

# AFRICAN COMMUNITY HEALTH

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## ACHI AT NIGERIAN YOUTH ORGANIZATION'S COOKOUT



PICTURED HERE: PARTICIPANTS AT THE COOKOUT SPONSORED BY THE NIGERIAN YOUTH ORGANIZATION AND ACHI

On July 19<sup>th</sup> ACHI co-sponsored the Nigerian Youth Organization's annual cookout. The event took place at Franklin Park and was designed for Nigerian youth from different parts of

Massachusetts to come together and celebrate their heritage. There was much singing, dancing, and networking amongst the participants.

ACHI provided much support to the event. Many informational brochures on wellness, healthy living, and ACHI's mission were disseminated amongst the youth. ACHI also answered many questions that uninsured attendees had about health coverage. In short, ACHI made many personal and interactive encounters with those who participated in the event.

There were several people who came to the cookout. Because of this turnout, the

level of awareness about ACHI's program has increased in the Nigerian community. The co sponsorship propelled ACHI's visibility. Overall, the event was a huge success for the Nigerian Youth Organization and the African Community Health Initiatives.



## ACHI AT SALEM CULTUREFEST 2008

The Salem CultureFest took place on Saturday July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in Salem, MA. ACHI co-sponsored the event in order to boost its presence in the African community of Salem and found the partnership to be very beneficial and worthwhile. The event took place outdoors under beautiful weather and was filled with African food, clothing and dancing with many people in attendance.

Hundreds of health informational brochures were given to participants. Even more one-on-one dialogues between ACHI staff and participants took place and participants left with a firm grasp about ACHI's holistic approach to health

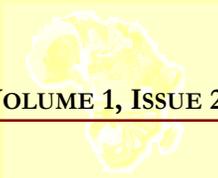


PICTURED HERE: MAMADOU DIOP (FAR LEFT) PRESIDENT OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DRUM AND DANCE (A3D)

care. The 2008 Salem CultureFest was a major success for ACHI.

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## HEAR FROM ONE OF ACHI'S INTERNS

**M**y name is Marie Kong and I am a Junior at Regis College in Weston, MA. My major is child psychology; and after graduating from Regis I plan to go to graduate school to get my PhD in child psychology. I was born and raised in Boston, MA; however my mother is Haitian and my “father” is Cameroonian.

I joined ACHI, as its first intern, in June 2007. My experience was so wonderful I was invited to return for my winter break. In May 2008 I returned to ACHI for my summer break. I personally enjoy working for ACHI. It has been such a unique, rewarding, and humbling experience; and I am really grateful to work for such an organization that changes people's lives constantly through quality health and social services.

My recent most memorable moment with ACHI was after a long day of work in the office. I was asked to go visit one of our clients, at Boston Medical Center. Her name was Mary and she had just undergone a knee operation. I ended up getting lost for a good 20 minutes because they had moved her to another building. So after the frustration of being lost I finally arrived at the hospital and met Mary. Once I reached Mary I couldn't help but forget about my previous frustration of wandering around the campuses of Boston Medical Center. She was so sweet, kind-hearted, and humble. The reason this is so memorable is because I look at her and I can see what ACHI has done for her. That alone is personally and spiritually rewarding to me.



MARIE IS ONE OF ACHI'S INTERNS

“I PERSONALLY ENJOY WORKING FOR ACHI. IT HAS BEEN SUCH A UNIQUE, REWARDING, AND HUMBLING EXPERIENCE”

## ACHI AT THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

**A**CHI reached out to a group of West African women at an Apostolic Church in Hyde Park on June 22, 2008. A presentation was made by John Agboola, an ACHI member, during the launching of the women's group which consists of Nigerians, Cameroonians, and Ghanaians. Mr. Agboola informed the attentive women of the mission and activities of ACHI.

In response, Pastor Bisi Asere of the Apostolic Church invited ACHI to

the church's revival which took place on July 12 and 13. At the event ACHI addressed the congregation on her mission and enlightened them on the benefits of ‘Chapter 58’, the Health Care Reform law that mandates health insurance coverage for all Massachusetts residents. Informational materials were also given out.



