



BY ELIAS-DEEN SOO-HWAN ZADI

It all started with "Brown Bags for All" in January, 2020



As a BIPOC led community based nonprofit, we recognized the impact of COVID-19 pandemic early. We wanted to help the most vulnerable during pandemic: the unhoused. We started making hundreds, then thousands of brown bag meal kits. We distributed them in Skid Row and in South Central LA.

We got \$25,000 in private donations. Each brown bag cost \$2.50 to make.



February 20, 2020: We tried launching a neighborhood taco cart in Skid Row. The realities of pandemic started coming down like a two ton brick. One unhoused resident bought Lawry's seasoning and said "now it smells like home." We gave a thousand tacos that day.



My mother, Susan Park, founded Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice founded on February 28, 2020
KIWA (Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance became our fiscal sponsor



"We had \$50,000 worth of canceled catering orders during the last week of February in 2020. Shelter-in place-mandates loomed on the horizon. My restaurant foot traffic was sinking like the Titanic. I had over \$50,000 of ingredients for normal business that wasn't coming back. I started giving all the food away." Susan Park



My parents and our family restaurant, Revolutionario, is well known in the community for giving back. Our restaurant was a hub for the community and local officials took notice. Councilman Marqueese Harris-Dawson gave my father an "Immigrant Business owner of the year award. My father attended a community cook out with Herb Wesson.

Councilman Wesson gave Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice its first grant of \$25,000 in March 2020.

The Community Took Notice. Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice raised \$150,000 in private donations from individuals

The Media Took Notice. Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice was featured in The LA TIMES, RAFU SHIMPO, The Korean Daily, CBS, Sundance Film Festival Panel, LA Taco, Hal Eisner FOX11 LA, and many more.



Paying the Good Fortune Forward

Susan Park hasn't forgotten the kindness of others, and is sharing the love in a time of crisis.

By BRITTANY KO and ANNAKAI HAYAKAWA GESHIDER

Susan Park plans to order at least \$100 per day from Fugetsu-Do, starting this week. "It's a pay-it-back, 45 years later," she said.

From 1975-79, the revolutionary Korean American restaurateur Susan Park's family made a modest profit from the quiet generosity of Fugetsu-Do, the 117-year-old Japanese confectionery store on Little Tokyo's First Street.

"My mom used to buy wholesale cases of fortune cookies from Fugetsu-Do and divide up the contents into produce bags and sell them to her co-workers. The owners of Fugetsu-Do would sometimes charge my mom \$5 per case. But more often than not they would charge her 25-50 cents per case and then throw in a bunch of cases for free. My mom made \$15-\$20 profit from each case. I was very impressed by my mother," Park said.

Park is the owner of Revolutionary North-African Tacos on Jefferson Boulevard and long-time community organizer. Having lived in Los Angeles for nearly five decades, she has seen the city, and Asian Americans, experience many shifts. The memories of her family's economic prowess and desire to help others fuel the work she does today.

She believes the most powerful way Asian Americans can help each other amidst COVID-19 is through the redistribution of wealth, knowledge and material resources. To carry out these goals, Park created two fundraisers: Fundraiser for Unhoused Korean Seniors and Pan-Asian COVID-19 Mutual Aid.

at small-business restaurants. "I gave \$200 to Mitsuru Cafe because it's a cultural heirloom for the Japanese American community in Little Tokyo," said Park.

Little Tokyo's Cafe Dulce owner James Choi was given \$300 by Park. Choi says this money will be directly used towards Go Little Tokyo's

community alive, Choi said. "Vote with your dollars."

Chinatown was the earliest enclave damaged by the COVID-19 crisis. For this reason, Park wanted to give the neighborhood immediate attention. "You have to give people at the very bottom resources," she said. "The reason we're starting with Chinatown is because Chinatown ... has been hit the hardest by COVID-19 fears."

In Chinatown alone, there are 58 Chinese and Southeast Asian-owned restaurants. Forced to battle gentrification, these restaurants have hustled to survive — regardless of the state of the economy. "Even at the best of times, it wasn't that good," Park said of mom-and-pop shops' ridiculously low prices, quoting her friend William Kwan, a Cantonese Chinese American UCLA alumnus who is helping her fundraise.

"And now some of these restaurants are choking," she added. When Park visited Saigon Deli in Chinatown, an order for ten people came out to around \$40. "So we left a \$150 tip." Park and volunteers then distributed the food to unhoused and low-income seniors around L.A.

