

SUMMER ACTIVIST TRAINING

To encourage activism within the Asian Pacific Islander community, the NCRR joined with other like-minded organizations to sponsor the Summer Activist Training program. Students are invited from the various colleges and community based groups to attend an intensive three-day training session in which all aspects of community organizing are examined and taught. In addition, they are urged to share their own personal experiences as they participate in workshops, group discussions and strategy games. Site visits to grass roots organizations take place as well as the opportunity to meet with and listen to speakers who have much to share about their own experiences in the struggle for a just society.

NCRR member, Kathy Masaoka, describes the program as a life changing experience for many of the young student participants. "I get a lot of encouragement and I get re-energized," she said. "I think it's one of the best things that NCRR has participated in." "It's important to involve, guide and teach young people, said Kathy, and the training you get through the SAT program is a lot more that we ever had."



Ayako Hagihara, NCRR member and SAT participant receives an award from Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates in 2001

The Summer Activist Training program is currently sponsored by a consortium of groups that have a strong history of supporting worker's rights. The Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), the Thai Community Development Center, the Pilipino Workers Center and the Garment Workers Center are the recent sponsors in addition to NCRR. All of these organizations have a commitment to bettering peoples' lives. They see a vital link between the conditions of those who must work to survive and it's effect on the community they live in. Often, the graduates of the SAT program will go on to serve in organizations committed to gaining workers a living wage, health benefits and decent working conditions instead of just being continually exploited for their labor.

A clear example of this was when the members of the Thai CDC took a leading role in helping to free workers that had literally been imprisoned for years in a sweatshop in El Monte. In addition to gaining freedom for those

being held as “slave laborers,” the members of the organization helped to acclimate the released workers to their new environment. They also provided them with knowledge on how to seek legal recourse for their years of indentured servitude.



The thrust for a leadership and advocacy training program like this came out of the turmoil that engulfed Los Angeles in 1992. However one wants to describe it, whether it be called a “disturbance,” “riot,” or an “uprising,” a firestorm was unleashed upon the city with Korean merchants unjustly targeted as scapegoats for the anger that developed over the jury’s decision involving Rodney King.

KIWA initiated the SAT program the following year (in 1993) with the help of Korean American participants from UCLA. More than

Christina Shigemura MC’s the Day of Remembrance program for NCR in 2002. She is an active member of NCR and a former SAT participant.

a decade later it is still in existence. Operating on a “shoestring” budget, the staff and instructors are more often than not, volunteers. The operating staff tend to be students from the previous years program.

The venue itself has had to change from time to time. The Peace and Justice Building near Bixel Street in downtown Los Angeles gave way to the Halifax Hotel in Hollywood. The last few years have found it at the All Peoples Christian Center where Kathy Masaoka is an instructor for the Services for Asian American Youth (SAAY) program. Kathy commented that it has always been difficult to find a place. “The Halifax Hotel was so small at least at All Peoples, we can have a larger group,” she said. “We also never have any money and we never charge. We do it because we know that it will bring in new people, so we have a definite stake in this program.”

SAT continues to seek a more permanent home but the concept of cooperation among various Asian Pacific groups to develop progressive leadership will not change.