

Sengoudone Soy Pátana

Asian Family Services

What would your life be like if you were suddenly blind, deaf, cripple, and mute? That is how life is for our clients that come to Asian Family Services. They have eyes, arms, legs, and ears but they might as well be cripple. There is no one to advocate for their needs. They have no access to transportation, are uneducated, illiterate, even in their native languages. Many of them have suffered from extensive trauma; have medical issues and mental illnesses. They come to see us as an outlet for support. We are Asian Family Services, an independent nonprofit mental health and substance abuse agency and the only outpatient clinic in CT that specializes in serving the Asian population. Our services include helping people cope with a range of problems from post-traumatic stress disorder, family violence, compulsive gambling, job loss, and poverty. We also provide ESL and Citizenship classes to our clients. We are a non-profit agency with limited funding.

Asians are reluctant to acknowledge problems and seek help. Culturally, identifying as mentally ill brings shame upon the family, ancestors, and the entire community. Those with mental illnesses are alienated from their ethnic communities and mainstream society. For example, we have a client that comes to see us with his wife. They're both in their 70's. They are neglected and isolated. His wife receives medical treatment weekly for her eyes. In order to get to the doctor's office, she's got to hire a translator and pay for transportation. This is taken out of their SSI money in order to meet medical needs. As a result, they have sacrificed meals to pay for her treatments. They have no access to food banks, pantries, or soup kitchens because they have no transportation to resources, can't speak English, and have many cultural barriers. Just the other day, they came in and I helped them apply for food stamps. They brought me a little box of pork fried rice. Tears filled my eyes because I knew they could not afford this. I could not say no to the food because I knew how much pride they had in buying it for me. Even though the people who come here may be cripple in certain aspects, but their hearts are full of love, kindness, and respect for all. They have no voice to advocate for needed services, at some level are basic needs; this is why we as providers support this commission. We need this commission to represent our needs and the rising issues within the Asian Pacific American community that are not visible or heard. Please, don't silence us any longer.