Dear CAAAV Voice Readers,

We wanted to start off this issue by saying THANKS to everyone who called or wrote in about the last issue. You are welcome to write us at the CAAAV office, 191 East 3rd Street, New York, NY 10009. You can contact us via Voice, or email us at caaav@watson.net.

In this issue we feature CAAAV’s Youth Leadership Project (YLP), coordinated by staff member Eric Tang. As part of the feature, read the article "Youth Leading a Community" written by staff member Eric Tang, and the "Youth Community Organizing" department gives updates on some of CAAAV’s ongoing organizing projects. This issue, find out what’s been going on with the Youth Leadership Project and the Racial Justice Committee. In “Readers Take A Stand,” we reprint letters written by one of the victims of police brutality CAAAV has worked with, originally addressed to the Comptroller. And finally, our “Struggles for Justice” department gives you a look at the work of other organizations involved with social, political, and economic justice issues. So read on, and let us know what you think!

CAAAV Voice Editorial Collective
June 1997

---

YLP has grown tremendously from its 1995 program into a full-scale organizing project which works with youth and community members in order to systematically address community concerns, such as exploitative housing conditions, an abusive state welfare system, as well as youth leadership itself. To this day, YLP remains the only program in the area—service orientated or otherwise—designed specifically for Southeast Asian refugee youth.

Community Organizing: Beyond Youth Services

However, YLP’s focus on youth has a larger purpose than typical “youth work” or “youth services.” YLP’s ultimate objective is to organize the broader Vietnamese and Cambodian community. Because of the youths’ bilingual and bicultural skills, as well as their contact with a variety of community formal and informal organizations and institutions, they have great, generally untapped potential as community organizers. Yet YLP also recognizes the need to address issues particular to Southeast Asian youth. Therefore, YLP’s program consists of two parts: political education workshops to address issues particular to the youth, and trainings to equip them as community organizers. This two-pronged approach is essential because “youth issues” are inherently linked with the broader community’s struggles for social, economic, and racial justice.

In the past two years, YLP has grown to fulfill and, often surpass, our original vision. In its pilot summer program in 1995, YLP worked with six local youth who were trained in community organizing skills and also implemented a summer tutoring and cultural enrichment program for Southeast Asian children in the area. Throughout the summer, CAAAV YLP organizers, with the help of the youth, explored the neighborhood, learning about the informal networks and systems of support that held the community together.

Most importantly, the program trained the youth in community organizing skills and developed a core group of organizers, half of whom remained for the 1996 Summer Program.

1996 Program: New Challenges

In early 1996 YLP expanded its outreach through weekly workshops at high schools, the health center, and the local library. YLP met with over seventy Asian youth, mostly Vietnamese or Cambodian, more than half of whom attended consistently. In
May, thirty applied for the 1996 Summer Program. YLP was able to hire a total of ten Cambodian and Vietnamese youth, including three 1995 Summer Program graduates.

The 1996 Summer Program was an intensive, eight-week community organizing training with five components:

1) political education
2) implementation of a community-based project (the tutoring program)
3) organizing skills training
4) application of organizing skills (a short-term youth-run project)
5) creation of a youth-run community organizing project.

The program was designed to inspire and enable the trainees to develop this final, on-going project to benefit their community.

During the first two weeks, the youth trainees learned about Asian American history, the history of the relationships between the United States and Asian countries, racism, the socioeconomics of poverty, labor struggles, immigration patterns and legislation, domestic violence, and environmental racism. They also investigated specific issues facing the Southeast Asian community in the Bronx, as well as differences and similarities in the struggles of nearby Black and Latino communities. These sessions included lectures, guest speakers, discussions, video, weekend retreats, field trips, interactive workshops, and community exercise groupings. There were also trainings on structure and process—working collectively and consciously among various groups, strengths and limitations, follow-through on responsibilities, delegation of work, and communication skills. The youth trainees then began a four-week tutoring program in Southeast Asian children in Fordham, similar to the one in 1995. The youth facilitated the children in truth-telling, reading and writing. Also, through frequent home visits, the trainees became more aware of the children's needs, the families' concerns, and problems faced by children and parents. The families also came to know the youth as community advocates. The tutoring program was a success and is being repeated in more than one location with the help of community organizations.

