ANNUAL REPORT
2018

ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY
Asian Americans for Equality is a 45-year-old community development organization dedicated to enriching the lives of Asian Americans and all of those in need.

2018 was a year of transition and exciting new opportunities for Asian Americans for Equality.

In June, the Board of Directors completed a nationwide search, appointing Jennifer Sun and Thomas Yu to serve as co-executive directors. As a new era dawned for one of New York City’s leading nonprofit organizations, AAFE forged ahead with several transformative initiatives, including new affordable housing projects in three boroughs and a new headquarters in Queens. During the past 45 years, AAFE has earned a nationwide reputation as an innovator in the community development field. We are now laying the groundwork for a new period of innovation and growth to address some of our community’s biggest challenges. In this Annual Report, you will see the impact of AAFE’s programs today and learn about our efforts to make an even bigger impact in the lives of thousands of New Yorkers in the years to come.

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On the Cover: (Clockwise from upper left) AAFE’s Jessica Salgado with immigration client Sara Mencho-Lopez; tenant leader Jaime Galezzo; Yoli Chen, alumnus of AAFE’s youth program; small business owners Chi-Sum Ngai and Kaleena Teoh.
A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

As an AAFE founder, I have witnessed first-hand this organization’s remarkable transformation from an all-volunteer group of activists 45 years ago into a multi-faceted community development organization. One of AAFE’s hallmarks has always been its ability to adapt to community needs and change with the times.

For the first time in a quarter century, we have new executive leadership. The appointment of Jennifer Sun and Thomas Yu this past year offered a unique opportunity to inject new energy and ideas into everything we do. Like almost everyone AAFE serves, Jennifer and Thomas come from immigrant families. They are both rooted in our communities and are deeply committed to social justice and equal opportunity. But they also represent a new generation of leadership for AAFE, one dedicated to building on our legacy of empowering a vibrant, diverse and multiethnic city.

They have been working these past nine months to strengthen our partnerships, reinvigorate programs and expand AAFE’s organizational capacity. All of these activities share a common goal: helping Asian Americans and all communities thrive in these challenging times. You have always stood by us as we worked to expand affordable housing opportunities, empower small businesses, provide critical social services and advocate for an equitable city. All of us at AAFE want you to know what an enormous difference you have made in the lives of countless immigrant families. As we make plans to accomplish even more on their behalf, your support is more important than ever. We thank you for your enduring commitment to the dream of equality.

Lydia Tom

A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

In this Annual Report, you will meet some of the people who benefit from AAFE programs, including residents of our affordable housing developments, small business owners, immigrants seeking American citizenship and a former student in our Flushing youth program. In our first months as co-executive directors, we have been touched by so many individuals and families just like them. They are why AAFE exists and -- in spite of everything this organization has accomplished in the past 45 years -- why we must do even more in support of their American dreams.

AAFE has been able to make a major impact year after year for a few key reasons. First, it has remained a grassroots organization laser focused on the needs of Asian Americans, immigrants and low-income New Yorkers. Second, AAFE developed a unique comprehensive approach to community development. Few, if any, nonprofits offer a similar array of programs and services, from affordable housing, to small business support, homeownership assistance, social services and community organizing. And third, a strong entrepreneurial spirit has repeatedly driven the organization to develop and implement innovative programs that were often emulated across the nonprofit sector.

In the past year, we have been working to enhance our community engagement initiatives, strengthen our program services and build on AAFE’s legacy as a community development trailblazer. New programs will integrate our social services in AAFE-owned and managed affordable housing properties. We are refining our youth and workforce development programs to meet evolving community needs. And we are forging new partnerships and creating new models to create even more affordable housing in the years ahead.

These goals and other challenges sure to come our way can only be met through community-wide collaboration. That’s where you come in. We are eager to work with you to develop new strategies to empower and engage our neighbors. We’re looking to AAFE’s future with optimism and anticipation. It’s a future we must embrace together.

Jennifer Sun
Thomas Yu

Lydia Tom

AAFE.org

Asian Americans for Equality

2018 Annual Report
On Feb. 21, 2019 AAFE and its development partners opened One Flushing, the largest 100% affordable project to come to Queens in decades. The multi-generational community in the heart of Downtown Flushing includes 231 apartments, more than 20,000 square feet of local retail space, a new headquarters for AAFE in Queens and 156 public parking spaces underground.

