

## Long Beach Celebrates Mental Health Month, API Heritage Month and 30 Years of Service

By Kathleen Piché, Public Affairs Director



*Lawrence Lue, Herbert Hatanaka, Derek Hsieh, Mariko Kahn, Jina Lawler, Dennis Murata.*

On Wednesday, May 25, 2016, Long Beach Asian Pacific Islander Family Mental Health Center (APIFMHC) hosted “Be You-nique: A Vision of Me,” a celebration of Asian Heritage Month, Mental Health Month, and the 30-year anniversary of the clinic. Derek Hsieh, LCSW, PhD, APIFMHC Program Head, served as Master of Ceremonies and welcomed the crowd of over 100 dignitaries, providers, clients and community members.



Sovicheth EI, Medical Case Worker, who has been working at the clinic for the last 30 years since its inception, gave a brief historical account of its early days.

LACDMH Acting Chief Deputy Director, Dennis Murata, MSW, spoke on the impact the clinic has had over the years on the API community and

also emphasized the need to reach out to the API community as recent data continues to find Asians under-utilize mental health services compared to all other ethnic groups.



Derek informed the standing-only crowd on the past, present and future of the clinic and the need for services in the API community. Currently, the API community constitutes sixteen-percent of the Los Angeles County population and is the fastest growing minority group. There is tremendous diversity *within* the API community, as there are over forty-five Asian ethnic groups and over 100 Asian languages and dialects spoken in the US.

Long Beach hosts the largest Cambodian population outside of Cambodia, a community with an extremely high incidence of trauma as a result of starvation and killings during the Khmer Rouge. A 2005 JAMA study reported that, of 586 randomly selected Cambodian adults (age 35-75) residing in Long Beach who'd lived in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge, 99% experienced near-death experiences due to starvation, 90% had a family member or friend murdered, 62% had PTSD, and 51% had MDD.

Despite the significant mental health needs in the API community, Derek pointed out that Asians have historically underutilized mental health services, in part due to the stigma attached to having a mental health diagnosis, limited providers who speak the various Asian languages, and the tendency for Asians to experience and communicate psychological distress through bodily symptoms and to seek medical help for them (somatization). Asians also tend to wait longer before seeking professional help, usually only after problems are so severe that the family can no longer handle them.



Highlighting Asian heritage and its cultural diversity, Nita Saing performed a beautiful, traditional Thai “Blessing Dance” for the crowd. More entertainment was provided by Mitch, who played the guitar and sang in Japanese.

As testimony of the quality care and effectiveness of APIFMHC services, clients Linda and Jason bravely told their stories of recovery. This was followed by Long Beach Councilman Daryl Supernaw, who presented the clinic with a certificate of recognition. Staff clinical supervisor Anne Choe assisted clinicians in presenting certificates of achievement to their clients to acknowledge progress and efforts in treatment.



Many clinic staff members dressed in their country of origin’s dress for a cultural fashion show. Staff also prepared a delicious multi-ethnic lunch for the crowd, many of them had been up since 4am to grill over 350 beef skewers, 350 egg rolls, chicken curry, vegetarian udon noodles, among an array of other delicious Asian cuisine and dessert. All who attended thoroughly enjoyed the event, including food, raffles, open mic singing, as well as networking and socializing with staff, peers, and community agency representatives.

Over 60 community agency representatives attended this event, and provided informational resources at the fair.

