



# Midwest Oromo

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MIDWEST OROMO  
COMMUNITIES  
SAINT CLOUD, MN

## Initiative Foundation Grant to MOC

Midwest Oromo Community (MOC) has recently received a grant for \$12,350 from the Initiative Foundation. These funds are devoted to organizational training, wages for a part-time contract worker and some office equipment.

The grant effort was led by MOC executive director Mohamed Webo. Significant assistance was obtained from Center for Non-Profit Excellence and Social Innovation, MOC's fiscal sponsor. Jeanette Bineham, Executive Director of CNESI, was particularly supportive and willing to offer advice and encouragement at a crucial stage.

The organization's offices in east Saint Cloud have been hindered by a lack of office

equipment. The Initiative Foundation funds will allow for the purchase of a printer and copier and a new computer. This equipment will aid the organization in helping community members adapt to life in America by aiding communications and grant-writing capabilities.

Organizational training is provided by the Initiative Foundation. In monthly meetings, representatives of different non-profit agencies come together for workshops and discussions. In this forum, participants gain the tools needed to develop strong organizations. This experience has been particularly valuable for MOC staff, because it has let them make connections with other non-profit agencies from whom

they could learn.

In addition, the grant from the Initiative Foundation has allowed MOC to hire a contract worker, Oumar Wako. Mr. Wako has previous experience working with other non-profit organizations. In addition, prior to coming to America, he worked with the Ministry of Agriculture in Ethiopia.

Oumar Wako's responsibilities involve developing a three-year plan for the organization, focusing on plans for MOC's fiscal health and office structure. He will be reviewing accounting systems, drawing up a staffing plan, researching future grant opportunities and making other fund-raising plans.

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## MOC Granted 501(3)(c) Status

The Internal Revenue Service has granted 501(3)(c) status to the Midwest Oromo Community. In a letter dated September 17th, the organization was notified of its official non-profit tax exemption status.

Receiving 501 (3)(c) status is an important first step for new non-profit organizations. The news is significant because it means that charitable donations made to the organization are now tax-deductible.

In addition, 501 (3)(c) status makes MOC eligible to apply for additional grant opportunities. Currently, the organization is trying to develop an after-school program for at-risk youth. Grant applications are being submitted to support this program.

# Who Are the Oromo People?



Coffee is central to the Oromo social experience

It is estimated that there are about two hundred Oromo families plus additional individuals living in Central Minnesota, for a total population of nearly five hundred. Most of these people have arrived within the last ten years, finding jobs in the meat-packing industry and other sectors of the local economy.

The Oromo are a Cushitic people from the Horn of Africa. They have a long history of trade with the Somali, another Cushitic people to the east of Oromiya. Parts of Oromiya have been subjugated by Somali rulers, as well as by the Amhara and Tigray to the north. However, the Oromo maintained a distinct society, language and culture. The culture was notably stratified by age groups, with different ages having different responsibilities. This feature led to an element

of democracy, with councils elected every eight years to make laws for the community.

The main religious beliefs of the Oromo are Islam and Orthodox Christianity. Protestant Christianity is a third major religion.

Today, the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, living in a wide swath across the country's central highlands. Census data suggests the Oromo comprise about 35% of Ethiopia's population. However, the Oromo have often faced oppression in their homeland. This was true during the imperial era, during the communist regime, and under the present administration. At times, Oromo have been prevented from owning land and the written Oromo language has historically been banned. Oromos lobbying for improved

conditions have been arrested in the thousands, and even today there are reports of extra-judicial executions of Oromo activists. As a result, many Oromos have fled to neighboring areas in Somalia and Kenya, with some ultimately relocating in the United States.

Because they are traditionally rural farmers and herders, and due to the previous suppression of their written language, many Oromos come to the U.S. with limited literacy. In addition, many urban Oromos who can read and write in English have no concept of written Oromiffa, and are thus handicapped to some extent in either language. This problem, along with the cultural contrasts between their homeland and America, presents a significant obstacle to the integration of the Oromo people into mainstream American society.

The Oromo have often faced oppression in their homeland

## SCSU Offers Conflict Resolution Training



Conflict resolution training aims to help communities work together

Members of the MOC staff recently participated in conflict resolution training at Saint Cloud State University. The program was held in late October.

The training was part of an SCSU program funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation. The Bremer Foundation is a charitable organization dedicated to helping people achieve full economic, civic and social participation in their com-

munity.

MOC hopes to put these tools to use in mediating conflicts both between members of the local Oromo community and disputes involving the community at large.

