

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

**Date:** September 11, 2014

**Location:** Asian Family Center, Portland, Oregon

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**Interviewee:** Sophorn Cheang

**Interviewer:** Natalia Fernández

**Transcribers:** Hope Glenn and Avery Sorensen

[00:00:00]

NF: Natalia Fernández

SC: Sophorn Cheang

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

NF: My name is Natalia Fernández and I am the Oregon Multicultural Librarian at Oregon State University's Special Collections and Archives Research Center, the Oregon Multicultural Archives. Today's date is September 11, 2014 and we are at the Asian Family Center, and we'll go ahead and get started. So, if you could please state your name and spell it out loud.

SC: My name is Sophorn Cheang. It's spelled S-O-P-H-O-R-N and my last name C-H-E-A-N-G.

NF: Great. And what is your birthdate and your birthplace?

SC: I was born in Cambodia in the capital city on October 16, 1980.

NF: And do you consider yourself Cambodian when someone asks you your ethnic or racial background? Is that what you respond? Cambodian?

SC: Yes. Yes, Cambodian-American.

NF: Cambodian-American. And when and where were your parents born?

SC: Both of my parents were born in Cambodia, too. My mom came from the capital city and my dad came from the countryside. But they both were born – came from Cambodia.

NF: And so, you grew up in Cambodia when you were little and through junior high and high school?

SC: Yes, I actually grew up in Cambodia until I was nineteen. I moved here to Oregon when I was nineteen.

NF: And why did you decide to move to Oregon?

SC: I first came here, actually came for school. I came for college. I have family here; my aunt and uncle who are here were here during that time. They just came – moved from Chicago, so they stayed at Oregon, they wanted to move to the west coast, and my dad wanted me to come to the state to continue my education. During that time I already received my associate degree in banking. I graduated when I was sixteen from high school, so my dad said maybe you look into opportunities to go and pursue your education and live with your uncle here. So, my uncle and my aunt sponsor me and help me get into school here, so that's when I moved here.

NF: So, to Portland, your uncle and aunt lived in Portland?

SC: Yeah, they live in Gresham, in particular. So, I went to Mount Hood first, Mount Hood Community College and transferred to Portland State University afterward.

NF: And what did you study?

SC: Finance, business.

NF: So, when you came here to study that, did you have anything in mind in terms of what career you were interested in?

SC: I wanted to be a CPA. So, I wanted to be in accounting. My dad thought that it would [?]. I had a degree in banking and I was selected to work at the National Bank of Cambodia before I came here. I already passed the exam. It was a three-round exam. There was like three, four hundred people and they only selected ten, and I was the second one on the list. So, I was so happy. I thought that banking was kind of my career, but when my dad asked me what did I want to do in banking, I said like maybe I want to be an accountant because it's easy to find a job anywhere, always is looking for accounting degree, and eventually wanted to become a CPA. But then, when I went to Portland State, in my junior year I decided it's not really my thing. I wanted to know more of like – I wanted to become a financial analyst. I wanted to do more of like in depth analyzing things and the stock, like the market, so I decided to switch and graduated in finance. So, accounting is my, kind of always my base.

NF: And so you decided to stay here in Portland?

SC: Yes. I decided to stay here in Portland at—just right before I graduated. And then I met my husband, we were together for a while and then we decided to get married just right before I graduated.

NF: Great. And so, how did you get involved with the Asian Family Center?

SC: So, I got involved with the Asian Family Center through the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon. When I went to Portland State, getting closer to my graduation, then they say that let's get more with the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon through the Cambodian community of Oregon, they are so involved with IRCO. Actually, I know IRCO first before Asian Family Center. So, because the executive director, he's also Cambodian and he's very actively involved with the Cambodian community here. There's everybody known him and he's just really respectable, you know, being respected in the community. So, I say well I wanted to learn more about the—kind of watch the immigrants and refugees here.

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I volunteered here and there on any kind of activities that IRCO had, and through the involvement with the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon I started to get to know some of the programs here within IRCO and also the Asian Family Center. Then one of the programmers, the civic engagement, which is the leadership; the diversity and civic leadership engagement activity - so I was a part of the class or the engaged class back in 2010 and 2011, so I learned, I kind of getting myself to learn more. Then, after that my—a good friend, he's kind of one of my mentors too, in the community, he was a board member, an advisory board member for the Asian Family Center. Then he said that he didn't really want to do it anymore because of his time. He wanted to spend more time with the family. They're looking for someone who's from the Cambodian community to come and join the board. It took me a while, then I decided to apply and joined the advisory board in around, I think, the end of 2010, early 2011.

NF: And then you've been on the board ever since?

