

BOSTON GRANTS INITIATIVE UPDATED GRANTEE PROFILE JUNE 2011 Shanbaro Community Association

1. What is the mission or the goals of your group?

The Shanbaro Community Association (SCA) supports the Somali Bantu refugee community in Chelsea, MA and surrounding communities. *Shanbaro* means “five tribes,” representing the five tribes among Somali Bantu. The word *Shanbaro* symbolizes unity, pride, hope, and future. The Somali Bantu Leaders are those who actively and collectively work together to improve the quality of life of their community

The mission of the SCA is *to advocate, organize and to help their community with Issues related to work, housing, immigration, language, and education*. This is accomplished by providing information and finding resources that will allow the community to acclimate and reach self sufficiency in their new country. The SCA continues to support Somali Bantus in Chelsea, MA and surrounding communities. .

The SCA continues to work toward developing the skills of its members and to evolve from a limited direct service organization into a grassroots community organizing group with the support of the Chelsea Collaborative and its other committees.

2. How long has your group been in existence?

The SCA was formed in 2004 by the more than 70 families in the greater Boston area, mainly in Chelsea, Revere, Everett, and Lynn. SCA began with no office or meeting space and had limited access to resources. SCA came to the Chelsea Collaborative via the Social Capital campaign in 2007.

After receiving the grant from NEGEF, the Chelsea Collaborative’s Director of Organizing and CLIC’s community organizer as well as Executive and Associate Executive Directors worked with SCA community members throughout the fall to understand the community’s needs and desires regarding the SCA staff person. There were five organized community meetings and at least five impromptu meetings with community elders. There were also individual conversations with community members that came by the office. These meetings provided an opportunity to explain grassroots organizing to community members who had no experiences with organizing. It also provided an opportunity to present an overview on the components of a Collaborative committee, what the responsibilities of the Collaborative, staff member, and community members would be. The credentials that would be required of the staff person from the Collaborative’s point of view and from the community’s point of view were discussed as well as which community members should be candidates for the position. The process was narrowed down to two candidates. Aweis Hussein was hired as the SCA community organizer in January of 2009. At that time, the SCA formalized itself as a committee under the Chelsea Collaborative’s umbrella in January of 2009.

3. What issue/issues got your group going?

Upon arrival in the United States, the Somali Bantus who settled in Chelsea and neighboring communities were overwhelmed by the differences in culture between their previous home in a Kenyan refugee camp and America. Close to 95% could not speak English and most of them were also illiterate in their own language of Maay-Maay, making it nearly impossible to find jobs that would allow them to pay the rent and other bills that soon started arriving in their mailboxes. Language was a barrier with almost every agency that Bantus encountered, prompting the community to create a mutual assistance association (SCA) through which those among them who did speak English could help the others navigate the various systems needed to survive.

4. How many people started the group?

The group was started by representatives of the more than 70 Bantu families living in and around Chelsea. A handful of those representatives, primarily the elders and those who spoke English, led the group's formation.

5. Is this the first time that the group's "founders" had been "activated"?

Yes, the group's founders had previously been residents of a Kenyan refugee camp.

If not the first time, with what other issues had they been involved?

N/A

6. How many people are currently involved as the core group of leaders/workers?

When the SCA was set up as a volunteer mutual aid society three Somali Bantu males volunteered their time and English language skills to support the SCA through translation, explanation, and hands on direct service. In addition, Bantu elders were involved in decision making and community meetings.

When the SCA formalized itself as a committee, the SCA established an 18 member Executive Committee consisting of officers and oversight members. The SCA held meetings and a pre-planning retreat to get ready for its Planning Retreat in January of 2011. The SCA decided during its pre-retreat work and its planning retreat in January to decrease the size of its steering committee. It has been difficult to get all of the oversight members to participate regularly. It was decided that a smaller group that would be more active and would receive more support and training would help move the SCA forward. Thus the President will also be the Chair of Youth and Sports, and the number of oversight members has been decreased from 9 to 6.

The SCA has 2 staff members, 10 Executive Committee members and 53 active members. More detailed member information is below.

7. Is this a membership organization? If so, how many members do you have?

As a formal committee, the SCA does have members. Membership as determined by our community means that all community members, including the baby that was born yesterday, are members of the SCA. We have 393 members. Of these, 132 are adults. There are 2 staff members. There are 10 members of the Executive Committee. Of the remaining adults, 53 are active members and 67 are regular members.