Learning and Applying Community Organizing Skills

The youth trainees also participated in workshops on community organizing. They learned how to identify potential partners and resources, and prioritize problems in their community, and how to present issues and mobilize support and solutions for them. As part of these trainings, current local struggles were analyzed with respect to their focus, outreach methods, and strategies for action. In addition, the youth attended a conference sponsored by the Environmental Justice Alliance and learned about the struggles of various communities in New York City fighting to improve the conditions of their neighborhoods.

In order to apply the skills they had learned and to develop ties as a group with the Southeast Asian community, the youth trainees designed a one-day housing community event, "Mannehive: The Rise of the Southeast Asian Youth," at the end of the summer. In order to plan the event, the trainees donated many hours of their own time, organized a core group of 16 Southeast Asian volunteer youth from the community, and sent letters to many community members.

On August 17, 1996, more than one hundred Southeast Asian community members, including several children, came to the event. The event included a discussion, food trucks, and a social for community members.

As YLP began its outreach for the fall 1996 housing campaign, it soon realized that the most pressing issue for community members is the new federal law that cuts off all documented immigrants, food stamps and Social Security Income (SSI). (After five years, Vietnamese and Cambodian

refugees are reclassified as documented immigrants.) For some, the cuts could mean a loss of nearly half their income. YLP's analysis of the 1990 U.S. Census found that, in the five tract area in which YLP works, 23% of the population is Southeast Asian. Of this group, 17% of the population (8,000 people) is estimated to be Southeast Asian. Of these, 38% (3,100 people) are estimated to be elderly, living below the poverty level. YLP surveys, conducted with housing organizing visits in selected buildings in the area, showed reality to be even worse. In at least 900 households Southeast Asian families are receiving some form of public assistance.

Recognizing the need to fight welfare reform initiatives, the youth organizers (graduates of the summer program) began distributing welfare rights information during their housing organizing visits. The goal is to inform Southeast Asian families about their welfare rights, to develop a collective spirit, frequently socializing together outside of the program.

In late March, YLP held a community-

YLP Youth Write About Their Experiences

Do you think people see you differently?

I think back then people thought that I was a thing. But now (since being part of YLP) I think the ones that had doubts of me are surprised.

Sarath Pan

How do you think your attitudes have changed?

I just looked at myself. I was going nowhere. Since being part of YLP I feel more comfortable, more people know me. I've tried to help improve my community and that's why I joined. I've been a volunteer and I've helped in the community at the same time.

Sandal Tal

From participating in YLP, I have benefitted the most in terms of skills that I have received from this program. I know now that there are skills to be able to organize.

Im:Tien Truong

I've become much more aware of things around me. For example what people with power are trying to do and how I can help not only my community but the community in general. I have also gained knowledge that schools wouldn't teach about Asian history and other things too.

Chalyha Choun

Do you think your community has changed since the program began?

I think it's going to take a lot of work to make a change. It is going to take a lot of hard work to make people in the community. We have to make more of an impact to make a change. We have to change ourselves to make a change.

Vieal Truong

My community hasn't changed but I feel that it is eventually going to change. It has taken some time. Only the patience, hard work and time will tell.

Chalyha Choun
Victories for Chinese Victims of Police Violence

Chinese Woman Acquitted in Brooklyn

On December 9, 1996, Ngan Lee, a Chinese woman arrested and arrested by NYPD Officer Taconni of the 60th Precinct in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn—was acquitted of wrongful charges of harassing a police officer (see CAAV Voice Summer '96). Officer Taconni and his partner testified that Ms. Lee—whose first language is Cantonese—had coerced her children in English to lie and say that the police had hit her. On November 21st, Ms. Lee's 11-year-old daughter countered the allegations by testifying against the officers' claims. Ms. Lee's trial was closely followed by the Chinese-language press, which has been monitoring cases of police brutality within the Chinese community. Ngan Lee will file a lawsuit against the City of New York for police misconduct and wrongful prosecution.

Victories for Police Brutality Victims

The Coalition for the Advancement of Police Accountability (CAPA) has more reasons to celebrate as the wrongful charges against its other members were recently dismissed in court. Charges against WC-bruton and arrested by a 5th Precinct officer (budge #10666) on May 27, 1996 were dismissed on January 22, 1997 (See CAAV Voice Winter '97).

