



African Community Health Initiatives

Summer 2011 Newsletter
Volume 4, Issue 1

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ACHI is Making a Difference

Statewide Enrollment Challenge

ACHI was one of the organizations that were recognized for their commitment to enrolling uninsured children into health insurance in Massachusetts. During an award ceremony sponsored by Health Care For All and Blue Cross on June 14, 2011, ACHI was awarded:



Daniel, minutes after he received the award from Governor Deval Patrick on behalf of ACHI.

Awards

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Governor's citation in recognition of ACHI's work

An official citation from the Massachusetts State Senate

A certificate of appreciation from Health Care for All and Dr. Bigby, Secretary of the Executive office of Health and Human Services



A representative of Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, Daniel, and Nonye with the Senate citation.

"During the month of May, African Community Health Initiatives participated in the "got coverage? Health Coverage for Kids and Teens" campaign's Statewide Enrollment Challenge, in which 66 organizations across the state came together to enroll 1,479 children into health coverage. ... While participating in the Challenge, an incredible 14.285 percent of African Community Health Initiatives' total enrollments were for children. Their dedication to getting health insurance to Massachusetts children is commendable."

*-Gretchen Scheminger
Health Care For All*

ACHI Continues to Make a Difference

It is not every day that a non-profit organization goes above and beyond its expectations. However, the African Community Health Initiatives is one of those organizations. Funded mainly by grants, ACHI is committed to making a difference in the lives of the African community in Massachusetts.

ACHI is one of the first organizations of its kind that focuses on the African community and its well-being. Program Director, Sister Elizabeth, and staff member, Daniel, are passionate about their work. Both of them were born in Africa and can understand the problems of their clients. They understand how it is not common for someone of African descent to seek medical help until their condition has become unbearable. By educating their clients and by taking the extra step of going with them to appointments, they are creating a healthier African community.

They give a holistic approach to their clients. Not only do they want them to be physically healthy but also to be mentally and spiritually healthy.

One client, named Justina, sends her thanks to ACHI: “Personally I would like to thank the management and staff of ACHI for the tremendous amount of effort you put into helping me find my foot at the darkest point of my life and, in particular, for the generous allocation of your time accompanying me to other places where I could get help. I know that the outcome of your services has been of considerable help to me in finding my way again. I would want to thank especially, Sister Elizabeth for her immense kindness.”

Everyday ACHI continues to help many people and continues to grow. The accomplishments of this organization are truly remarkable.



Two clients in the ACHI office being signed up for health insurance.



Sister Elizabeth, Daniel, and Esther at the opening ceremony for the Statewide Enrollment Program.

Events

Earned Income Tax Campaign (EITC)

ACHI participates in the City of Boston's EITC program each year. The coordinators commended ACHI for its dedication and success in providing enrollment services at the tax sites. Because of ACHI's strong work ethic, it was assigned to three different locations. These locations were the Roxbury Resource Center, Codman Square and Dorchester House.

Malden District Meeting

ACHI performed its outreach and enrollment activities on February 9, 2011 at the district meeting of Malden's Immigrant Community and State Senator Katharine Clark. An ACHI representative also discussed the difficulties encountered when an immigrant who does not have documentation tries to access health care and social services. The Senator was impressed by the activities of ACHI.



Daniel setting up the table at the Men's Health Summit

Men's Health Summit 2011

On June 11, 2011 ACHI participated in Whittier Street Health Center's Men's Health Summit. This event was held at the Reggie Lewis Track and Field Center in Roxbury, MA. The goal of the health summit was to promote a healthier men's community and to create awareness of the health problems that affect men. At this event, seven men who have made a difference in the health care industry were honored, guest speaker Robert Clemente Jr. spoke, and a panel discussion was held.

Imparting a Legacy of Change

On February 11, 2011 ACHI took part in "Imparting a Legacy of Change" which was organized by the Women's Bureau: U.S. Department of Labor. The purpose of this event was to empower all working women by preparing them for high paying jobs, ensuring fair compensation, promoting workplace flexibility, and helping homeless women veterans reintegrate into the workplace. ACHI was able to share its mission and vision with regional administrator, Jacqueline Cooke.

Events

A Hope Needle Exchange Program

ACHI participated in the needle exchange program which was conducted by the Boston Public Health Commission in collaboration with Project Health Moves on March 30, 2011. The program provided education on HIV and Hepatitis and also offered HIV testing. During the event, ACHI staff shared the vision of the organization and its mission with the participants and encouraged them to get tested.

