



# The Lenny Zakim Fund

BRIDGING COMMUNITIES

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP COHORT**

## **FELLOW PROFILES**

## **Asian Women for Health**

*Somerville*

Asian Women for Health is a peer-led, community-based network dedicated to advancing Asian women's health and wellbeing through education, advocacy, and support. We are a diverse group of individuals working together across differences in age, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, socio-economic and educational levels, to address individual, community-wide and systemic barriers that affect Asian women and their loved ones.

**Chien-Chi Huang** is the founder of the Asian Breast Cancer Project and the Executive Director of Asian Women for Health. Ms. Huang's personal cancer journey led her to participate in national as well as local efforts on health equity and racial justice. Her remarkable passion for the community has changed the healthcare landscape for Asian women and created a pipeline of future leaders and peer health educators. A skilled and passionate community advocate, Chien-Chi was the Asian Community Program Manager at the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling from 2006 to 2011 and she spearheaded several new health initiatives addressing the unique issues and challenges facing the Asian American community. A deft community organizer and trainer, Chien-Chi has provided capacity building, technical guidance and network enhancement to community-based organizations and providers serving Asian Americans throughout the Commonwealth. Both mainstream and Asian media outlets have featured Chien-Chi's efforts and highlighted her dedication to reducing health disparities related to gambling addiction, mental health, and breast cancer.



## **Adaptive Sports New England**

*Boston*

Adaptive Sports New England's mission is to increase participation in sports among youth and young adults who have visual or mobility impairments. Adaptive Sports NE collaborates with many adaptive-specific and mainstream sports programs, adding value through its focus on raising awareness, increasing participation, and building capacity so that more youth and young adults with visual or mobility disabilities can access sports closer to home.

**Joe Walsh** is a native of Braintree and a graduate of Dartmouth College and UMass Amherst. He is a two-time Paralympian in cross country skiing, and former Managing Director of Paralympics for the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee. Joe served on Team USA's delegation staff at six Paralympic Games and as Chef de Mission at two Parapan American Games. He coached youth cross country skiing for 13 seasons, served on the founding staff of the C. Everett Koop Institute at Dartmouth, and was the first Paralympic athlete representative elected to the USOPC Athletes' Advisory Council and Board of Directors. Joe served as Vice President of the International Blind Sports Federation from 2013-2017 and is currently a director of Move United, a national organization focused on adaptive sports and empowerment of people who have a disability.



## **Africano Waltham (African Cultural Services)**

*Waltham*

Africano's mission is to use a holistic approach to lift African immigrant youth and their families to succeed in life through provision of a safe space, educational and mental assistance, visual and performing arts, and cultural connections. Africano provides a range of arts and educational services for youth, including tutoring, college prep, book club, African language classes (Swahili, Luganda and Lusoga), and Saturday enrichment and cultural programming, including music, dance, visual arts and field trips. Africano's performing group, the Afro-Diamonds, have performed at universities, community groups, and celebrations around eastern Massachusetts. For adults, Africano provides psycho-social support, financial literacy, digital literacy, and emergency support. Africano aims to bridge cultural and generational gaps between immigrant parents and grandparents and their American-born children and grandchildren.

**Juliet Najjumba** is the founder and CEO of Africano Waltham, which was founded in 2010. She is an experienced educator and performer. Originally from Uganda in East Africa, Juliet has lived and worked in Waltham since 2010. She moved to the U.S. from Germany, where she earned a BA in Business Administration from the University of Applied Sciences Heilbronn. When she arrived in Waltham, Juliet immediately sought to address the challenges she saw all around her faced by Africans coming to the U.S. A natural bridge-builder and community leader, Juliet established Africano as the area's main go-to resource for African immigrants to get the help they so urgently need, but also as a space for them to connect and support each other. For years, Waltham has been the primary destination of Ugandan immigrants to the U.S. because they can find connections here that lead to paths for successful settlement in the region. But Juliet noticed something was missing in her new home—a sense of community that she had experienced in her Ugandan village upbringing. Surrounded by 1,500 Ugandan immigrants in the Waltham area, she was sure many of them had the same lost feeling she was experiencing, so Juliet set out to replicate the village atmosphere that supported her growing up in Uganda. Juliet uses Africano to promote African cultural awareness via exploration of, and passing on, traditional African art forms, using music, dance, poetry, storytelling and handcrafts. Juliet is a sought-after speaker and panelist, serving on Waltham Public School's Racial Equity Task Force and has spoken at Brandeis, Harvard and many other forums. As a mediator supporting the City's work on equity issues, she is a trusted conduit to a community that is often underserved and "under the radar." Juliet is fluent in Luganda, English, German, Spanish and several African languages. Juliet is the mother of 2 lovely children.



## **BalletRox**

*Jamaica Plain*

BalletRox provides structured, multi-year dance programs for young people in Boston Public Schools with pathways to mastery of dance and development of leadership skills. These year-long programs for grades K0-12 provide arts-integrated dance curriculum to over 800 BPS students each year. BalletRox also offers specialized integrative dance instruction for children with autism. BalletRox Dance! is a low-cost, no-audition community dance program open to all community members from kindergarten through high school.