SC: I've been on the board—yes, and then around two-thousand—so, I joined around 2010, the end of 2010, I believe, and when it's around two-thousand—the end of two-thousand or middle of 2012, I was selected to be the chair of the advisory board. Then I resigned at the end of last year, kind of early this year, because of my interest to do more in a non-profit and there was an opportunity during that time to come to do more on the operating side, so I wanted to join the Asian Family Center, so that's where I'm on IRCO on the operation side.

NF: Okay. So, let's talk a little about your involvement with Engage, with that program. Can you explain a little about how you applied and what you did for that and what you learned from that?

SC: Okay. So, I think in a way, right now that's easy because now I'm turning to be like managing that program, but when I really first heard about that it was in 2008. That's really when we—just a year or two after IRCO, Asian Family Center, became one of the partners with the Office of Neighborhood involvement. And so, the goal of this diversity and civic leadership involvement here, for within the city of Portland, they work with the organizations like IRCO, they actually have five partners. IRCO is one of them. They want to getting people to do more of like the civic engagement - to be informed, to get awards, to be part of the—being the voice from their prospective community. So, the recruitment is every year and when I first heard that, it was early in 2008, because my husband, back then my husband was the board chair for the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon, so he was really actively involved with the community. Then he joined it, kind of like the first graduate from 2008. So, through many years then I applied. So, what happened is they said “okay, this is the classes.” They have all the workshops.

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I think—I believe in 2011, this is all the workshops that you come to attend. They're advocacy workshops, community organizing and the—I don't remember all of the things—but there's classes and all the workshops back then. So, not just me, then there's going through their selection, I believe during that time it's only thirty people coming from the applicants in the immigrant community, from the Slavic community and also the Asians Pacific Islander. I remember my class and during that time in the Engage 2011 there were a couple people were newcomers too, from [?], from Burma. So, it's a, the involvement is to empower our community leaders to take more on of the leadership role as well as becoming like, again like becoming the part of the decision makers. So, one thing that I recently learned is they call the river model, so there's the upstream, the middle stream and the downstream, and often times, especially the immigrants and refugees who come here, languages is one of the challenges for them. They always, from time to time, just having the language barrier and depends a lot to their own community or their children. So, to kind of preserve the culture and also empower them to speak up on their—on the behalf of their own community, we would like to see more of the community leaders be more into the upstream, so sitting at a table or talking to the decision maker and say, “this is what's going on, this is the need in my community.” And also it is very important, like just for example for us as a community based organization, we feel that just to sit down and listen to them, to hear like what their needs are, it really helps us to make sure we provide the culturally

specific services to the right ethnic group; to the right community – see where they’re coming from. So, they see they can preserve the cultures that they have.

NF: Wonderful. Do you keep in touch with the members of your cohort, the ones that went to the program with you? Is that common, to remain that rela – to retain that relationship with them?

SC: We didn’t really have, for our Engage we didn’t really have the alumni or the senior cohort kind of system set up yet. But it’s kind of part of the wish and the plans for the next upcoming like two or three years, to see how we can get them to come back together anymore. However, from time to time, this is just the same, kind of like you know, many of them coming the same people as a community leader, so we tend to run into each other at various events, community events, things like that.

NF: Great. Well, let’s talk a little about your time as a board member. Can you share maybe some of your achievements as a board member? The things that you did that you’re especially proud of during your tenure as a board member and as a chair?

SC: Ten years? Did I say ten years?

NF: No, your time that you served.

SC: Oh, okay, thank you. I feel that one of them is working with all the other boards, the experience that they have sitting at the table with all the boards, all the advisory board members, who is the leaders from their own community, who’s been the advisors to their agency and supporting the programs that Asian Family Center is working on in specific, and I recall that they experience is remarkable. And during two-thousand, I would say like 2013, was it last year, that when we had, together with the board and staff, we put together a fundraising event. Normally the Asian Family Center, we had the Asian Cultural Night, and – but for the last couple years we didn’t. We skipped a couple years because of the moving. Because they just moved here several – a few years ago, actually, from the old building to here. So, part of having the capital campaign – and we worked together, the advisory board worked together with staff, putting together that event. And I don’t recall exactly how much, the numbers that we raised, but compared to other years that normally it’s a celebration, this year I believe that we, during that year, in 2013, we raised over ten thousand dollars, to contribute to the capital campaign to have this building.

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NF: Wonderful. Were you a part of the process of the move and the decision to come to a new building?

SC: Part of the advisory board role, it is to help guide, so it's not – I think the decision is more of like the governing board. Our IRCO governing board is the one who decides that, and most importantly is our executive director. Under his leadership I feel that I trust and strongly support his leadership, and he's the one who's also recommend and suggest to us to invest into the building rather than rent. That request a suggestions being brought up by our Asian Family Center director, and he's also the associate director, Mr. Lee Po Cha, so he brought it up to the advisory board, the Asian Family advisory board, to share that to. We talk about it and so some of us came to check out the building to see during that time, and in a way that make a recommendation that is a good decision, to able to invest in something like this for the agency.

