

## **Young Survivors' Presentation to WTCHP-STAC, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023**

### **Statement by Winnie Yu**

My name is Winnie Yu, I am 28 years old and I was born and raised in Chinatown, New York City. On 9/11/2001, I was in class as a 1st grader at PS 124 on Division Street. I remember arriving at school for not too long before news of the incident was shared. I wasn't sure of what was happening at the time, but remember my teacher watching outside our classroom window as she spoke on the phone with the other school personnel. It's eerie... we had a pretty good view of the Twin Towers from our school, but all we saw that morning was a grotesque cloud of smoke. I remember our teacher then herding all of us into our school cafeteria to join the rest of the students. We were instructed to huddle away from the windows and notified that our parents had been contacted to pick us up. My mom worked at the Empire State Building at the time, I remember that she picked me up from school in a panic and brought me home. We sat as a family that afternoon in the evening watching the news as everything happened. Over the next several days, our school did not allow outdoor recess due to the dust and smoke present, and my parents rushed us home every evening after school. At that age, I did not really understand the impact of what had really happened that day. All I could understand at the time was that my family and everyone else in the neighborhood was scared.

Although I left New York for brief periods at a time for work, I have, for the majority of my life including now, been based in Manhattan, NYC. I now work as a Doctor of Physical Therapy. Although I am fortunate to not have any immediate health impacts, my father was diagnosed with Stage 4 Cancer in 2016. As a healthcare worker, I strive to help improve the lives of others every single day but have come to realize that there are sometimes factors that influence our health that can be beyond our control. Supporting a family member with terminal illness has not been easy. It takes a toll not only on the involved person, but his entire support system as well.

As a first responder in the hospital system during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I can wholeheartedly understand the urgency and need for supporting those who were at the front lines during 9/11. But we must not forget everyone else that was also in the vicinity exposed to the disaster. Implementation of a cohort that includes children who were living and/or going to school in Lower Manhattan on 9/11 would allow individuals, like myself and my family, have a chance of being recognized at the long term effects of the incident. Diseases and illnesses don't appear overnight. If we make the mistake of only capturing a snapshot of only a portion of the population at one point in time, we run into the chance of neglecting hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals that may have been affected. Children who are especially vulnerable to harm from environmental exposures, have a very long time in which to develop 9/11-related health impacts

I know for a fact that many of my peers that were also in school or living in Lower Manhattan during 9/11 are still living in or frequently visit NYC. I strongly encourage reaching out to local organizations that now can be easily contacted via social media, to connect with more young individuals that were located in Lower Manhattan during 9/11.