point, we may not have been that much of a success in terms of individual fundraising outside of grants. At this point, I'll say that that would be one of the areas that in the future our organization has to be much more stronger and enhanced at, areas of fundraising. But at the moment, most of our funds are coming through grants--either governmental funding or, you know, private foundations, and/or corporate support. That is, in general, what we are now doing.

NF: Through grants, does that also mean a lot of partnerships with other organizations or not necessarily?

LC: It varies a lot, it depends. Some granters or some RFPs, they encourage collaboration and partnerships which we are also very good at that. So, locally we work with many, you know, collaborative partners or non-profit organizations. We also work with other institutions like the school districts or, you know, like, other research and, you know, I mean, institutions like Portland State or [?], and that kind of thing. Indeed, we partner with many organizations over the years. I think, my gosh, I think if I go back to the list of agencies that we work with, must be in the hundreds because we have very long lists of people who we have worked with and partnered with.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about the Coalition of Communities of Color report, that report that came out that had many partners and it had a lot of great information? Can you talk a little bit about how that began in terms of doing that research and then the data that came out of it, what you learned from it?

LC: Yes. A little bit on the history on the Coalition: Again, I'm part of the founding members of the Coalition and was one of the original co-chairs of the Coalition. Interestingly enough, collectively our community have struggled in a very similar way. I think in the past we used to, wanted to, do it for our self, speak for ourselves, and hoping that we'll be able to just represent ourselves. But, over the years, I think, collectively we have learned that if you wanted to overcome and if you wanted to promote bigger policies and deal with the bigger picture, then we need to come together. That's really where the ideas of forming the Coalition, it really came about.

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So, specifically about the research, after a few years of operating and coming together, we also have learned that in order for us to be effective, we need to be able to speak from a different way. That means that we – you know, if I was to be able to be more effective in asking for policy-change and for, you know, our elected leaders and policy-makers out there to do something much more tangible, then we need to have data to back our, you know, our asks. So that's really where we started to, you know, working with Multnomah County to ask them to start funding this research project in partnership with Portland State. So, you know, the whole idea there is that we wanted to really – how do we bring the issue that faces our community to the forefront? You know, we are very good at knocking on doors and telling stories, but those stories need to go beyond just story-telling; there has to be some way to tie it to scientific-method of, you know, bring it out. That way, we're truly not just talking from an anecdote position but, rather, true facts, scientific facts about how well our communities are doing in different areas. That's really where, you know, the thinking behind the research really, you know, came about. When the research came out, many of the findings and recommendations was not surprising to many of us, but some others surprising. I think, in particular, in the API community, we thought that certain communities would do very well in comparison to, you know, others, but we find out that that's not the case. I think internally, we thought that, for example, like, our Asian-Indian would do really well, right, but when the research came out, that isn't so. The other piece is that, if you were to lump all API students together, my god, our k-12 achievement should be very – I mean, that number alone, that percentage should be, I mean, should look so good and that we should be so proud. But, if you look at how only an individual community separately, then, my god, that would then really show which community is so behind, you know, in such a way that you never thought about. So, things like that are some of the surprising things that come out from the research. The other piece is, it's a bit

surprise when it comes to how well we're doing and how prosper we are economically compared to, you know, the other community or the mainstream community – well, not so; so that's one of the surprising things for us also. So then, what's really telling is-- there is truly and in some--whether or not it's a political climate, whether or not it's a social climate, or whether or not it's just the way we are in Oregon or in Portland, Oregon that, you know, people of color just [do] not fare well. When this research came out, we see that how we compare to, you know, like, King County or, you know, our neighboring state, we thought that we are such a progressive city and town, but, well no, not quite – not quite. There's a lot that we have learned through that research.

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NF: And, based on that information, did the AFC begin to shift its services, shift its resources to start addressing those needs? Is that something that you're now working on?

LC: We, certainly, strategically have shaped our development, you know, plan and are thinking about what community and how we may have to modify and tailor our service-model in the future to address to those most-vulnerable communities. I think, certainly we have done a lot of work in the areas of youth academic and also family engagement of how – because whether you're looking at scientifically or practically, education is really going to be the key indicator for economic prosperity in such a developed world, country, like America. So, a lot of the emphasis has been truly looking at communities that are most vulnerable; and if you don't help those communities, then, in the long term, it's going to be much more harder to address to this population. So, we have intentionally, in terms of our own development and our own--whether or not you're looking at actual service delivery, you're looking at advocacy policies, or you're looking at how you work with systems, school institutions, and every level from service to delivery to, you know, decision-making and leadership-level, how do we help to change the thinking, how do we help to change the how; you know, because we may have the right "what," but we may not have the right "how." That way, how do we begin to change those methodologies or strategies so, that way, we can, you know, also be much more effective in serving the most vulnerable population? So indeed, you know, youth academic programs, family engagement programs, and even in our homeless-prevention programs, you know, we have really intentionally shifting a lot of thinking in terms of, who we may be much more intentionally-targeted so that way we can help to make the change. So, those are some of the things we are now thinking in terms of how to best address to our community forward.

