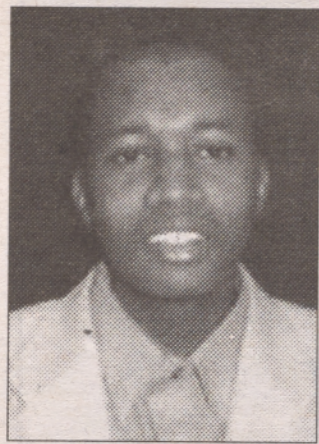


African immigrants develop leadership, voice at Africa House



Abdiasis Mohamed, originally from Somalia, moved to Oregon in 2006. He is currently pursuing his masters of social work degree at Portland State University. He is the Program Coordinator at Africa House, and has been advocating for equity throughout the Portland metropolitan region for the last five years.

ABDIASIS MOHAMED
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

The African Leadership Development Project at IRCOs Africa House began in 2012 as a result of a generous contribution by the Meyer Memorial Trust. The project was started as a means of developing strong African community leaders and empowering African immigrant and refugee communities to represent themselves in the public arena and advocate for social and economic equality. Its primary purpose is to foster a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous African community that is rich with cultural heritage, equal educational and economic opportunities, and a focused public engagement.

The project's long-term goals are to make Oregon a state where collaborative and creative thinking flourish, opportunities are provided to make the voiceless heard, communities of color are empowered to self-organize, network, develop pathways to greater social inclusion, and build culturally-specific social capital. It's goals are also to give Africans the capacity to act as leaders within and outside communities of color.

Since its inception, the African Leadership Development Project has successfully recruited 25 African leaders from around the greater Portland area to stand up for the interests of the African community in public forums and to serve as community role models for political and civic engagement. These leaders represent a diverse range of African ethnic and cultural backgrounds and have been trained to engage in political advocacy and lobbying activities by representatives from the city of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement and other partner organizations. Subsequently, four distinct committees were created by these leaders with the purpose of developing specific goals and strategies to address the



Formed in 2001, the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) is an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations with representatives from six communities of color: African, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, Native American and Slavic. Representation on the CCC is determined by individual communities, and all decisions are based on consensus.

disparities that African communities face in economic development, housing, education, and policy and advocacy work.

The African Leadership Council has also begun to actively engage with city, county and state officials in legislative sessions and meet with state representatives one-on-one to discuss the issues that are most critical to African success and self-sufficiency.

In turn, these leaders have also conducted a number of training workshops within their respective ethnic communities that have taught Africans about the American political process and how to participate in advocacy work and community organizing.

As a result of these workshops, members of the African immigrant and refugee community as a whole have become more engaged in local and statewide politics on a level that they have never been capable of before.

As a result of these workshops, and the direction of the African Leadership Council, many Africans throughout the state of Oregon have begun to actively participate in various public meetings, city and county budget hearings, and other public forums where they have provided testimony on behalf of the African community and its

interests. They have started to publicly voice their concerns about disparities in economic and business development, housing equity, educational achievement, disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, and incarceration among other issues.

Furthermore, the African Leadership Council has started branching out on their own to build partnerships and form bonds with other ethnically based organizations and leadership groups through the Coalition of Communities of Color. They have successfully worked with these groups to promote cultural diversity throughout the State of Oregon and to collectively bring awareness to the issues that all communities of color presently face. In addition, they have effectively collaborated with these partner organizations to develop mutual strategies to reduce disparities among ethnic communities as well as to support statewide legislative efforts that seek racial justice and equality for all in Oregon.

Going into the future, the project is preparing to seek out and foster the development of even more African leaders who will represent the interests of the community, teach additional African immigrants and refugees about responsible political and civic engagement, and develop activists and allies from within their respective ethnic communities.

The African Leadership Council is continuing to strengthen existing partnerships and build new bonds with ethnic organizations and government offices that will ensure a mutually beneficial and constructive dialogue about the inequalities that affect communities of color. Finally, the African leaders remain actively committed to training and community outreach that will prepare them to submit their own legislative proposals starting in the 2014-15 state legislative session.

Is it love or is it hate?

By Griffin Chaska

Is it love or is it hate?
All I see is darkness.
Life is bitter and cold.
Nobody cares about me.
No happiness.
All sadness.
No Love.
There's nothing left.
Do I need help or don't I?

I need friends that understand my pain
and help me through the pain.
Nobody understands what I've been through.
Nobody seems like they don't know.
I just wish I had someone that understood.

Slowly I'm giving up.
Does it even matter if I'm giving up slowly?
Why should I care about you if you don't care about me?
Am I messed up?

I'm Lonely and Cold.
I'm so lonely.
I have stopped caring for my loved ones.
My heart is going in the darkness.
I don't see the end of this. I'm falling into the darkness.
I try to grab out for help but there's no one there.

I see all the death that happened to me.
I see Angie again.
All I want to do is hold her
Tell her I love you but when I try to talk she's gone

I'm getting weak
I need her
Should I end it all or shouldn't I?
I want to live but I'm to weak.

I wish I could be the old me that wasn't so cold
and didn't cut himself.
Can I make it?
Am I gone forever?
Am I going to be in the darkness?
Am I going to be so cold and bitter?
What do I have to live for?

I'm trying to fight
Can someone help me?
The last light is going dark
All my hope is fading away
Why am I still here?
All pain no game

Putting on a fake smile
I'm dead inside
My life is all about death
When is the pain going away?
When can I be me again?

Why me?
Why all this pain?
Is this going to be the last night of this pain?
Where's my happiness?
Where's my joy?
Can I be happy again?
Can I have fun again?

Where's my family when I NEED them?
Where's everybody when I NEED them?

The autobiographical poems on this and the following page are submitted as part of a special project at Hudson Bay High School in Vancouver, Wash.

All students are 9th grade boys. One was a free write on how the student was feeling at the time, and the other two are intended suppose to reflect on their individual life, family, culture, history, etc, and create a short poem using sensory words. Each stanza was to begin with "I am from..."

I am from...

By Thaddaeus Jimenez.

I am from a creative quote that explains life and richness a clown that's never happy. A Taurus by birth, a Gemini by expression.

I am from a world of love and hate that seems to always go away a passion that can't be forgotten a true love that 2 share as 1.

I am from a spoken person, that I never hear from but in a mirror I'm a twin, he hates what he sees knowing what he's going to be and become.

I am from the birth of a beautiful woman that cares, tends, and provides. A Mom of 3 others but always has time, she doesn't regret me but the person she made me with, is a joke that never seems to enlighten my day but who cares about him he is the joke in my life.