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# New American Africans

## *Dear Friends of New American Africans,*

There is much to tell you about. Since the last update, New American Africans has worked tirelessly to support African refugees living in New Hampshire. As you may know, most refugees have spent years, if not their whole lives, living in refugee camps. Moving to New Hampshire offers a new beginning but it is not without struggle. The process of making a new home a foreign country can be overwhelming in many ways. New American Africans, under the guidance and leadership of Honore Murenzi, offers direct emergency support to those in need and aims to ease this transition period.

Imagine moving to a country where you did not understand the laws, could not speak the language, and struggled to make a living. That is the reality that refugees face once they arrive. New American Africans has continued to aid the community through outreach and advocacy. Thanks to a grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, NAA now has a Program Manager to help facilitate the development of our programs and deepen our capacity building for future programs. This is an exciting time for New American Africans to grow and meet the needs of the community so that we can expand the opportunity to succeed to all new Americans.



*"Together We Will Be Stronger!"*

## Thank you Volunteers!

*"Little by little, a little becomes a lot."*

*- Tanzanian proverb*



New American Africans recognizes that the success of our after-school program is due in large part to the generous and dedicated volunteers who make it all possible. We would like to thank you for all that you do! We would also like to thank the Immaculate Heart of Mary for their continued generosity in allowing NAA to use their classroom space free of charge.

# WHAT WE DO

*The mission of New American Africans is to strengthen and sustain immigrants by gathering for mutual support and education, promoting leadership development and sharing values and culture that will enrich the broader community.*



Please like us on Facebook.



Any questions or comments can be directed to [info@newamericanaficans.org](mailto:info@newamericanaficans.org)

- **Advocacy**

NAA provides accompaniment and advocacy during appointments with agencies and institutions such as schools, places of employment, accessing needed entitlement benefits, interactions with law officials, housing issues (landlords and neighbors), and standing up for the rights and needs of immigrants and refugees alongside our community partners

- **After School Program**

Youths who have newly arrived in the U.S are eager to excel in school. NAA supports youth in their efforts to catch up academically and to improve their ability to communicate in English. The after school program provides learning activities for immigrants of all ages in a safe and supportive environment where students are comfortable asking important questions related to unfamiliar American expectations. Dedicated volunteers tutor students Monday-Thursday.

- **English for Speakers of Other Languages**

Adults who have recently arrived to the US are eager to learn English. NAA offers conversational English classes Monday-Friday run by a dedicated team of volunteers. NAA also collaborates with community resources to offer educational classes such as cooking, parenting and information about available supports and services.

- **Strengthening Families and Communities**

NAA recognizes resilience and strength in families and communities as core to our values and efforts. Cultural perspectives and values that promote well-being are nurtured, NAA facilitates family conversations and thoughtful attention to communication across generations amidst rapid and sometimes confusing adaptation to U.S culture.

- **Leadership Development**

NAA promotes parent involvement in schools and community-based leadership and facilitates African community efforts to speak on their own behalf with community resources (i.e. schools, law enforcement, media)

- **African Dance**

Sponsored by the New Hampshire Council on the Arts, NAA provides East African dance classes at no cost to high school students every Friday afternoon.

- **Love Your Neighbor**

NAA plays a leadership role in both Concord and Manchester to offer opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and community conversation. The Love your Neighbor campaign began in 2011 in response to hateful graffiti written on the homes of immigrant families in Concord, NH. NAA, in collaboration with churches, community advocates, and residents rallied around the families, proclaiming they are not only welcome but they are loved.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars!

### FRIDAY FAMILY FUN NIGHT

A **BIG** thank you to everyone who came out and supported our second Friday Family Fun Night! It was a **HUGE** success. We hope to continue to exceed all expectations with our upcoming events!

**Please Join us** for a night of dance, drumming, ice cream, and friendship!

**June 19th 2015** South Congregational Church, 27 Pleasant st  
Concord, NH

**October 9th 2015** Unitarian Universalist Church, 274 Pleasant st  
Concord, NH

**February 5th 2016** Stay tuned!





*A word from Board Member, Shelly  
Stratton...*

## Resilience at its Best: A Reflection on New American Africans' Friday Family Fun Night

The buzz of the evening began to grow when a flurry of young African dancers arrived at the Immaculate Heart of Mary, two hours early. They were anxious to practice their performance, but their animated conversations in Kinyarwanda and comfortable affection also revealed their desire to extend their time spent together. African dance classes, which are facilitated by the New American Africans after school program and funded by the New Hampshire Council for the Arts, are enthusiastically attended by 15 – 20 African youth on Friday afternoons. This was their first performance since the class began in October, and they were both excited and nervous. While a team of teenage girls was clearly preparing for the performance, a couple of younger children planted themselves comfortably in the mix. As I looked on I was reminded of groups of children in Kenya and Rwanda, where mixed ages lean into one another; where it is not unusual for the elder child to reprimand the behavior of their younger shadows, or to casually lift them to their back when little legs can no longer keep up.

