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# AFRICAN SERVICES

## COMMITTEE

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### In This Issue

Amerigroup Foundation Award

ASC Takes the Lead

Food Pantry Receives Funding

Harlem Nights Success!

ASC Hosts Girl Empowerment Retreat

ASC Defends Immigrant Rights

Fun in the City: Human Rights Watch Film Festival

Fun in the City: Mafrika Music Festival

ASC Ethiopia Volunteer Reports from the Field

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## ASC Walks in Solidarity for AIDS Walk 2012



ASC Walkers pose for a picture (L to R: Claire Thomas, Demetri Blanas, Dalit Kaplan, Corinne Champilou)

In 1986, as the HIV/AIDS crisis exploded, GMHC (Gay Mens Health Crisis) was looking for a way to get everyday people involved in the battle against the rapidly growing AIDS epidemic.

Since then, more than 845,000 people have walked in the New York City AIDS

Walk and have raised over \$122 million to combat HIV and AIDS.

African Services once again came together to fundraise for the 2012 AIDS Walk that took place on May 20, 2012. This year, our team's proceeds will benefit African Services' pediatric HIV program in Ethiopia. The Ethiopia clinics provide comprehensive HIV prevention, testing and care services to HIV positive and other vulnerable children, many of whom have been orphaned by AIDS or come from families living on less than \$1 a day. Donations will allow us to continue our treatment, provide crucial nutritional supplements--vitamins and milk, and extend support to even more children in need.

On May 20th, over 20 ASC supporters came out on a beautiful Sunday morning to walk in support of African Services' efforts in Ethiopia. "It was inspiring to see such a diverse crowd of so many thousands of people together and united to raise money and awareness for HIV/AIDS," shared Claire Thomas, ASC Attorney and a STAR Fundraiser for the ASC team.

New York City provided a beautiful backdrop for the thousands of walkers that flooded Central Park, including gorgeous 70 degree weather and blue skies. The only worries on Sunday were, according to Claire, "a little bit of sunburn."

Since the start of fundraising the African Services team has raised \$9,319 of our \$20,000 goal. Our work isn't over, and we can continue our fundraising efforts through June 15th, so if you were unable to join us to walk, then [visit our team page and donate](#) -- any amount is welcome!

Thank you in advance for your support, and consider joining us for AIDS Walk next year!

## News and Activities

### Amerigroup Foundation Honors ASC



Several staff members pose with representatives from the Amerigroup Foundation

On March 14, 2012, African Services Committee welcomed representatives from the Amerigroup Foundation to our offices to accept a check from the foundation in the amount of \$5,000.

African Services was honored to accept this award, and the money has already been put to good use assisting in the funding of our testing center programs. This, along with our food pantry and ESL programs, suffered debilitating cuts in the previous year. In fact, the African Services ESL program has been running on a shoestring for the last several months thanks to dedicated volunteer teachers and students.

"It doesn't take much to make a difference in the lives of our clients and in the work we do here at African Services," shared Kim Nichols, African Services' Co-Executive Director, "several programs had massive cuts and we rely on individual donations and small grants to help sustain them, as we search for other funding sources. So we're thankful for the contribution of the Amerigroup Foundation."

The Amerigroup Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Amerigroup Corporation. The foundation works to create healthy communities fostering access to care, encouraging safe and healthy children and families, and promotes community empowerment and healthy neighborhoods.

To learn more about the Amerigroup Foundation click [here](#). Also, consider making a donation to African Services that will help us keep these programs up and running during tough times -- [Donate here](#).

## ASC Takes the Lead on Viral Hepatitis in the African Community

On April 4th, African Services played host to the first ever meeting of the African Hepatitis B and C Subcommittee. Over 30 doctors, public



ASC & Mt. Sinai Partner for Hepatitis Screening Event

health professionals, community leaders, and outreach workers joined us at our offices to help develop a plan of action for fighting hepatitis both here in New York City and nationwide.

The hepatitis B virus affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, but disproportionately affects Asian and African peoples, both in their home countries and among those who live abroad. New York City's African community is no exception: over the years, rates of positive

tests for hepatitis B and C at our testing center have hovered around 20 and 15 percent, respectively.