The ribbon cutting was attended by top New York City housing officials and Flushing community leaders, who had long considered the development on the former site of Flushing Municipal Lot #3, a top local priority. It is the first project to be built under the City of New York’s Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Program (MIH), and adds critically needed affordable housing in a rapidly developing neighborhood. Sixty-six apartments at One Flushing are reserved for low-income seniors.

AAFE partnered with Monadnock Development and HANAC for the project. A new branch of the AAFE Care Senior Center is located at One Flushing, as well as our expanded community and small business services. Under a new pilot program AAFE services will be specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of building residents, as well as people who live in the surrounding community.

One Flushing is only the latest demonstration of AAFE’s unique abilities as an affordable housing developer. Our deep roots in the Flushing community, strong relationships with city agencies and willingness to collaborate with both public and private sector partners were all ingredients in One Flushing’s ultimate success.

In the past year, we also completed construction at 244 Elizabeth St. in Manhattan, the first project under the city’s Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program (ANCP). AAFE successfully navigated the conversion of this formerly city-owned property into a 19-unit affordable cooperative owned and operated by its residents. We are now in development for a second ANCP project, 201-207 7th Avenue in Chelsea. Over the next several years, we will transform a longtime neighborhood eyesore, creating a nine-story cooperative with 26 apartments and nearly 4,000 square feet of ground floor neighborhood retail. All five building residents will return to brand new apartments once the project is completed, purchasing the units for $2,500 each.

A third ANCP project, in Manhattan’s East Village neighborhood, will result in 45 low-income cooperative apartments on three sites. Construction on the first of the sites is expected to begin shortly after the closing in the fall of 2019.

Finally, AAFE has been chosen to develop two sites on East 2nd Street and East 3rd Street in the East Village as part of the city’s...
Neighborhood Construction Program (NCP), which creates affordable housing by utilizing small “infill” sites. In collaboration with Leroy Street Studios, we are developing 54 units of low- and moderate-income rental housing with ground floor neighborhood retail and a community facility.

**AAFE Property Management**

AAFE not only develops projects across New York City, but also owns and directly manages hundreds of units in buildings in Chinatown, the Lower East Side, Queens and Brooklyn. We take great pride in operating clean, safe and responsibly-run properties. For many years, our Stanton Norfolk Property Management Company has maintained more than 600 rental apartments in 36 buildings throughout Lower Manhattan, and 40 commercial spaces. This year, Stanton Norfolk is assuming management of all 231 rental apartments at One Flushing. Stanton Norfolk has received the highest possible “Exemplary” rating from NeighborWorks America, which conducts annual audits of our housing portfolio. The real estate website, Brick Underground, named Stanton Norfolk one of the 12 best landlords in Manhattan.

**Building Community Brick-By-Brick**

A tragic fire in Chinatown in 1985 spurred AAFE’s transition from community advocate to community builder. Following the devastating blaze, which killed two elderly tenants and left 125 residents homeless, the organization’s leaders came up with a novel idea.

Teaming up with Enterprise Community Partners, AAFE utilized low-income housing tax credits to acquire and renovate two dilapidated tenements at 176-180 Eldridge St. Through this project, known as Equality House, 59 affordable apartments were created and AAFE pioneered what would become a popular model for creating affordable housing across New York City.

It was just the first of many times the organization led the way in piloting new housing programs. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, AAFE used the newly created Chinatown/Lower East Side Acquisition Program to rehabilitate and preserve 152 units of affordable housing in seven buildings.

In 2013, AAFE became the first nonprofit to successfully transform a building (244 Elizabeth St. in Manhattan) under New York City’s Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program.

And in 2017, the city announced that AAFE would be one of the first nonprofit developers to pioneer its new Neighborhood Construction Program, which is designed to create new affordable housing projects on small vacant city-owned lots.

‘Equality House’ under construction in the late 1980s.

Enrilynn Perine, a former New York City housing official, said of AAFE, “They’ve been willing to take risks with us on new program models, and it has sometimes made their work much tougher because they went first... (But) the fact that they’ve been willing to do that, has been really helpful. It goes beyond just the buildings.”

**Creating housing for those who need it the most**

When the city-sponsored lottery opened in the summer of 2018, more than 84,000 people filed applications for 231 affordable apartments at One Flushing, our new project in Queens. One of them was Andre Alexander, homeless in the months before he landed a beautiful studio apartment on the third floor.

Alexander was overcome with emotion when he saw his new home for the first time. “I just can’t believe it,” said Alexander, who suffered a hip injury four years ago and is on disability. “I’m going to cry.”

