



CHINESE AMERICAN SERVICE LEAGUE, Inc. (CASL)

A Not-For-Profit Organization



BERNARDA LO WONG

Bernarda Wong, better known as “Bernie,” is a founder and the President of the Chinese American Service League (CASL). Under Bernie’s leadership, CASL has grown from a one-person shop in 1979 with an annual budget of \$30,000 to \$12 million. She spearheaded the initiative to build a \$6.7 million Senior Housing facility as well as CASL’s new adjacent facility, the \$9.2 million Kam L. Liu Building, a community service center that combined all of CASL’s disparate sites. Prior to founding CASL, Bernie served as Director of Social Services for a community center and a Head Start Day Care Program in a predominantly African American community.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Bernie’s early life experiences set the stage for her mission driven approach to serving others with dignity and respect. At eighteen, Bernie left Hong Kong alone for Sioux City, Iowa, where she earned a B.A. in Sociology from Briar Cliff College. This was followed by a Master’s Degree in Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis. Bernie truly understood what poor new immigrants face when confronted by a completely different culture and language, which gave her the courage to gather a few friends and begin the difficult task of building the Chinese American Service League from the ground up in 1979.

Bernie chaired the Chicago Mayor’s Advisory Council on Asian Affairs and was the first Asian appointed to the Boards of United Way of Chicago and the Chicago Public Library. She also served on the Governor’s Asian Advisory Council and the Leadership of Greater Chicago Board. Currently, Bernie serves on committees including the Chicago Commission Human Relations (CCHR), the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA) Board, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) Board, and Council for the Illinois Department on Aging. Bernie is also founding member of Chinese Immigrant Service Agencies Network International (CISANI).

Her awards include the Community Organizer Trailblazer Award from Rainbow/Push Coalition, the Distinguished Alumni Award from both Briar Cliff College and Washington University in St. Louis, the Edward J. Williams Community Leadership Award from Harris Bank, and the Distinguished Community Leader award from Mayor Richard Daley. In March 2012, Bernie was a recipient of the “Champion of Change” award which is part of President Obama’s “Winning the Future” initiative in honor of leaders like Cesar Chavez, who have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of others in their community and across the nation. The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Chicago Chapter bestowed the Outstanding Community Leader award to Bernie in May 2012 for her exemplary leadership in developing CASL into a nurturing hub within the Chinese immigrant and American community. She received the YWCA Outstanding Leaders – Racial Justice Award in October of 2012. In June, 2013, she received the Jane Addams Making History Award for Distinction in Social Service, given by the Chicago History Museum. Then in July of 2013, Bernie was honored by the Chicago Tribune as a “Remarkable Woman”, and by Today’s Chicago Women as one of “100 Women of Influence”.

Bernie continues to be active today in the Chinese and greater Chicago community through her work at CASL and on her many boards and committees. She is a frequent speaker on social service, non-profits, and the Asian American community. Bernie is currently leading CASL in its 36th year of operation.