

## Let's Talk: Countering Anti-Blackness and Fostering Asian Black Solidarity in Chicago Chinatown

Editing & Audio Transcription by Christopher Nakatsuka

[intro music plays-Lundstroem: *The perfect corporate podcast intro*]

Let's Talk intro

**Stephanie Hoang:** Welcome to another episode of Let's Talk, a podcast where we feature individuals and organizations who are working hard to bring our AAPI and Black communities together. By highlighting their stories, we hope to encourage inclusive, intergenerational, and anti-racist perspectives in all spaces. I'm Stephanie Hoang, the Program Manager at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center and this is "Let's Talk."

Today we will hear from Angela Lin and Consuela Hendricks, co-founders of People Matter, a community-based organization based in Chicago. Using their experiences and positionality within Chinatown, they work to address anti-blackness in the Asian American community and to build relationships between Chinatown's Black and Asian populations. Joining us as facilitator is Pamela Ybañez, OACC's Facilities Coordinator.

**Pamela Ybañez:** All right. So I thought we'd just get started just introducing ourselves and talking about your background.

**Angela Lin:** Yeah, so I can start first. My name is Angela Lin. I am co-founder of People Matter along with Consuela who, you know, is here with me. She's also my best friend. I am from the suburbs of Atlanta. But I lived in Shenzhen for three or four years growing up, and that's where I got my language skills that made, that paved my road to organizing. But I came to Chicago about ten years ago, and then, right after I graduated from college, I fell into this community organizing position in Chicago Chinatown's really only political organization, advocacy organization—and that's where I met Consuela because she had been a volunteer at the organization since she was a teenager. And she really had a lot of institutional knowledge that she shared with me and really taught me a lot about Chinatown, which I think a lot of people find weird. Like people say, "How did this Black person teach you about your own Chinese history and culture?" and things like that. I think that Consuela was a really big part of my entry into Chinatown and understanding my Chinese identity.

I worked on an organizing project, and my very first day was basically on this very racially tense campaign for a high school for Chicago's Chinatown that essentially, was gonna shut down a majority low income Black elementary school that was also very high performing. So like right off the bat, my organizing journey was very much [about] racial tensions, deep rooted racial tensions between Black and Chinese folks on the South Side of Chicago. And, you know, Consuela and I, we were such a big part of the Chinatown community, but because but the Chinatown community had a lot of issues, that weren't being addressed, such as anti-blackness, such as you know, domestic violence, different things that weren't being addressed. And so that's why we wanted to create an alternative and to create something that would address these

things. And that's why, you know, that's how we started People Matter and really started doing a lot of work together, specifically on tackling anti-blackness and just bridging race relations across, like all communities of color on the South Side of Chicago, to have a more united front to fight for schools, fight for health care, fight for housing—things like that. And I'll pass it to Consuela.

**Consuela Hendricks:** So my name is Consuela Hendricks. I'm Co-President of People Matter. I got myself started in the work that we do today back in high school. I've been organizing since I was sixteen years old—I was part of this club called Undocumented Unafraid and I was vice president of that club. We were fundraising for our fellow students, and mostly our undocumented students, and undocumented peers. In addition to that, I started a club called International Club. This was due to a lot of the gang violence that was happening at my high school, specifically between Black and Brown students.

One day someone told me, “Hey, Consuela, don't go outside because they're hitting, or they're gonna probably kill any Black person outside, so I think that you should stay behind.” So that sparked me to start trying to do more racial equity work and racial justice work within my school because it was affecting my real life. But also I really felt like we didn't necessarily have to fight as violently. I remember walking outside at school that day, and seeing puddles of blood on the sidewalk, and really being fearful of what really happened and who was actually hurt. So that sparked me to start organizing in my high school around, again like, racial justice work and starting these conversations. Of course it was really difficult to get, like, gang members to come to my club. However, we did start having conversations about race, identity, immigration status, and etc., and I was able to work with my school's bilingual program and build that out. And so we just had, like really deep conversations around identity.