While our viral hepatitis testing program was originally funded by the New York City Department of Health, budget cuts have forced us to find alternative solutions. African Services now collaborates with Mount Sinai Hospital's HONE Project to offer free testing, but in response to the gaps in testing, treatment, care and support that still remain, members of the committee have come together to continue the campaign against the virus.

At this month's meeting, members discussed the situation in their communities, sharing stories and their strategies for conducting outreach and educating others about the disease. "There was a consensus that more needs to be done to increase public awareness, screening, vaccination and linkage to care," explained Yahuza Siba of Ghana, a doctor at Harlem Hospital. Dr. Siba was selected as the group's leader, and afterwards expressed his optimism for the group's future projects: "It is our hope that through (raising) public awareness, we will be able to change health policy so health care providers will routinely offer hepatitis B screenings to African-born residents, as part of their appropriate health maintenance screen."

The committee will be expanding its activities in the months to come, with plans to raise awareness and secure more resources for hepatitis through meetings with key policymakers. The meeting, with its excellent turnout, also represents a step forward in the creation of a unified community of experts dedicated to combating the virus. Members are planning a community testing session at the Association of Senegalese in America for the upcoming month. As the group moves forward with its mission, we'll be sure to keep you posted about their efforts to keep New York's African immigrants healthy!

## Food Pantry Receives Much Needed Funding



The last year has been a difficult one for African Services Committee, and many other nonprofit organizations throughout New York City. Budget cuts came from every angle, and several African Services' programs took big funding hits, all while the demand for these services—largely due to the financial downturn—were increasing.

At African Services, the food pantry serves hundreds of our clients, regardless of their HIV status. Good nutrition provides the foundation for a healthy mind and body. For the last year, the food pantry has been operating on a tight budget, but thanks to donations and partnerships we have managed to sustain our level of service to clients.

As we progress through 2012, we have some GOOD news to share! Our persistence and hard work has paid off, as ASC received news from the New York State Department of Health that our food pantry will be receiving funding for the upcoming year. This funding will allow us to restore weekly food bag delivery for our HIV positive clients, as opposed to bi-weekly delivery. We can also begin re-opening enrollment into the program, allowing us to up the number of clients served by 20-30 families per week.

"This will make a huge impact in the community," said ASC food pantry coordinator Ndeye Gueye, "we can now expand the amount of clients we serve as well as the nutritional offerings, including hot meals."

For over 30 years African Services has served the African & Caribbean immigrant community offering a multitude of services including HIV, STD, and TB testing, case management, ESL classes and food pantry. It is this diversity of offerings that has allowed us to thrive. In 2011, African Services distributed over 2,600 food pantry pages and in 2012 and beyond we are looking to increase that impact and reach in the community.

## Harlem Nights/Visionaries at African Services Committee

On Thursday, May 3rd, African Services Committee opened its doors once again for its second Visionaries/Harlem Nights collaboration.

African Services partnered with Jennifer Samuel's newly established art promotion collective, Visionaries, to put on the Harlem Nights event. This series is meant to invite Harlemites and friends into our space, to become acquainted with the work we do here at African Services Committee, and also to provide a platform for up and coming artists and presenters.

For its second event, Harlem Nights featured excerpts from two documentary films in the works, allowing the filmmakers

to get feedback and promote their upcoming films. Both films focused on HIV/AIDS in America and made for an interesting and lively discussion with the filmmakers.

The first film, *Public Health Private Pain*, followed the lives of rural African-American women infected with HIV in the American South. This heartbreaking story of a family dealing with the ravages of HIV was riveting. Producer Lisa Desai was in attendance to discuss the film following the screening.

The second film, *25 to Life*, detailed the story of how one man's AIDS diagnosis-and his decision to keep that a secret-affected his entire family and community. Mike Brown, the director, was in attendance to answer questions from the audience.



The event drew almost 50 attendees, and showcased the work of both of these talented filmmakers. A lively Q & A session followed the screening of both films.

As always, a fantastic spread of food and beverages were available and DJ El Pete spun tunes late into the evening.