One Flushing is making a big difference in the lives of hundreds of families and individuals. In the midst of a homeless crisis, Alexander’s story is an especially powerful and moving testament to the impact of this project not just in Flushing, but citywide. Ever since AAFE began developing affordable projects in the 1980s, housing formerly homeless New Yorkers has been a top priority. Today, at least 10% of the apartments in our buildings are reserved for people who have been forced onto the street. It is our strong belief that affordable housing stabilizes lives and communities. Andre’s story is living proof of that.

**A place to call home on the Lower East Side**

At AAFE, we believe our seniors, the people who have helped build their community, should be able to stay in the neighborhood, rather than being forced to move far away from friends family and familiar surroundings. We are proud of the fact that our AAFE-managed buildings in Chinatown and the Lower East Side continue to be a bastion of safe and affordable housing for older members of the community.

Chang Cun Wu has lived at 141 Norfolk St. for about 10 years. Now in his 90s, Mr. Wu moved to the six-story elevator building -- the first ground-up project AAFE developed -- after a car accident made it difficult for him to climb the stairs. He had previously been in another AAFE building, a walk-up on Rivington Street.

Mr. Wu came to this country from the Canton Province in China in 1988, and worked for years as a dishwasher in a Chinatown restaurant. He looks forward to visits from his children (one is a police officer, another is in the U.S. military). In his younger years, Mr. Wu worked as an AAFE volunteer, serving hot meals at our Norfolk Street senior center. Just a few steps from his current home. Mr. Wu contributed to his community, and now, we’re happy that the community is able to give back to him.

Chang Cun Wu, resident of 141 Norfolk St.
Strong and vibrant communities can only develop when individuals and families are empowered to build their own assets. This was the driving principle behind the establishment of our small business affiliate, Renaissance Economic Development Corporation (REDC) in 1997 and our homeownership affiliate, AAFE Community Development Fund (AAFE CDF), in 1999. Together, they have helped improve the financial futures of thousands of families and strengthen neighborhoods throughout New York City.

REDC is dedicated to providing low-interest small business loans and multilingual training programs for immigrant, low-income and minority entrepreneurs across the five boroughs. It has dispersed more than $50 million during the past two decades, driving small business innovation and economic opportunity.

In 2018, REDC swiftly responded to several disasters that threatened the futures of small businesses throughout New York City. Reprising our longstanding role as a “first responder” in times of crisis, REDC teams mobilized for a devastating fire in Sunnyside, Queens (Dec. 13), a steam pipe explosion in Manhattan’s Flatiron District (July 19) and a water main break in Jackson Heights, Queens (Jan. 12).

Communities and city government have come to rely on Renaissance Economic Development Corporation for several reasons. Like the small businesses REDC serves, we are entrepreneurial and nimble, accustomed to responding in real time to emergency situations. We understand immigrant communities, speak their languages and have a wealth of experience assisting small business owners often overlooked by mainstream lenders. From 9/11, to Hurricane Sandy, to the 2015 East Village gas explosion -- our counselors have been on the scene to help neighborhoods when they needed it the most.
We employ this same sense of urgency and resourcefulness every day in helping immigrant entrepreneurs start, sustain and grow small businesses. REDC is a U.S. Treasury-certified Community Development Financial Institution ranked by the U.S. Small Business Administration as one of the nation’s top 10 microloan intermediaries. In 2018, we closed more than 90 small business loans and helped hundreds of small business owners build their skills for future success.

It is well established that small business ownership is one of the only paths out of poverty for new immigrants. Yet loans from mainstream lenders remain scarce. And first-time business owners are often susceptible to scams. This is why our mission is so critical. Small businesses not only provide families stability, but they are the lifeblood of our immigrant communities. They need a financial partner they can trust.

In September of 2018, REDC was awarded a $600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s CDFI Fund. The highly competitive award is enabling our organization to expand loan products in Manhattan’s Chinatown, Flushing and Jackson Heights in Queens and Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Today, REDC is serving Asian American and Latinx small business owners in these diverse neighborhoods.

In early 2019, we launched a new series of Spanish-language digital marketing workshops in Jackson Heights and are preparing to debut a new loan program in support of struggling small businesses in Manhattan’s East Village neighborhood. More than 80% of our loans were allocated to minority-owned businesses in 2018, and over half went to women-owned businesses.