One of the people there actually had brought me to Chinatown at that age as well, saying, “Hey, you should do some of this work in Chinatown.” So at sixteen, then, I was able to go to Chinatown, and I was volunteering at the organization, where I met Angela at, for about nine years. And during that nine year span, I was helping with voter registration and really building my understanding and connection to the Chinese American community, as well as, you know, just figuring out what's the best ways that we could all work together. And that's part of the reason why me and Angela started our organization because we found that not that many people were talking about these issues, or even [about] the most marginalized communities that are in Chinatown. And so we wanted to break away, and figure out ways that we can start these conversations and start building solidarity amongst Black, Brown, and Chinese, as well as Asian American, individuals in the communities that we serve.

**Pamela:** Great! Thank you so much for that background information Angela and Consuela. I'll just talk briefly about myself and how I found your group. I am the Facilities & Rentals Coordinator (at OACC). My name is Pamela Ybañez. I've been at OACC since January, and I've always been interested in these intersections of Black and Asian communities, and looking at historically, how these communities—or when different communities come together, they can create so much more power and change in our lives. So I was really excited to learn about People Matter, and when I was working at the Black Heroes of Chinatown event, when you both

came and presented to Willie Davis. It was really an awesome event, and like how the community came together. And it was from kids to seniors, and just to learn about his impact, that Willie Davis has made in our area was really exciting, and I thought it was such a great thing to have in our center and just to highlight achievements of the Black community. Since obviously in Oakland we're housed with, right in downtown, and these communities definitely come together in this area. So I was really excited to meet, that you both are willing to do this interview. So thank you so much.

## **Starting the Organization**

**Pamela:** You talked a little bit about how the organization got started. And I was looking at your website, and on the [About Us](#) page, for [peoplematter.one](#), Consuela kind of talks about walking through Chinatown and feeling afraid, and I think that is something that I haven't really heard from a Black person walking through Chinatown—like how they feel—and so that was kind of eye-opening to me. I guess I'm interested in how the...what your thoughts were in starting this organization together and the kind of changes you'd like to see from the work you're doing.

**Consuela:** Yeah, definitely. I can answer that first and then I can pass it to Angela. Yeah. So our thoughts around getting it started was, because like I was saying earlier, no one was really talking about this. And even connecting it to my own personal experience is that again, I was in a lot of spaces where we were talking about activism within Chinese American spaces. We were talking about different things that, you know, the community that we were serving was in need of, and I think that at the same time what was being ignored was the huge undertone of anti-blackness. So I saw myself, even as a child, helping out what I see as my community, Chinatown—Chicago's Chinatown—and being a part of that, but yet still feeling like I'm an outsider in the sense of racial background. And in some ways, of course, I would never be Chinese American, of course that, but it was also feeling like I was... people put me in a box of not being a—particularly a community member, right? Which sparks a lot of conversations where we would end up talking to other Black American folks, or like Black folks in general who are feeling the same way, where they are fourth generation Chinatown residents, and they're having these conversations around, “Hey! I still don't feel quite accepted into the community,” which sparked us to...[start] interviewing people having these conversations, as well as doing our work about other folks who may be neglected, that share Chinese American or Chinese immigrant identities, who may not also be talked about in our own personal Chinatown.

**Angela:** Definitely, and I mean, I think that what you point to Pamela is something that I think a lot of people feel the same, because I mean oftentimes in our Chicago Chinatown—but from what I understand, many Chinatowns—Black and Asian tensions are very high right now, and so a lot of Chinatown community members will be very scared of Black people, and be surveilling them. In our community, we have like the Chinatown Gun Club, the Chinese Gun Club, the Chinatown Neighborhood Watch, that really ramped up since 2020 to do a lot of police surveillance of Black folks, and, you know, [there's] like lots more violence and violent rhetoric since 2020, I think a lot of people, Chinese people, are scared of Black people but people don't think about, “How do Black community members feel?” with all these tensions. And I think that, when we were doing Black Heroes of Chinatown, we really wanted to center how our Black

community members feel, and making sure that they're safe and protected and adding that narrative to it. But I mean, I think that ultimately the project that we're doing is a project of dismantling white supremacy, and we very much use Consuela's framework. Consuela is our lead racial justice organizer-strategist. I always say she's the brains and I'm the brawn. So she really is the genius behind all of it. But she teaches these unlearning anti-blackness classes with her framework: white supremacy is based on anti-blackness, xenophobia and capitalism. And so, when we do Black and Asian relations it's very strategic, because communities of color are pit against each other by white supremacy so that no one can really get that much.