# MOC Established to Help Refugees in Transition



The MOC was established to facilitate a smoother transition for Oromos trying to establish themselves in central Minnesota. In addition, MOC is meant to put in place a network of social support that these immigrants have left behind in their homeland. By helping to liaise between newly arrived immigrants and local businesses and agencies, MOC hopes to establish positive relationships between the Oromo community and other communities in Central Minnesota.

They also acted as interpreters in a variety of situations: helping fill out applications for economic, food or housing assistance; helping to fill

**MOC sees youth programs as an important focus** out job applications; helping to fill out forms for background checks and helping to schedule appointments. Staff members have conducted orientations for individuals new to the community, including visits to the food shelf and social service agencies.

On some occasions, MOC facilitated conflict resolution between members of the Oromo community, with agreements brokered by Oromo community elders. In addition, MOC has sponsored informational meetings between representatives of the Oromo community and the St. Cloud Police Department. Additional community meetings are envisioned in order to educate new immigrants about the local educational and justice systems, American culture and employment opportunities. MOC has also produced its first informa-

tional flyer in the Oromo language.

Education of the Oromo population will help these community members to more smoothly integrate into the surrounding population, with fewer conflicts that often characterize the arrival of new immigrants.

Rather than simply connecting individuals to existing social services, MOC would like to be pro-active in helping to more fully integrate Oromo immigrants into the wider community. Plans are already underway to start an after-school mentoring program. Some communities are seeing Oromo children struggle with social problems as teenagers; MOC hopes to prevent that here.

As it grows, MOC would like to translate its skills into helping immigrant populations from other areas of Africa.

*Continued on page 4, "Non-Profit"*

**MOC views itself as playing a long-term role in the successful assimilation of new immigrants into the Central Minnesota community**



## MOC Selects First Board of Directors

The Midwest Oromo Community has selected a group of community representatives familiar with the organization to act as its first board of directors. These board members were drawn both from the local Oromo community and the Saint Cloud community at large.

Chris Schaller is an Associate Professor of Chemistry at the College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University. He cur-

rently serves as Chair of the MOC Board. Abdu Wako, Vice-Chair, is an Oromo community member. Laura Tripiciano, an immigration attorney with offices in east Saint Cloud, serves as the Secretary-Treasurer.

The board is rounded out by additional members of the Oromo and non-Oromo community. Mohamoud Mohamed is the Founder and Executive Director of the St. Cloud Area

Somali Salvation Organization. He brings extensive experience in the non-profit arena to the board. Three additional Oromo community members, Omar Intale and Amina Omar and Kemer Khabiro also serve on the board. Mr. Intale, an Oromo elder, is an especially valuable member because of his respected position in the Oromo community.



# MOC

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### Shelter and Support for African Immigrants.

Midwest Oromo Communities was established in 2009. MOC is a non-profit, non-political, and non-religious organization. Its purpose is to provide education, leadership, support and other services for newly resettled refugees from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia). Such services include: providing social, recreational and academic support to Oromo youth and families; preserving and promoting the Oromo culture and language; and mediation to help resolve conflicts. In addition, MOC hopes to educate the American public about the Oromo people and their history.

*About the Newsletter logo:* In Ethiopia, the tree is a symbol of the Oromo people. Trees are often planted outside Oromo homes as shelter for social gatherings.



## Non-Profit Set to Help Immigrants

*Continued from page 3*

Thus, the organization views itself as playing a long-term role in the successful assimilation of new immigrants into the central Minnesota community. By helping new groups become successful participants in American society, MOC hopes to combat problems typically associated with new immigrant populations, such as depression and joblessness in adults or drug abuse and gang activity among youth.

In short, MOC has moved quickly from an idea to a valuable resource for the Oromo community. The long-term goal of MOC is to build expertise and experience in how to assist new arrivals in adapting to life in America and successfully becoming responsible community members. MOC hopes to eventually build connections to other immigrant communities that it may also be able to serve.

### From Our Kitchen

## Silse

*Eggs with ginger, onion and peppers: a traditional Oromo breakfast dish*



6 eggs

1 small red onion, chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger

1 green bell pepper, chopped

3 tablespoons olive oil

Scramble eggs in a bowl and set aside. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium flame. Add the onion and

sauté until translucent, about five minutes. Add garlic and stir for a minute longer. Add bell pepper and ginger and stir briefly, then add eggs, stirring constantly until cooked.

Serve with fresh, home-made bread or toast.