NF: So, what is your current role with the Asian Family Center? Your current title and your position?

SC: Okay, so my current role right now is the community health and leadership development manager. I mean particularly, for the community health department that so many other programs are kind of falling under - the community health, including the leadership development and community development and community development. Even though the community development right now, the structure actually changed a little bit from the kind of IRCO organizational structure, that community have come under the community development. So, however, we kind of shared that leadership through the main IRCO and Africa House. You've heard about our other place, Africa House, right?

NF: Yes.

SC: Okay.

NF: So, what are your job duties? What are the types of things that you do?

SC: There's so many meetings. That's one thing. But, my kind of role, I think, is set to oversee all the programs and to work closely with our health programs or with leaders, our leadership development coordinator to make sure that we deliver and we meet the goals and objectives for each program that we're working on. And one other thing too, and is most important, to manage the budget within all of the programs; make sure that all of our activities and programs stay within the budget.

NF: So, in terms of community health programs and services, can you talk a little bit about the types of services and types of programs that you oversee, that AFC provides?

SC: One of the big kind of, I would say that the health programs that we – we're very fortunate to receive the grant from the Cover Oregon and also from the OHA, Oregon Health Authority, through the Cover Oregon outreach and involvement. So, from seeing last year and then this year to help the population, especially for the immigrants and refugee community, to educate them about the coverage, to have insurance and why it's so important to have coverage, and also to improve the understanding of the preventive care and wellness, compared to going to the emergency. On top of that, we have our staff, our team here, help those communities, like the community we serve, to help them and grow into the program, receive the health insurance. From counting last year, we have over seven hundred families and we're very fortunate to receive to continue that program until early next year, to continue for the next enrollment. On top of that, we go after – we send five of staff who are from here, Asian Family – from actually not just in the Asian Family Center but also from IRCO to be a certified community health worker, and right now two of them are on the program. So, the part of the community health worker is to have – to work closely with the community member, to help them to navigate too, because I mean, you know through all of this, especially when it comes to the health topic, people feel that they only want to talk to someone who they can trust, so this part of kind of what we're asking for role as a community health worker.

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And just we're doing a little bit of, more of like the community education and outreach, like this month we're putting together three Hepatitis B screenings, working together with the Providence Center. So, at Providence we're working with the team there to see the [?] cancer center, to kind of help how to educate, to put a workshop together and invite the community from different communities. We're going to have from this African community and also the Burmese community, to educate them and see why it's so important for them to get screening. So, that's just kind of briefly from some of the health programs that we have.

NF: Yes. And so you mentioned partnerships and grants. Does most of your work, especially the health programs, is that through partnerships and grants through Multnomah County or on the state level, or both? Does it just depend?

SC: I would say that it depends. Like if – for the Cover Oregon in particular, it's the state level is where we receive from. But most, like most of the time we depend on the grants and the partnership.

NF: Great. So, how about talking a little about the programs and services in terms of the leadership role? So, you mentioned that you took part in the engage program and now you're managing it. So, how was that transition? Was it helpful, do you think, that you took part in the program and now you're managing it? You'll get to see it from both sides?

SC: I think it's very, very interesting and it's always good. The managers, Dr. [?], who during that time was the manager for the program, I—that's how I got to know her, through that too. I learned so much from her. She's—she's just amazing and very valuable to the agency and she just had knowledge. You know, when it comes to the training and workshops. I can see that we're getting into like over the seven years, within the diversity and civic leadership program, so we've been working together with the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, with also the DCL, the Diversity and Civil Leadership, our partner, to look into what's our wish and in the next two years, four years, and seven years. I do enjoy the opportunity to be on the board to learn from the management side, kind of like be the one who's thinking ahead. Mr. Lee Po Cha has been a great mentor. He's one of the person who kind of started be part of—and see—had that programs in the beginning. So, he's very knowledgeable when it comes to the programs and the design and the work scope. So, our vision here is taking on to see how can we—we work together to get our community leaders to be more engaged, to take on the leadership role within the city of Portland, to grab any kind of opportunity to come to be more active at the council meeting, to be at the budget hearing, to start talking more about what the needs are within the community. So, I feel that this is a great timing, that now; you know we just recently, over a week ago, went to the retreat with the other partners. We received a grant from the Office of Neighborhood Involvement to have this conversations; what's our vision for the next years.

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NF: And so, is that the main leadership training program, or do you have other programs that you provide?

