

Message from WIN's New Chairperson-Christina Pourarien



Photo of Christina Pourarien with black hair in curls wearing a light purple Korean traditional dress (hanbok) with dark purple flowers.

Greetings!

I am so thrilled, humbled, and honored to take part of the Washington Immigrant Network Business Resource Group leadership team. It is my great pleasure to serve as your current chairperson.

I have been a state employee for almost 24-years and have held many positions in numerous state agencies. Currently I serve as an Information Technology Services Division Executive Operations Manager for the State of Washington Employment Security Department (ESD).

I was born in Great Falls, Montana and moved to South Korea with my father and mother when I was six-months old. My family returned to the United States when I was a young child in the early 1980s.

Even though my father was born and raised in the United States. My mother and I learned to speak English together as well as try to assimilate to the American culture. As a child, living in dual worlds inside and outside of my home was very challenging, however, I was privileged to have a father who was our advocate, champion, and protector to help my mother, brother, sister, and me navigate living in the United States. He also helped us to transition into this new life and culture to provide us a safe space at home to continue our Korean culture, tradition, and roots as well as instilled in us that we must continue to speak our native language in the home. This was especially important for our father, as he did not want us to stop communicating with our maternal grandmother who also immigrated from Korea to America.

Honestly, my early childhood experience was difficult as I also struggle a lot to fit into a box that my teachers or friends wanted me to be in which made me feel very socially awkward. I felt I was an outsider and very invisible. I faced many challenges ranging from the initial cultural difference, food, and language barrier. I also had many difficulties understanding my own identify and finding a social group of my peers that would accept me because my homelife was vastly different than my other classmate.

I know that I was very privileged to be the first in my family to receive a formal education from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington to earn a bachelor's degree. My parents worked multiple jobs to ensure that I did not have to worry about the financial impact of obtaining my degree.

During college, I needed to find a summer job to help me save for my expenses at school. My mother took me to meet with a personnel officer so I could apply for a night custodian position. During my visit, a man walked towards my mom, and she smiled at him to share news that I would be working with her. He asked me if I wanted to apply for the night custodian position. I responded that I was looking for any job that will help me lessen the financial burden on my family while I was going to college. At that moment, he offered me an internship opportunity within his office. Again, I was privileged as I had an opportunity to have a wonderful mentor who happened to be the Director at General Administration. He mentored and helped me transition into the professional world.

After graduating from CWU, I really wanted to further my education by obtaining a master's degree in urban studies. However, due to the financial burden for my parents and the amount of loans I would need to apply for very overwhelming. My parents sacrificed so much for me that I knew that I needed to find my own path to achieve my career goal. I was offered a temporary clerk typist position at the Lottery and moved my way to the Seattle office for a permanent position. During this time, I was privileged to have the former director of the Washington State Lottery, Merritt D. Long, take me under his wings to help me navigate the unwritten rules working in a professional environment. Before joining the Lottery, I had an opportunity to meet with Lorraine Lee and I felt an instant connection. I was so fortunate and humble to have them as my mentors early in my state career. Their guidance and advice were most impactful moments in my professional career.

Fast forward to my first WIN meeting in 2020. In late 2019, I reached out to Lorraine Lee, to invite her to speak at Labor and Industries Asian American Pacific Islander Employee Resource Group May 2020 heritage event. During our first meeting, she shared information with me about WIN and encouraged me to attend a meeting. In late 2020, I attended WIN's Meet and Greet session and I instantly felt that I finally belonged and connected.

I continued to attend WIN's events and realized there are not a lot of stories about our many diverse cultures and ethnicities in the media. I learned a lot from members sharing their own immigrant stories and knew I belonged. Late 2020, Joanne Lee, previous WIN chairperson, asked me if I had an interest in volunteering my time and if I would like to share my immigrant story. I immediately was so humbled and honored for her asking me that I said yes, without realizing what I would be volunteering to do. I had this overwhelming feeling of belonging and connected with other members from Central and South America, North Africa, Sub Sahara Africa, Mexico, Caribbean, East & Southeast Asian, and Europe.

WIN gave me a purpose as each member had shared their unconditional support, showed how they cared for each other by opening their hearts and ears, listened to understand instead of judging. I felt like I belonged again and was no longer invisible. WIN members also helped me prepare for my current leadership role at ESD to become an inclusive leader that transforms teams and individuals with love, compassion, and empathy while considering individuals on their own unique skills and perspectives.

As the WIN chairperson this year, I commit to provide support to our immigrant communities, build strong partnership with other Business Resource Group, and promote WIN BRG.

If you are curious or feel you could benefit from our group, are an immigrant or ally, have a parent who is an immigrant, or want to learn more about our community, we encourage you to join us! Our group embraces you with open arms and hearts.

We also collect Immigrant Stories to highlight in our newsletter, social media, YouTube, and website. If you are interested in sharing your story, please visit this [page](#). We would love to read your story.

We also provide an opportunity for you to share your story during our membership meetings. If you are interested in sharing your story, please contact us at WIN@ofm.wa.gov. We love to meet you and listen to your story!

WIN welcomes you to attend our general members meeting on [August 2, 2022](#), from 12pm to 1pm via Zoom.

Please visit our [website](#) for more information.

Best wishes,

Christina
(Pronouns: She/Her)

Washington Immigrant Network Chair
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