



**Waltham Connections**  
for Healthy Aging

**Report on early work of the Waltham CoA's outreach worker  
to the Ugandan community**

Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging  
From Walter Leutz, Connections evaluator  
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The Waltham Council on Aging's (CoA) first-ever Ugandan outreach worker ('the worker') started in late August 2022. Her time is supported by grants to Waltham Connections by Springwell (federal Title III funds) and the Tufts Health Plan Foundation. The purpose of this report is to learn about the needs of Ugandan seniors and how the worker has addressed needs in her first five months in the job.

Methods

The report is based on the worker's weekly timesheets from late August 2022 through the end of January 2023, two interviews with her, and two meetings with her and the CoA Director.

In the timesheets the worker reports the hours worked each week and writes narrative descriptions of activities. For timesheets in December and January, I talked to the worker about her entries and wrote down what she said to clarify and expand on the original sheets.

I conducted two interviews with the worker, one in October and one in January. I started the first interview by distinguishing the purpose of the evaluation, which is to describe what is happening with the outreach position itself, versus supervision by the CoA Director, which includes guidance, assessment of how well the worker is doing in the role, and how she might do better. In the meetings with the CoA Director, we talked about the becoming part of the CoA staff, communicating with them, receiving needed training, and how the work was going from her perspective.

I have reviewed the timesheets and my notes on meetings, and I report what I have learned in the seven areas below. I quote extensively from my notes and the timesheets. I have edited the text (but not the substance) slightly to make it more readable.

1. The Ugandan community in Waltham
2. Contacts with community agencies
3. Help provided to individuals
4. Holding group discussions, meetings, events
5. Developing new/improved services
6. Distribution of materials/communications
7. Other, including training, supervision, and staff collaboration

### Timesheet and interview analysis

According to the timesheets, the worker billed for 33 hours in September, 32 hours in October and 38 hours in November, 8 hours in December (she was ill), and 24 hours in January. Her day in the office was Tuesday, and early in the period 6 of her 8 hours reported were typically on that day. In later months she recorded proportionately more hours working in the community.

#### 1. The Ugandan community in Waltham

To understand the efforts of the Ugandan outreach worker, it is necessary to know some things about the Ugandan community in Waltham.<sup>1</sup> Ugandans call Waltham “Little Kampala,” reflecting the fact that Waltham is one of the “capitals” of the Ugandan community in the U.S. An estimated 1,500 or more Ugandans reside in Waltham, and thousands more reside in nearby communities and come to Waltham for Ugandan restaurants, religious communities, social life, and a variety of services.<sup>2</sup> Radio Uganda broadcasts from Waltham, and there are also Ugandan professional and civic groups.

The signature occupation of Ugandan immigrants in the Boston area is caregiving, that is, working as personal care workers, certified nursing assistants (CNAs), and nurses in hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living, and private homes. This is shift work that takes place at all hours and days of the week. One result is the need for someone to watch the children, and seniors often take on this role in their own families and for other families.

The Ugandan outreach worker says it is important to understand that Ugandan seniors live in the context of their multi-generational families, where they have responsibilities. Many also have jobs. In a December email to me the worker wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> I have prior knowledge and experience with the Ugandan community, having served for several years on the board (including board President) of African Cultural Services (Africano), a community group primarily serving Ugandan youth. As noted below, the CoA’s worker has also worked for five years at Africano, and I knew her from my time there.

<sup>2</sup>

[http://archive.boston.com/news/local/articles/2009/08/20/for\\_immigrant\\_ugandans\\_waltham\\_becomes\\_little\\_kampala/](http://archive.boston.com/news/local/articles/2009/08/20/for_immigrant_ugandans_waltham_becomes_little_kampala/)

There are very few retired Ugandan seniors who have the luxury of attending events during the week. Most of them go back home (to Uganda) to retire. The rest are working here and there. Most Ugandan seniors are looking for resources because this population had been ignored for a very long time. They barely ever had anyone to direct them to resources.<sup>3</sup> Having a Ugandan CoA outreach worker has been positively impactful. That is why I do not measure my success on the events and activities but on the referrals and calls that I am getting. I have gotten so many calls, but some are not beneficial to the CoA because the people may not be Waltham residents.

