



AFRICAN SERVICES

COMMITTEE

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Welcome to 2013!



Dear Friends,

2013 is well underway. With the Presidential election behind us, Congress and the Executive Office can finally move ahead with immigration and health care reform. Both of these issues are at the heart of what we do here at African Services Committee. Our

staff is already feeling the brightening effects of President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals executive order, whereby youth who meet eligibility criteria can apply for a Green Card and work authorization. This is changing young lives, and ASC's strong legal department has been right here helping young immigrants apply.

With this, comes the opportunity and need for stronger English language and literacy skills. ASC's English as a Second Language program is abuzz with new students and new volunteer teachers. The food pantry has grown exponentially this year with further grant funding, and the nutrition health education and cooking classes offered rival anything on the Food Network. Case management has scaled up their mental health counseling services. ASC's housing program placements are at an all-time high. Our infant mortality reduction program has evolved to provide increased breastfeeding advocacy and education. And our testing center has parlayed CDC support for viral hepatitis screening and access to treatment into near-weekly off-site screenings at other African fraternal organizations, businesses, mosques, and churches. Our partnership with several research institutions and placements of clinical fellows and medical students at ASC has generated new research opportunities and publications for African Services.

Our Ethiopia programs now support 5 HIV/TB and reproductive health clinics, in diverse regions of the country. It's shaping up to be a memorable year!

Grant support for our programs is strong, but we rely on our friends and supporters to help with operating costs. You've increasingly been there for us. Know that this makes all the difference in the world. We thank you. Here is to a happy, healthy and prosperous 2013 for us all!

Best--

Kim Nichols
Co-Executive Director

Ethiopia Update: 5th Clinic Opens in Hawassa



2012 wasn't just a big year for our US-based operations, it was also a big year for our Ethiopian-based programs as well. We were able to begin distributing ARV treatment directly from our clinics thanks to the support of the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, and although we were experiencing a budget shortfall at the end of the year we were able to survive thanks to YOUR support. With 2012 in our rearview mirrors we move into 2013 with our eyes towards the horizon.

Firstly, we are proud to announce the opening of our 5th clinic in the Ethiopian city of Hawassa, located 270 km south of Addis. This clinic's existence is thanks to the GENEROUS support of Castel Wineries/BGI Ethiopia.

This new clinic will serve a population that up to this point has been unable to access HIV testing and treatment assistance. The clinic, consisting of a staff of 6, will be providing HIV prevention outreach, HIV counseling and testing, reproductive health and family planning assistance to the local urban community and surrounding areas. Since its opening it has already served over 3,000 members of the community.

We are excited to announce its opening, and the expansion of ASC to an area in such desperate need.

Stay tuned to future newsletters and our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages as several staff members are traveling in March to tour the clinics and will be providing LIVE COVERAGE of the clinics and work being accomplished.

News & Activities

NYAF-Funded Girls Empowerment Camp a Success



As we near the one-year mark of our inaugural young immigrant women's program, we can't help but look back on the past twelve months and marvel at the progress and success that has occurred since the program's inception. In March 2012, the New York Community Trust and New York City AIDS Foundation (NYAF) approved an African Services proposal that established a young immigrant women's support program at African Services. This program allowed us to create an environment for young African and Caribbean

immigrant women to come together in fellowship -- and fun -- and to support one

NYAF-Funded Girls Empowerment Camp a Success (cont.)

another as a group as we discussed and dealt with topics ranging from school to boyfriends/sexual health to fashion and more. The girls named themselves the NYC D.I.V.A.S. (Dynamic. Independent. Vivacious. Amazing. Sophisticated.).

The NYAF-supported program allowed for African Services staff to meet with the young women one weekend day each month, and staff were able to educate and mentor the girls on a variety of topics including education, health, college planning and more. The girls even began an [online blog](#) that gives them the ability to share their struggles, successes and passions with the other young immigrant women around the world.

On February 24th, we hosted an African Women's Career Panel and College Prep seminar. We were honored to have ten amazingly talented and dedicated women come and share their diverse experiences -- from growing up "African" in America, to choosing a college, and forging their path towards their respective careers.