SC: We do have other programs on top of that. So, one of the other programs is the Asian Pacific Islander leadership program, but I think the name of it we call the Asian Pacific Islanders Community Leadership Institute. So, that's the whole title of the name. The program is one of the six leadership programs under the CCC. CCC is the Coalition of Communities of Color. We received the funding from the Meyer Memorial Trust. So, through this programs, what we focus on is two big components; is building a pipeline and connecting the pipeline. So, for the API Leadership Program, building the pipeline, what's unique about it that I found out, that's how the program has been designed, and this is our third year; it's to provide more of like the culturally specific, but when it



comes to the API Leadership Program, we feel that it's more of like a multi – you know, because it's not really just one culture, because there are so many like from the API community, I believe there's around forty languages, and so for the last two years, we all did graduate two leadership fellows. Two years of leadership, you know, of the program here. So, the first year there were twenty-two graduates, the second year fifteen graduates. They shared like sixteen – they came from sixteen different ethnic backgrounds, from the API group. So, our program, what we do as a program model, as building the pipeline, is resuming the training, through the popular education. So, which means that they will have – they had opportunity to take, to have a hands-on experience, to co-design or design and facilitate their own workshop; to pick the topic, research, analyze, and then put together the workshop, facilitate it and share it in their cohort. It is a cohort kind of activity program, and it was a very intense six-month program. So, it's only for six months. On top of coming to the workshop and learn for the popular education, they also took on the community – we call community action projects – and mentorship program. So, those two we, the IRCO Asian Family Center, is in partnership with the APANO, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon. So, they put together, they do one leader community action projects that is time that our leadership fellows had an opportunity to work on some of the activities, some of the projects that involve taking on some leadership role like doing more, connecting with the two-on-one info, how to do data research, work at the Jade District, being a part of the council, be a part of the committee, and one of the successful, kind of area, one of the cohort, she is an attorney. So, she worked together with Oregon Law Center and put together a free legal clinic to the underserved community. It's been going on for over a year already. It's every month for two hours. She worked to find a pro-bono attorney to help give the free legal consultant to the clients, and we've been hosting that every month here. Before it used to be rotated between the main IRCO, Africa House and Asian Family Center, but now we try to keep it just within the Asian Family Center, so to make it easy for the attorney to kind of just come for one place.

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Mentorship programs, we match with APANO, IRCO, and Asian Family Center and with our cohort, identify what kind of area of interest that our cohorts have. So they, each one of them, was matched with a mentor, to work together through that six months of the program, who they can talk to about whatever is their career interest. But, there are so many of them who didn't really have that opportunity to have someone who they can look up to, or had opportunity to have someone who they can look up to, or have the opportunity to seek one on one with someone who's sitting at a state level or sitting at an office with the governor or sitting at the big advisory board, or the board. So, they can have the opportunity to ask those kind of questions. For the next coming year, we just went through the selection for the third year, so the next, the third

year cohort is going, they are starting next month, by the kick-off, is going to be on October fourth and fifth, and we selected twenty-two. It was very hard, because over – a couple months ago, we received forty-four applications, and we were able to select twenty two, because of the capacity that we have because of the funding. So, it was really hard for the steering committee. The program has a steering committee who helps guide the project, who advise and help support the program. So, it seemed to be a lot, because there's a lot of commitment we ask from the fellows. The bottom line is, like I mentioned earlier, is to connect to the pipeline. We want to see; now again from the API community here, to be a part of like – this is a state-wide program, by the way, so we had many people coming from Eugene too. So, every year there's one or two coming from Eugene, from Salem, from Springfield, like this year there's going to be two from Eugene, one Springfield and from Salem. So, we have everyone coming all over, trying to recruit to have involvement from all over the state.

NF: So then, is the goal that the work that comes out of the institute will then continue in their local communities? Like the attorney that is now providing that service every month, that's the idea, that they'll develop something and then take it back to their community and continue providing the service?

SC: That is one thing. That is one thing of, like, building the pipeline, for them to go back and either they decide to continue to utilize the model of the program through the popular education; another thing, that to help empower and strengthen their own community. Another thing is we like to see them taking on more of, again, like, the civic engagement that is a higher level in a state wide. One of our graduates whose – actually she's Pacific Islander – she just recently graduated in 2014 here. She teaches at a public school--will be moving to public school in Keizer near Salem. And she was just recently appointed to be on the board for the Oregon, you know, the Asian Pacific Islander's affair, appointed by the governor to serve for the next few years. This is just one of the examples that we wanted to see as a part of connecting the pipeline. Through the process, in the next year here, we hope to continue to connect the fellows, the community leaders with the board and the commission. So, they, perhaps, can start by shadowing someone whose already sat at a board and commission.

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Believe it or not, just for the last couple years--and I meet with our community leaders, recently, our last graduate here – there was 15 of them, not all the 15 came to graduate. I believe it was 12 came to the graduate. More than half say that they've never been to the city hall. So, that's just a part of like, how, for them to kind of come out to take on, say that, you know, the--not trying to get them to involve in politics, but in a way of like they kind of know which areas that they need to share their voice, they need to share their concerns, the issue that they have within their own community. So, we, here, hope

that, ultimately, we'll connect them to be a part of, again, sitting at the big table. Be the one who is able to let the decision-makers know to be aware of the data, of the populations, and their culture. Make sure that we continue to provide a culturally-specific program to the community. Especially, what are the needs, again, the needs and the services – we wouldn't really know. I'm sure that many of our decision-makers will not even know what really, exactly, that community needs. So, we make sure to provide the right service to them.