Chinese Woman Falls Victim to Racial and Sexual Harassment

At a Chinese woman who has been racially and sexually harassed by a neighbor for the past two years in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, received little justice from the Brooklyn District Attorney's office. At's neighbor threatened her with remarks like: "Chair and are you happy? Do you know some Chinese sex gestures?" Her neighbor has also threatened her life and even broke her window and fence on numerous occasions. Despite repeated reports to the NYPD, the police failed to remedy At's situation. The police finally brought charges against the neighbor when he attacked AT with a baseball bat.

Although AT told Bureau Chief Frank Manero of the Brooklyn District Attorney's office that she did not think mediation would resolve her dispute (as attempts at mediation had failed in the past), her office scheduled mediation in her absence. Throughout the case, Manero remained inaccessible to AT, and every time she appeared in court, her case was assigned to a new Assistant District Attorney who had no knowledge of the history of the case. After AT finally wrote a letter to District Attorney Bisscom complaining about her experience with the judicial process, Manero offered an ACD (Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal) to AT's neighbor. The ACD will dismiss the charges in 6 months. AT is now fearful of further violent harassment from her neighbor.

Manhattan

Japanese Man Assaulted by Police

On November 21, 1996, KK, a Japanese man, was severely beaten and arrested by several police officers from the 13th Precinct.

As he was entering a Dunkin Donuts on 23rd Street and Broadway, KK was approached by a police officer who directed a comment at him. Possessing very limited English skills, KK did not respond to the officer's comment and proceeded to enter the shop. The officer then struck him on the back of the head and knocked him onto the sidewalk. Two to three more police officers came on the scene and began beating him. KK was eventually arrested by Officers Matthew Ryan (#7163) and charged with attempted assault, resisting arrest, and disorderly conduct. KK was consciousness and later woke up in the hospital where he was treated for a broken nose and other injuries. KK's court-appointed attorney referred him to CAAV, alarmed by the extent of his injuries.

Korean Woman Raped and Brutally Beaten

In December 1996, CC, a Korean woman working for an escort service, was raped, strangled, beaten, and left for dead in a downtown Manhattan office building. She was found in a coma by a security guard that weekend; had she been found 24 hours later, she would have died. The perpetrator, Michael Sperko, a self-proclaimed martial arts expert and military school graduate, was arrested for attempted murder, rape, and robbery. On May 22, 1996 Sperko pleaded guilty.

Innocent Chinese Youth Framed and Railroaded

19-year-old BZ, framed by 5th Precinct NYPD officers for two crimes he did not commit, was imprisoned at Riker's Island for several months while awaiting trial. In May 1996, BZ was arrested as a suspect in a robbery that took place in a brothel on May 7, 1996. In November 1996, BZ sat through a jury trial at Manhattan Criminal Court in which witnesses testified that BZ's physical presence was the conclusion that BZ had been framed. On the morning of November 18, BZ was acquitted of the original charges. The prosecutor returned to court to charge BZ of a second time in the courtroom and sent him straight to Riker's Island where he was imprisoned without bail.

18 weeks after the second arrest, BZ returned to court to receive the verdict from the first trial, and was acquitted by the jury. Despite evidence that points to BZ's innocence in the murder case—such as clear alibis and a videotape taken by the supermarket surveillance camera in which BZ is nowhere to be seen—the same assistant district attorney (ADA) who unsuccessfully prosecuted BZ in the first case refused to dismiss the charges against BZ in the murder case.

In March 1997, BZ was unexpectedly released from Riker's Island on a $1 bail, with no explanation from the ADA to him or his lawyer as to why he had been imprisoned in the first place and why he was suddenly being released. On March 10, 1997, BZ went to court and his charges were formally dismissed. The ADA did not appear in court that day, but instead sent a message to the judge requesting dismissal.

CAAV believes that this case is yet another example of the criminalization of our youth by Chinatown's 5th Precinct and the Manhattan District Attorney's office. BZ plans to file a civil suit against the city, the police, and the ADA for malicious prosecution.

Chinatown Van Driver Brutalized by NYPD

On January 3, 1997, CZ, a young Chinese man, was attacked by 5th Precinct police officers on the corner of Grand Street and Chrystie in Chinatown at the same location where KL and WC were assaulted by the police in two separate incidents last summer (See Voice Winter '97). CZ, a van driver for his father's van company, was parked next to a parking meter when a police car pulled up next to him. The officer motioned him to leave the parking space. CZ drove to another block. The police followed him and ordered CZ to step out of the van. When CZ showed the police his license, an officer ordered him to put his hands up and choked him from behind. Three plainclothes officers joined him, pushed CZ to the ground and knocked him in the face. CZ was arrested and taken to the 5th Precinct and charged with disorderly conduct.