We see that in the high school campaign, where Chinatown wanted a high school, and the Chicago Public Schools was basically saying, "You can maybe get a high school, but you'd be taking away from the Black community, and that would be like your only option," right? So this is an instance where no one really wins, or if people do win, it's not really to the full extent of what people need and deserve, and it's specifically pitting Black and Asian communities against each other. And so I think that when we try to bridge these things, we're trying to say, "No, we can ask together as communities of color, living together, working together. We all have the same needs, and we can ask for more, and we can ask for all of our needs together." And, I think that working across these communities... It's very strategic to work together to build a stronger united front so that we can ask for more things.

**Pamela:** Thanks, Angela. I think just hearing those other perspectives of how people feel being in the area, I think it is very empowering, and my hope is we actually all realize that we can get more if we come together, so that's always the goal.

### **Other Programs Offered**

**Pamela:** So you talked a little bit about the kind of unlearning anti-blackness in communities, and you have other programs as well. People Matter really just kind of encompasses so many different aspects that are really critical in bettering people's lives. And so I was wondering if, Consuela, if you want to talk about these other programs.

**Consuela:** Definitely, definitely. So a lot of our programs are through an anti-racism lens that we try to put and implement into it. So we have our community language program, which focuses on people learning English, but also people who are interested in learning Cantonese. So we have one class for heritage speakers connecting people to their heritage as well as their history, as well as language. And then we also have our other portions like Cantonese One-on-One which is connecting community members of color, and everyone of color is allowed in; we try to make sure it's POC friendly, of course. But yeah, just making sure people are able to learn Cantonese one-on-one and speak Cantonese. I think that one thing I want to highlight, the importance of it is that one of the biggest things when we talk to community members about why [they] weren't interacting with people outside the race, or interacting with Black folks specifically, or even Brown folks specifically, the [biggest] thing that people say was language barrier. Even Black folks said language barrier. Latinx folks were saying language barrier. So what we wanted to do is create a class or courses where people can be able to bridge those gaps and interact with each other. And so part of that is a dual immersion version of it as well, where the Cantonese speakers or Cantonese learners are coming together with people who are English learners and are teaching each other bits and pieces of the language, and communicating with one another, and building up that relationship. I think one of the joyous moments that I have

remembered, is like during a graduation. We have someone, one of our students, who is like a bright bubbly mother, who is learning English. She sees one of the Black folks in the community that was in part of her class, just like, "Yeah! You helped me speak better English", and then the Black person responds to her and says, "Yes, you helped me with my Cantonese, thank you so much." I think that that was one of the moments of using this anti-racism lens—like learning from one another, building that community.

Another thing I would point to is our Garden Fellows program, which is teaching, majority, kids of color about environmental injustice in their communities and doing it, again, in the anti-racism lens. So we have majority Black kids, Chinese kids come together, having these conversations around how environmental injustice impacts their communities? About why it's important to be good stewards of land. Why is it good to take care of one another? Who is your community? Why is it important to build community across racial lines? And so we have kids between eleven and eighteen, having these deep conversations, and really trying to bridge those gaps. But people who live—in Chicago, we're extremely segregated. So your neighbor right across the street could be a whole different community. But it's so racially segregated that you just, people just don't really interact, even though they're like, maybe like ten feet down the street or whatever. And so one of the ways we try to do this is like making sure these kids that we're bringing in and we're teaching, are talking to people, talking to one another, bridging the cultural gap, and really trying to learn from one another and dismantling racial stereotypes that they have both for Chinese people, or Asian Americans as well as for dismantling the stereotypes that people have for Black Americans or Black people, right?

**Angela:** I'll just add one more, which is working with seniors. Actually in the 60s, Chicago built a lot of public housing projects that are majority low income and Black and a lot around the Chinatown area, So in the 60s, the population of Black folks increased by like 3-400% over that decade. And so, since the 60s, you've had a lot of like Black and Chinese people living in proximity, but always segregated like Consuela mentioned. Now we have one of the Section 8 buildings in Chinatown. It used to be all Black, and now it's like 70% Chinese seniors. And so a lot of the people, they live together, but there's a language barrier. There's a cultural barrier. There's tensions, even within the housing community and the apartment complex. And so, we were invited to come in to basically ease those racial tensions. And then we found out there are a lot of housing conditions that everyone had troubles with, and so we were doing more tenant organizing, and we were able to establish a sort of temporary, democratically elected council of both Black and Chinese residents to work together to advocate for better housing conditions. So there's work like that as well, that is very much issue-area based. But also, you need to bridge those racial tensions in order to even get to the issue.