Another somewhat invisible barrier to services for Ugandan seniors is that they generally speak and understand English, but for full understanding and expression they much prefer speaking Luganda, one of the native languages of Uganda.

## 2. Contacts with community agencies

The worker contacted a number of community agencies during her first five months: Springwell for SHINE (benefits) counseling, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), TRII Right to Immigration, the CMC Foundation, the Charles River Community Health Center, Family Access of Newton, and the Waltham Interagency Network. She also distributed information about the CoA's programming to organizations and groups active in the Ugandan community, e.g., social media sites, community meetings (she spoke to at least four events, one with 200 people), and a Ugandan grocery across the street from the Senior Center.

Additionally, the worker comes with a built-in connection to the flagship community agency for Ugandans in the Waltham area: African Cultural Services (Africano). She has worked there for more than five years, and she has helped convene and run a seniors' group there. She and the CoA have worked out that it is all right to have meetings for seniors at Africano instead of the CoA. The March 5 event with FAN (see below) is an example. Another factor is that Africano is open and active on weekends, while the CoA is closed. Finally, about 60 Ugandan families come to the Africano food pantry every two weeks. This pantry is a collaboration with the large Waltham pantry held by Healthy Waltham. The worker reports that she puts aside and sometimes delivers pantry items to seniors.

Here is some detail on agency contacts.

Charles River Community Health Center: I made a phone call to Charles River to get their fax number so that The Ride could send an emergency ride request for the

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<sup>3</sup> This was confirmed in a focus group Connections held with 19 Ugandan seniors in March 2022. Only a few had heard of the senior center and only one had ever received any help from it. 'Issue Brief on Healthy Aging Listening Sessions Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging.' Available on the Connections website: [Walthamconnections.org](http://Walthamconnections.org).

seniors PCP. The person at CR wasn't sure she could give number to me, so she sent me to (the main office in) Brighton. Unfortunately, after being transferred several times I was not able to get the fax number for CR. But the good news is that I was able to connect with their new Haitian outreach worker and made plans to connect next Wednesday.

January 31: I attended the Waltham Interagency Network meeting. This is a meeting that lasts for about one hour. It includes representatives from several non-profit organizations serving Waltham among other towns. It is very helpful because it has introduced me to so many resources that are beneficial to the seniors. (This is the meeting where she met the contact from FAN – see below). Another follow up from the meeting is that I will follow up with TRII – Right to immigration. The staff member said to reach out to her if you have seniors.

Saturday: I attended the CMC foundation for an “invitation to change” training for mental health professionals working with communities. This was a great training for me to attend because it has equipped me with the knowledge that I can share with the Ugandans seniors who have family members that are struggling with substance abuse, by using science and kindness to help them change and also the seniors not to blame themselves. (Total training time was 12 hours. She did not report all the hours to the CoA since this was good for Africano, too.)

January: Another fruitful contact was with Family Access of Newton (FAN), which provides help to families and children. My initial contact was to see if there might be jobs there for seniors as caregivers, but the discussion of seniors' other needs led to plans for a Sunday afternoon presentation at Africano to Ugandan seniors who care for youth. FAN and I developed a flyer (attached). Most of the seniors who provide childcare are off on Sundays. They go to church so we can do it after church.

### 3. Individual help provided

The timesheet reporting makes it difficult to get an accurate count of how many seniors the worker interacted with and helped in the five months. This is because some entries have indeterminate numbers, e.g., “returned phone calls and emails.” Also, there are many “phone calls to clients,” e.g., to remind them of the November 4 open house (see below). However, there are entries that provide some detail about 29 contacts with individuals and their issues (5 each in September and October, and 7 in November, five in December, and seven in January).

Issues with which the worker helped seniors include applications for Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and senior housing; making appointments with SHINE for benefits counseling; help from the Community Health Center; and help with job searches. The Ugandan seniors she sees have concrete needs, e.g., housing, insurance, transportation (taxi vouchers, the Ride). They are less interested in activities like those offered at the Senior Center.