As of April 10, Park has been able to set a budget of \$6,000 for Chinatown restaurants alone — \$3,000 from a creative company and \$3,000 from Park's fundraising efforts. She will have spent up to \$30,000 at various restaurants in Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Tokyo, Thai Town, Little Saigon and at Asian wholesalers by the end of this week.

Park plans to raise funds to gradually expand her restaurant initiative across L.A. County's Asian American enclaves. Sue works with passion and conviction for her ideas of food and social justice and equity. Looking long-term, she hopes her economic plan will expand to securing contracts and orders with the city for these subsistence level restaurants. Park also hopes to work with the L.A. Unified School District to implement her model, in order to feed low-income heritage-language-speaking families and children — and specifi-



Photos by BRITTANY KO

Susan Park inside her former restaurant, now Asian-specific food bank, with \$360 worth of kimchi purchased at Kae Sung Kimchi in Koreatown. Park has established fundraisers and a supply chain to help seniors and anyone who has fallen through holes in the social safety net. Below: loading meals for seniors from Nak Won Restaurant in Koreatown.



Revolutionario's restaurant parking lot turned into a food distribution hub with dozens of community organizations and grassroots nonprofits coming to pick up.

- Agape Church in South Central**
- My Cielo**
- Helping Hands**
- Chesapeake Apartments Tenants Union**
- Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance**
- Thai CDC**
- YMCA locations**
- Church of Latter Day Saints**
- Little Tokyo Services Center**
- Southeast Asian Community Alliance**
- API Forward Movement**
- Fernandeno Tataviam Band of Mission Indians**

And many more



Food Companies Took Notice



In Kind Donations
Mutual Trading Co
NONGSHIM Ramen
Red Boat fish sauce
Asian food ingredients to provide culturally relevant foods to low-income Asian Americans



LA Mission shared their surplus in-kind donations with us. They gave us 1500 boxes of meat and cheese for 16 weeks. They gave us truck loads of personal care products.





Summer of 2020
We got meal contracts from Jose Andres' World Kitchen and Dineen to make 10,000 meals at a cost of \$10 per meal. We distributed the meals ourselves and through our community network of distribution partners



In August of 2020, Robert Sausedo of Community Build, a nonprofit founded by Maxine Waters, introduced us to Kat Taylor's "Growing The Table" Team to distribute produce purchased from BIPOC farmers to low-income BIPOC communities. GTT gave us an operating and administrative grant. Mr. Sausedo told us that we are family and he will always be at our side when we need him.



In October of 2020, we were approved for a \$440,000 grocery and prepared meal distribution grant from a Foundation.

From December 2020 to March 31, 2020
We purchased, packed, and distributed over 17,000 bags or boxes of groceries in four months.

We made or purchased over 14,000 hot meals in four months.



Spring/Summer 2021

The Foundation Grant overlapped in February with The Growing The Table Grant. We distributed 200 boxes of produce every week for 12 weeks.

As the GTT grant cycle was closing, we started intaking and distributing 1000 boxes of produce per week from the USDA for 12 weeks.

Fall/Winter 2021-2022: We took a break from our produce distribution, but continued our social and human services.



Winter/Spring 2022

We are in pilot II of Growing The Table

Our current produce distribution sites and partners:

The Korean Resource Center on Crenshaw

The Korean Resource Center on Kingsley

Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)

United American Indian Involvement

Baldwin Hills, Leimert Park, Crenshaw (BLT) Tenants Union

Chesapeake Apartments in South Central LA

The Giving Table in Inglewood

National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON)

Mano o Mano

Father's Table Homeless Shelter in Koreatown

Tongan Community in Inglewood

Keys to The Streets in South Central LA

Semillas Community in El Sereno

VOCES Church in El Sereno

In December of 2021, our nonprofit, World Food Bank, Kitchen, and Urban Farm was approved by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit retroactively dated back to March 2021 when we applied for nonprofit status.

Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice became a program of World Food Bank, Kitchen, and Urban Farm.

The Korean Resource Center and CDC www.minjokrc.org is another program we started with KRC Union Members.

Reflections on the past and what we're doing today

My mother, Susan Park, started community level social and human services when we first opened our family restaurant in May of 2015.