### **Anti-Blackness Class Format/Layout & Lessons Learned**

**Pamela:** I know that Consuela, you teach the anti-blackness program. This is something I would love to see happen at OACC. For people who would be unable to attend this program, I was hoping you could talk a little bit about kind of the layout of it, and some things you've learned from it that you found to be really useful to people to help them kind of think about this anti-blackness mentality that we that is often present in our society.

**Consuela:** Yeah definitely. So we switched it to calling it "Unlearning anti-blackness". But yeah, I can just go over a little bit about the framework of what I use. So a lot of this is due to reasons I had, and also a lot of critical thinking as well, and I did a lot of theory building on what I feel like would be the best way into dismantling racism or dismantling the system that we have at first, that we have in society. So I [will] go over some of the principles or some of the steps that I feel

are the best things to take when someone is tackling their own internalized anti-blackness as well as tackling their own internalized racism.

Step one, admitting to a problem. We live in the white supremacists's system—no one can escape it really. So many times I run into folks that don't necessarily admit that we have a problem. We have a race problem in the United States. So like we have race problems globally right, and admitting that people are affected by systematic oppression, admitting the historical traumas that people face. Our job is to unlearn it and become less racist and less problematic within ourselves as well, so that our neighbors and our community can experience, you know, better instances of ourselves, right?

I would say step two would be coming to terms with your own personal fall on the racial hierarchy and your own racial identity. So coming to terms with where you fall on the racial hierarchy is super important—I think someone had brought up a conversation with me and Angela, maybe some months ago, and they said that they don't believe in comparative suffering. But it's not comparative suffering, or we're talking about hierarchical things right. Some people have it better. Some people have it worse. Some people, you know, have it worse than the worst. So I think that just acknowledging that as well and building that up, too.

And then, thirdly, building your sense of self. It's so important, and I say that because it's good to connect to your own race, your own cultural heritage, and your own, like, your background. And I think that this is important to take that step in connecting to unlearning racism, but also unlearning also like anti-blackness, because sometimes folks will stay on the step of identity stuff or understanding where they fall on the racial hierarchy, and they just leave it at that. But, they don't go to their own [connections], finding their own connectedness within our own community, and find their own connectedness, and how they show up in the world, and being very secure in that identity. Even with that I will also warn against taking too much of like a, and not taking too much of like a maybe a narcissistic view of it, too. So sometimes what I see with people [who] are in that third principle or third step of unlearning racism or unlearning anti-Blackness. They and like connecting this with their own race and culture, they become like supremacists in that aspect, being like, “my culture is the best,” “my history is the best.” And that's not what i'm saying [to] come out with. Come out with a security of being secure in who you are and your cultural background.

And i'll say number four would be like, Learn other People's histories, learn other people's, cultural and historical oppressions. And I think that goes into that too like Learn to love other people's, histories and stuff like that, so that you can be able to empathize with folks and really understand what you're talking about, especially if you either start doing work with teaching other people to unlearn their racism and unlearn their anti-blackness, but also to have people to also for your own personal understanding. And, I would say, also build and reconcile relationships with those who have been impacted by your racism or your anti-blackness. With that said, sometimes we hurt people unintentionally, right? Sometimes we say things that we don't mean, and that's like within racism and outside of racism depending on other folks who may have marginalized identities. With that said We have to remedy and try to reconcile and provide space for a healing for those that we have impacted, intentionally, unintentionally; consciously, and unconsciously—subconsciously—with our racism. And then, lastly, I would say, seeing people of a different race as an extension of yourself, so getting to that place where it doesn't matter if that person is a different race or a different cultural background, that you also see them as an extension of your personal self, that you see them as people who deserve liberty, life, and justice, and you're able to recognize them as whole entire people, and not just

individuals that you see, or the others or someone to have sympathy with—that you're truly empathizing with these folks and these human beings.