**Ellice Patterson** is the founder and executive/artistic director of Abilities Dance, a Boston-based dance company that welcomes artists with and without disabilities. She is also the executive director of BalletRox, a Boston-based dance education program providing access to high quality dance education to youth within Boston Public Schools and in its after-school program in Jamaica Plain. Outside of self-produced Abilities Dance's shows, her choreography has appeared in the MFA, Links Hall in Chicago, Gibney Dance in NYC, The Series: Vol IV at the Ailey Citigroup Theatre in NYC, and more. She has given lectures and workshops at schools, universities, and organizations across the country, including Harvard Graduate School of Education, Fidelity Investments, Boston University, and more. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Biological Sciences from Wellesley College and her Master of Science in Management Studies from Boston University Questrom School of Business. Outside of dance nonprofit work, she is also committed to science communication and black women in STEM. She is currently on exhibit at the Discovery Museum for her contributions to the science communication field.



## **Building Bridges Through Music**

*Lynn*

Building Bridges Through Music's mission is to bring together diverse neighboring communities for the purpose of increasing cultural awareness and racial harmony by using music, dance, and dramatic presentation as a multicultural educational tool. Serving Lynn and surrounding North Shore Communities since 2002, its community youth outreach programs offer educational enrichment, Integrative Arts, and performance-based programs for children and youth. Building Bridges Through Music implements and achieves systematic change using music as a universal language to bring children and adults together, actively as participants and visually as audience members.

**Doreen Murray** is the Co-founder and Executive Programs Director of Building Bridges Through Music. One thing that stands out is her love and desire to bring people together and enrich academic and social skills of underserved children through the use of music and the arts. Doreen has an extensive background working with at-risk children, youth and families as a former social worker, independent court investigator, and family advocate. She is a gospel choir workshop presenter, professional soloist, performing artist, and playwright. Doreen is a vocal coach, acts as choir director for the Building Bridges "Follow Hymn Community Choir", and has been an instructor of traditional West African dance for more than 25 years. She holds an MA in Educational Consulting and Counseling from Cambridge College and a BS in Biology & Psychology, from UMass Boston, and has served as an adjunct Psychology instructor at North Shore Community College.



## **Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (Community Workers' Center)**

*New Bedford*

CCT is a not-for-profit tax-exempt organization that works with the immigrant community in New Bedford and surrounding areas to provide workers with support in situations of workplace injustice. Many of their members are of K'iche' Mayan ethnicity, though they serve workers who have roots across Latin America, the Atlantic world and beyond. CCT members come from a variety of countries and backgrounds and speak different languages but as suggested by its name, strives to enhance working experience through community building and organizing. Its staff and leadership are drawn exclusively from the immigrant worker community it serves. CCT provides workers with support in situations of workplace injustice through a three-pronged approach, which includes education, organization and taking action. Ultimately, CCT seeks to effect long-term changes that will empower and dignify immigrant workers.

**Adrian Ventura** is a veteran activist for indigenous rights, worker and immigrant rights, and is currently the Executive Director of the Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (Community Workers' Center). He was born in a rural village in the municipality of Chinique, a small mostly indigenous village in the department of El Quiché in the western highlands of Guatemala. He is a member of the Maya K'iche' ethnicity - the largest of the 23

Mayan ethnic groups in Guatemala. Adrián began his activist career from an early age, participating with his father in the LIO Campesino. When he arrived in New Bedford in 2003, he began working with the Catholic Church once again, organizing young people who had emigrated alone and lived without their families, so he would be able to avoid alcoholism, crime and gangs. He began working with community organizations that address the needs of Central American immigrants, including the Community Coalition for Economic Development (CEDC) and the Maya K'iche' Organization. His indignation at the numerous violations of human and labor rights in local workplaces led him to help found the Community Workers' Center as an independent organization in 2009. He worked part-time for CCT from 2010 until 2014, as its director of organizing, and then he became the Executive Director –a full-time position – in 2013. Between 2014 and 2017, he also worked part-time as an organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), helping with the organizing drives at Bob's Tire and Eastland Foods.



## **Chinese Culture Connection**

*Malden*

Chinese Culture Connection (CCC) promotes intercultural harmony, strengthens diverse communities and builds bridges between American and Chinese people through interactive educational programs and arts in schools, libraries, museums and community centers throughout New England. CCC offers an array of cultural programs for both children and adults. Exposure to Chinese culture enhances participants' appreciation of their own culture, and expands their awareness and understanding of the world.

