

Community history, Chinese

Henry Nan Hung Pan (b. 1951)

He was brought up in Singapore to a businessman father who had come from Wuxi in China before World War II. He studied Mechanical Engineering at the University of New South Wales, graduating with First Class Honours and the University Medal. In 1981 he became Foundation Chairperson of the Chinese Australian Services Society, CASS, initially set up to provide child care services.

Henry Pan: The first diversion from child care happened in 1987...[with] the immigration debate. In 1986, Ron Casey was a broadcaster on 2KY...On numerous occasions he denigrated Asians, and tended to incite racial discrimination...We felt we should do something. We sent a news release to the only two newspapers in the Chinese community...You have to stand up and fight for your own rights and air your concerns or deep grievances...We suggested people copy a model letter and send it to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal...We got an overwhelming response. In fact, the ABT received 1300 responses...at the time we were not very well off in terms of organisation—and also we were not very well-known. We couldn't afford legal representation...Another major organisation, ACCA, the Australian Chinese Community Association, were better in that sense and were represented by some legal people. So they took up the issue...

Diana Giese: So [through CASS] you're looking after your children; you're reclaiming your culture; you're socialising the next generation—and you're taking a stand on rights.

Henry Pan: Yes.

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Diana Giese: You use an enormous army of volunteers. You reward them with recognition, don't you?...

Henry Pan: ...We recognise that it would be important to show appreciation of people's involvement...The minimum is you serve about two years, and you get a Certificate of Appreciation...These people are mainly regular helpers in fund-raising events like the Dragon Charity Walk...involved in registration, amenities—a particular task. If you have an organisational role to play...then you go to the next step. ..We give you a medallion. Then depending on the length of your service—could be two years, five years—then there are different forms of medallion. The highest award is a gold medallion for ten years' service.

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Diana Giese: What do you see as the future of CASS?

Henry Pan: ...There are two key areas. One is that government policy is changing. No matter whether it's Liberal or Labor...there will be less government funding. So community organisations in all cases have to learn to stand on their own feet. We have to try to be able to survive as an ongoing business. That is the first challenge...We will run some of our services with fees...obviously try to earn some money...We've put up our fees for child care to compete with other centres. Really you are just like any other business...Long-term there is another challenge. All our services and activities came about because of the first generation of migrants and their needs...However, the second generation or future generations will be more adapted to Australia. Unless we recognise this...you will see a decline in this organisation...I think we need to get more young people involved, and also we need to work more closely with the mainstream as partners...We are part of Australia, OK; we are part of the system. If we can do well in looking after the Chinese community, there's no reason why we can't look after other people. We can always expand into other communities, including the mainstream...Right now, we are called CASS. There's no reason why we cannot be known as MASS, Multicultural Australian Services Society.

(from interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3454, 1998, *Chinese Australian Oral History Partnership/Post-War Chinese Australians*, National Library of Australia)

Link

Chinese Australian Services Society, CASS <http://www.cass.net.au/>