AAFE Community Development Fund

Homeownership allows families to plant deep roots in neighborhoods and build stability for themselves and their communities. This is why AAFE offers home loan products and training programs to educate community members about the home-buying process.

In 2018, AAFE Community Development Fund continued to experience high demand for our first-time homebuyer courses. The reality is that fewer immigrant community members can afford to make a purchase in today’s housing market. As a result, our focus has expanded to help current LMI (Medium-Low Income) owners remain in their homes.

AAFE CDF has routinely provided loans for homeowners needing to complete repairs or renovation projects. In today’s market, these loan products are becoming more popular. People are staying in their homes longer and have a need to maintain their

544 clients received individual or group counseling in 2018

$50 Million

In loans have been closed by REDC since 1997

204 community members received homeownership counseling in 2018

85 clients applied for mortgages through AAFE CDF in 2018

$22 Million

In mortgages were facilitated through AAFE CDF in 2018
equity. Our home improvement loans are available to applicants in 1-4 family homes, condominiums and cooperatives in the five boroughs of New York City. Up to $50,000 can be awarded for roof repairs, new boilers and other upgrades.

Another growth area in recent years has been financial counseling. Due to skyrocketing housing prices, many community members must push off their dreams of homeownership. But they recognize the importance of improving their credit scores, learning about mortgages and saving for down payments, so that they’re prepared to eventually become homeowners. AAFE CDF offers individual counseling and regularly scheduled classes to meet the demand for financial education.

REDC Helps Rebuild Chinatown after 9/11

AAFE established its first small business affiliate in 1989 to provide much-needed capital in the Chinatown community for entrepreneurship and job creation. In 1997, we took the important step of creating Renaissance Economic Development Corporation (REDC), a community development financial institution, which was certified by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Four years later, in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, REDC became a vital resource, providing emergency assistance and local leadership during one of New York City’s darkest hours. After AAFE helped deal with the immediate crisis, REDC quickly came forward with an initial loan fund to help stabilize small businesses. Government aid was slow to materialize even though Chinatown’s economy had been devastated, with the neighborhood completely isolated in the 9/11 security zone. The fund was small, but sent an important message that the community was suffering. Outside support finally did arrive -- a friendly community-centered cafe featuring innovative specialty coffee drinks. While the shop was a big hit, in part due to the Coffee Project’s much-talked about “deconstructed latte” flight (served in three glasses), they realized the business had to expand.

In 2002, AAFE launched the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative, a community-driven project to create a blueprint for the revival of the neighborhood. The two-year planning process, which included extensive outreach across Chinatown, laid out short- and long-term programs to jump-start economic life and to address long-standing problems, in areas such as sanitation, transportation and affordable housing. Through Rebuild Chinatown’s recommendations, approximately $100 million was invested by public and private funders to strengthen Chinatown’s infrastructure.

REDC Provides Small Businesses Support with a Personal Touch

Whether you are a seasoned pro or a new entrepreneur, starting a small business is hard. Expanding a business, building a successful and sustainable independent venture, is even more difficult. Luckily, Chi-Sum Ngai and Kaleena Teoh were able to rely on REDC for financial, technical, and moral support.

When they first came to REDC, Coffee Project NY, their startup, was already operating out of a 300 square foot space in Manhattan’s East Village. Ngai and Teoh had left their office jobs behind to pursue their passion project -- a friendly community-centered cafe featuring inventive specialty coffee drinks. While the shop was a big hit, in part due to the Coffee Project’s much-talked about “deconstructed latte” flight (served in three glasses), they realized the business had to expand.

Recognizing a need for more opportunities for employees, the partners decided to open a second location in Brooklyn. “We wanted to grow with the people who were helping us to build the business,” explained Ngai. Ngai and Teoh say it’s not easy as first time entrepreneurs. They have contended with high rents, unscrupulous contractors and numerous construction headaches, all of which led to cost overruns. But the new spot, a large loft-like space in the downtown Brooklyn area, was already bustling in February, less than six months after opening. The business now has a staff of 12.

One of our main objectives is to help small business owners make inroads with mainstream financial institutions. REDC provided a $50,000 loan, 13 hours of business counseling and assistance in obtaining status as a Minority- or Woman-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE). Later Ngai and Teoh were approved for a conventional bank loan. Now the partners have even bigger plans. They’re opening a “coffee campus” a school sanctioned by the Specialty Coffee Association, the only facility of its kind in New York State, which will provide additional employment opportunities.