A bit later the boys who also attend dance class but who prefer to remain more elusive in their interests and skills, began to appear. They were quick to ask if they could help set up and often noticed my non-verbal indicators of opportunities to be helpful. One of the boys noticed my concentrated contemplation of a heavy couch, and quickly recruited a friend to effortlessly move it to a more suitable spot. Hardly a word was exchanged.

When Murenzi arrived the children greeted him with respect and affection, and with an urgent string of Kinyarwandan words the children kicked into high gear clearing up tables and setting up chairs. I was in awe, but not surprised. I have often seen Murenzi speak to the children with quiet authority, wishing I could understand the words, but knowing that there is so much more than the words that motivates their quick and content response. I realize I am witnessing a community where relationships are practiced and reinforced in the act of collaborative and multi-generational efforts. The assumption that everyone must pitch in with collective responsibility seems to reinforce a sense of self worth in the children, rather than dreaded obligation. And while Murenzi's authority activates activity, these are children who know how to make things happen, they know how to collaborate with others and problem-solve difficult circumstances, and little direction from me or Murenzi is required once they get going.

As people began to pour in to the Friday Family Fun Night event, the noise and the energy continued to rise. Half way through the evening, board member Victoria Adewumi invited people to say hello to someone they had not yet met. It was heart warming to see children from Congo and Rwanda weave through the audience enthusiastically introducing themselves, often offering a hand with their opposite hand gently resting on their arm in a sign of respect. They seemed to have abandoned the caution that I have sometimes seen, and their enthusiasm, matched by the warmth of long-term NH residents, was infectious and difficult to tame for the rest of Victoria's message.

As the evening progressed the drumming pulled the crowd into yet another layer of abandon and joy, and the lovely dance performance by the students captivated a standing audience. Soon the floor was filled with all ages and a vibrant mix of ethnicity and culture. Dancers demonstrated moves from East and West Africa, while Americans began to lose their inhibitions and did their best to keep up. The drummers seemed to be expanding the world for African youth as well as those of us who had not traveled so far. Their smiles encouraged us to feel the rhythm and our connections to others deeply. And as African youth began to truly show their moves the energy seemed unstoppable... In fact it took some concerted effort when our time came to an end.

As I reflect on the evening I think to myself, "This is what integration looks like! This is how you build true grass-roots collaboration and respect for the basic human needs for expression and connection." The New American Africans Friday Family Fun Night has become a mix of just enough organization to get it off the ground and enough messiness to invite true participation in the growing of energy and commitment. This participation allows for a space to develop where everyone feels they belong. And THIS is resilience at its best.



# LOOKING FORWARD

As we begin to finish this academic year we have much to be thankful for here at New American Africans. Planning for this summer and next year is well underway. We continue to offer emergency assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week to those in need in addition to interpretation services in seven languages (English, French, Arabic, Swahili, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Lingala) for schools, health care facilities, benefits offices, the police and the courts. We are looking forward to regularly scheduled outreach with the Concord police to establish good lines of communication and assistance across the community.

This summer we hope to provide a bit of a relief for refugees new to New Hampshire. Focusing on our school aged children, we hope to coordinate several trips to explore and experience all that New Hampshire has to offer. Tentative plans include a camping excursion, cookout by the beach, and hiking trips. Where many have not yet had the opportunity or ability to travel outside of Concord, we hope to expand their concept of what New Hampshire has to offer.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

*As a non-profit, New American Africans is dependent upon the generosity of those in the community to support our on-going efforts. Any donation is appreciated and goes towards achieving our overarching goal of creating a stable and positive start for refugees in New Hampshire. Please consider supporting New American Africans with a tax deductible donation.*

Everyone can help and bring something to the table. It is not about how much you know. It's about the difference you can make in someone's life. Our students are eager to learn and to become part of this community. There's no fixed schedule required. Everyone is welcome any day.



## Thank you!

New American Africans would like to thank you for your continued interest in our efforts to achieve a thriving community. A donor envelope has been included for your convenience.