NF: Wonderful. Are there any other programs that you'd like to talk about?

SC: Well, I talked a lot – I think so far, I've talked about, also, about the API community leadership program. Under my department--the Slavic leadership program is also under, you know, the community health department as well. Similar to the leadership, the API leadership program, they also went through the cohorts program. There are some similar routines, but they don't use the popular education. Just to make sure – because they want to make sure they provide the right, kind of, culturally specific services or program. So, the program design more for what fits into the Slavic community. One of the unique parts about that program is they conduct most of their workshop in Russian, in their language.

NF: Wonderful.

SC: Yeah. And, it is to also keeping their culture; and also many of their community leaders they can do an outreach. Because of the language barrier, sometimes it stops them from taking on, you know, any kind of action. One thing about the Slavic community too, when it comes to the government side and community side, there is a big wall and barriers. So, you know, it is very important for us to be a part of, like, helping to lower that wall down; see how they can come together and not to shy away from the government. There are so many things that they could be a part with and share with, share with the government. So, that is kind of, so far, kind of, most of the main programs that we have under the community health. We do have, you know, a couple of other small civic engagement and, kind of, working with the DHS on the child welfare issues. So those are just the small grants. Some of our grants to our programs, sometimes it goes across departments; so, often times, we are reaching out to the youth department, we are reaching out to the parenting department to get their advice, to connect with them and see how we can work together.

NF: Can you talk a little bit about how you connect to communities? Do you go out to local association meetings? Do you set up opportunities for gatherings? How do you connect with the community, because that can seem so simple but be quite difficult and challenging. So, can you talk a little bit about how that works?

SC: That's a good question, Natalia, because outreach alone, it sounds easy, but it's not. The people--that's why I always encourage and advice our staff, my team, for that skill that they have when it comes to the outreach and community organizers. There's people that -- people might think that, "oh, it, maybe people will come." No, it didn't really, you know, do that way. There's a lot of things, and I would say that one thing is coming from trust. Our team here, we -- our community organizers, the most of them are actually coming from the community, including myself, who's very strongly, actively involved with their own community. And I could say that almost everybody in my team within the community health department--like Mr. Lee Po Cha, he's our director, but he's really rooted and very strong connected with the Hmong and Lao community; like Mr. Hongsa, he's very well-connected, not just near the Lao community but from the Burmese community and some of the Thai, Thai community and some of the Bhutanese and the [?]. So there are so many communities in there. We -- what we do is through our programs that work together through the civic engagement and the leadership programs; we already have the database of who's the community leaders. It -- often times, it doesn't really happen that I can walk into the event and say that "let me share with you what's happening." It's really hard, and I, several years, through the -- I work as a partnerships assistant through the [?] program in 2010. So, it was my job -- so like, community outreach and also work within the community. Through their community leaders, that's where we start because they already have the trust; their community already selected a leader within their community, and they believe more than any of us who's coming. It is kind of one of the reasons why we want to help strengthen their skill and their leadership skills. To go back to your question, there's -- let's say if you need to have any of an event, the first person we pick up the phone call, or -- let's say, this information needs to go to the Cambodian, maybe that's too easy, picking the Cambodian community, but, let's say it is an event that needs to go to a Vietnamese community. So, the Vietnamese community is very big. One person will not preach to the whole community. The whole population would not just need a whole, not need a whole [?], just need to make sure he's alone, one person cannot do; the same as a Cambodian community even though the size of a Cambodian community is not the same. But, so many ethnic communities here, they always have a, you know, different group. So, that's why it's very important for us to empower more than just the community leaders. So what we would do is to connect to these leaders who we know, "okay this leader's at a temple, this leader's at a church, this leader's at an education area." So we try to connect and say, this information, that's how we want to pass to your community; how can we get that information to your community? That's one of the ways how we work as a community outreach because, again, building trust is hard, but, and, also that's why it has to take time to earn the trust and be strongly respected and believed that the trust that they have in their own

community already. Here at the Asian Family Center, other centers that we want to have promoting the culturally specific programs, and to help connecting the people to the right resource and the right service, we want to be the place and agency to help them [?] them, to help them, to empower them, to – how can we do to support on things that they need to do, like, within their own community through technical assistance, through whatever, like, the civic engagement, through anything so we can help. So any, kind of, information that we receive or we know that will be very beneficial to any kind of community, we try to pass it on to those communities. I hope I answered your question.

NF: Yes, that was wonderful. Thank you.

SC: Okay.

[00:45:01]

NF: So, what do you see, in your opinion, as some of the recommendations for the future, if you have future plans or ideas of what you would like to see the Asian Family Center do? What you would like to do with your role, with your current position? Can you talk a little bit about your hopes and your plans?