50th Independence Anniversary of Sierra Leone

The 50th year of the independence of Sierra Leone was celebrated. It started with the raising of the flag at the Boston City Hall Plaza on April 27, 2011. Then on April 30, 2011 there was a soccer tournament which had teams represented from different countries in Africa. ACHI showed support for the events as well as educating people on their services.

Annual Summer Fun Health Fair

On July 14, 2011 ACHI participated in a health fair at Castle Island. This event was conducted by Boston Regional WIC Task Force, in partnership with South Boston Community Health Center. During the event, ACHI handed out informational material and enrolled clients into state health insurance programs.



Daniel and Nonye at the Summer Health Fair.

4th Annual ACHI Summer Cookout

ACHI held its annual cookout at Carson Beach on July 30, 2011. The day was filled with food and entertainment. Raffle prizes that ranged from a restaurant gift certificate to beautiful paintings were given to their winners.



Danielle and Nonye at the summer cookout.



The beautiful weather brought out people of all ages.

Volunteer Gives A Helping Hand

Q: Tell me a little about yourself and your background?

A: I am Tope Akinmejiwa, born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. I had my college education at the University of Lagos where I studied Medicine and thereafter, got into a residency training program in pathology at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital. While working I felt frustrated with the inefficient healthcare delivery and sought answers to ways of creating a more cost-efficient and effective health care system. I was admitted to the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), Boston MA and concluded a 9 month Master of Public Health (MPH) degree in May 2010.

Q: How did you first get involved in ACHI?

A: During my MPH program, a former intern at ACHI (Wunmi Omoniwa), herself a recent alum of HSPH had come around to school to create awareness of ACHI's activities and invite would-be volunteers to the monthly meetings. At the end of my academic program, I realized I needed some hands-on experience in an organization with structured community/public health promotion activities. I contacted Wunmi who put me through the internship/volunteer application process which is largely online on ACHI's website and attended my first ACHI monthly meeting.

Q: What is it like to be a volunteer for ACHI?

A: I got to be involved in activities that promotes ACHI's mission of improving access of Africans to health services in the U.S. The different needs of people who came to ACHI with their health-access problems e.g. following job loss or financial constraints got addressed as well as helping those with other social needs of housing and English Language-learning



Tope Akinmejiwa

resources. ACHI also had regular weekly outreach programs (Lazarus House) and was also invited to health awareness programs of other organizations. As a volunteer, I found it to be an enlightening experience.

Q: Tell me about someone who has influenced your decision to volunteer with ACHI?

A: Wunmi Omoniwa (earlier mentioned) influenced my volunteering with ACHI. We shared a similar background and her enthusiasm when recruiting volunteers for ACHI was infectious!

Q: What is the most memorable experience you have had with ACHI?

A: One experience I had that stands out was when I had to accompany a late middle-aged ACHI client to an appointment concerning her immigration status. It was one of those occasions that involved going above and beyond the line of duty to render help to someone with a real need. It involved helping with getting to the location, helping with numerous paperwork and making plans for follow-up. Her sincere "thank you" at the end of the day made it all worth it.

Outsider's Perspective on ACHI

"As the Program Manager for the Men's Health Department at the Whittier Street Health Center I am very encouraged with the great work that ACHI is doing in our communities. They have been very vital in the fight to eliminate health and social disparities. ACHI has helped tremendously to link African men to services at the Whittier health center.

The African Community Health Initiatives is very consistent with their support to the organizations in the community that educate the public about acquiring health insurance, disease management and resources for social services. ACHI is often present at many symposiums, our Men's Health Summit each year held in June and community events. The men that come to Whittier Street Health Center have benefited from ACHI through accessing healthcare and linkage to care. This gives many men hope and an experience that they cherish for a lifetime. I believe that ACHI is a great asset to the Whittier Street Health Center and the communities we serve."

*-Dalton Skerritt
Program Manager
WSHC Men's Health Dept*



Dalton Skerritt at the 2011 Men's Health Summit.

Ongoing Activities of ACHI

Sharewood Project- Malden

On Tuesdays ACHI participates in a health fair conducted by Tufts University Medical School. At this event uninsured clients are enrolled into state health insurance programs and clients are also assisted with other problems.

