



2015 Annual Report

SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOURCE ACTION CENTER

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Letter from the Executive Director

As we wrapped up our last *40 & Forward: Southeast Asian Americans Rooted & Rising* event in my home town, San Jose, CA, last November, I changed from my high heels to flats to begin the break-down and clean-up work of our beautiful reception. I walked out to the street to take down our sandwich board street signs and balloons, and passed these balloons on to four eager Khmer American kids who were celebrating their dad's (and our Board Treasurer's) historical win on that same evening as the first Cambodian elected to city council in California.

I was in disbelief that this historic year was coming to an end.

And then I came back to Washington, DC, to remember that our work was not done.

I returned to DC the next week to begin planning our last major event of the year – hosting a congressional briefing on the topic of Exposing the School-to-Prison-to-Deportation Pipeline. We were honored to host that briefing with six formerly-incarcerated individuals from diverse Asian American backgrounds, three of whom were Southeast Asian Americans, two with deportation orders for old criminal conviction records.

On that cold DC December day, we filled a congressional briefing room for two hours with 60 people, leaving only standing room. Even with little air circulation in the room and no water left, the room remained packed and captivated with congressional members, congressional staff, partners, allies, and media representatives to hear about the group's experiences, including SEARAC's own Lundy Khoy, our operations manager who is fighting a deportation order.

After that briefing, Lundy and I were interviewed by a DC news outlet on criminal

justice reform and the role that SEARAC played in helping Lundy to win a stay of removal.

Lundy shared, "SEARAC showed me that I was not alone. That there was an entire community who supports me. That I'm not my crime."

In January of 2016, Lundy brought her first baby, Gabriel, into this world and into SEARAC's expanding family.

In presenting our 2015 annual report, I am humbled to share with you the voices of families, leaders, and advocates who were part of SEARAC's work to build a stronger community for Gabriel and the next generation of Southeast Asian Americans – from growing the advocacy skills of leaders nationwide, to relentlessly pushing for policy change through countless meetings with legislators, to hosting a three-city commemoration and story collection campaign that created community spaces to strengthen and nurture our shared identity as Southeast Asian Americans and our history as survivors of genocide and war.

On behalf of SEARAC, I am honored to share with you the historical victories that we gained in demonstrating our community's power in this pivotal year.

In partnership,



Quyen Dinh



Our Mission and Values

SEARAC is a national organization that advances the interests of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans by empowering communities through advocacy, leadership development, and capacity building to create a socially just and equitable society. We envision a socially, politically, and economically just society for all communities to enjoy for all generations.

- We believe all people have inherent human rights.
- We respect, honor and promote the historical and cultural diversity within our communities.
- We value the voices of all ages.
- We stand in solidarity with other communities in pursuit of social equity.
- We work in partnership, particularly with local communities, as we believe in the exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience, and resources.
- We believe everyone is an active agent in creating a just society, regardless of socio-economic or immigration status.
- We act with integrity, transparency, and accountability.

- We believe the communities most impacted by the issues are the faces and voices leading our work.

STRATEGIES

- Policy Advocacy
- Leadership Development
- Capacity Building
- Research

PROGRAM AND POLICY AREAS

- Education
- Health
- Boys and Men of Color
- Immigration
- Aging

Boys and Men of Color



ROOTS volunteers and participants at the AAPIs Behind Bars convening at San Quentin State Prison

Contrary to the Asian “model minority myth” that AAPIs are not touched by violence and incarceration, the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) prisoner population grew by 250% during the prison “boom” of the 1990s. In some cities, like Oakland, CA, Southeast Asian American youth have had the highest arrest rates among all groups (Cambodians with 63 per 1000, and Laotians with 52 per 1000).

Together with national partners and the Restoring Our Original True Selves (ROOTS) AAPI prisoner program, SEARAC held “AAPIs Behind Bars,” the first-ever national AAPI convening on mass incarceration, at San Quentin State Prison in California. AAPI prisoners participating in the ROOTS program, along with formerly-incarcerated individuals and

community leaders, led discussions about the unique impact of policing, incarceration, and deportation on the AAPI community.

Duc Ta came to the convening as someone who knew life within the walls of prison. He writes, “The convening was such a humbling experience, and I was so grateful to be a part of it. Being formerly incarcerated, I know that most people would never think to go back to prison for any reason. But when the opportunity came up to participate in the AAPIs Behind Bars convening, I couldn’t wait to get back into prison!”