Unlike large corporate lenders, said Ngai, REDC takes the time to engage with business owners and understand their individual needs. “With Renaissance,” she said, “the difference is that they put a touch of humanity in the relationship... I feel they genuinely care about our business.”
IMMIGRANT SERVICES

AAFE has been helping both newly arrived immigrants and longtime community members cope with daily life struggles since the organization’s founding 45 years ago. Back then, AAFE dealt with many complaints about deplorable housing conditions in Manhattan’s Chinatown. Today, we continue to help residents in Manhattan’s Chinatown, but also throughout Queens and Brooklyn resolve difficult housing issues. Our services are offered in English, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

In 2018, more than 400 tenants came through our doors with reports of tenant harassment, unsafe building conditions, improper rent charges and other issues threatening their housing rights. At our neighborhood offices in Manhattan and in Flushing and Jackson Heights, Queens, AAFE counselors worked to resolve problems in rent stabilized, Section 8 and NYCHA buildings. When necessary, we connected tenants with attorneys who represented them in housing court. AAFE continues to work within several housing coalitions to advocate for tenants and for legislative reforms to protect New York City’s endangered affordable housing stock. And we conducted tenant workshops to help residents understand their rights and to organize tenant associations.

Throughout the year, we helped community members access essential social safety net benefits, including, applications for Medicare, health insurance and SNAP benefits (for food purchases) At our AAFE Care Senior Center on the Lower East Side, we provided lunch service, and planned daily social activities and assisted seniors in filling out requests for rent increase exemptions (SCRIE). Despite the atmosphere of fear in immigrant communities, AAFE leveraged its credibility and trust in the community to provide in-language, confidential, and reliable immigration services. In 2018, AAFE counselors provided legal support in more than 400 immigration cases, with 29 AAFE clients becoming American citizens. AAFE conducted ESL classes, civics classes, and mock interviews to prepare community members to learn conversational English for the naturalization interview to obtain U.S. citizenship.

AAFE’s Flushing-based Workforce Development Program placed 160 people in jobs in 2018. Founded in 2013, this program is designed to meet the needs of new immigrants. AAFE’s counselors assist clients to build soft and hard skills while harnessing the jobseekers’ strengths and experiences. Jobseekers often do not speak fluent English and lack experience in the American workplace. 90% of our clients take advantage of AAFE’s English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Our counselors offer one-on-one counseling, resume preparation, interview skills training, and job referral services.

Left to right: AAFE staff members Jessica Salgado, Lilian Cheung, Winnie Fung, Shu Huang.
Fighting for tenant rights, no matter how long it takes

On April 11, 2010 a fast-moving fire tore through three tenement buildings on Grand Street in Manhattan’s Chinatown, killing an elderly resident and leaving more than 100 people homeless. Fires are unfortunately commonplace in the neighborhood, where property owners all-too-often fail to maintain basic safety standards in their buildings.

Over the years, AAFE has responded repeatedly to help displaced tenants and advocate for their rights. This catastrophe at 283 and 285 Grand St. was one of the worst fires New York City had experienced in decades. In its aftermath, AAFE helped the tenants from the adjacent building at 289 Grand St. file a lawsuit in housing court, forcing the building owner to make repairs and allow residents to return to their rent stabilized apartments.

Even though the other buildings could not be inhabited, AAFE never stopped fighting for the tenants. Working with the law firm Patterson Belknap, AAFE was able to facilitate a settlement for tenants. By January 2019, they received a total of $1 million as a result of property damages from the 2010 fire.

After nine long years, the Grand Street residents were finally able to close a painful chapter in their lives.

AAFE Helps Fulfill the Dream of American Citizenship

More than a decade ago, Sara Mencho Lopez fled Guatemala at the age of 17 when she and nine siblings were abandoned by their father. After being detained at the U.S. border, she endured a long legal battle before finally obtaining residency. But she never gave up on her dream of becoming an American citizen.

In 2018, Sara came to AAFE’s Jackson Heights office for help. She heard about our services through MetroPlus Health Plan, AAFE’s longtime community partner. Sara enrolled in AAFE’s citizenship classes, learning about American government and history. Our counselor, Jessica Salgado, provided Sara with packets of information, helping her prepare for the Naturalization interview with the U.S. Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services.