8. Do you have any paid staff?

When we initially applied to NEGEF the SCA did not have any paid staff. With support from NEGEF, the SCA was able to hire one part-time paid staff person, community organizer Aweis Hussein. We continued to seek support to expand this position to full time. The SCA received funding from the Clowes Fund for Fiscal Year 2011 which enabled the SCA to significantly expand the hours of the SCA community organizer. However, Aweis, the SCA's community organizer was able to take on a number of extra hours, but not all of them. He has been working for a hotel as his full-time job which provides him with a very good benefits package for his family which he cannot give up. Discussion took place between Aweis and the Executive and Associate Executive Directors of the Collaborative about the best ways to address the community's needs. It was decided to add a female community organizer who would also work part-time. Culturally the Somali Bantu community divides much of its "work" along gender lines. This tradition has continued within the United States. While Aweis has been very effective in reaching out to all members of the community, and we have made some progress in including women among the leadership, we want to insure that that we are building the skills and empowering the women of the

community as well as the men so that we will have equal representation. As such Zahara Haji was added as an additional part time community organizer.

9. What is the role of volunteers? Approximately how many volunteers are involved in your work?

When the SCA began all of its work was done on a volunteer basis. Volunteers provided translation; accompanied fellow Bantus to appointments with doctors, teachers, and community agencies; and helped with completing of applications and other paperwork.

Once the SCA formalized itself as a committee, it's structure changed.

The SCA is led by an Executive Committee comprised of 4 officers and 6 oversight members. The Committee members are all Somali Bantus who reside in Chelsea or surrounding communities. All Executive Committee members are volunteers. The Executive Committee makes decisions for the SCA and is responsible for setting goals and priorities for the SCA, taking formal positions on behalf of the SCA, and volunteering to lead or participate in the projects the SCA undertakes. The Executive Committee works with SCA's staff organizer, as well as staff of the Chelsea Collaborative, to ensure that projects are moving forward. The work plan that the Executive committee and SCA staff member oversee is set in a planning retreat that is open to all SCA members. The SCA has two part-time staff member Aweis Hussein and Zahara Haji. Both Aweis and Zahara are members of the Somali Bantu community and have a history of volunteering in the community prior to being hired. Of the SCA's 393 members, 53 are active volunteer members, 67 are regular members and the rest are youth members.

10. Approximately how many people in your community can be "mobilized" to support your issue – i.e., go to a meeting, sign a petition, call a city councilor, etc.?

There are more than 390 Somali Bantus living in Chelsea and surrounding communities. This small and cohesive group is well connected. As such, the group could be mobilized to support SCA's issues. To this point, the majority of SCA's work has focused on ensuring that Bantus are able to access the benefits and supports they are entitled to. The SCA is working with its community to ensure that comprehensive and linguistically appropriate services are available.

11. Has the focus of your group broadened or changed at all since it first started? If so, in what ways?

The focus of the SCA began to shift when the group began to associate with the Chelsea Collaborative, a community organizing agency in Chelsea, MA. We began to see that working with a broader perspective could have a greater and longer lasting positive impact on the Somali Bantu community living in Chelsea and surrounding communities.

12. Have any members of your group run for or been appointed to public office since they started working on your issue/issues? If so, for what office?

No members of our group have yet to run for or be appointed to office. The first Somali Bantu family arrived in this area in November of 2003. Somali Bantus have refugee status in the United States. After one year in the U.S.A., we are eligible to apply for permanent residency. After five years, we are eligible to apply for citizenship.

Community members are anxious to become citizens of their new home. Through organizing trainings and work with the Collaborative, SCA members have learned the power that the vote holds here in the United States for moving one's agenda forward. However, language and the cost of the application impact community members' ability to apply for citizenship. The large number of community members who have limited English proficiency slows the process of attaining citizenship as the Citizenship test must be taken in English and there is a literacy section. The cost of the application process, close to \$700, is also a factor when the majority of the community falls into the Extremely Low Income category.

Aweis has passed the citizenship and is an American Citizen. He has helped 7 community members complete Citizenship applications. Six community members have passed the test and are now citizens. One community member will be take the test at the end of June. Additionally, Aweis has been providing citizenship classes on Friday mornings since November of 2010. Three community members have been helping him. Ten community members have been attending regularly. Additionally, those community members who are not able to attend on Fridays have received materials to study at home. We are working with legal partners to plan a clinic to help with the citizenship applications and to find out about waivers for the fees.

We are hopeful that we will see community members appointed to public office in the future.

13. Describe the size and make-up of your neighborhood/community.

There are approximately 390 Somali Bantus living in Chelsea, MA and neighboring communities. These Bantus were part of the thousands of Bantus who received refugee status after spending more than a decade living in Kenyan refugee camps. Somali Bantus were forced to flee their country during a civil war.

