

KEEPING YOUR IDENTITY IN A SHIFTING WORLD



WU YEE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wu Yee is Cantonese for “protector of children,” and this decades old organization embodies that description. Founded in the mid-1970s, Wu Yee Children’s Services grew out of a lack of child care and family programs in San Francisco’s Chinatown — especially for the newly-arrived and low-income Chinese community.

Over the years, the organization developed into a formal child care resource and referral agency and became a local institution, supporting training for child care professionals, acting as a clearing house for child and family services information, and creating a culturally- and linguistically-welcoming environment for Cantonese and English-speaking families alike.

But as time passed, Chinatown became more of a commercial district and less of a homogeneous residential neighborhood. Meanwhile, families with Asian and Pacific Island heritage have become members of virtually every neighborhood in the city. So Wu Yee found itself at a crossroad — How should the organization define itself, its crucial services, and its core constituency in the coming years?

PROJECT DATE:

2008 - 2010

SECTOR: *Child care and family services*

FTA SKILLS AND SERVICES:

Strategic planning; creation of “white papers” to support board discussion of complex issues; communication strategies; messaging; print collateral

For more than 30 years, WU YEE CHILDREN'S SERVICES has been a bridge for Asian immigrant families who face multiple barriers to understanding the systems, benefits, and challenges of locating appropriate child care, becoming licensed providers, and expanding parenting skills.

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Since 1977, Wu Yee Children's Services has grown from a small single site to a \$15 million multi-program agency with six child care centers across the city that serve more than 250 children, in addition to the hundreds who attend family child care or home-based programs that benefit from the organization's training and support. Along with the growth of its child care programs, Wu Yee expanded from its focus on low-income Chinese-speaking children and families to include training programs and advocacy to support well-trained, well-compensated child care providers who speak multiple languages.

In 2008, Wu Yee Children's services approached Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to help the organization become more strategic in its approach to communications and to create appropriate materials for its diverse audiences. During the early phases of this work, it became apparent that the organization was struggling with important issues that impacted its identity and direction – issues that needed to be resolved prior to the development of both a plan for visibility and the creation of materials to support the organization's objectives. As a result, Wu Yee's Board of Directors expanded the scope of FTA's work to include the development of a comprehensive strategic plan, within which communications would be an in-depth element.

The FTA-led planning process resulted in a new organizational mission: "Create opportunities for children to be healthy, for families to thrive, and for communities to be strong."



About one-third of San Francisco's population is of Asian descent, compared with 13% statewide and 6% nationally.

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FTA conducted intense research and analysis, including a series of one-on-one, in-person interviews with a broad cross-section of internal and external stakeholders, site visits, and designed and facilitated Board retreats to present the firm's findings, to guide the Board to articulate the organization's mission, to resolve "key issues" (related to whether the organization's focus was as an Asian immigrant-serving group whose programs ultimately impacted all families in San Francisco or whether it was a family serving organization whose work supported Asian immigrant families), and to prioritize organizational and program directions. These efforts led to the development of a comprehensive set of strategies, goals, and recommendations outlined in a bold strategic plan.

Following completion of the communications plan, FTA developed and designed numerous materials and guidelines for branding, as well as traditional and social media, to set the stage for a new level of professionalism. Most significant was the creation of a 54-panel "flip book-style" publication, *A Guide to Healthy Children*, which contained useful information for parents and child care providers, and which replaced a cacophony of small, uncoordinated, individual pamphlets that had been cobbled together in-house over many years. Another publication highlighted the organization's deep history of quality services and advocacy for low-income Asian immigrant families, as well as its role with Chinese-speaking child care providers.

After spending much time in the Wu Yee waiting area, FTA staff noticed that almost all of the visiting parents and caregivers would look through the shelves of free educational tri-fold brochures and would deposit them in their pockets, strollers, or children's backpacks. It seemed as if the same brochures were being taken repeatedly by the same people, week after week. Thus FTA surmised that Wu Yee needed one omnibus publication — a substantial and durable, bilingual information compendium that clients could keep and refer to easily, what would become "A Guide to Healthy Children."

