

Grassroots Leadership for a Just and Inclusive Society

Learning from 25 years of Grassroots Leadership and Looking Toward the Future

**Asian Immigrant Women Advocates
Oakland, California
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Leadership is traditionally seen as:

- a single individual, such as a CEO, an elected official, or the lone voice of a social movement
- a set of “naturally endowed” qualities and attributes necessary for leading others.

Grassroots Leadership means:

- **Collective decision-making, accountability and engagement** of disenfranchised groups, such as low-income immigrant women and youth.
- **Developing leadership skills** for determining the welfare and future of one's community or social group.
- **Working toward institutional and policy changes** for the advancement of a just and inclusive society.

AIWA advocates Grassroots Leadership because:

AIWA strongly believes that **grassroots leadership** in disenfranchised communities is the most powerful and effective way to **successfully challenge** racial, gender, migration, economic, age, and language inequalities and **bring about positive social change**

The Community Transformational Organizing Strategy (CTOS)

- is **AIWA's multi-pronged approach** for developing grassroots leadership.
- promotes the belief that **leadership skills are learned** rather than inherent.
- recognizes the importance of **self- and peer-education** for **collective leadership and action**.

AIWA'S Grassroots Leadership Strengthening Social Justice Movements:

- **AIWA wants to assess and share what we've learned from 25 years of grassroots leadership development to strengthen and influence AIWA's and other social justice movement building efforts locally, regionally, nationally and globally.**

Organizationally,

- AIWA wants to **reflect and assess our CTOS Grassroots Leadership program and its socioeconomic and political impact** for the past 25 years

Broadly,

AIWA wants to demonstrate a greater impact of **“deep” leadership development** by addressing two major questions:

- 1) How can **the disenfranchised**, such as Asian Immigrant women, find effective ways to **voice, participate and advocate?**
- 2) How does grassroots community organizing **at the local level affect the power imbalances in our world?**

What we have learned so far:



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Impact on Individual level: preliminary findings from focus group interviews

In 2006, AIWA has conducted focus group interviews with over 20 participants to understand their perceptions of their leadership development process and its influence on their socioeconomic status and political empowerment.

We have found that **AIWA's
Grassroots Leadership program**
promotes:

Confidence and hope, which leads to economic gain



“I have worked at the same company for over 20 years as an assembler. Before coming to AIWA I never thought I could hope for more. But developing my leadership gave me confidence. When I heard a supervisor position was open, I asked the company to promote me. My co-workers said I was so bold, but I got the job and am very happy. Now I encourage them to have hope too.” *AIWA member, Korean Women’s Group*

Collective Advocacy



“Several years ago, I needed treatments not covered by my insurance. I had nightmares every night. I cried so much over the fact that I couldn’t afford to go to the hospital, even while I was working so hard day and night. **By participating in AIWA’s leadership training,** I found that we can **work in coalition** to bring about health care for all.”

–*Board Member, Korean Women’s Group.*

Political Awareness and Engaged Citizenship.



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“Knowing and learning are absolutely necessary. I used to think that voicing my opinions meant being too obnoxious, and the best thing was to be humble and silent. I thought it was a great virtue.

“But then, **as I learned about women’s rights and immigrants’ rights, that didn’t hold any more...** This is an immigrant society, yet what’s really going on is that except for the small minority of political elites, all the rest of us are being severely oppressed.” -*Board member, Chinese Women’s Group*

Impact on Individual Level: Preliminary findings from AIWA Leadership Database

Beginning in 2003, AIWA developed a **Leadership database**, to assess the impact of women's leadership transformation at AIWA.

Members' Socioeconomic Status

We have found that women who have been **active in AIWA for over 10 years have higher annual incomes** than those who have participated for 5 years or less.

Members' Political Growth

When provided with **AIWA's culturally appropriate leadership training**, we have found that women, **regardless of their former educational level**, developed and gained **leadership knowledge and skills** to engage in collective advocacy and civic engagement.

Impact on Collective Level: from 25 years of AIWA programs and campaigns

AIWA immigrant women and youth leaders, using the CTOS approach, have demonstrated their Grassroots Leadership by:



- applying their skills and knowledge to educate, train and organize working-class and immigrant communities.





- successfully engaging in collective campaigns, electoral work, and policy advocacy to bring about institutional and policy changes.