SC: Of course I want to have a lot more money. You know, it's not just need the money part, but it's also, because of the funding, we can do a lot more. But, in particular, the reason why, too, is because we want to – I see more of the education and community development as they really need within, especially, the Asian Pacific Islanders. Here in particular, for the Asian Family Center, like I mentioned earlier, we serve a culturally specific center, so we want – I want to, kind of, see the future that my vision is to see how can we continue to help promoting each ethnic community. I want to do more of the leadership development program. I do want to see that we do more of the improving of the youth development; improving the wellness from the parenting and in from the birth to all the way to, you know, through there – from the birth-time to all the way to the high school. Oh, and then take on what will be helping to support, you know, through the college, through wherever is going to become the family. So it is whatever is in every corner that we can help providing any kind of service to be a support to that. And, to be a part of – connect them to take on and be stronger, kind of like, they can speak louder for their own community. Right now, they only probably whisper, or they only say things to us; but, if you want to change--we want to do social change and often times, especially when it comes to our society, we've been talking about equity. So, we want to see things different. And, I strongly believe that when it comes to the people of color here, the number is going up. So, the population is more; how do we make that become, you know, awareness? There's a big, you know – see that the data is shifting. So they need to speak louder to, kind of, see, "okay this is what our

community wants – what our community – what works and what not.” You know, I think that community development is one of the biggest parts. Most importantly, we definitely want to continue helping them to fill the gap with the social disparity and economic disparity--to help anything that we can improve their lives, to make their resettlement here, as they come as immigrants and refugees, to help them feel that they’re home. I mean, many of them have gone through so much trauma already, it is – you know, we don’t want them to face that poverty line. I feel that that’s kind of a big wish. And, if because it’s also have to, you know, connect with the system change as well. So that’s the reason why I mentioned community development; it is very important to help being part of the system change.

NF: Right. And in terms of addressing the needs and doing a needs assessment with the community, do you also work through the community leaders? Do you host events where community members are able to tell you what their needs are? How does that work in terms of asking people what their needs are? And then, are people willing to share what they need, or can that be challenging sometimes for people to express their desires?

SC: Yes, very good questions. In fact, IRCO is one of, I would say, one of the only organizations that put together, it’s called, a community needs assessment. So, every three years, we’ve been putting together the community assessment. Recently here--the last one that we had was just in June this year, I’m sure you heard about that. So, we invited all the community leaders.

[00:50:04]

The recruitment was challenging, like, you know, you know getting their participation and the commitment. And we value their time; we respect that because it means so much, especially when we ask for a day long. It was a day-long event, so us and IRCO,-- you know the IRCO agency, not just only the Asian Family Center--we put together the community assessment by inviting all the communities from ethnic groups. I’m more than happy to share a little bit of how the process works. For this year--I’m going to talk about this year because that’s where I experienced the most and was part of one of the organizers in putting the event together – we were reaching out through staff, through the community leaders. We were trying to reach out to all their community members, community leaders to come and participate at a conference. And, as a result, we had just over 40 people who signed up, we had their names. We had 142 community members who came. We believe that we had more because there were so many people who came, they don’t really sign-up. The structure or the process here: We divided, separated them into eight groups based on their ethnic groups. One of them is – so we even separated the Asian Pacific Islanders. Like I mentioned earlier, Asian Pacific Islanders is so big. So we separated the Asian Pacific Islanders’ established

communities – like the Cambodian, Chinese, Taiwanese, Hmong, Lao. These are the communities who have really been here for a long time and are already settled and established their own family; so, their need is totally different from the newcomers who's the Pacific Islanders from Turkey and from, like the Burmese, the Bhutanese, who's the Asian community from Southeast Asia. So, Asian Pacific Islander established, the Pacific Islander, they have their own group. Burmese alone, it was challenging; and, do you know why?

NF: Why?

SC: Because they speak different languages. So, they are – they can say they are from Burma, but there was Karen, Sumi, Kachin, and then Burmese. So, they have their own really small tribes, their own – it's a different group which is the Burmese; however, we still put them together. They were a really big group. Bhutanese and Nepalese group, they kind of sharing the same – they're similar; so they were in the same group. Slavic community, they were in one group; Middle East, the people coming from Iraq. And what is the other one, Africans. So, we had the African group also, you know, within their own group as well, so that way they can speak their own language. Slavic, again, they conduct the meeting in their own language. So, the first session that we asked them to share with us: What really the needs are, so it's a discussion. The needs around – we, kind of, gave them some eight topics – the transportation, the education, community development, economic, health, and...so, kind of mentioned, their discussion in housing, parenting, domestic violence, surrounding those topics. And I let them share more [about] what really they see within their own community. After that, we asked them to prioritize. If they want to see the change, what's really the most need within their community? Many of them pick education as the topic – kind of one of the top. Community development, and, also, it depends on each community; so some communities like – I forgot to mention that we did have Latino too, so there were eight – so like Latino, transportation is one of the things that they mentioned as one of the needs as a part of the top priority besides education. They did address about the driver's license issue as well.