Panelists

Lilian Ajayi, Founder of Global Connections for Women Foundation

Arao Ameny, Journalist

Stephanie Arthur, Non-Profit Professional and Community Organizer

Catherine Mbewe, Healthcare Professional and College Professor

Divine Muragijimana, Marketing Professional and Community Advocate

Ijeoma Mbamalu, Founder of MUI - The PR Company

Wadzanai Mhute, Multimedia Producer and report

Nekpen Osuan, Financial Analyst and Community Organizer

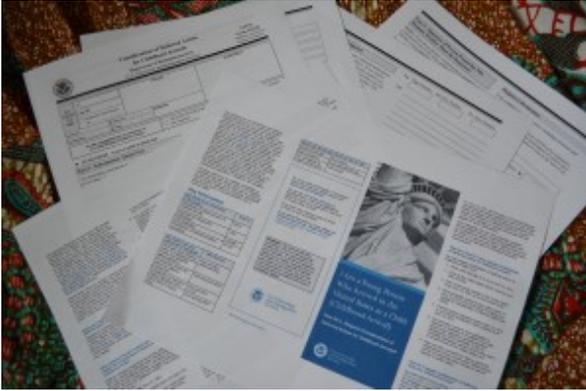
Theara J. Ward, Performing Artist & Choreographer, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation

It was so wonderful to hear their amazing and inspiring stories, and it was obvious that the girls were moved and inspired in their own right.

We were also honored to have the participation of Katie Korhonen, a college admissions counselor from the Dwight School. Katie's career began as a college admissions counselor at NYU, and she was able to share invaluable information with all the girls about what they needed to do to prepare for the college application process including advice on choosing curriculums, which standardized tests to take, and best practices for writing their entrance essays. It is never too early for our girls to be thinking about the college application process, and we were so pleased to have her insight into the process.

We are also pleased to announce that thanks to the assistance of ASC staff and Katie's guidance, one of our NYC DIVAS members, Danielle, was admitted to Colby-Sawyer College on scholarship! She is still awaiting replies from her other college choices, but we are so proud of her and can't wait to see where she finally attends university in the Fall.

Legal Team Assists Hundreds in Applying for DACA



As the debate for comprehensive immigration reform rages on Capitol Hill, thousands of immigrants are taking advantage of Barack Obama's executive order, passed on June 15th, 2012. DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, allows eligible young, undocumented immigrants the ability to apply and attain a temporary work authorization while they are pursuing education, serving in the military, or working to attain their GEDs. With this authorization, applicants can apply for a social security number, Medicaid, state identification and a driver's license.

On September 20th, African Services Committee began offering assistance in applying for Deferred Action. These Deferred Action Clinics provided free legal counsel to anyone who was deemed to meet DACA eligibility criteria. During the clinics, staff attorneys were able to meet with clients privately and discuss their options and pathways to legalization of status.

"Many of the people we see have never spoken to an immigration attorney, so they don't know their options," explains staff attorney Jessica Greenberg. "Often, within the first 15-20 minutes of a meeting, we can determine whether they are eligible for other immigration relief that is also a pathway to citizenship, like Special Immigrant Juvenile Status."



Columbia Law Students assisting with the DACA clinic pose for a photo.

In only 4 short months, the African Services legal staff has assisted in the filing of over 120 DACA applications from clients originating from Mali, Niger, Senegal, The Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Zambia, and the Caribbean Islands. All of the legal services provided were completely FREE to the client, outside of the actual application filing fee.

In the case that a client does not qualify for DACA, African Services Committee also offers nominal fee legal services. These services are open to anyone who is in need of assistance - Africans and others alike. There is a dire need in the community for quality and affordable legal assistance, as we have seen an increase in predatory legal practices. Our lawyers are able to assist clients with a variety of immigration related issues, and we have already seen the demand growing exponentially since the programs inception. For more information regarding our nominal fee legal program please contact immigration@africanservices.org.

--Kelly Gilbert

ASC Staff Generosity Knows No Borders



Our staff members are some of the most dedicated and hard-working individuals, and not only dedicate their careers and time to helping those here in our offices in New York City, but also abroad.

Family Case Management Supervisor, Yvonne Mbewe-Palmer, began her New Year by serving as a social work volunteer for several weeks in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic with [Project Esperanza](#). Project Esperanza is an organization that aims to alleviate the myriad stressors impacting Haitian citizens living in the Dominican Republic.

Yvonne took her skills to the Caribbean country, and counseled young girls experiencing sexual abuse and trauma. In addition, she assisted in the creation of an educational curriculum focused on developing English language skills, co-facilitated self-defense workshops for female students, and created dance/music routines that promoted self-esteem and growth with the student population.



Yvonne (far right) poses with two young girls enrolled in the Project Esperanza program.

Yvonne was able to witness first-hand the oppressive circumstances that Haitian refugees experience, and for that short time frame attempted to provide a reprieve from the impoverished conditions surrounding the community. Yvonne to stay involved with Project Esperanza in the future, and may possibly return this summer for additional volunteer opportunities.