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To learn more about the artists you can visit their respective websites here:

Public Health/Private Pain: <http://www.publichealthprivatepain.com/>

25 to Life: <http://www.25tolifefilmsite.com/>

Stay tuned to the newsletter for upcoming *Harlem Nights* events.

## ASC Hosts Girls Empowerment Retreat for Young Immigrant Women

Since 1981, African Services has



Participants and leaders pose for a photo after the final theater performance.

welcomed thousands of newcomers from across the Diaspora, embracing their potential and providing a wide range of services to meet the needs of this growing and dynamic community. In 2011, African Services noticed a lack of support and funding for work with young African immigrant women, especially those who were brought here as children or born here to immigrant parents.

Thanks to a partnership established with the NYC AIDS Fund (NYAF) of the New York Community Trust in January 2012, ASC has been able to expand our services to include a new young women's outreach program that will enable us to educate, empower and motivate at-risk African Diaspora girls, young women and

mothers and train them to become mentors to their peers.

In collaboration with the NYAF and Theater of the Oppressed, African Services was able to hold its first ever Young Women's Empowerment Workshop on May 5th and 6th. Thirteen girls attended the workshop, and activities included empowerment and theater exercises--based on the Theater of the Oppressed model--that allowed the girls to participate in interactive, physical and playful games that can be used to investigate situations in which they feel they are denied basic rights. Through these exercises the girls can reveal problems and issues that they deal with on a regular basis (bullying, underage sex, disrespect, etc.) and then allows them to solve those problems as 'outside observers.' On Sunday, at the completion of the workshop, the girls had an opportunity to present these plays for parents and audience members, and were presented with certificates honoring their completion of the workshop.

"It was amazing to see the girls progress and open up to one another as the weekend went on and to see them perform. It gave them an amazing opportunity to meet other young women and opened up a dialogue that didn't previously exist," said Co-Executive Director Kim Nichols, who attended the closing ceremonies.

The project doesn't just stop there, but will continue through March 2013, thanks to the generous support of NYAF. The girls will continue to meet monthly to continue their friendship, grow in a supportive environment, and be provided with a safe space to learn and discuss the issues that are most important to them.

"It is our hope that through the continued meetings that the girls will grow together, become confident in themselves and one another, and become leaders in their communities and among their peers. We are grateful to NYAF for the opportunity to bring this project to life," stated project coordinator Stephanie Kaplan.

As the meetings progress, the girls will also assist in the writing and development of print outreach material for this specific target group including information on HIV and STD prevention--this demographic is one of the most vulnerable and HIV/STD infection rates continue to rise. Through this dynamic and vibrant health program we will address all the various issues that young women are facing, and provide a platform and an outlet for them to discuss and problem solve these issues together.

African Services is thankful for the participation of the New York Community Trust and other partners that have made this project possible, and we look forward to sharing updates with all of you as the group progresses and continues to grow.

## ASC Heads to DC in Defense of Immigration



ASC's Bakary Tandia joins the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) to protest in front of the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

With the Supreme Court hearing arguments on the constitutionality of Senate Bill 1070, Arizona's aggressive immigration law passed in early 2010, ASC's Bakary Tandia headed to Washington, DC for a major demonstration on the steps of the Supreme Court. Speeches by labor representatives, civil rights advocates, and religious leaders gave a passionate presentation of the many arguments against the bill. A large, diverse crowd of protesters greatly outnumbered the demonstrators in support of the bill.

SB 1070 authorizes law enforcement officers to demand papers from anyone whom they have

"reasonable cause" to suspect is an undocumented immigrant, a provision which many believe will lead to racial profiling and harassment. It also criminalizes undocumented immigrants' presence in the state and their pursuit of a job. For the time being, these provisions have been suspended by a US Court of Appeals due to a lawsuit brought by the federal government. The decision on SB 1070 will have major implications for similar laws in states such as Alabama, Mississippi, and Utah.