[00:55:07]

So, it was just an example that how we conduct and, kind of, assess. We just, kind of, are almost wrapping up and finalizing the report of how we seen through the needs that we have in the community. But, they are sitting in a really small group, even though we want it small, but then the group is arranged around, like, ten people to, like, thirty people for some. It depends on some ethnic groups. Ask them to be there from nine o'clock until four thirty, so that's really an all-day-long. But you can tell that these people are the people who really committed, who really want to be a part of their community, and they represented their own community. They care so much about their

community that they are aware what's going on, and they want to pass it on to us. It's very important for us, as a community-based organization, to hear that and see how we can be here to help them. So, we want to make sure that we continue to provide the service that they need in the community.

NF: So then you're able to use that information to apply for grants, to develop programs, to build partnerships? You use that data, that evidence, as showcasing what your community needs?

SC: Yes. What this data is really helping our agency, in particular, for our development team, so that the development team can use this data to help us look into what's available grants out there, [and] how we can work to design or work to find a resource for the needs within the community. And, when it comes to the [?] or strategy, we want to make sure that we have our strategy planned around the needs from the community who we serve.

NF: Wonderful. So, those are most of my questions for the Asian Family Center. I would like to talk to you a little bit about the other work that you do. But, do you have anything else that you'd like to share in terms of the Asian Family Center before we switch topics?

SC: Um. I think some – I'm good. I think that I shared a lot already.

NF: Okay. Okay, well if something comes back to you, then we can talk about that again.

SC: Okay, yeah, definitely.

NF: So, I'm interested in your work with the Golden Leaf Education Foundation. Can you talk a little bit about that organization and your role with it and the mission and what you do with that?

SC: So the Golden Leaf Education Foundation is, really, a volunteer work, a volunteer organization. I can share a little bit of how it started. When it first started, one of the survivors, – he's a Cambodian American to have born here - Kilong Ung. He decided to put together a memoir, like, a book through his life, through Khmer Rouge. By publishing that book called *Golden Leaf*--he published that in 2009. He worked together with a royal [?], and he's wrote, he's a fellow rotarion through the rotary clubs [?]. He said that one of giving back to Cambodia - he wants to help building schools through education. So, we feel that the Cambodian community--of course, he used to be the president within the community and he's very active with the Cambodian



community – there’s many of us, including the Cambodian-American community, during that time say that “are you going to build in Cambodia?” So, the Cambodian community really has been a strong support and they say that they want to build one school, so, let’s put a fundraising event. Let’s do potluck to build one school, or do a fundraising event. Then we formed, kind of, around 2010. So in 2010, the organization was under the Cambodian-American community in Oregon called CACO. They were just, kind of, the fiscal agent that operated--but the mission for the Golden Leaf Education Foundation is to enhance the educational opportunity for the children in-need internationally. Cambodia has been our pilot country.

[01:00:02]

So we put together the fundraising. It was very successful. I believe, if I remember correctly, we raised over 30,000. And, we say, “well, of course it’s not enough to build a school yet,” but we’re really excited. We already had the first school, and the support, we will see it continue, its keep coming. So, just empower – you know, inspired by the story of survivors and want to see that through the education. And many of us, including *myself*, I – my dad was the professor. So even when I grew up I didn’t really want to be a professor or a teacher like him, but I feel that education is what Cambodia really needs because I see that area still needs a lot of help in school; and just, you know, if you don’t have the school building, and people don’t have enough place – don’t have the building for the kid to go to school, the kid cannot go to school because of travelling, the family really is not going to send their kid to go to school because the population in Cambodia, they’re still very poor. In 2011, they recruited me to take on the leadership role as the executive director of the organization without pay, so...it took me a while to decide that. During that time I think I was about to start with the corporate work before I move to Asian Family Center, but I have been very passionate about giving back to Cambodia. Humanitarian work is something that my husband and I are very, you know, passionate about. So, I decided to take on the role to, kind of, lead the organization. This was in the 2000’s when I first started in 2011. And now, we’re about to finish our third school.

NF: Wonderful.