**Mei Hung** is the Executive Director and leads by example with great passion in life. She feels fortunate to do what she loves, which is to utilize Chinese culture as a conduit to unite people. She believes that arts and culture are the best way to enrich each other for mutual benefit. A native of Taiwan, Mei came to America to pursue higher education, expand her horizons, and search for the meaning of life. Since joining the Chinese Culture Connection (CCC) in 1997 as a volunteer, Mei saw a high-minded organization that, not only gave her the opportunity to share her cultural heritage, but also provided a great way for her to learn more about the American way. In 1999, Mei succeeded the founder and Executive Director of CCC, Catherine Hsu, and relocated the charitable and outreach organization to Malden. During her tenure, Mei has delivered numerous programs, as well as developed many new ones. She hopes that using Chinese arts and culture as a conduit will inspire all cultures to come together to connect, understand and appreciate each other. Hopefully, this spirit will help unite humanity into a world of mutual benefit. Mei obtained her BA degree from Bentley (College) University, and earned her MA degree in Education and Psychology from Tufts University. She has studied Tai Ji for many years with world-renowned masters, which has informed her teaching at Boston University since 2003. In her rare moments of free time, Mei enjoys cooking and playing the GuQin, an ancient Chinese stringed instrument.



## **Mount Olives Community Center**

*Hyde Park*

The mission of Mount Olives Community Center is to actively provide services that contribute to the betterment and vitality of the community. It provides high quality, compassionate and comprehensive services by providing opportunities for everyone to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities. Mount Olives Community empowers children and families to achieve lifelong success and helps individuals create a nurturing, stable, and culturally diverse family environment which encourages youth with emotional and behavioral disturbance to become effective and contributing adults. The center strives for social justice and equity where we can climb the ladder together.

**Gina Dessources Benjamin, LICSW** was born in Haiti and grew up just outside of Boston. For almost two decades, Gina has served the poor and those with major mental health issues as a Clinical Social Worker. Gina is an active member of the Haitian community and her local church where she serves to meet the social service needs of Haitian immigrants at the Mount Olives Community Center (MOCC). At MOCC, she works tirelessly to address food security issues and bridge the digital divide through digital literacy programming for learners of all ages. Gina is a seminary student at the Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her studies focus on urban ministry leadership, partnership development, global missions, and the intersection between spirituality and global mental health. Gina is a past Vice President of the Haitian Mental Health Network. Currently, Gina is a board member and medical committee member of Functional Literacy Ministry (FLM) Haiti and a board member of FLM Haiti's Boston Chapter. Gina speaks Haitian Creole fluently and travels to Haiti frequently on missionary assignment. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends and serving her beloved Haitian community.



## **Sisters Unchained**

*Jamaica Plain*

Sisters Unchained is a prison abolitionist non-profit organization dedicated to supporting young women and girls with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents. We are a refuge space where young women of color can focus on loving and improving themselves and their communities in the way they see fit. Sisters Unchained came from the understanding that when you incarcerate one person you incarcerate their friends, family and entire community. By building community through radical education, art, collective healing and visioning, we aim to work towards a world without prisons. In doing so, we create a community of radical love and sisterhood to support each other along our paths towards healing and justice.

### **Vanessa Ly**

Vanessa Ly is the President and Co-Founder of Sisters Unchained, which addresses parental incarceration and the violence of family separation by breaking the isolation between young women with incarcerated parents. She immigrated to the U.S. from Lima, Peru at the age of 4. Vanessa holds a BA in Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts, Boston.



## **We are Better Together: The Warren Daniel Hairston Project**

*Roxbury*

We are Better Together connects and heals women and girls affected by homicide and incarceration to prevent the cycles of violence and victimization. WAB2G serves families on all sides of homicide, incarceration, and violence. They aim to create a world where the cycles of trauma and violence are broken within families, and communities are actively engaged in healing. They are a community of sisters dedicated to improving the physical, mental, and emotional health of mothers. Their target population includes incarcerated individuals, formerly incarcerated, mothers, and families affected by homicide and incarceration. We Are Better Together offers innovative services around healing, leadership, resource, and emotional support.

**Ruth Rollins:** In 2007, Ruth lost her 21-year-old son to a senseless killing with a gun in Boston. As a result of her personal loss and violence in the community, Ruth became an early architect of Operation LIPSTICK (Ladies Involved in Putting a Stop to Inner-City Killing), a nationally recognized organization that addresses the crisis of gun trafficking and straw buying of firearms in urban communities and served as its first Program Director. In addition to her work with LIPSTICK, Ruth has been involved in protecting families from domestic violence in various capacities as an advocate, crisis and substance abuse counselor, community organizer, and domestic violence educator/trainer and program planner. She has been the Support Group Coordinator for the Elizabeth Stone House, serving families for 16 years. In 2016, Ruth founded We Are Better Together: The Warren Daniel Hairston Project to educate, support, and serve families on both sides of the gun violence problem and break cycles of violence and victimization. Ruth developed language and curriculum on Community Harm, removing the stigma surrounding families of victims and families of loved ones causing harm that are traumatized by gun violence. Families on both sides experience anger, guilt, shame, and fear that their loved ones will eventually end up dead or in prison. Through the Warren Daniel Hairston Project, Ruth and courageous mothers like her are working to end cycles of violence and help them actualize a future free of violence for them and their children.