Since his release on parole in 2013, Duc has worked tirelessly as a mentor and an advocate on behalf of other incarcerated persons eligible for or recently released on parole.

“For almost two decades I lived and survived the atrocities of prison. Programs like ROOTS and their volunteers played a vital role in my rehabilitation. They brought hope in a place where hope seldom exists. They brought humanity in a place where it didn’t exist. To be the one bringing that hope and humanity inside those walls today as a free man just brings tears to my eyes. I know the struggles, pain, sadness that exist within those walls, but I also know the love, joy, and hope that is created when a band of people come together for a greater cause.”

— DUC TA

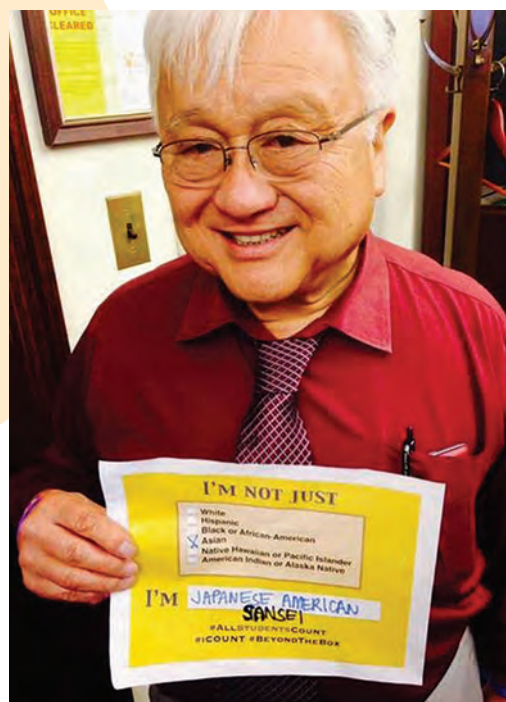
Education

“SEARAC is a strong and consistent voice joining me in advocating for U.S. Census categories to be used in student data collection and reporting. When we know more about our students, we are better at meeting the educational needs of each and every child. I am proud my legislation, The All Student Counts Act, helped to shape the discussion during the recent debate and passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act. By working together, we helped move toward greater equity in education by providing educators and families with the focused information they need to meet the diverse needs of every Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) student. Within the larger AAPI community, we must focus unerringly on the needs of our underserved communities from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, while we recognize the value of our distinct experiences.”

— CONGRESSMAN
MICHAEL HONDA

SEARAC uses policy advocacy to build educational opportunity for our young people by collaborating with Congressional champions who understand our community’s unique challenges and who will fight for education equity nationwide. Only about two-thirds of Southeast Asian American students graduate from high school, compared to almost 87% of students overall. This represents an educational crisis for our youth, many of whom will face substantial barriers to economic success without a high school diploma. However, the deep achievement gap for Southeast Asian American students will remain invisible to most policymakers as long as data for all Asian Americans are collected and reported under one monolithic “Asian” category. In 2015, SEARAC continued the All Students Count campaign to disaggregate data by Asian American subgroups like Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese. The campaign energized students across the country who demand to be seen, counted, and accounted for in national policy.

This year SEARAC made history by authoring national legislation that would mandate the collection and reporting of disaggregated data for AAPI subgroups. The All Students Count Act was introduced in the House by Representative Mike Honda (CA-17) and in the Senate by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI). Though the Act did not become law,



Congressman Mike Honda supporting the All Students Count campaign

portions of the bill were included in the report of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The report encourages states to make disaggregated data on AAPI subgroups in education publicly available, and promises technical assistance to help states do so. With SEARAC’s support, community members in several states, including California, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Washington, also continued to push for disaggregated data at the state level.

Immigration

A year ago, Touch Hak was bracing for the trauma of immediate deportation. After serving a decade in prison for a drug-related conviction, Touch's only wish was to return home to donate his kidney to his brother Puthy, who was dying of kidney failure. But the U.S. claimed that Touch, a lawful permanent resident, should be deported to Cambodia, a country he fled as a refugee child. Through targeted advocacy and a groundswell of community support, SEARAC and our allies were able to delay Touch's deportation for one year – long enough, he hoped, to give his brother Puthy the gift of a healthy life.

Over the course of the year, Touch not only reconnected with his beloved brother and family. He became an advocate. While he worked to put the pieces of his life back together after a decade of incarceration, he talked to young people about staying out of trouble. He spoke to community groups about the injustice of an immigration system that breaks apart families, even those who came to this country fleeing war and genocide.