NF: And how important was the report and the data, not just the anecdotal story-telling data but the hard-data that you gathered? How important is that in your role in terms of government relations and policy change? How has that been received by the government?

LC: Well, very important. I think we have seen some progress; some areas might be right on, but some areas might be very slowly coming. I think to the positive side, once this research and recommendations and data had been done and presented to local governments and decision-makers, certainly I think--like, school districts have adopted and have created equity policies and, you know, creating their own equity lens and things like that. So, those are some of the positive movements. Also, you know, to our local government - city, county - have adopted similar policies in creating, you know, a special effort to really use equity as a way to, you know, really be the center of all of their planning. So that way, whether or not it's service-delivery, whether or not it's resource-allocation, whether or not it's policy-driven conversation, that equity should be, you know, a very essential element of all of this conversation if you're going to be able to make some change to address the disparity that exists in this region.

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So, you know, to say the very least, I think the research and data findings has been very useful, not only for our community but also to, you know, local policy and decision-makers.

NF: And you mentioned that some of the struggles and challenges are similar beyond the API community; can you talk a little bit about how you see those similarities and differences? In terms of making policy change, is that something that you really have to try and explain--that there are similarities but there are distinct differences that need to be addressed? Can you talk a little bit about how you balance those needs?

LC: Sure. Well I would probably say that, certainly – example like in the education arena, sure, I mean it's so uniquely, I mean commonly, you know, across many of our community of, I mean, community of color. Same thing, economic prosperity – very similar. And/or opportunity. Those are some of the similarities that we see that exist among all of our communities. I think that some of the things that may be varied, it could be, for example, like, kids who end up in foster care, or minority kids that are, you know, overrepresented in the correction system, or people of color represented in the correction system, period – adults or children. So these are some of the areas that may have differences, you know, in some of our communities. So I could say that, you know, like I mentioned earlier, in the '80s is where Asians and African-Americans are the two target populations but now it's Latino and African-American. You know, if

you're looking at income, my god, it's so similar among all of our community. Living wage jobs, owning homes, and, you know, what is the average incomes, I mean, if you're looking at those charts, it's so similar facing people of color. That's why one of the strong indicators that would probably – I mean, even though it's easily said, it's very hard to have a conversation that we are the city and county and state, are we truly having an institutional racism that's still in place or that still exists? So, how do we overcome that, how do we continue to create policies where [it] would help those behaviors, would help to change those structures. And so, I think, those are some of the, you know, common issues that are facing our folks; even though, if you break down into different areas, some communities may be harder hit than the other. You know, like, areas of law-enforcement,--and that may be an example like racial profiling--it may phase certain communities more. It just depends on what topic and what are we're looking into. But, the one thing that become so similar to each other is the economic prosperity; it's just not much different. I mean, it's just so similar that we're not making it.

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NF: So what do you foresee as the next big steps for the AFC and for IRCO, if you'd like to speak on behalf of IRCO as well, in terms of the next five years, the next ten years? As part of being an associate director, as part of your vision for that, what do you see?

LC: Well, I think that, you know, the Asian Family Center, I envision that the Asian Family Center is still going to be a focal point, one of the center that would be a home for and a resource for all of the Asian Pacific Islander communities. I'm hoping that we will be able to continue to be the resource and the provider for our community that way. I think, certainly, you know, as long as the Center continues to look at the needs of the community and really then work with our community to, you know, develop programs and resources to address those issues, then we will continue to be the center for all. The other piece that I like to say, that even though right now we're able to have staff that address to more than 28 different languages here on a daily basis, I like to see that that should be growing in capacity. I know that – the other piece that we also know is that the demographic of the API population, you know, in the tri-county is going to continue to grow. Not only that--not only that our birthrate or our migration of API population to this tri-county, but also refugees and immigrants continue to, you know, arrive. On that piece, as long as our, you know, national interests do not get changed globally, we may continue to, you know, see more refugees coming to our state. Again, forward, in the future, I am hoping that we don't have to outgrow this building again because we just moved to this building during 2011. At this point, we're pretty maxed-out in terms of space, but we're hoping that we will continue to grow in some way that, you know, we can steadily develop a program to respond to our community needs. Certainly in the next five to ten years, I could still see that Asian Family Center is still going to be a very strong focal-point for the Asian community in the state.

NF: And as you continue to do needs-assessments within the API community, do you foresee doing another joint communities of color research report or something like that?

LC: I think we will probably go on to continue in two, I think, in two ways that I see right now. One is how do we continue to deepen the research that has already been done? Because, I think there are much more-detailed studies that needed to be done or, you know, different communities or different, you know, topic areas. So, to answer your question, yes; I see that, you know, the research will continue to be a critical, integral part of our needs-assessments and our research needs for not only the API community but for all people of color. Yeah.

