

## 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Diversity Day at the Community Action Agency of New Haven-May 17, 2010

The Community Action Agency of New Haven's Employee Morale Committee held their 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Diversity Day, on Wednesday afternoon. The committee was founded and organized by Angela Scipio, Quality Assurance Manager. Members include Sharon Willard, Director of Facilities and Special Projects, Annette Weatherspoon, Purchasing Agent, Lisa Driscoll, Human Resources Administration Coordinator, and Sandra McKinnie, Financial Asset Development Coordinator. The total staff function, the first of its kind in the history of the agency, is one of a series of developmental, educational teambuilding workshops that CEO and President Amos Smith had fostered. Smith provided the reorganization over the past three years that has totally changed the way service is provided at the previously plagued agency. The employment of a group of strategic and dedicated professionals from the region has allowed CAA to close their Energy Assistance season on May 17<sup>th</sup> after serving an unprecedented 15, 263 families.

Attorney Clifton E. Graves, Jr. an experienced leader in Affirmative Action/Diversity Training/Multicultural Affairs, Civil and Human Rights was the keynote speaker. "Mountain move out of my way", Graves had the staff chanting as he began a dynamic motivational lecture that set an incredible mood of empowerment within the training room. "In order for us to begin to understand diversity, we must recognize our ethnicity, that is who we are", Graves insisted. He then proceeded to ask each staff member share their ethnicity. One by one we heard staff talk of African-American, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, Barbadian, Native Indian, and Dominican, cultures to name a few. The exercise became humorous as Ed Williams, (Director of Weatherization), a medium build, middle aged, Caucasian gentleman bellowed out, "I be Jamaican". Followed by the response from IT Director, Al Grimm, "I'm 1/4 Scotch and the rest ginger ale," led the staff to an uproar of laughter. The exercise set the stage for a most uplifting lecture.

Attorney Graves cleverly embedded in the mind of each staff member how unimportant what we look like is, or even where we have come from but what is important is that we recognize that we are all in the same boat trying to stay afloat while going through life's struggles. "Understanding and appreciating where we and others come from allow us to be the best at providing service for our community", Graves told the staff. The story of Brother Leroy who fell overboard the Carnival Cruise Liner and waved by three means of escaping sure drowning ended the lecture. Apparently Brother Leroy was not paying attention to the vehicles "God" sent him to save himself. Attorney Graves concluded, "God helps those who help themselves". "Mountain of ignorance, disrespect, intolerance...move out of my way."

The staff of CAA applauded enthusiastically at the conclusion of Attorney Grave's great dissertation. He was awarded a framed Certificate of Appreciation from CAA and a salute of gratitude was mentioned as CEO Amos Smith concluded the program. Smith went on to say that CAA has demonstrated that we are in a different agency strong in commitment and dedicated to helping to provide our clients with the excellence in service through programs we now provide. Smith was alluding to his brainchild "Passport to Prosperity", which offer comprehensive case management services and partner referrals for physical, emotional and financial, family stability as the agency uses this as another vehicle to move the community forward to more self sufficiency.