So that's like what framework I teach from the, from the most part, and I try to do it in a way where people can feel more connected to the mission that we're teaching that people matter, and the mission that we teach out of, but as well as like trying to have, some type of steps to take. Of course, these steps can be taken out of order. they're not like written in stone, but I do think these are things that are should be taken, and stuff that should be taken to move forward into developing your own personal theory of change, but also your own sense of unlearning and your own journey of unlearning your own internalized racism and anti-blackness

**Angela:** Yeah, so I just want to add something, just because I hear it very often when Consuela talks in workshops or classes to folks to East Asians, most of the time, about acknowledging the racial hierarchy, or that, East Asians, I use the term yellow, are higher on the racial hierarchy, I think a lot of people get very defensive. They say, “Oh, but we go through things,” “You know, there's a lot of anti Asian sentiment, anti chinese sentiment. There's a model minority myth that says that we don't go through things,” and while that is true, I think that is hard for people to hold space for both; that as well as being higher on the racial hierarchy and benefiting from white supremacy due to being lighter, and also, the historical relationship between, yellow people and white people being like more proof which they are in a more privileged position. And even the stereotypes that come to, you know, like East Asians and Southeast asians to some extent is like it's more positive, in a sense, and maybe like you're overly smart, or you know you have Confucian, wisdom, but it's not the same as like with Black folks where those stereotypes are more animalistic, dehuman like unhuman. And I think that coming to that, coming to that—basically like Consuela was saying that acknowledgement of that racial hierarchy and all of the problems here is something that a lot of people have a hard time doing. And so I just want to emphasize it's not saying that we don't acknowledge our own specific issues and our own oppressions—lack of language access, other issues—but it also means holding space for both. And I also think that the way that Consuela teaches it, she doesn't call people out, and she really comes meet people where they are. A lot of our students are Chinese immigrant mothers, and she'll take a different approach to that than talking about police violence to someone who is very fluent in Black Lives Matter and all these kinds of movements, but it's very much a different approach. We still get a lot of parents; a lot of our immigrant mothers are a huge part of our base and come out and talk about race issues with us.

**Consuela:** Oftentimes it is in a small group setting where we do workshops, it's in a larger group setting, so our workshops are more activity driven and healing based. Usually we have both Black and Asian groups come together, or even if it is just Asian groups that are coming together, we try to focus on healing and asking people to be honest and ask those hard questions that they've been thinking about, specifically when it comes to race.

### **Success of People Matter**

**Pamela:** Thanks for sharing that. And I like that point that you made Angela, it's like, yes, *and* also this. You have to hold space for everybody's personal [experiences], where they're coming from. I also really thought the language programs that you offer where it's not just English learning, but also Cantonese learning was so smart because it values everyone. You know. It's not just this emphasis of learning English, people literally coming together through language to find a common ground. I have a Filipino artist collective, and sometimes we've talked about how I don't speak Tagalog—I'm Filipina—but other people in the group do—and you know, when we talk in the US it's like we're using the oppressor's language. You know this English language, which

has words that are created to uphold white supremacy. So I'm curious where you feel like your organization people matter where it's been really successful, and I would love to hear about that.

**Consuela:** Yeah, definitely. I feel like our organization has been really successful in pushing our own Chinatown to have these conversations. When we first started, people did not want to have these conversations. They told us, "you guys are too political." But now we're causing our Chinatown to have these deep conversations around race as well as outside communities to have these deep conversations about race within our local Black communities and within our local Brown communities to have these conversations about race, and how they show up. And I think that what has also happened is that we started to get more organizers and more nonprofit folks coming in to be like, "How can we dismantle it in our nonprofits, in our industries?" And I think that's something that we have been doing really good with. And I think that another thing I would say is building leadership right. We build leadership with a lot of our community members, a lot of the people in our schools that we work with. We build leaders with a lot of our volunteers. And so we try to build leaders, because one thing we want to do is teach people how to fight for themselves too. And we want to give them empowerment, to fight for themselves; and to take ownership of their life; and to have self determination; and to figure out what do they need and what do the community need? And we want to give them a voice to do that, and fight for them when they can't, but also give them encouragement to fight for themselves as well. So I think that we have been doing a good job with that. We've been around for only two years, basically, and we've been trying to revolutionize our own Chinatown as well as surrounding communities.