Prior to the civil war, when living in Somalia, Somali Bantus were treated as slaves and denied education, causing the vast majority to be illiterate even in their native language. They were forced to do manual labor and other low status jobs. Despite their improved standing and refugee status in the US, Bantus still struggle to overcome the hierarchy that has been imposed on them for decades. In addition, Bantus speak Maay-Maay, a language different from that of other Somalians, making services available to non-Bantu Somalis unavailable to them.

14. Who are the constituents of your proposal?

Somali Bantus living in Chelsea, MA and neighboring communities.

**15. Have you networked or shared information/resources with other groups?
If so, with whom and how did you find out about them?**

The SCA continues to work with the Collaborative and community based organizations in Chelsea, Revere, Everett, Lynn and Boston.

The SCA also continues to develop its ties to other Somali Bantu organizations throughout the U.S.A. In August of 2008, SCA representatives attended the National Somali Bantu Workshops in Louisville, Kentucky. The theme was "Somali Bantus in the USA, Breaking Free of the Past: Accessing Opportunity and Achieving the American Dream. The purpose of the workshops was to enable Somali Bantus to help themselves through a national network of community based organizations. The SCA hopes to participate in the National Somali Bantu workshops again and present on its work with Harvard University School of Public Health's Research Program on Children and Global Adversity.

Additionally through training opportunities with both NEGEF and the Lenny Zakim Fund, the SCA has made new connections. Aweis made a connection with Stacey Pires the Director of Housing Assistance at the Somerville Community Corporation. She referred Aweis to both CAPIC and the ICNA Relief Organization/Muslims for Humanity. While the SCA was familiar with and had already made connections with CAPIC, ICNA Relief/Muslims for Humanity was a new contact. This relationship resulted in a film screening on the Somali Bantu experience and a panel discussion with refugees from the Somali Bantu, Iraqi, and Bhutanese communities in Summer 2010. The film screening was a collaboration of the SCA, the CPD and Muslims for Humanity.

The SCA, the CPD, and Muslims for Humanity are sponsoring a film screening on the Somali Bantu experience and a panel discussion with refugees from our community so that the larger community can learn more about the Somali Bantu specifically and the refugee experience.

Muslims for Humanity was considering allowing their space to be used to get a Madrassa, or Muslim religious school, started. However, they are having trouble with their space as the building is being sold. They have now asked Shanbaro to see if the Collaborative could help them with space or connect them to another agency that might be able to give them the space they need.

The SCA has also started to build a relationship with Mass General Hospital's (MGH) Healthy Chelsea initiative. The SCA is working with MGH to develop workshops on healthy eating and nutrition on a budget. This relationship was developed as the Collaborative's Green Space and Neighbors United have been working with MGH's Healthy Chelsea Initiative.

The SCA has also made a connection with the Bosnian Community Center for Resource Development. Aweis made this connection at a Lenny Zakim training. This center is located in Lynn and they have a large space. The SCA may be able to use their space for meeting or trainings in Lynn to make it easier for community members in Lynn to access trainings.

16. How have you gained knowledge about your issue?

As Somali Bantus, those leading the SCA have first-hand knowledge about the issues affecting their fellow Bantus. We have turned to the Chelsea Collaborative for training and technical assistance on issues related to community organizing.

17. If your group is more than a year old, can you quantify any of your "successes"? Examples might be toxic sites cleaned up, greenspaces/community gardens created, amount of money raised, legislation passed, etc.

We count among our successes:

- Convening a March 2008 community meeting of Somali Bantus, local elected officials, and community organizations to discuss the needs of Somali Bantus living in the area. More than 40 individuals participated in the meeting and committed to assisting the Bantus in accessing the services they need. The initial proposal to NEGEF fulfilled one of the commitments.
- Formalizing the SCA as a committee under the Chelsea Collaborative's umbrella
- Obtaining funding to hire part-time community organizers
- Working through the Chelsea Collaborative with North Suffolk Mental Health to have a Somali Bantu community member hired full-time as part of the Community Support Program providing coordination of support and linkage to community resources for Somali Bantu clients
- Continuing to develop the relationship with and learning from the Chelsea Latino Immigrant Committee (CLIC) an established immigrant organizing committee, having SCA leadership participate in the Workers Center Leadership Institute jointly with CLIC's leadership to foster even stronger ties between the communities.
- Developing and undertaking a Somali Bantu Research Project with the Harvard School of Public Health's Research Program on Children and Global Adversity; Training Somali Bantu community members on Research Methods; Conducting three different types of interviewing techniques within the Somali Bantu community; Presenting the initial results of the research at the Collaborative's Annual Meeting in May 2011
- Continuing to develop the relationship, slowly but surely, with Temple Emmanuel; Somali Bantu community members will start gardening in the Temple Emmanuel's side yard at the end of June

18. What are your long-range financial plans for sustaining your group?

All committees under the Chelsea Collaborative's umbrella are supported by its Development Coordinator through grant research, grant writing, and other fundraising. We continue to work with the Chelsea Collaborative to identify foundations and other sources of support to expand SCA community organizer's position to full-time. The SCA operates under the umbrella of the Chelsea Collaborative which employs a

part-time financial manager to support the projects of the Collaborative. We receive financial reports at least quarterly and the business manager advises us on our budget, spending, and fundraising.