Touch was given only one year to complete the complex organ donor process. During this year, SEARAC led an online petition campaign and gained media coverage to put pressure on Immigration and Customs



Touch Hak (third from left) and Immigration Policy Manager Katrina Dizon Mariategue (second from left) at a Khmer Girls in Action community forum

Enforcement (ICE) to extend Touch's stay of removal. As the end of his year began to approach, SEARAC flew Touch to Washington, DC, to educate lawmakers about the impact of deportation on refugee families like his. Just when the Hak family prepared once again to say goodbye to Touch, ICE granted him another "stay of removal" of up to three years, allowing him to see through his mission to save his brother's life.

"When I spoke to 20 people in a class, I saw my story touch a lot of people, and they cried. It motivated me to speak out to more people. My life is not just about deportation."

— TOUCH HAK

Health



“I have grown professionally and personally. SEARAC’s summits and trainings are helping me with my work. SEARAC showed me the tools to gather stories and present them to make an impact. I use it in almost everything I do.”

— DAVISNA OUM

SEARAC’s work in California focuses on building the capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs) to meet the health needs of California’s Southeast Asian American communities by combining their direct service experience with powerful advocacy. Almost one million Cambodian, Hmong, Lu Mien, Lao, and Vietnamese Americans call California home, the largest population in the country. Despite this large population, SEAAAs in California still face substantial barriers to economic stability, quality education, and good health. Our CBO partners have reported that community members still struggle to connect to California’s Medicaid program and the insurance exchange because of language barriers and a lack of resources for targeted, in-person outreach. In 2015, SEARAC coordinated two Southeast Asian Health Summits to bring together staff from seven partner organizations to identify common challenges, share best practices, and strategize on joint advocacy goals. The summits help staff working with communities across the state break out of isolation and connect with each other.

Davisna Oum attended SEARAC’s health summits as the health outreach coordinator for United Cambodian Community (UCC). Davisna had been volunteering with youth in his community for many years. “How I grew up,” he said, “I didn’t have a person to guide me, to show me the way. I was drawn to working with youth because I have a similar background to the youth we serve.”

Davisna came away from the summits with a clearer picture about the connection between direct service, coalition building, and advocacy. He said, “There are so many issues that people come up to me for. The training showed me ways to keep these stories. Remember these people. See how many people have the same problem. Call my partners [in other organizations]. So many people have the same issues. The training helped that click for me.” Davisna took the next step by attending SEARAC’s Leadership and Advocacy Training program in Washington, DC, where he met other advocates working to improve health for communities nationwide.

Leadership Development

LENA TRAN

In 2014, Lena Tran, a second-generation Vietnamese American from Vermillion, South Dakota, came to DC to attend SEARAC's Leadership and Advocacy Training to sharpen her skills to advocate for her community. With only between 1-2% of South Dakota's population identifying as Asian American, compared to the national average of 6%, Lena knew she would have to start with the basics to educate her member of Congress about her community's needs and demands.

Before her LAT experience, Lena said, "I didn't know that I could just meet my representatives, and that I have power to voice my opinion and tell them straight up what the community needs." Citing the importance of immigrants to South Dakota's economy, Lena found common ground with her Republican Member's staff person and further educated her about how deportation tears immigrant and refugee families apart.

Last year, Lena returned to SEARAC for the inaugural Leadership, Empowerment, and Advocacy Fellowship (LEAF) as an advanced advocate. She continues to raise



awareness about her community in South Dakota as a community activist and in her role as the Intercultural Coordinator at the University of South Dakota's Center for Diversity & Community. Lena's personal immigration, education, and advocacy story was published in the state's largest newspaper, the *Argus Leader*.

"If I didn't go through LAT & LEAF, I would have never known the opportunities of being just a 'regular' citizen and how much power one can have for positive change."

— LENA TRAN

SURAJ BUDATHOKI

Suraj Budathoki arrived at the Leadership and Advocacy Training (LAT) and to the first-annual Leadership, Empowerment, and Advocacy Fellowship (LEAF) already as a passionate advocate, serving as the executive director of An International Campaign for Human Rights in Bhutan. Suraj came to the U.S. as a refugee from Bhutan, a small Himalayan country in South Asia. The Bhutanese regime has historically persecuted and disenfranchised its ethnic Nepali (Lhotshampa) community, resulting in large flows of refugees into Nepal and eventually to third countries like the U.S. Between 2008 and 2013, nearly 70,000 Bhutanese refugees were admitted to the U.S., making it the third largest refugee population to be resettled in the last five years, behind those from Iraq and Burma.