After about 10 months, Sara became a citizen. Asked how difficult the process was for her, she said, “It was easy because Jessica was there as a translator. She helped me a lot.” Now Sara can focus on making a better life for her family in New York. Sara is married with three children. When she first came to AAFE, Sara was a cashier. Earlier this year, she was promoted to store manager.

Jessica reflects on her work as an immigration counselor: “I feel really happy when I see a client’s achievements. I feel really privileged. I was raised here, I went to elementary school and middle school in this neighborhood. To help in the community feels good. [My clients] could be my parents or my uncles or cousins.”

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP & COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAMS

In many cases, immigrant students walk through the doors of a typical public high school in Flushing, Queens a matter of days or weeks after arriving in this country. They don’t know the English language. They’re unfamiliar with American youth culture. They’re adapting to a completely different educational system. Our Youth & Family Program is designed to help them with the transition. Against daunting odds, it’s remarkably successful. In this past year, all 29 seniors enrolled in our Castle Immigrant Youth Leadership Program were admitted to college.

AAFE’s youth programs are operated in partnership with three local high schools in downtown Flushing: Flushing High School, Queens High School for Language Studies and Flushing International High School. Since 2009, we have cultivated student leaders through AAFE’s after school curriculum, which is designed to cultivate students’ critical thinking skills, develop civic leadership, and build their readiness for future education and careers.

Through our Youth Leadership for College Access Program, students are trained to assist their peers in completing college and financial aid applications. This initiative reduces the college counselor to student ratio from 1:300 to 1:65 at local high schools. The Castle Immigrant Youth Leadership Program and COMPASS High Program are focused on college readiness and service learning projects, as well as job shadowing and college trips.

In 2018, AAFE staff and 28 student leaders led the 7th annual career conference for Flushing youth. Thirty professionals shared their workplace experiences with 120 student attendees. In breakout sessions, students learned about careers in fields such as health care, law, journalism, creative arts, and technology -- and received invaluable mentoring from adult participants about the educational requirements in various fields.

Serving the Flushing community for more than 20 years

AAFE’s Flushing youth initiatives were created a decade ago as a natural extension of our comprehensive community development philosophy. Nothing changes the trajectory of an immigrant family so dramatically as a college education. But the Youth & Family Program was only a part of our strategy for lifting up the Flushing community.

AAFE first established a permanent office in Flushing in 1996. The primary focus was addressing fair housing issues, which were becoming more prevalent in the gentrifying neighborhood. We offered outreach programs, education initiatives and direct counseling services.

In the early years, AAFE’s work in Manhattan’s Chinatown largely centered around the Chinese American community. In Flushing, we developed a pan-Asian approach, which was well-suited to the remarkably diverse neighborhoods in Northern Queens. The Chinese, Korean and South Asian communities were rapidly growing in Flushing, as well as neighboring communities such as Elmhurst, Corona, Jackson Heights and Jamaica.

AAFE expanded its services to meet changing needs, becoming one of the largest community development organizations in Flushing.

This year’s opening of One Flushing, our new residential and community services hub, is a new milestone for AAFE, allowing the organization to provide even more robust resources in New York City’s most dynamic ethnic enclave.
AAFE helped Yuki Chen Thrive at Flushing High School

The first days of high school can be terrifying for anyone. Yuki Chen knows the feeling. Having come to the U.S. from China with her family at age 5, she had already overcome quite a few obstacles. But she found Flushing High School to be a pretty intimidating place.

When Yuki found AAFE during her sophomore year, she blossomed both academically and socially. Yuki joined our youth program, and later was one of 13 students selected for Youth Leadership for College Access, AAFE’s peer mentorship initiative, in which participants assist other students with college and financial aid applications. Today, Yuki is an honors student at City College and aspires to become a physician.

“Being the first in my family to go to college is, I would say, exciting, but at the same time really challenging,” said Yuki. “There’s not a lot of places like AAFE where I can feel safe and feel like you’re part of the community. AAFE is a place where youth can grow and seek out advice on just about anything.”

Today, even as a college student in a demanding program, Yuki comes back to AAFE to volunteer. In 2019, she will facilitate the Young Adult Series,” a workshop dedicated to AAFE youth alumni ages 18-24. “I think once you join AAFE,” Yuki explains, “it’s really hard to leave because there are so many amazing people.”

AAFE is a place where youth can grow and seek out advice on just about anything.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

One of the foundations of AAFE’s work is community education and leadership. We believe in cultivating grassroots activism neighborhood by neighborhood, and even building by building.