Both the Lenny Zakim Fund and the Foley Hoag Foundation awarded us grants for a third time. The third application was our last for the Foley Hoag Foundation per their guidelines. The Lenny Zakim Fund is allowing us to submit an application in August as the first award was given through a special raffle. The SCA will have to take break after that application. We have been awarded a second year of funding from the Clowes Fund for FY12. We have also submitted a new application to the Anna B Stearns Foundation. We continue to build the relationship with the Office for Refugees and Immigrants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We may be applying for grants through our new relationship with Harvard University School of Public Health's Research Program on Children and Global Adversity. We are also talking to MGH about a potential grant proposal.

19. What are the biggest challenges your group/ community/neighborhood faces?

Language is still an issue of primary concern as tied to the issues noted above. Chelsea Refugee Services part of the City of Chelsea's Health and Human Services Department was the one place where the Somali Bantu could access free English classes, though the community need was still greater than the resource. They also received assistance with job searches there and workshops to assist with cultural differences and adjusting to new systems. Refugee Services was at one time the only agency providing culturally appropriate support to the Somali Bantu community. Unfortunately, Chelsea Refugee Services' funding was cut and the program ended on October 8, 2010. This continues to leave a large gap in services available to the Somali Bantu community. The SCA continues to be inundated with requests for help from community members.

We are looking into suggestions about partnering with colleges/universities and looking for possible grant opportunities to partner with other community agencies that provide English to address the language piece. The SCA is proactively working with the Boston Interpreters Collective to provide trainings for those community members with advanced English skills. The goal is to have a pool of trained Somali Bantu volunteer interpreters to assist with community members' needs. Additionally, it is hoped that these community members will build their resumes through this volunteer service and will potentially receive paid interpretation jobs. The SCA will also continue to advocate for increased services in the Somali Bantu language of Maay Maay. By ensuring that community organizations, health centers, and public agencies have the capacity to assist their Somali Bantu clients in their own language, the SCA can focus more of its efforts on organizing the Somali Bantu community to become more vocal and civically engaged.

Regarding the loss of support around cultural differences and adjustments, the SCA continues to draw on the resources and knowledge of the Collaborative, local non-profit agencies, the larger community, and its own members to provide trainings and workshops in Maay Maay for the Somali Bantu community. The SCA has been working with the Chelsea Police Department to present safety awareness trainings and as a way to familiarize and connect community members to the police. The SCA is also working with the Collaborative and its parent organizing committee, Chelsea United in Defense of Education, to identify presenters and develop trainings on an overview of the public school system and to address cultural differences in parenting. Six SCA families took part in a CUDE organized training by the Chelsea Public Schools' Parent Liaison on Understanding Your Child's Report Card which was very successful.

The SCA believes it is very important to not only address the direct service needs of the community, but to continue to develop the skills and abilities of individual community members and the whole community's ability to organize and advocate for themselves.

20. What skills do you feel you and/or members of your group could use to help move your issue forward (e.g., community organizing, fundraising, media and message development, board development, etc.)?

SCA staff and members truly appreciated and benefitted from the trainings presented by NEGEF last year and this past weekend. Aweis, one of the SCA's part-time community organizers also works a full time job at a hotel, takes classes at Bunker Hill Community College, has a wife and six children and still extends himself for community members beyond his work at the SCA. He found the Leadership training particularly relevant and helpful. He stated, "It was fantastic. I learned a lot. I learned about what you can do so that you don't get burned out. All the things she was talking about, it was like she was describing me, talking about me. She was talking about sustainability and how to have difficult conversations with members or volunteers. She was giving a lot of good information. I will be sharing this with the most active members. Zahara, Abdi, Zeinab, Faisal and I will be meeting to look at how we can take what we learned to the community. We are also very interested in media training. Also, it would be good to have refresher trainings on the things we are learning so we remember them."

We would like to say "Thank You" again and say that we are still beginning as a community organizing committee and would be grateful for any training that NEGEF is able to provide.