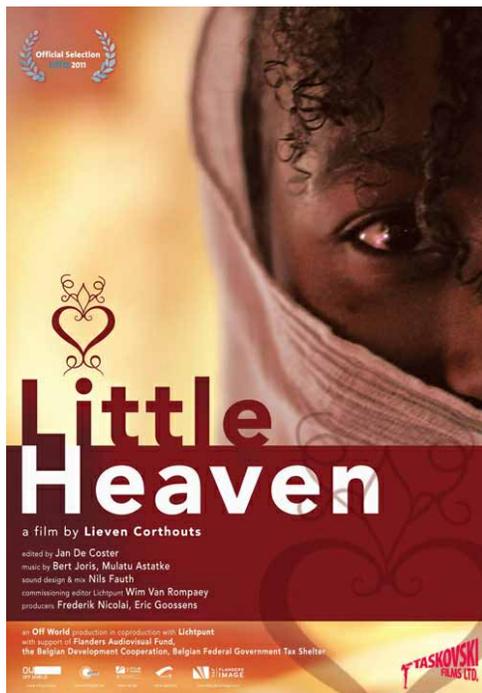
While no similar law is in danger of passing in New York in the near future, Tandia insists that a narrow focus on exclusively African or local issues is not enough. "The issue is not only a Hispanic issue," he argued. "This is about human dignity, human rights, and civil rights. The diversity of the (human rights) community must be shown, and anyone who cares about these rights should be involved."

Many speakers, including representatives from state governments, also addressed the universal impact of immigration reform, emphasizing the parallels between harsh new immigration laws and the segregationist laws overturned by an earlier generation in the civil rights movement. While lawyers focused their case on Arizona's lack of legal authority on matters of immigration, protestors focused on the more poignant issue of racial profiling - critics fear that the law will cause harassment and arbitrary arrests of those who "look un-American."

The justices' decision will be handed down in June; in the meantime, the advocacy will continue. "We have to really show the justices that the issue is serious and will affect real people," explained Tandia. "People are ready to fight to secure the rights they already have, and to continue to improve them."

## Fun in the City

Stephanie Kaplan, Communications Director recommends...



African Services Committee, in partnership with the Human Rights Watch Film Festival presents the New York Premiere of the documentary, Little Heaven.

"HIV is like somebody living in my body without paying rent. I don't know him and I don't like him." -Lydia, 13

Little Heaven follows the story of Lydia, an orphan at the Little Heaven orphanage in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. On her 13th birthday, a nurse at the orphanage breaks the news to her that she is HIV positive. Through her eyes we experience the struggles and triumphs of Lydia as she comes to terms with the diagnosis and continues to live her life.

A Q & A with the filmmakers will follow each screening!

**When:** Monday, June 25th (4 pm), Tuesday, June 26th (6:30 pm) & Wednesday, June 27th (9 pm)

**Where:** Film Society of Lincoln Center - Walter Reade

Theater (165 West 65th Street, New York, NY)

To purchase tickets visit the Human Rights Watch Film Festival site here. Or visit the Lincoln Center Theater site here.

Watch the Little Heaven Trailer below:



Little Heaven - Official Trailer

**Aida Diallo-Diagne**, HOPWA Housing Coordinator recommends...



Burkinabe Entertainment presents the 6th Annual Mafrika Music Festival. This festival has been growing in popularity and attendance every year, and this year is no different! With major musical acts from across the continent of African and the globe, it is sure to be a fun and entertaining day! Even better...it's FREE, so you have no excuse not to be there!

**When:** Sunday, June 24th (Noon to 7 pm)

**Where:** Marcus Garvey Park (120th Street & 5th Ave)

Fantastic food from Yatenga Bistro & Bar will be on sale, and a rockin' after party at the Shrine World Music Venue will follow.

To find out more, visit the Shrine website [here](#).

Check out this fun video made from last year's Mafrika Music Festival!



MAFRIKA MUSIC FESTIVAL - 2011

## ASC Ethiopia Volunteers Report from the Field



In early 2012, ASC Ethiopia welcomed Peter and Hinda Schnurman to Ethiopia as volunteers.

They have been blogging about their adventures with ASC and in Ethiopia - ["Somewhere in the World With Hinda and Peter Schnurman"](#)

Check out their blog and follow them as they live and work in Ethiopia!

<http://www.peterandhindas.blogspot.com/>

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