For example:

Garment Workers' Justice Campaign: Corporate Accountability



Pickets demand payment from Jessica McClintock for wages not paid by a subcontractor.

Jessica McClintock picketed for wages owed by subcontractor

Workers didn't get paid by bankrupt sewing factory

By Steven A. Chin
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

Seeking compensation for the back wages they are owed after their sewing factory folded, seamstresses and their supporters held a rally in front of garment manufacturer Jessica McClintock's San Francisco headquarters.

When the Oakland-based Lucky Sewing Co., which sewed clothes for Jessica McClintock Inc. and other manufacturers, went bankrupt in May, it still owed 12 workers about \$10,000 in wages. The workers last week asked that McClintock compensate them about \$2,000 for the time and labor it took to sew her product.

McClintock refused, saying it was "unfair and totally unjustified" for them to single her out. McClintock, who paid Lucky for the

dresses, said that her company had ceased doing business with Lucky more than a year before it went bankrupt.

At McClintock's headquarters at 1400 16th St. on Tuesday, about 300 people carrying banners and waving red flags called on the San Francisco manufacturer to meet its social responsibility.

"Jessica McClintock may be able to hide behind their system of subcontracting which created the sweatshops that have plagued many, many women since the turn of the century, but she cannot hide from one single truth — those garment workers sewed her fancy, romantic dresses," said Young Shin, executive director of Asian Immigrant Womens Advocates, an Oakland-based immigrant rights group assisting the seamstresses. "Jessica McClintock sold them and made a profit."

More rallies are planned this month in San Francisco and around the country as part of a national campaign to improve in-

dustry wages and working conditions, said organizers.

In a letter to The Examiner published Monday, McClintock said her company "has demonstrated its commitment and concern that employees of its contractors be treated fairly and paid in accordance with the law long before it became fashionable for organizations such as Asian Immigrant Womens Advocates to champion this cause."

She also said her company refuses to do business with contractors charged with labor violations.

Other supporters of the seamstresses included Katie Quan, an International Ladies' Garment Workers Union manager, who said the Lucky incident represented "just the tip of the iceberg as far as what happens to workers in sweatshops."

"Across the Bay Area," Quan said, "there are more than 20,000 garment workers whose wages are not being paid, whose overtime pay is not being paid."

In 1992, twelve AIWA Chinese immigrant women garment workers demanded that Jessica McClintock Inc. be accountable for unpaid back wages, sparking a national movement for corporate responsibility.

Community Equity Campaign: *Government Accountability*



In February 2000, immigrant women from AIWA protested at Oakland's City Hall and secured the creation of an access fund for city-owned spaces.

Ergonomic Improvement Campaign: *Grassroots Research Collaborations*



In 2002, garment workers from AIWA formed ergonomic research partnerships to improve working conditions in garment factories. Through their efforts, these women pioneered safer and healthier workplaces in the industry.

“I Have Something to Say” Campaign: *Language Access and School Accountability*



Although 30% of the Oakland High School student body was Cantonese-speaking, the school provided no staff member who could speak the language.

In 2003, members of AIWA's Youth Build Immigrant Power (YBIP) demanded equitable language access, resulting in two new Bilingual Community Assistant positions.

Equal Access to Health Insurance Programs

AIWA women leaders successfully sought to improve access for immigrants to a California state medical insurance program for people with pre-existing conditions (Major Risk Medical Insurance Program), by making **their materials available in languages other than English.**



From preliminary reflection and assessments, we found that

AIWA's grassroots leadership promotes the ability of marginalized communities **to fully voice, participate and advocate on their own behalf and to bring about meaningful collective changes to challenge systems of oppression and inequalities.**

"No great victories are won in a war for the transformation of a whole people without total participation. Less than this will not create a new society: it will only evoke more sophisticated token amelioration..."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Looking Toward the Future

For the next three years, AIWA plans to:

- **Develop a concrete measurement and evaluation tool** for continued improvement of our grassroots leadership model
- **Conduct in-depth analysis to measure and assess the effectiveness** of our signature CTOS grassroots leadership model.

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- **Strengthen social justice movement building efforts** by sharing our grassroots leadership tools and measurements with other organizations locally, nationally or globally.

 - **Shift social paradigms** to put priority on the full and equal development of grassroots leaders from the disenfranchised communities toward building a just and inclusive society.

Thank you for your support!



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