**Angela:** Yeah, I think that we are really setting an example of what solidarity can look like. And I would say that I think that Black and Asian, or Black and yellow solidarity, even though it does have a historical presence—and it does have a much stronger background in Oakland than it is in Chicago—I do think that it's very much not visible in the mainstream, and it's not something that I think many Black folks feel. It's not like something that people are like, "Oh, yes, we, our communities, have this history of solidarity like I feel safe behind you." I don't think that is very present at all. I think that, like historically, even though there have been movements, I don't think that solidarity has reached its full potential at all, and there is still so much work to be done that it almost feels like we're at the very beginning. And so I think that, you know, like I do think that this is sort of like a pioneer of solidarity work and what it could look like. A lot of folks, I hear mention, Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama. Of course, while they have been like amazing, amazing things, I think that they, as individuals, were very much committed to Black liberation. But in terms of like a whole entire community, you know, like schools, churches like the community together, like like coming together and saying, "We are in solidarity with our Black and Brown community members," is a much different endeavor, to galvanize leadership among the community rather than as an individual, to wholeheartedly commit to liberation of everyone. I think that that's something that has not really been done in many instances. Of course it has been done, but I think that that's something that I think we're really doing a good job, doing the steps right, building at the speed of trust. Just just doing it.

### **Inspiring People Who Feel Disempowered/Uninspired**

**Pamela:** Two years? Your organization is two years old?

[Angela nods yes]

**Pamela:** That is exciting, because I mean ten years from now, eight years from now to see what will come of it is really, that's great. Well, I'm, I just can't wait to see what that looks like. It gives



me hope for the future. I am curious—for people who often feel disempowered, how do you...do you have ideas of how to inspire those people to become change makers, you know, active individuals to create change in their own community? I'd love to hear any tips you might have about that.

**Consuela:** Mhm definitely. For those who may be a little nervous of stepping up, I would say that find the power within yourself. Courage is needed in this line of work and sometimes you may surprise yourself, and I think that with a little bit of courage and a little bit of power, empowerment, and a little bit of confidence can go a long way. [In] dismantling a lot of these systems, sometimes it takes one person just to speak up to have a domino effect to have other people speak up. I think that sometimes it's courage. And don't get me wrong, sometimes I get a little nervous speaking up about those, because sometimes I'm the only Black person in the room, and I'm like, "Oh, I'm not going to be that person." I think that there's nothing wrong with being that person. I think that finding the power that's within yourself, and having confidence in yourself and your ability, and even knowing what you know and what you don't know—you can be like, I'm not sure about this, I don't know too much about this—and educate yourself on that too. Build your personal and internal power, and also educate yourself on things that you wish you were taught and you wish that you could teach others.

**Angela:** Yeah, I would say it's definitely a mix of personal agency and will, and desire for community. I think also finding a good community to do it with is so important. I think that in an individualist world, oftentimes we put a lot of burden on individuals. Even though there is free will— I definitely believe in individual power—sometimes, when something goes wrong people talk about self-care. But there is also community care where sometimes, individuals can't do it alone and community members need to step up to support. I think that just the love for community, building community, and being able to make those connections, genuine connections, is a really big inspirational point. And maybe that reminds me of the kids. I get a lot of energy from working with our youth—you really have someone that you need to be responsible for, that you need to protect and take care of. So I just feel finding that sense of community, whether it's for elders, whether it's with youth, or really connecting to those folks in your community is really important.

### **How to Stay Engaged and Inspired**

**Pamela:** Thank you for sharing how you get inspired to keep going. I am also curious for Consuela, what do you find to help keep you engaged in the work that you do?

**Consuela:** I think that what keeps me engaged is seeing people's smiles and seeing people actually start thinking about how to show up in the world, and seeing their minds change. I think that sometimes it can be so hard, because sometimes we're hitting a brick wall, and it just seems like folks are not getting it, and sometimes it just can feel so difficult. But then, sometimes, when you get that moment where one person's like, "I get it, and you're like "You get it?" and they're like, "Yes, I get it now!" it just washes over you; this is the reason why I'm doing the work. I'm doing it to change minds and changing minds is not easy. If it was easy, then we would all be on the same accord all the time. Sometimes when we work with our Chinese immigrant mothers. They can sometimes say things are anti-black, but then sometimes throughout our conversations, they change their opinion. They say, like, "No, Black lives *do* matter." Something they wouldn't say a year ago, something they don't even stay in front of me, today, on x, y, z day they're saying "Black lives matter," and they get it. And then they tell other people about it, and they explain to people in Mandarin, or Cantonese, or Taishanese, talking about what they learned, and it's like, "Yes, you're becoming a leader!" So I think that's

something that really touches my heart when it comes to doing this work and that keeps me going and keeps me excited and connected to why it's so important, so very, very important to do this work.