MEMBERS OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH WORSHIPPING.





## ACHI'S IMPACT ON A CLIENT'S LIFE

**K**wasi Kwaa is a 22 year old college student who was born in Ghana, but moved to the United States when he was only eleven. Enrolling in Powder House Elementary School in Somerville, Massachusetts, Kwasi took advantage of every opportunity at educational attainment within his reach. In fact, he recently received an Associate Degree at Roxbury Community College and now plans to attend the University of Massachusetts Boston to obtain a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Kwasi has been an ACHI client for 2 years. His relationship with the organization was set in motion when both he and his brother were in urgent need of oral health services. His mother found out about ACHI through the outreach efforts of Sr. Elizabeth Metebaghafoh, ACHI's Program Director. Sr. Elizabeth accompanied both Kwasi and his brother to the office of Dr. Joseph Noah, one of ACHI's health care partners, and the two brothers received dental services on a pro-bono basis. Kwasi fervently recollects the memory stating, "ACHI helped me a lot because I had a lot of dental issues and if it wasn't for ACHI I wouldn't have gotten [any] services. I visited Dr. Noah and he's been able to help me out a lot ... I don't have any dental issues because he helped me out with that problem."

However, nearly two years after visiting Dr. Noah's office Kwasi still suffered from poor health. "I had trouble reading for a long period of time," he recounted. "When I read for too long it strained my eyes and I got severe headaches... for someone who is in college it was very important [that I] read." Kwasi, however, could not receive medical care because he was one of the 47 million people in America without health insurance. The health insurance offered by his university was not affordable for him.

ACHI again intervened. "Joseph applied for MassHealth programs for me and I was given Health Safety Net." Kwasi says. "He was a really nice guy friendly and easy to talk to. He made the process simple and not complicated at all... [and] it's been a huge help. HSN covers everything that a general health insurance plan would cover, emergency visits, prescriptions and dental services..."

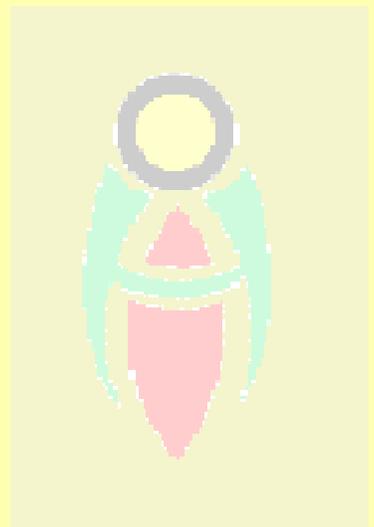


KWASI KWAA HAS BEEN AN ACHI CLIENT FOR TWO YEARS.

*The African Community Health Initiative (ACHI) is a 501 c 3 organization (non-profit) that was founded in 2000 to improve the health of the African community in Massachusetts. ACHI's mission is to support and improve the health of Africans living in Massachusetts by promoting access to quality, culturally competent health and social services through education, research and community partnerships.*

Joseph Adetowubo, ACHI's Health System Navigator, has enrolled several people of African descent into the state sponsored Health insurance programs. Health Safety Net has saved Kwasi over \$800 and since enrolling Kwasi has visited an optometrist to receive eye treatment.

Kwasi is very appreciative of ACHI's services. "The ACHI program," he asserts, "has been a big help... Not having insurance in general is a scary thing, but enrolling in Health Safety Net has relieved many of my financial burdens. ACHI has been able to help out so that things are not hard anymore." Although he has not been back to Ghana, he plans on giving back to the community from which he came. With his marketing degree from the University of Massachusetts Boston, Kwasi intends to start his own non-profit geared towards providing low income children with after school activities. Kwasi aspires to have the same impact in the lives of the underprivileged that ACHI had on his.