AAFE, for example, has a long history of providing residents with the knowledge and tools to start their own tenant associations. We believe organized tenants are a powerful force for neighborhood preservation. Our community organizing is rooted in the concept that tenants have the power to mobilize and advocate for their rights, regardless of age, English proficiency, or income. AAFE is one of the few organizations that organizes tenants in English, Spanish and Chinese -- with tenant activists in both Manhattan and Queens. AAFE often works in coalitions such as “Stabilizing NYC”, to organize tenants citywide against real estate speculators who engage in predatory equity practices to displace long-term tenants from their homes. A hallmark of our community organizing work is collaboration across New York City’s many diverse groups. We believe that our emerging communities must rise together.

This past November, AAFE hosted its 11th Annual Community Development Conference, held at the Asia Society. There were lively conversations about issues of critical concern to our community, including proposed changes in admissions to New York City’s specialized high schools and political activism in these tumultuous times. AAFE takes seriously its role as a convener in our diverse community.
A Powerful Movement Begins at Confucius Plaza

On May 16, 1974 AAFE’s founders led the first organized protest at the Confucius Plaza construction site in Manhattan’s Chinatown. The bold act of defiance, inspired by the black and Latino civil rights actions of the 1960s and early 1970s, marked the beginning of Asian Americans for Equality as an advocacy organization. Spurred into action by a developer who refused to hire Asian American workers for the federally financed project, Asian Americans for Equal Employment (as AAFE was then known) led weeks of protests. The Confucius Plaza action was initiated by young people, but they were soon joined by older community members, as well as members of other communities of color. The developer, the DeMatteis Corp., eventually relented, hiring 27 Asian, black and Latino workers.

This triumph established AAFE as a group willing to stand up for equal rights for all people and to advocate forcefully for the Chinatown community. More than four decades later, AAFE has evolved, becoming a multi-faceted community development organization, but we have never forgotten our roots. Community organizing remains a vital part of our work today.

AAFE has played a significant role over the years in neighborhood planning initiatives, helping to engage residents, small business owners and other stakeholders to shape their communities. We are currently partnering with the NYC Department of Small Business Services, the Downtown Flushing BID and the Greater Flushing Chamber for “Neighborhood 360°” to develop commercial revitalization projects in the Flushing community.

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AAFE Promotes Tenant Power Across New York City

In his Jamaica, Queens apartment, Jaime Galezo has a suitcase stuffed with papers, documents he’s using to shine a light on Zara Realty’s long record of tenant harassment. In March of 2019, this meticulous record-keeping paid off when State Attorney General Letitia James filed a lawsuit against Zara for illegally exploiting low- and middle-income tenants in 38 buildings across Jamaica.

For the past five years, AAFE and our nonprofit partners have been supporting tenants in Zara buildings. But the residents are the ones leading the charge and, we believe, this is the way it should be. Tenants are their own best advocates. Our role has been to hold “Know Your Rights” workshops, to help educate residents about the law and to help organize the Zara Tenant Coalition.

Jaime, originally from Colombia, has lived in the neighborhood for more than 40 years. We first met him three years ago when Zara Realty purchased his building on 88th Avenue. The attorney general and the New York State Tenant Protection Unit have found in their investigation that the notorious landlord routinely flouts the law. Zara illegally charges broker fees, even when residents are moving from one apartment to another within the same building. When Zara takes over a building it typically changes the locks and charges tenants $300 for each new key. Some tenants paid more than $11,000 just to move into their rent-stabilized apartments.

Jaime is happy that years of protests and advocacy have finally started to pay off. But he says some tenants have already been forced out and others are in jeopardy. He’s feeling upbeat, though. “Knowledge is power,” says Galezo. “I feel like we’re going to win this battle.”

Knowledge is power. I feel like we’re going to win this battle.
## FINANCIALS

### (Audited)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>$118,882,137</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Liabilities</td>
<td>$88,732,420</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Assets</td>
<td>$30,149,717</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</td>
<td>$118,882,137</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liabilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payables and Accruals</td>
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<td>Long-Term Debt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Liabilities</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sources of Income

- 55% Rental Income
- 32% Contributions & Grants
- 8% Management, Consulting & Fees
- 4% Interest Income
- 1% Other

### Uses of Income

- 83% Affordable Housing, Social Services & Loan Programs
- 15% Administrative
- 2% Fundraising
- 4% Real Estate Development
- 18% Small Business & Home Lending
- 32% Community Services
- 4% Property Management
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