Here are some excerpts from the November entries.

- Ms. A was interested in SNAP benefits and had questions about senior housing. I was able to help her apply for SNAP and answer her housing questions.
- Mr. B wanted more information on how to apply for senior housing. I made an appointment for him with (the CoA social worker) for the following week. He also wanted some cultural food, so I took him to the Ugandan store across the street.
- Ms. C wanted more information on housing from (the CoA social worker).
- Mrs. D was doing an inquiry on behalf of her Ugandan friend who has cancer. She was wondering if there was a program that could offer some housing assistance to her. She said she would be back with her friend.
- Mrs. E was looking for a job. I gave her some information about Opportunities for Inclusion in Waltham because I knew they were looking to hire.

Here's a December entry that reflects Waltham's place in the local Ugandan community described above. One of the questions the worker has raised is how and how and how much she can serve out-of-town seniors.

I called Mrs. M to check on her if she still needs the SHINE appointment to ask about health insurance plan. She is a Ugandan lady who works. She keeps getting insurance offers in the mail. Should she keep or change? Got an appointment in Framingham but didn't have transport. (A Waltham CoA colleague) will ask SHINE in Waltham.

Another challenge faced by the worker is that her meetings with Ugandan seniors take a long time. She needs to listen to their stories before just focusing on needs:

My people are so big on building rapport. How do I limit my interaction with them to the point that will make sense to CoA? One of the seniors who has taken a lot of time is taking care of her two teenage grandchildren. Her immediate service need is transportation to her doctor, but her life need is caring for her two teenage grandchildren whose parents are absent. Their mother returned to Uganda to live with her religious community. When I call, she wants to vent about her grandson who was missing from home for over 10 days and she wanted me to check in with her granddaughter too. The granddaughter gave up a full college scholarship to take a job to support the family.

Another challenge is fitting help into working seniors' schedules. Here's from January:

Help me with trip to Mall with my husband. Re the van, it's tricky because CoA is closed on the weekend. Most seniors work during the week. Caregiver shift workers can't take an hour off.

#### 4. Holding group discussions, meetings, events

The worker developed two events for Ugandan seniors – an open house at the CoA in November and a workshop at Africano in March for Ugandans providing childcare.

Much of the worker's time in her first few months was spent on planning and holding a November 4th open house at the Senior Center. This was a chance to bring seniors, families, and Ugandan organizations to the Center and to let them know what she and the Center could offer. Planning started early in the quarter and progressed from finding a date for the auditorium, developing and distributing flyers, enlisting CoA staff to attend and talk, speaking to several Ugandan gatherings, posting the flier on Ugandan social platforms, talking to community leaders, arranging Ugandan food, making reminder phone calls to seniors, and hosting the event. There were about 20 people from the community – 15 seniors and several family members - plus several agencies. Several CoA staff and a few Connections volunteers welcomed the guests and spoke about their jobs.

As described in Section 2, a contact made by the worker at a professional meeting opened the door for creating an event at Africano for senior childcare providers. The event brought in Family Access of Newton to explore how FAN could support Ugandan seniors caring for children. Four caregiving seniors, plus a few family members, attended the event.

#### 5. Developing new/improved services

For the past two years Connections has offered a Welcome to the Digital Age (WDA) program that gives free Chromebook computers and wifi and training to use both to Waltham seniors who cannot afford them.<sup>4</sup> The worker has talked to the WDA team about creating a WDA for Ugandans. They may need a different time structure for classes, given their family and work obligations. She has a candidate who is Ugandan to be an instructor.

#### 6. Distribution of materials/communications

As described in the events area above, the worker spoke about the CoA and her new role at several community events, and she distributed the open-house flyer on Ugandan social media. Here's an entry from January:

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<sup>4</sup> [Walthamconnections.org](http://Walthamconnections.org): 'Evaluation of Welcome to the Digital Age.'