On February 14, 1997, CAAV accompanied CZ to a criminal court where his charge was dismissed due to lack of evidence. CZ plans to file a civil suit against the City of New York.
“Call for a Democratic TLC”

The Lease Drivers Coalition

Protests Police Abuse

and Demands TLC Reform

Recently, LDC has been working intensively to gain up for its two major campaigns—“Protest Police Abuse of Taxi Drivers” and “Call for a Democratic TLC.” The New York City yellow cab driver community totals close to 30,000 drivers. A majority of the drivers are male immigrants of color, mostly from South Asian countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka.

Driver after driver stated to LDC organizers that LDC must build a mass membership to have a legitimate bargaining tool. Collective action is seen in drivers’ only advantage. To build membership, LDC members—both drivers and non-drivers—are at restaurants, on buses, and other places where other taxi drivers stop for a bite. They are there at gas stations and garages at shift change when day drivers are turning the cabs over to night drivers. They tap into informal networks through mosques, through garages, and over four different CH channels. Membership of both day and night drivers has expanded and continues to grow.

LDC is collecting signatures for a petition demanding a public meeting with the TLC Commissioner.

“Protest Police Abuse” aims to draw public attention to the NYC’s harassment, excessive ticketing, assault, and wrongful arrest of drivers.

Though drivers commonly talk about these problems, information about the experiences has never been consolidated. LDC is collecting this information now, along with the names, badge numbers, and precincts of the police officers who perpetrate the offenses. LDC coordinator Bharavi Desai states that this campaign will “make the public aware of what drivers already know: that taxi drivers face daily police abuse.”

Racial Justice Committee Conducts Petition Drive

Against Police Brutality

and Holds Yong Xin Huang Remembrance

Petition Drive

RJC, in partnership with the Coalition for the Advancement of Police Accountability (CAPA), is a group founded by Chinese victims of police violence. The petition drive has been conducting weekly petition drives in Chinatown and Brooklyn. The Community-based organizations including the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, CAAAV, La Raza, the Audubon Project, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the Student Power Movement coordinated Racial Justice Day to protest police violence against people of color. Angry family members movingly spoke about the loss of the loved ones at the hands of the police. Speakers included Joyce Huang, the sister of Yong Xin Huang. Racial Justice Day culminated in a wake and another police killing. Kevin Cohen, a Trinidadian youth who was shot in the back and killed by the NYPD on the day before the rally.

Yong Xin Huang Remembrance

On Saturday, March 23, nearly a hundred people gathered in Chinatown’s Columbus Park to observe the two-year anniversary of the murder of Yong Xin Huang by an NYPD Officer Steven Mizrahi. Speakers included other victims of police violence like Susan Chan as well as representatives from Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger’s office, Project REACH, the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, the Korean Merchants’ Association of the Village, and others. Yong Xin’s sisters spoke. Memorials adorned blue ribbons and had white carnations around Yong Xin’s portrait while drummers from the Center for Korean Americans Culture performed. Hyun Lee, coordinator of the Racial Justice Committee, summed up the event: “a day of mourning, but also a day of strength.”

Over a thousand people and dozens of organizations turned out to support Racial Justice Day on April 7, 1997. The rally began at City Hall and was followed by a march that snaked through Chinatown and the Lower East Side. Racial Justice Day concluded in Washington Square Park, where organizers vowed to continue the fight against police brutality.

CAA AV VOICE SUMMER 1997
Dear Mr. Lawrence Schindelman:

Thank you so much for your letter concerning the settlement to my claim. Although S410 is not a big sum of money, it is significant and meaningful to me. My exhausting effort in New York brings some positive results. When the incident happened, I felt that I was groping in the dark. I was not familiar with the law, I didn’t have much money to get sufficient legal aid; I didn’t have connections to help me. All I relied on was my own courage and persistence in pursuit of justice. I did nothing wrong, so I thought nobody could prevent me from seeking justice.

On the other hand, I think your revised offer is based on your deep investigation into my case. So I think it shows your respect for the fact that you are sympathetic for innocent people. In addition, it is also the result of the effort of the Asian community. Without their help and support, I couldn’t have gotten such results.

