



2020 International ACAC Annual Awards

Rising Star Award

Aileen Lee

College Counselor

The Affiliated High School of Peking University

Xiaoyang Dong, Director of College Counseling at The Affiliated High School of Peking University, shares her nomination of Aileen for the Rising Star Award:

I have been a college counselor and department chair at The Affiliated High School of Peking University for the past four years where I have worked closely with Aileen Lee in establishing a unique scholarship program designed to address global college admissions inequality for refugee students and those from marginalized communities hit hard by the refugee flow as a result of the war in Syria that has been ongoing since 2011.

Aileen and I visited Jordan for two weeks to meet with UN staff, Jordanian government officials, NGO representatives, as well as to visit refugee camps, schools in camps, and refugee relief projects. After our first trip to Jordan, students lobbied our school administration to establish a scholarship program to bring disadvantaged students from Jordan with a lack of access to quality secondary education to finish their high school with us in Beijing. Aileen took the lead in quickly getting the program off the ground and within months going to Jordan to conduct the scholarship program outreach and selection of the awardees. The first scholarship recipient was a Syrian refugee whose family escaped the war on foot in 2012 and ended up in Zataari Camp, the second-largest refugee camp in the world. Getting a Syrian refugee student to Beijing was only a small part of a much larger dilemma. Aileen knew that the scholarship would be meaningless if it did not transition to a full 4-year college scholarship in a university with an English language curriculum. She spent months of sleepless nights scouring the International ACAC network contacts all over the world to find a 4-year full college scholarship for our refugee student. She assisted our student in applying for over 20 university scholarship programs. Only at the last minute did she and our student succeed in securing a 4-year scholarship at the satellite campus of Northwestern University in Qatar.

One scholarship does not change education inequality for the 70 million people in the world who have been forcibly displaced. Aileen's vision is to build our scholarship program as a model to be replicated by others. The scholarship program that she established was the first of its kind in all of China. She tirelessly advocates for other high schools in China to follow our model. She has fought to ensure that our scholarship program continues and is strengthened. She mentored our graduates to raise the issue of refugee scholarships at the universities where they are admitted. And many of our students have become advocates for refugee scholarships at institutions like University of St. Andrews, Brandeis, Swarthmore, and in the UC system. She has also planted the refugee scholarship seed in the International ACAC network at every chance she gets.

Aileen will always be a rising star for me in her dedication to opening the opportunity for post-secondary education to every student no matter the economic circumstances of their families or their documented or undocumented political status. She is distinguished by her commitment to public service, social justice, and addressing international unequal access to higher education.

International ACAC congratulates Aileen Lee on receiving the 2020 International ACAC Rising Star Award!