I put the Tax and \$5 parking sticker information from the newsletter on different social media platforms that can reach the Ugandan seniors, e.g., Facebook and different WhatsApp groups. Replied to the comments and messages. There were 15 comments on parking sticker.

There is a subgroup of 32 seniors set up by (the senior who organized Connections' Ugandan focus group) last year – on WhatsApp. I put up a message in Lugano on tax season help at CoA. They access the group through their cell phones. They all have phones to talk to Uganda.

Here are several more entries from January that point to the need for communications outside of Waltham to reach some Waltham Ugandans:

I requested to present at St. Peters Church in Belmont. The responses praised my presentation.

Spoke to a church dinner in Burlington.

If it's an outside Waltham person, I can give them resource guide info. Or I ask them to come on my Africano time. E.g., Gentleman who wanted to move to Waltham and wanted help with public housing and life insurance.

Often they are renting and status may change, e.g., move back to Waltham.

## 7. Other, including training, supervision, and staff collaboration

Almost every day in the office there are timesheet entries about meeting with other CoA staff, including arranging help for individual seniors and receiving training and orientation. The worker also met with her supervisor, the CoA Director, almost weekly. Areas of training mentioned are both administrative (data entry, phone mail system) and substantive (the CoA resource guide, making DTA and housing applications). Here are entries from January:

I had a meeting with (the CoA social worker). We talked about doing some outreach work in the community, starting with her coming to the Africano pantry and then also visiting the senior housing on Pine St among other things.

I enjoy chatting with (other CoA staff) because they understand the culture the CoA serves. We learn from each other. (The Director) said the CoA gives people paperwork and their families take care of it. This may not work with Ugandans. Writing is so hard for many.

## Concluding thoughts

This report on the Ugandan worker comes on the heels of a report on the first three months of the Latina outreach worker (see footnote 1). It is reasonable to make comparisons and to understand how and why their accomplishments differ. Just looking at the numbers, the Ugandan worker seems to be off to a slower start than the Spanish worker – in serving individual seniors, making connections with outside agencies, and convening seniors in groups. It is important to understand that this is to be expected given the much longer standing and more resourced CoA efforts to reach Latinos. Further, the current Latina outreach worker has work experience advantages. Over the last two years she has been involved in CoA programming. She managed the 2020-21 Waltham Senior Civic Academy, and she is the WDA program's Spanish instructor and marketer. More than half of the 55 WDA students to date have been Spanish speakers. She also serves on the Connections Coordinating Committee.

In contrast, there has been much less CoA effort to reach senior Ugandans. In late 2017 Connections organized a tea featuring youth dancers from Africano that attracted 65 Ugandans, but there has been little follow-up since then besides distributing the CoA newsletter to Africano. Also, the Ugandan worker is new to the CoA, to the aging field, and to the agencies/programs serving seniors in the area.

One thing that stands out from the analysis is that the Ugandan worker needs some guidance and support on how and how much to serve Ugandan seniors who do not live in Waltham. Although there is no prohibition for seniors to attend programs (e.g., exercise classes) in CoAs in neighboring towns, CoAs generally serve their own residents with social work and referral services. One way to address this would be to identify social workers at CoAs in nearby communities where Ugandans reside and developing referral relationships.

Also, the worker needs some guidance on how to allocate her time and billing for work for the CoA and work for Africano. A meeting of the worker with the CoA and Africano director could address this.

Finally, and perhaps a little aspirational, is there is a way that the Ugandan worker could help Springwell address its shortage of home care workers by helping recruit qualified Ugandan caregivers, including seniors? There seems to be some seniors who are interested.





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## **A Conversation with Seniors Caring for Young Children** ages 0 -6 years old




**Join Family ACCESS Community Connections, The  
Waltham Council on Aging and Africano Waltham,  
to share your experiences as a caregiver of young  
children**

**Learn new ideas for engaging young children and  
supporting their learning through play**

**Sunday, March 5th 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

**at Africano Waltham, 703 Main St. Waltham**

**Contact Anisha with questions (857) 746-9163**

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