

## Commission on African Affairs (COAA) September Meeting

**Date:** 9/9/2020

**Time:** 6:20pm-7:45pm

**Attendees:** \*Hellen Fissihaie, \*Yodit Shibru, \*Etayenesh Asfaw, Aly Kaba, Thierry Tchenko, \*Carmen Eliam, Fesha Woldu, Gelila Getaneh, Ify Bozimo, Ify Nwabukwu, \*Nana Yaw, Nick Chantiles, Sarah Priddy, Semhal Hagos, Sosina Baruda, \*Theodore Ngatchou

**\*Commissioners Present**

Quorum met at 6:25pm, Yodit and Hellen call meeting into order and request to start with MOAA updates followed by COAA updates.

**Updates: MOAA (Thierry)** September is African Heritage Month. African immigrants in DC are among the highest in the Country. DC African restaurant series is a program of MOAA highlighting African restaurants in the District. There is a dance group performing as well. Grant season is ending and reports from grantees are coming in. MOAA is making informational resources are translated in different languages to assist in this difficult time. The office is being a bridge between government and people in the community.

Presentation by MOAA Grantee **Asylum Works** (speaker Nick Chantiles): (formerly The **Asylum Seeker** Assistance Project)

**Nick Chantiles** spoke about the program, which is one of the best nonprofits in the District. They provide employment support, housing support and other assistance to help them achieve asylum. There are 500 plus Asylum seekers they are currently supporting and most of them can achieve support. Asylum Works' Social Work program is tasked with ensuring client safety and wellbeing. They have career services to help them effectively enter the US workforce. They provide safe meaningful and legal employment. Their "Retire" program is geared towards the professional jobs. WMATA is a partner in this program.

Asylum Works also has the Path Forward program, which is a new program, geared towards clientele with language barrier. The job focus is to help clients find jobs with a two-day skill-building workshop. Most clients of Asylum Works go on to get higher than minimum paying jobs. More than a quarter of the Employment program clients were from the African diaspora.

Post COVID clients lost jobs as restaurants closed and they were impacted. Clients were also not able to access the federal, state and local funds. Asylum Works has raised 35k to assist clients impacted by COVID. Most of the funds went to assist with food security programs. There is also a program to connect clients with community supporters. Development and Engagement manager has been hired to assist in raising funds for the stakeholders.

An attendee asked about entrepreneurship and education related assistance to clients that have the interest. Currently, Asylum Works does not provide education assistance, but is interested in partnering and similarly on entrepreneurship they are interested in talking about partnership with Small Business Development.

**Email:** [nick@asylumworks.org](mailto:nick@asylumworks.org) for all Employment Program related inquiries, Sarah Priddy, our Community & Engagement Program Manager ([sarah.priddy@asylumworks.org](mailto:sarah.priddy@asylumworks.org)) is also available for general Asylum Works inquiries.

### **Commission agenda**

**Hellen:** Provides a high-level overview of goals and roles of COAA in supporting MOAA such as finding ways to support the Office and the community. COAA's role is to share information, resources to the African Community members. The role is to support, advise, and advocate for the African DC community and the work of MOAA.

### **Available Commissioners introduce selves and their work.**

**Yodit:** Works for the Small Business Development Center, Director of Government and Procurement Services. The SBA Center, which provides business assistance to obtain certifications for local and federal procurements. For more information visit [www.dcsb.org](http://www.dcsb.org). She works on assisting entrepreneurs for individuals who want to expand their businesses. Yodit was on a panel with the Hellen Show, which is an Ethiopian broadcasting cable where she talked about her day-to-day work and her role with the Commission.

The commission works to support the OAA and the mayor to advocate on behalf of Africans in DC. The commission also aims to advocate and supporting the demands of the community. The meetings are held every other month and next meeting will be in November.

**Theodore:** He was having trouble accessing the Webex. He is with the Renaissance Center for Culture and Education and works with clients who have physical limitations to help them in their daily life. Renaissance Center is a platform put in place to support people with various limitations. It connects to resources so they can reach their individual goals.

**Hellen Fissihai:** Her company is focused on training and program management. She is working with DOH to support the African community. Her company partnered with DOH to assist the African Women's Cancer Awareness Association (AWCAA) in getting information about COVID.

**Ty Asfaw:** Introduced herself as an environmental scientist working on green jobs fair in the Fall of 2020.

Hellen introduces Ms. Ify of AWCAA to detail the Credible Messenger Program funded by D.C. Department of Health (DOH). AWCAA is a grantee of this program and focused on spreading the message and awareness of Covid-19 Contact Tracing program as a Credible Messenger within the African community.

**Ms Ify (AWCAA):** Her organization has been in existence for 16 years and they work with African women immigrants. With COVID her organization is working to see how best to help the community. DOH offered the Credible Messenger grant. The contact-tracing program helps in sharing information on COVID. The purpose is to contact individuals that could be impacted by COVID. The contact tracers call and inform the community without threatening the call recipients from answering questions. Everyone should be aware of the contact tracers to work with them and understanding the purpose of the calls.

On September 16 at 11am there will be a call to discuss the work. The African Community Credible Stakeholder's Meetings is hosting the meeting to educate and support communities in battling Covid-19 through providing information about DOH's Contact tracing outreach. DC is providing housing, medication for the time that a person has to quarantine in case they are living in a family where they could possibly get additional people contacted. The point is to keep the community engaged on this topic.

**Hellen invited Dr. Woldu to share the work that they are doing within the Eritrean community. His organization is made up of Eritrean medical professionals, this it is a Task Force to support the community to target community health.**

**Dr Fesseha Woldu** was introduced to speak about his organization. He is currently working with healthcare professionals in the area to navigate the healthcare system especially on the COVID issue. His organization is called Eritrean Healthcare Community Service. He is doing outreach to churches and other organizations to protect people from the disease. The organization is also working with Iffy to broaden reach to larger African communities. They are also looking to see what they can do with PPE.

**Hellen open's up the floor for others to discuss upcoming events/programming or make announcements:**

**Hellen: Hellen and Yodit** are putting together a webinar: Navigating DC resources for the African Community. One of the goals was to get resources to the African community. The focus areas are businesses, healthcare, and housing resources to the African community. Date and details will be shared in the coming weeks.

**Yodit:** The **Great Street Grant** is available and SBDC is hosting the grant. The dream grant is also out and it is managed by DC small and local business grant. The grant is for 10k for Ward 7 and 8 businesses.

**Thierry:** Introduces new Staffer at MOAA: Sosina Baruda: Community outreach specialist

**Hellen calls meeting to call close.**

**Note:** There were technical difficulties with the meeting platform-WebEx. The group acknowledged the system might not be working for everyone.