### **Addressing Anti-Asian Violence and the Problem of Police Surveillance**

**Pamela:** Yeah, I mean, that's like real real change that you're seeing. It's exciting. That's awesome.

In Chinatown we have had more police surveillance as requested by the different chambers and stuff, and a lot of business owners feel safer and stuff like that [with increased police presence]. And obviously it's very problematic, this relationship with the police. And so, how have you been addressing this topic in your own area, around police surveillance or police involvement in the Chinatown community?

**Angela:** Um. Well, one thing that we've been doing is of course, talking about the root issues. Our alderman is pretty proactive, and when having community meetings, bringing together the voices, like the businesses and the people who do want more police, but also bringing us in, so that we can talk about the root issues and bring the mental health organizations in. We do have a really strong advocate like in our alderman, but I also think that in turn, there have been way more shootings that are more highly visible than ever before in our Chinatown. In one of those public safety meetings, in December 2021—it was near Christmas—and there was another shooting [in the area] There was a huge community public safety meeting, and what we tried to do was bring in the Black organizations who work on the Southside with us, who are really strong in their community to just be at the table...giving them a seat at the table.

When Consuela teaches the English class in the community language program, we will talk about police surveillance, and we will talk about what the alternatives to the police are. But the way we will probably say it is not like, "Tackle your anti-blackness!" It would be more like, "You know, the police are really busy, and this may take their time away. You know, you don't always call them when you see a Black person." We also just break down how, even when there is more police that doesn't always solve crime. Consuela has a workshop about why more police doesn't solve crime, because you know, in a lot of Black communities there are more in place, and that doesn't really do much to the crime, if not exacerbating it. So we use workshops, community meetings, one on one conversations and just really try to be that alternative.

And then, of course, like the garden program is a violence prevention program. So we're trying to have more data to show that violence prevention programs that work with Black kids are effective, and they're effective not within five years, ten years, they can be effective within one year or two years, if you really invest.

**Pamela:** Thanks, Angela. Consuela, is there anything you wanted to add? ,

**Consuela:** Yeah, Angela touched on my workshop. I just go over how sometimes, adding more police does not stop crime. And then another way that we talk about. It, too, is sometimes we, even in English classes, or maybe even with individuals, we give alternatives to calling the police as well. We try to give alternatives to saying, "Maybe you can call us if something is happening. Call someone from our organization and we can show up if it's just something that has to do with someone loitering, or someone not really doing anything wrong, they're just like just there." "You can call us, if you feel like something is happening," and stuff like that. We just leave our lines open, instead of involving the police directly. Sometimes some things can just be

talked about individually, right? Some things can be like, “Hey, excuse me. Can you get off my porch?”, or some of this can be like, “Hey, I would appreciate it if you wouldn't blah blah blah.” Some of these are conversational things, and I think that sometimes people are really scared to have that confrontation. I think that there's also the assumption that Black people are confrontational, or that people who are perceived to do more crime are confrontational. If people can tackle that and really just talk to people—if you ask people, they will just definitely answer honestly and be like, “Okay.” Most people are reasonable people, so they will just leave. Those are some other ways that we try to tackle people like consistently calling the police or people who are consistently trying to make Chinatown our Chinatown. Specifically in Chicago [Chinatown], it is definitely a police neighborhood. The police are down the street from us and they're very much involved. We have a lot of surveillance happening in Chinatown, but we're trying to start these conversations around, “What do they really help?” We know who did it because we have a camera, but it doesn't really stop the crime from happening. What can we do to stop this crime?

## Ending

**Pamela:** Okay, cool. Thank you for kind of relaying what you do, and these steps into these conversations. It's really helpful to me, and I really enjoyed talking with you two. It was really inspiring, and so I really appreciate the time you took to have this dialogue.

[outro music plays - *Lundstroem: The perfect corporate podcast intro*]

Let's Talk outro

**Stephanie:** This podcast was produced with the support of the Ginkgo Fund, the Asian Pacific Fund, and the Awesome Foundation. Wanna suggest future guests? Email us at [programs@oacc.cc](mailto:programs@oacc.cc).

[outro music concludes]