Dan, an 84 year old Black elder , was living out of his van. He needed help fixing a parking ticket. He said that when he went to the Metropolitan Courthouse they told him to go to the DMV. When he went to the DMV, they told him to go the Metropolitan Courthouse. Back and forth. Back and forth. He was losing what little money he had at the gas pump. My mother looked up how to fix the ticket. She typed up a letter for him to show the DMV and the Metropolitan Courthouse. His ticket was resolved that day. If his van was impounded, he would have ended up on the streets. He refuses to go to a crowded shelter. We also gave him recyclables and hot meals. Because he didn't have to spend time looking for recyclables and because he saved money on 5-10 meals per week, he was able to afford housing. He eventually found a room for \$500 that he could afford with his social security payments.

Maria, a 98 year old indigenous elder lives all alone. She has no family. Our restaurant became a wellness check in center for her, where she could always get hot meals, translations for legal notices and letters from the county, and it was a place where she found people cared about her. We got her signed up for SNAP and MediCal.

Darla, a 98 year old, a Black elder was dumpster diving in our restaurant's trash container. We asked her what she needed. She said food and recyclables. We invited her inside our restaurant and told her that she can come anytime for a hot meal and a cold drink. We also gave her recyclables that we saved. Because she didn't have to spend hours per day looking for recyclables and food, she was able to find a part-time job. She earned enough to find a \$300 room to rent.

The individuals and families we have given healthy produce to since February 28, 2020 have reported back that they have experienced an overall improved feeling of security and health by knowing that they can get supplemental produce when they need it. The money they save on groceries helps them save money for other basic necessities such as rent, utilities, and work related travel expenses.

Our holistic approach helps marginalized people who do not have the resources, knowledge, or time to be shuffled around the system or who feel harmed by the system. We expanded our social and human services by being trusted community members that marginalized people felt comfortable with.

We found two homeless shelters in Koreatown. We in-took all the resident into social services and MediCal. Several residents qualified for Rapid Rehousing. We connected them with housing providers. We take a grassroots approach while utilizing our knowledge of systems. Susan Park took a job at the Korean Resource Center in October of 2021. She joined the union and formed The Korean Resource Center and CDC to grow social and human services, access to healthcare, and revitalize community. The Korean Resource Center has 10,000 constituents.

Our current services and direct aid...

Our strength lies in our grassroots, community based, people to people, one on one approach and our ability to harness systemic benefits with our professional, administrative, and executive skills

We work in the areas of social services and human services. We take a holistic approach to human care, health equity, improving access, behavioral health, and healthcare access

Letter and document translation

CalFresh (SNAP/EBT), Medical, Medicare, Social Security, Dental, Vision

Naturalization, DACA initial and renewal, Green card renewal, Family Petitions, VAWA, T-Visa, U-Visa, SIJS and other forms of relief

Tenants Rights, Eviction Protection, Rent Relief, Rapid Rehousing

Healthy Produce Distribution

Community Safety Patrol

Healthcare Access and Equity for Small Business owners and their employees

JEPWA Community Land Trust uniting Koreatown and South Central LA

Who We Are....



My sister Kamilah graduated from UCLA with a degree in political in June 2020. She is currently studying to take the California Bar. She was inspired by our mother. She witnessed people being helped in meaningful and impactful ways with just a little bit of legal information from our mother. My sister worked 3 part-times and helped out at our restaurant while attending college full-time. I'm on the same path as my big sister with an emphasis on labor union organizing.

My father, Chef Zadi, teaches culinary arts and helps distribute produce. He is our resident volunteer chef for our hot meal programs.



Eileen Wisco, Secretary and Treasurer
BS in Business Administration
concentration in accounting, minor in
information systems, San Francisco State
University

Laura Stewart, Vice President
Degree in Visual Arts, UCSD, lighting
director in the film and television industry

Susan Park, Director of Services and
Diversity. Fluent in English and Korean.
Some Spanish. In-language services
coordinator.



Zerita Jones, President. Long time
advocate for tenants rights, housing, and
a co- founder of Liberty Community
Landtrust. Founder of Baldwin Hills
Leimert Park Crenshaw Local Tenant's
Coalition and BKC (Black Korean
Coalition) with Susan Park



Kamilah Zadi, Community Legal Services
Coordinator on her way to becoming an
attorney. Legal apprentice The Collective
for Liberatory Lawyering, founded by
attorneys from Public Counsel.

Elias-Deen Zadi, Executive Director and
Youth Coordinator learning from elders
and igniting youth into action.

Shout out to our volunteers and seasonal staff who make it happen...