St. Lazarus House- Lawrence

ACHI also goes to the St. Lazarus House in Lawrence, MA. At this venue, clients are enrolled into statewide insurance programs and are given informational materials.

Central Food Ministry- Lowell

On Thursdays ACHI goes to the Central Food Ministry in Lowell, MA. ACHI enrolls clients into SNAP(food stamps), state health insurance programs, and assist them with other health insurance problems.



Two ACHI community members making a connection with Harvard's African Student Association President (on the left).

Interview with a Board Member



Getachew Habteh-Yimer

Q: What is your position at ACHI and a brief description of that position?

A: Board Member.

Briefly, the role of Board members is to establish the Mission of ACHI, to promote its Mission by establishing policies unique to ACHI and to monitor and evaluate the organization's programs and services in accordance with the written job description for Board Members.

Q: What achievements have ACHI accomplished?

A: One has simply to visit ACHI's web site and be amazed by the numerous accomplishments ACHI has made since it started in order to promote the health and well-being of the communities it serves. For instance, ACHI has established partnerships with several providers in communities where a large number of Africans reside, in order to be able to refer African immigrants for health services. Because of these accomplishments, ACHI is now one of the major participants of the Health Care Organizations in Massachusetts. In addition, ACHI reaches out not only to Africans but also to all indigenous people who come and seek assistance for health, housing, immigration issues etc.

Q: What makes ACHI different from other organizations?

A: ACHI reaches out to all African communities in the Boston Metropolitan Areas and beyond. While out-reaching by itself is not unique, what makes ACHI different from other organizations is the role of its staff in establishing trusts and partnerships with these communities in order to allow those who seek assistance to come without fear of retribution. I would like to acknowledge the dedication of ACHI's Program Director and the Health System Navigators in advancing ACHI's Mission and its services to such a high level.

Q: ACHI has come a long way since it first started. Where do you see ACHI in 10 years?

A: I have no doubt that ACHI as a non-profit organization will grow provided that the dedication of its staff (paid and volunteers) remains undiminished and it continues to serve the target communities satisfactorily and is also able to continue successfully raising funds for its operation. If ACHI communicates effectively to its African communities the need for volunteerism, which is critical in order to recruit new officers as board members or staff members in the various ACHI committees, I foresee it becoming one of the largest non-profit organizations in Massachusetts.

Q: If you could get the attention of the whole African community, what would you tell them about ACHI?

A: I will tell the African communities that if they are already partners with ACHI they should continue that relationship and if they are not yet partners with ACHI I would encourage them to join. It is clear that the leaders of each African community have the greatest aspiration to be the important source of assistance to the members of the community they represent, and ACHI is committed to foster that principle. However, I will remind them that ACHI's services encompass all African communities. As such, I will encourage Africans in Massachusetts to come to ACHI's monthly meetings and learn more about ACHI and become active participants in its programs.

Program Director's Corner

Board of Directors:

Anne Medinus, PhD.
Chairperson

Wilner Borgella, Esq.
Treasurer

Georgina Waweru,
Secretary

Getachew Habteh-Yimer,
MA.
Board Member

Salamatu Mambula, PhD.
Board Member

Tony Amoah, MA
Board Member.

Abiodun Shobowale, MA
Board Member

Teye E. Adusu, DVM,
Board Member

“So far 2011 has been a tremendous year. We have done a lot of outreach to the African community and we have even reached out to those who are not African. We will not deny someone if they are not African because if they have a need we will help them. ACHI has found itself being called on more and more.

More organizations and health centers have a desire to partner with us. They see the efforts we are putting forth in the community and want to be involved.

ACHI is in the process of planning a program to manage two chronic diseases, diabetes and hypertension. We are hoping this program will be launched by the end of the year.

Every year we receive students from Health Career Connection to do their internship with us. They bring a lot of strengths and knowledge that enhance the vision of ACHI. This year we are lucky to have Danielle Joyce who has been working on various projects.

What we do here at ACHI on a daily basis helps to change people's lives because we go beyond the call of duty. This year the staff members were able to help three families with food and living expenses out of their own pocket.

We are quite excited about the new office equipment we have received and we would like to thank Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation which made this upgrade possible. It has made managing the office a lot easier.”

-Sister Elizabeth
Program Director

ACHI is sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA Foundation & The Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Office of Medicaid.

Space provided by Whittier Street Health Center.

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