SC: So, the roof, they just put up the roof for the third school last week. And, we expect that it’s gonna finish it before the end of this year. And, next year, in January, we plan to build the fourth one. So, um, over there. So, we’re very excited. We’ve been putting together most of the funding. It’s coming – so everybody – the organization is 100% volunteer-based. Many of them just volunteer and dedicated their time to the organization. So, most of the time, it’s really not interfering with any of my work. When I joined the AFC, I shared that with our associate director and also the executive director, I will not use, you know, I will make sure to [?] my time. Most of that

happened during, my volunteer work, during either the weekend or the evening even though the weekend I also work for AFC through all the leadership programs. So, it's been very challenging, as well, to be able to do the two non-profits for pay and non-pay. But, um, for the Golden Leaf Education Foundation, we receive a great support from the community and also through the board to put together our income. I would say, like, all of them is coming from donations, individual donors, and supporters, and through our fundraising event that we have once a year. This year's, like, just two months – last month actually, in August, that our fifth annual fundraising event, we raised 55,000. It's been very successful, so far, based on, just, you know, only volunteer efforts.

NF: So, have you travelled to Cambodia to see the schools built? Is that part of what you do?

SC: So to travel – so, it's not--the organization will not pay for any of my travelling. We do not compensate for that. And also, it's not something that – it's not my expectation for the organization to hire me. I feel that not just [?] free volunteer time, it'd also be donating some of their time too because of, just, the compassion that we have for the work that organizations do.

[01:05:04]

We went back to Cambodia through some – just to visit. When it was, we went to visit the school. The first one – the Cambodian-American community in Oregon and Golden Leaf Education Foundation put together a humanitarian trip in 2009, I think it was the very first one. But it was really small during that time; we hadn't really built any schools yet. So starting after that, in 2011, the end of 2011, we had a big one; there was about 31 or 32 people. So we did the trip for two weeks. Besides just go around the country and site-seeing, we went to visit all the orphanages and all the schools. That – in 2011, that's when we went to the first Golden Leaf inauguration for the first school. Then, early this year, we went back because the family even [went] too, so we were able to do some of the grand opening – to do the grand opening for the second school and the ground breaking for the third school. Next year, there's going to be another humanitarian trip that we're putting together. And, so far, we had about 21 or 22 people. My husband and I and another couple, who're from the Cambodian community, coordinate helping part of the tour and work with the tour agency in Cambodia. But, we pay the same, we donated the same, we donate our airfare, we pay for the fee-package. But it's just part of involving – kind of the fee, in a way, to involve the organization. So, for the next one, we will have an opening for the third school and do a groundbreaking for the number four.

NF: Wonderful. You mentioned your work with that organization, with the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon. Are there any other community organizations that you work with that you'd like to talk about? Or are those the main ones? That sounds like a lot already.

SC: Those are the main ones. I think that before I accepted the Golden Leaf Education Foundation as the role of the executive director, or volunteer executive director, I limited myself only to the Asian Family Center advisory board during that time because my, just, my passion about the work that the agency, IRCO's Asian Family Center, does. I didn't really--during that time, I'd already done my term as a vice-president of the Cambodian-American Community of Oregon. So, I limited myself, only those. One of the reasons, too, I think, is that because I just had my first son as well, and we wanted to have another one. So now, we have two. So there's kind of a family growing and changing, so it limited the volunteer work. But, before that -- before the Golden Leaf Education Foundation -- I was very actively involved with the Asian Pacific-American Chamber of Commerce. I was one of the founding board-members when it first started. So I involved with them for a while; and I'm still supporting the organization even though I'm not a part of it anymore. But, I'm still involved with that. There's so many other organizations, but right now, just trying to limit myself to the work that we do; and, especially, the work that I do here at the Asian Family Center is also helping me to give back to, not just native communities with Cambodia, but is also local. So, I still can continue to involve with other organizations that I used to involve with but, just, through the work that I do here at AFC.

NF: Wonderful. Well, in closing, throughout your answers and your discussions, you mentioned several people who mentored you. And you, yourself, with everything that you've accomplished, what advice would you give to youth, to young people who perhaps would like to follow in your footsteps and would see you as a mentor? What would you tell them in terms of advice in the work that you do in community engagement and in working with these organizations and giving back to the community?

[01:10:15]

SC: That's a very good question. You know, even though I have been through many -- I've seen many people as a role-models and as mentors, I haven't been playing as a mentor myself. What comes to my mind first, I would say, like, do not give up. It's -- you're not going to be successful at just a one-time try, so if you've won, just keep doing that. Just keep going. So, don't give up, and it's not the end of the world. So, I feel that that's, kind of, what comes up right now, and that's the message that I got from my dad too. So, my father told me, just, you know, say that you have to keep trying. It doesn't mean that it's not going work this time -- because it didn't work this time, doesn't mean that it's not gonna work the next one.

NF: Wonderful. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to share? Anything that we didn't cover? Anything that you'd like to expand upon?

SC: I think that we covered a lot already. I'd be more than happy to do any kind of follow-up, to give you additional info later, or if there's anything else you need. But um, I appreciate the time – that you're taking time and working with us through this project; it's taking a lot of your time and a commitment to come all the way up here. So, we greatly appreciate all the work you do with us.

NF: Great. Thank you so much.

SC: Thank you, Natalia.

**[end of interview 01:12:01]**