The LAT and LEAF trainings gave Suraj the skills and tools to influence key members of Congress to support human rights and humanitarian action in his native country. After the LEAF training ended, Suraj embarked on a successful campaign to get the U.S. Senate to send a letter to the King of Bhutan expressing concern for the plight of the Lhotshampa people.

When Suraj is not working on human rights in Bhutan, he is improving the well-being of other Bhutanese refugees in the United



Suraj Budathoki (right) and colleagues at SEARAC's inaugural Leadership, Empowerment, and Advocacy Fellowship training

States with the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire. Suraj said, “I am committed to working continuously on the meaningful integration of Bhutanese and other refugee communities, and helping them pursue the American dream while meeting the post-resettlement needs of refugees and immigrants in the Granite State. This work would not be possible without advocacy trainings such as LAT and LEAF.”

“Before, I used to think that I’m not at that level to talk to Senators and Representatives, and that they do not have time to hear me. LAT and LEAF helped me build my confidence, and now I am actively engaged in sharing the concerns of my community with them.”

— SURAJ BUDATHOKI

Capacity Building

SEARAC builds the capacity of local community-based organizations and activists to serve their communities through training and technical assistance (T&TA). In 2015, we provided support to four organizations and two individuals to enhance their capacity to communicate with community members and potential supporters about their transformational work. One of our capacity building recipients, Myra Dahgaypaw, is a Karen human rights activist from the Karen State, Eastern Burma. Myra has been part of SEARAC's organizational development program since 2012, working with SEARAC on strengthening board structure, building program design, and creating an online forum to engage Karen youth to pursue higher education.

Myra became an active community organizer and human rights advocate when she was 13 years old. She was an Internally Displaced Person in Burma for about 12 years and a refugee for 17 years until she received asylum in the United States. Myra lost many of the people she knew, including her own immediate family members, close relatives, and close friends due to torture and killing by the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) troops. Since coming to the United States, Myra has continued her activism to



advocate on behalf of Karen refugees overseas and in this country.

This year, Myra worked with SEARAC to enhance the capacity of her new project, the Karen Youth Education Center (KYECC), to provide online support to Karen youth in the United States considering higher education. Through a website, Facebook, and other online media, KYECC provides a space where Karen youth can support each other and access information about scholarships and college choices.

“SEARAC’s support and guidance helped push us to think outside the box and expand the way we reach the community, such as using YouTube videos to connect with more KYECC members. SEARAC helped our team maintain a positive attitude, and after implementing suggested changes, we saw our membership rise.”

— MYRA DAHGAYPAW

40 & Forward



In 2015, SEARAC marked the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Southeast Asian American community in the United States. The end of the U.S. war in Vietnam in 1975, the aftermath of the bombings of Laos, and the beginning of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia created a mass exodus of refugees and one of the largest humanitarian crises the world had seen. Over one million of these refugees were resettled in the United States – still the largest resettlement of refugees in United States history.

To commemorate our 40 year journey, SEARAC launched a year-long campaign called 40 & Forward: Southeast Asian Americans Rooted & Rising. 40 & Forward included commemorative receptions in

Washington, DC, Minneapolis, MN, and San Jose, CA, and a year-long social media and blog campaign. The campaign provided a space for the community to come together to reflect on our shared history and imagine our shared future. Over 300 people attended the receptions, including community members, staff from partner organizations, representatives from philanthropy and corporations, and elected officials. Each reception featured our community's arts and culture through dance, poetry, storytelling, music, and art. We also collected 16 poems, essays, images, and videos from community members representing multiple Southeast Asian American communities on our 40 & Forward blog.

Both on our blog and at community events, 40 & Forward provided an opportunity for community members to contribute to “writing our story” at this particular historical moment, weaving our narrative as survivors of war and genocide, as resilient refugees, and as Americans. We came together not only as Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese Americans, each with our distinct languages and cultural identities, but also

as Southeast Asian Americans with a stake in raising our collective voice. Our community emerged from the trauma of war 40 years ago, but we are healing and growing together as an increasingly powerful new American community. Our second and third generation children, who know the U.S. as their only home, are stitching the memories and traditions of their families into new integrated identities.