*On Thursday, July 20th 2008 Anne Medinus, the Chairperson for ACHI's Board of Directors, was interviewed by Okezie Nwoka.*

**Nwoka:** Well for starters, what achievements do you see ACHI accomplishing?

**Medinus:** ACHI has accomplished a lot in

two years. Though the organization started in 2000, ACHI didn't start operating as an independent entity till 2006. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, particularly, the Chairperson of the Foundation, Philip Johnston, who took a chance and gave ACHI a discretionary grant that got it started as an independent entity. Since then, we have been able to implement our own programs, including the Early Intervention/Community Referral and our Outreach and Enrollment programs. Earlier in the implementation of the Early Intervention program we referred people to health centers to get enrolled in health insurance programs but now we are able to help them enroll because ACHI is one of the organizations the state has entrusted with the implementation of Chapter 58 of the Acts of 2006 - the Massachusetts' Health Reform program. In addition, ACHI has its own staff. ACHI has also developed cooperative agreements with many area health care and social service organizations. Through these agreements we are not only able to refer our clients to receive services but we are also able to develop other programs aimed at lessening the burden of disease on the African immigrants of Massachusetts. It is quite fulfilling to know that we are finally able to serve our target population. Though our focus is health, we use the holistic approach, facilitating access to social services such as immigration, housing, food stamps, etc. The fact is that you can not get someone who is hungry to seek health care. People tend to take care of their biological needs first. So, we help them. Once those needs are met, they pay attention to their health care needs.

**Nwoka:** You're right. ACHI's holistic approach to health care is remarkable. What else do you think makes ACHI unique and different from other organizations?

**Medinus:** ACHI's governing board of directors, staff and the community volunteers are predominantly of African descent, so we can relate one on one with our target population. This is very important because there is always the element of trust reserved for those who understand your cultural beliefs, when you are seeking help.

**Nwoka:** Where do you see ACHI in 10 years? In other words, what is ACHI's future?

**Medinus:** Considering how far we have come in two years, I envision ACHI having its own home and well developed programs tailored to all the needs of the African immigrants. I seize this opportunity to express the Board of Directors' heartfelt gratitude to the CEO of Whittier Street Health Center and ACHI member, Frederica Williams, who provided ACHI an office space. It has been a good home for ACHI but Whittier Street Health Center itself is expanding so much and ACHI needs a more permanent home. In fact, I see ACHI serving as a welcome center for African immigrants in due course. With increase in awareness of ACHI's services, we have many organizations reaching out to us to collaborate in one way or the other and we have to seize the opportunity to develop more programs to help our people. Currently, we are developing a well articulated program to provide cultural competency training to organizations that provide services to Africans. In ten years, I see ACHI serving as the resource organization, not only for African immigrants but also the organizations that provide services to them and researchers.

**Nwoka:** Those are some bold endeavors. So then, what would you like the African community to know about ACHI?

**Medinus:** To my fellow Africans I simply want to say that ACHI is at your service. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or refer people to ACHI. I also will like to see more of you at ACHI's monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of every month. An ACHI member is anyone who will like to promote the goals of ACHI.

**Nwoka:** Is there anything else you would like to add Dr. Medinus?

**Medinus:** Yes. Thank you Okezie for giving me the opportunity to thank my fellow board members (past and present), who have taken time off their busy schedules to make ACHI a real organization. I am also grateful to Sister Elizabeth (Program Director), Lynn Finn and Patricia Walker (Nurse Consultants), Abdulai Moses Fofanah and Joseph Adetowubo (Health System Navigators), Marie Kong and you Okezie (Interns) for all the hard work, connecting people to care and other services. I am sure all the people you have helped will like to thank you too. Lynn Finn, not only serves as a nurse, but was instrumental in creating partnerships between ACHI and two very important organizations, Catholic Charities and the Irish Immigration Center. Last but not the least I'll like to thank Pastor Louis LaGatta, who didn't let the distance stop him from helping us develop the organization and continuing to help.

Anne Medinus, PhD.  
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