[01:00:01]

NF: And in terms of the immigrant and refugee population continuing to grow and people moving to this area, can you talk a little bit about how that's changed or, perhaps, stayed the same from the time when you and your family moved here? Now is this a place where people see that there are services and programs that will assist them so they think about moving here? Does that influence their choice in being here, or are there other ways, other reasons why they might come to this area?

LC: Well, I think, for sure, different factors. I know that for some whether or not it's because of the resources that they can seek out here, or just extended family, or just the existing community that there is here, outside of economic opportunity. You know, I think, our Asian community are very unique when it comes to, you know, their own relationship with their own community. You know, who they belong, and how they—I mean, simply put, we're such a community-orientated people, right; so, it's still very true to many of our, you know, API community. I would probably say that the API population, when it comes to newcomers, refugees as you stated, it will change. If you could see in the late '70s, the early '80s to the '90s, it's all Indo-Chinese population, that means: Laotian, Hmong, Mien, Cambodian, Vietnamese, right. These are the large-influx right after the Vietnam War. Between then and now, we saw so many different flow of nationalities and different races or ethnic groups, they're coming to our state. To which I'm going to say that that's going to change; for example, like right now, we have the Burmese, the Nepalese, and the Koreans. All of these are the newcomers now for the API. And certainly, we anticipate to continue to have more African newcomers and, you know, Asian—probably, you know, East-Asian or Middle-Eastern because of the current conflict now. We probably are going to have a continue to slow down on the Russian, you know, speaking community. That flow of refugees will definitely be slowing down to some degree. The majority of them will go—I would probably say that, currently, right now the majority of the newcomers are African. So indeed, the population will be changing.

NF: So looking back for over 30, 35 years in terms of your career, in terms of closing remarks, can you talk a little bit about your mentors and your community experience in terms of all of your many jobs, your many positions here with IRCO and AFC and how that played into your influence? I'm assuming this--you wanted to stay, so this was a great organization; you felt that this was, as you said, your home, so can you talk a little bit about that?

LC: This is my home. Well, you know, as a former refugee, in general, I think Americans are very generous. I know that sometimes, you know, the political climate and our global issues may have influenced some of our behavior; but, in general, I will say that Americans are very generous. You know, my only experience – you know, I think that, to the most part, I think that Americans are very welcoming; they are very hospitable towards newcomers. Even though we were in such a foreign land and that we may not know how to navigate a system or their system or understanding their language and their culture, but I think to the most part, most Americans are very generous, friendly, and helpful.

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I'll probably say that, you know, some of the very influential people – I'll say that whether or not its teachers, friends, or just church members, they're very encouraging, so the one good thing over here is that a lot of people are having these positive encouragements. So, whether or not they'll be able to do much for you, but at least, the sign of hope is there. A lot of times, those of us who are – you know, whether or not you're into an unfortunate situation, or to most refugees, as long as you continue to have hope, that is one very good dream, that is one very positive thing that you have in life, and a lot of times people without hope is really where you are getting to the bottom; so as long as you continue to have hope, and let people give you hope, and let them give you encouragement, you know, for tomorrow, sometimes that is what you want. That's all that you need. You know, when you continue to have hope, then you will work toward it, and then you'll be at a better place. Certainly, you know, its – this journey is not, what shall I say – you will not get the answer you wanted immediately, but as long as you continue to have hope, then you will continue to work toward your dreams. And, day by day, year by year, you will see the difference. One of the most rewarding, you know, of my 33 years in this organization is that a lot of times when I see struggling families and struggling individuals become somebody, not only become somebody but become very successful professionally or very successful in business, very successful in life. And that you may serve them today but five or ten years later when you meet them, they become somebody. I think that's worth more than a million dollars. I mean, I used to say that it's more than a million dollars, you know, for me.

And so, that's one of the rewarding that I continue to love, you know, doing social services and human services. In closing, I'd just like to say that everybody will need a helping hand sometimes. And so, to have a resource where vulnerable people and people who just need the little help to make a difference in their life that is one thing that I'm hoping that, you know, we as society should be very thoughtful about because we, as human beings, we all were born equal but we're not raised equal. Regardless what race, what nationality, whether or not you're male or female, we were born equal but we do not raise equal. So, you know, if we could provide them with the opportunity, my god, it would make a big difference in those people's life and that's what I'm so passionate about.

NF: Wonderful. Well is there anything else that you would like to add, anything that we've talked about that you want to talk about a little bit more, or...?

LC: No, I think that's good for now, right. But, if there's anything else that I forgot, certainly, feel free to ask me later. Good.

NF: Okay, wonderful. Well, thank you so much.

LC: Alright, thank you. Good.

[end of interview 01:09:48]