As we close out this year of reflection and commemoration, we look toward the 50th anniversary of our community in 2025 with anticipation. How will we grow together? How will SEARAC's national advocacy, our leadership development, and our nurturing of resilient community-based organizations change lives in our communities? Which young leaders will emerge to take us boldly forward toward our vision of a socially, politically, and economically just society? Together, we are taking a collective next step toward our shared future as Southeast Asian Americans.



“American Story”

by Danny Thang Ho



Boston rooftop she sits
State Street shines like mười lăm cây vàng
her papa melt gia đình
the seats on the floor of a floor of a drizzled boat
yeah her State Street shines
& high up
each window like a boat
her office, her window
her boat of driftwood gold
& then in leans a whisper, little but clear
like a mosquito in her ear
“if they come for you,
jump. Jump!”
& papa springs back like rubberbands
empty office, empty boat
only her & her laptop here

Dot Ave streets wind
like papa’s hands
his long fingers twist like cones
like his Huế accent winds like
the wood of that drizzled boat back then
her Mỹ years 11 but her Việt years 12
on those crusty planks
20 thieves wind the deck
200 dirt nail tips
swipe the night like kites
her eyes stare black water
& papa leans a whisper, little but clear
like a mosquito in her ear
“if they come for you,
jump. Jump!”

“40 Years, Countless Tears”
by Mary Keovisai



1. U.S. Representative Mike Honda with Cambodian dancers and friends at our DC reception 2. Director Xai Souphom and students from the Lao Heritage Foundation at our DC reception 3. Ngô Văn Diễm performs original poetry at our DC reception 4. Dancers from the Lao TLC program of the Center for Lao Studies at our CA reception 5 & 6. Far East Dragon Lion Dance Association at our CA reception





7. Wilder Foundation President and Honoree MayKao Hang with SEARAC Executive Director Quyen Dinh at our MN reception
 8. Live fashion exhibit by artist Ashaley Yang at our MN reception 9. Guests and friends of the Lao Assistance Center of MN at our MN reception 10. Dancers with the Light from Heaven Cambodian orchestra at our MN reception 11. RJ Sin performs at our CA reception
 12. Far East Dragon Lion Dance Association at our CA reception

Financial Statement

REVENUE

Grants-Foundation/Nonprofits	\$797,762
Grants-Corporate/Business	145,000
Individual contribution	5,876
Fundraising income	13,238
Other income	44,355
Total Revenue	1,006,231

EXPENDITURES

Program expenses	\$889,845
Administrative expenses	98,349
Fundraising expenses	15,373
Total Expenses	1,003,567

NET ASSETS

Net assets at the beginning of the year	\$1,091,408
Release from restriction	(221,898)
Total Net Assets	872,174

Supporters

FOUNDATIONS

AT&T Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
The California Endowment
Four Freedoms Fund
The Kresge Foundation
The Nathan Cummings Foundation
National Education Association
Sierra Health Foundation
W. K. Kellogg Foundation

ORGANIZATIONS

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
National CAPACD

CORPORATIONS

Comcast
Southwest Airlines
State Farm®

INDIVIDUALS

Matthew Abreu
Cynthia Brothers
Elizabeth Kessler
Edward Lin
May Shoua Moua
Bao Ngo
Rachel Quenemoen
Samorn Selim
Jay Stansell
Marcq Sung
Lena Tran

40 & FORWARD EVENT SPONSORS

Amherst Wilder Foundation
Asian American Studies Department (U of MN)
Asian Americans for Community Involvement
College of Education and Human Development (U of MN)
Department of Curriculum & Instruction (U of MN)
HealthPartners
Humphrey School of Public Affairs (U of MN)
ICAN
Lao Assistance Center of MN
N. Cheng & Co. P.C.
Navigate Forward
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
St. Paul Chamber of Commerce
St. Paul Foundation
St. Paul Public Schools Foundation
The SEAD Project
Thrivent Financial
Greater Twin Cities United Way

40 & FORWARD INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

WASHINGTON, DC

Hilary Binder-Aviles
Gregory Cendana
Channapha Khamvongsa
Helly Lee
Nicholas Lephram
Monica Thammarath
Jen Tolentino

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Southeast Asian Coalition

VAYONG MOUA

*Center for Prevention at Blue Cross
and Blue Shield of Minnesota*

REV. DR. SHARON STANLEY-REA

*Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)*



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