ASC Heads Down Under “Creating New Futures for All”



ASC Staff Attorney, Claire Thomas, headed to Australia with her former law professor to present and participate in a conference dedicated to the protection of children's rights as they relate to immigration. See below for a fascinating recap of her journey!

On Thanksgiving Day, I traveled with my immigration law professor, Lenni Benson, to Sydney, Australia, to speak at the "Creating New Futures for

ASC Heads Down Under, "Creating New Futures for All" (cont.)

All: Children, Youth, Disability and Situations of Forced Migration" conference held at the University of Sydney Law School. The purpose of the conference was to share knowledge, experience, and best practices surrounding the promotion and protection of children's rights, focusing on children and young persons in migration settings and those with disabilities. Conference participants came from all over the world and represented human rights and disability rights NGOs, government bodies, and international organizations.



Lenni and I gave our presentation the first day of the conference during a session on asylum. We described the challenges facing non-citizen children and young persons in the U.S. We discussed how substantive protections for children found in U.S. immigration law, primarily Special Immigrant Juvenile Status ("SIJS") and asylum, intersect with domestic children's law. We also explored the problem with specialty representatives, such as lawyers and social workers, not understanding the eligibility of young asylum applicants, particularly those living with HIV/AIDS or disabilities, for immediate social welfare benefits nor anticipating or providing for their emotional and physical needs. Participants from different countries asked us many questions about the U.S. system. They were particularly shocked when I informed them of the lack of social services for asylum-seekers in the U.S. compared with other countries, and when Lenni discussed the fact that there is no adequate and free legal counsel provided to children.

Before the conference officially began, Lenni and I participated in a workshop entitled "Best Interests Question: Strategies for Best Practice in Working with Refugee Children and Youth." During the workshop, we brainstormed as a group how to develop a child's rights focus using international law and worked to create an international dialogue. We then practiced interviewing techniques and strategies for gathering information from children and young persons.

The conference and workshop were informative and enlightening. Lenni and I have already each used one of the interviewing techniques we learned in the workshop- drawing a "mobility map"- with our young clients. For me, learning from advocates and practitioners from many different countries, particularly those with disabilities, was inspirational. Our Australian adventure was well-worth the long journey!

--Claire Thomas

2012 Holiday Party a Success!

Every December African Services invites clients, supporters, friends and family to our offices for an end of the year celebration. It is a celebration of successes of the previous year, as well as a celebration of the coming one.

The African Services Holiday Party is always quite the affair, and this year was no different. With over 200 attendees, the party was lively from the beginning. As usual, ASC put together a DELICIOUS food spread, thanks to the generous donations and support of [Jacob Restaurant](#), [Massawa Restaurant](#), [Queen of Sheba Restaurant](#), & [Fairway Supermarket](#).



A few pics from the holiday celebration!

Drinks and dancing continued throughout the night on the second floor of our offices. A performance by some amazing local djembe players from the group Sing Sing Rythm highlighted the evening as ASC staff and attendees jumped into the circle to sing and dance to the tunes being spun by the DJ.

The festivities lasted well into the evening, and were once again the highlight of ASC's year. It is always a great pleasure of ours to host this event, and to get together with all the people that make what we do possible. So, for those in attendance THANK YOU for sharing in the evening with us, and for those that missed it...take note and DON'T miss out on next year!

--Stephanie Kaplan

Fun in the City

Kelly Gilbert, African Services Intern Recommends...



Join the Harlem Smooth Movers for their FREE Soul Line Dance classes. Have fun while exercising and learn the latest dance moves!

When: Every Tuesday, 6:30 pm until April 30th

Where: Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Community Center, 34 West 134th Street (b/w Lenox and 5th Avenue)

How much: FREE!

Call 212-862-6401 for more information or visit the Harlem OneStop site [here](#).

Stephanie Kaplan, Communications Director recommends...



We may live in the Big Apple...an urban metropolis, but you never know when outdoor survival skills will come in handy. Join the Urban Park Rangers/NYC Parks & Recreation Department as they educate you on surviving in the wilderness.

What: Wilderness Survival Workshop

When: Saturday, March 2nd, 1 pm

Where: Dana Discovery Center (in Central Park) - 110th Street b/w 5th and Lenox Avenue. Click [here](#) for directions to this location.

How much: FREE!

This program is family friendly, but recommended for ages 8 years and older. The program will feature hands-on activities in an outdoor setting...so dress appropriately for cold weather.

Call 212-628-2345 for more information or visit the site for more information [here](#).

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