



*Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific  
Islander  
HERITAGE MONTH*

Mona Afary, Founder/Executive Director of the Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants.



***How do you identify within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?***

**While I'm not Asian American or Pacific Islander, I've built strong bonds with the Southeast Asian community over the past 20 years and relate to Cambodians as my second family.**

***How did you find your way to the Bay Area?***

**Originally from Iran, I came to the U.S. for higher education. It was in the Bay Area that I decided to study psychology and became deeply involved in the Iranian pro-democracy student movement, which fortunately led me to a life of community activism.**

***How has your heritage shaped the person you are today?***

**My Iranian background and close ties with Cambodian refugees whom I consider family, have significantly shaped my identity.**

***Who are the role models or mentors that have influenced you or helped guide you?***

**I draw inspiration from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and Narges Mohammadi—two Iranian human rights activists currently imprisoned by the Islamic Republic regime.**

***What brings you joy about your heritage and culture?***

**The following ethos and values that I have witnessed in my Cambodian and Southeast Asian family bring me joy : living in the moment and appreciating life, humility, authenticity, generosity, inclusiveness, forgiveness, and gratitude.**



**Behavioral Health  
Department**  
Alameda County Health