However, I must say that the settlement is far from the damage I suffered from the incident. For more than a year and a half, the economic loss, the mental and physical problems caused by the incident is not so easy to be counted by money. I am at a loss why society always uses money to measure, solve, and make up for justice. No5/38 lawyer told me that in the U.S., money is justice and justice is money.

Although I accept your offer, I still have lost hope. In my opinion, such an incident could have been avoided if the police had been fair and responsible. I still remember the day I was arrested. There was a large police — all in plain clothes — waiting around the entrance of a public facility. It was very easy for them to see what the token, and who did that.

Thank you again for working on my case.

Yours Sincerely,
Xiang Zhou

November 21, 1996

Office of the NYC Commissioner
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007-2341
Re: Claim #9500222747

Struggles For Justice

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice

Founded 15 years ago in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, El Puente ("The Bridge") began as a Latino-based community organization committed to "bridging self and community for peace and justice." In 1993, the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice opened as the academic and research arm of El Puente, described as "the only public high school for human rights in the world." The Academy's particular focus is El Puente's commitment to social justice and community-based needs. Some student-driven projects have included screening neighborhood children for lead poisoning; producing annual arts and cultural festivals; and fighting for issues ranging from immigrants' rights to police brutality. El Puente also incorporates and enhances the cultures of its racially and ethnically diverse students, offering classes on topics ranging from hip-hop's pioneers to Czars. More recently, El Puente made a strong showing on the National Geographic's "Race to the Top". The El Puente Academy stands as a model for public educational institutions beginning to recognize the needs for curriculums that bring the community and community issues into the classroom.

Project REACH

Project REACH is a multicultural organization that works on a number of fronts to combat discrimination, including heterosexism, homophobia, AIDS-phobia, sexism, and agrarianism. Using an empowerment model, youth work and participate in all aspects of programming. Project REACH organizes around an agenda of social responsibility and social change and encourages youth to take more (or take back) control of their lives and the communities in which they live.

Project REACH has a number of program areas. Pro-RADS (Project REACH Anti-Discrimination Space) is a drop-in center for queer youth. Youth are currently forming a new organization centered on Pro-RADS in which youth will sit on the board and provide direction in programming, fundraising, vision, and implementation. CASAA (Community AIDS Support Action Agenda) works with HIV-positive youth. Women's Base focuses on sexual assault, rape, and gynecological health. Youth Organizing Youth is a network provides youth services, organizes around youth issues, and trains youth for leadership in organizing. HOTT (Health Outreach to Teens), created in collaboration with the Lesbian & Gay Center, provides youth weekly access to a mobile health clinic. Project REACH is also planning its Summer Social Issues Program, where youth are trained around anti-discrimination organizing. All of these programs engage new skills like workshop facilitation. For more information, contact Project REACH at 212.986.4963 or visit the office at One Orchard Street in Chinatown, Manhattan.

Arson at Chinese Staff and Workers Association

On January 29, 1997, a fire was discovered in an abandoned brothel directly above the Chinese Staff and Workers Association. "From the timing, it looks like the CSWA was targeted because they were speaking out against weighted shop taxes," said a police officer said, according to Jim Dwyer (Daily News, 1/30/97). No one has been charged. The fire follows the NYS Attorney General's announcement of a $1.5 million lawsuit against Jing Fong Restaurant on behalf of 58 workers for back wages and overtime. New York State Attorney General Dennis Vacco called for the immediate reinstatement of Jing Fong waiter Mr. Deng and a court injunction which would force the restaurant to comply with labor laws during the court proceedings.

"Politics usually come to Chinatown for free food at fundraisers while they ignore the deplorable working conditions. Vacco shocked the Chinatown community with this lawsuit, however, the workers who were brave enough to complain against management and provide test monies to the NYS Attorney General's Office two years ago at the preliminary hearings made the lawsuit possible," said CSWA staff member Ken Kwong.

After Vacco's announcement Chinese American Restaurant Association (CARA), an association of Chinese restaurant owners, held a press conference for the Chinese press at the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) representing representatives denounced CSWA. "Some Chinese are helping outsiders to hurt our community. If we don't engage and put counter-attack, we will continue to be discriminated against, to be pushed around by other people. We hope Chinese restauranteurs and businesses get together and demand an apology from Vacco," said CARA honorary president Yung Tsin Mow.

It has been two years since the first Jing Fong worker was fired for speaking out about working conditions. CSWA asks that supporters maintain pressure, increase awareness on this issue, and boycott Jing Fong.