

## Association of Haitian Women in Boston

### Our Mission

AFAB's mission is to empower Haitian women by helping them develop their individual and collective capacity to improve social, economic and political status and thus be able to effect positive changes in their life and their families' lives.

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*Excerpts of*

### “The Working Conditions of Haitian Certified Nursing Assistants in the Greater Boston Nursing Homes”

A study by Carline Desiré  
Executive Director

#### INTRODUCTION

For several years, Haitian nursing assistants working in the nursing homes of greater Boston have complained of poor working conditions. Over the years, organizations like Jobs with Justice, SEIU, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, and the Association of Haitian Women in Boston have supported a movement for better working conditions for the Haitian nursing assistants. On October 10, 2004 a group of Haitian nursing assistants met with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization at Temple Salem, a Seven Day Adventist Church located in Dorchester, MA, to determine how best to improve what they call “a culture of disrespect” in too many nursing homes (McNamara, *Boston Globe*, October 2004).

In October, 2005, three Certified Nursing Assistants in informal individual interviews reported the work environment in Boston’s nursing homes to be hostile. They stated that Haitian nurses assistants are mistreated because they are black and Haitians. They also reported the pervasiveness of language discrimination, mistreatment by nursing home administration, and in general, a culture of disrespect. Several newspapers covered the Haitian CNA problem; however, there is a gap in available information on this particular workforce in Boston. What is the working condition of Haitian Certified Nursing Assistants in the Greater Boston Area? In this pilot study, we seek to understand the perspectives and work experiences of the majority of Haitian Certified Nurses Assistants (CNAs) in the Greater Boston nursing homes.

#### METHODOLOGY

We adopted a cross-sectional and purposive qualitative study with 11 Certified Nursing Assistants in a period of two months (January and February 2006). Nine (or 82%) of the interviews were conducted in complete privacy (7 at the residence of the CNAs and 2 at the Association of Haitian Women) and 3 (or 18%) were conducted at a nursing home in Boston. All the interviews followed the same format with an introductory statement expressing the relevance and importance of the interview and consistency of the sequence of questions. Open-ended interview questions were used to allow for greater flexibility. While all the women were asked the same questions, their answers often determined the direction of the interview’s focus. This method of interviewing encouraged the women to feel more comfortable freely expressing their opinions. While the interviews uncovered much information regarding each woman’s experience, in the analysis, more weight was given to the common themes highlighted in the data collected. Our data collection tools included:

- Informal interviews with three Certified Nursing Assistants
- Two visits to local nursing homes
- Face-to-face interviews with 11 Certified Nursing Assistants

The interviews included the following four questions: how are you treated as a Haitian nursing assistant? Please share the good things about being a Haitian nursing assistant? Please share the challenges about being a Haitian nursing assistant? What do you think can be done to address the challenges?

These open-ended questions revealed three major themes:

- Disrespect
- Workload/Inequality
- Job stability

**DISRESPECT**

*“Nursing home workers who are non-union in Boston have been complaining to their ministers that they are never allowed to speak French Church/Creole to friends at work. Nursing home workers have a right to be treated as full human beings on the job.”* **Stephanie Edma**

Disrespect was the recurrent theme in all of the four questions. Most of the women interviewed had a direct incident where they felt that either the nursing home administration or the patients disrespected them. The disrespect theme surfaced in all of their 4 open-ended questions.

Below are Haitian CNAs perspectives on disrespect:

**Table 1: Disrespect Interviewees**

1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The number one challenge is disrespect for Haitian CNAs. CNAs are not well respected. A nurse pulled a cell phone from my hand while I was taking care of an emergency.</li> <li>▪ Residents call us bad names and tell us bad words.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CNAs complain about the patients having all the rights and they have no rights.</li> <li>▪ The (CNA) job is very hard and challenging. You really must love your job to do it well. Not only the nurses, but some of the patients are also disrespectful. They call you boat people.</li> <li>▪ The nurses always believe the patients not the CNAs.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Harsh treatment for CNAs at the nursing home began in 2003.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patients are racist but the administration is okay.</li> <li>▪ The relatives show appreciation for the nurses but not the nursing assistants.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nursing assistants get a lot of abuse from the patients. Some of the things the patients tell the Haitian nursing assistants are: “Nigger; you are here to do the job”; “Bitch, go back home – to your country”; “I am a member of KKK you should be afraid of me”; “How did you come here by boat (boat people)”; “I don’t want any black people to touch me.”</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is racism and prejudice.</li> <li>▪ We need to stop patient abuse of the CNAs.</li> <li>▪ The patients sometimes call us bad names and tell us bad words.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When the patients file complaints, administration does investigations. When CNAs complain about residents nothing is done. They never give CNAs reason over the residents no matter what happened. Sometimes it takes a lot for the administration to see that the patients are not consistent in their stories. This may cause CNAs to lose their jobs for no reason.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Once, I almost got fired because a patient told a lie to the administration about me. I was sent home without pay. But, they later found out that I was telling the truth and I went back to work.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work hard, poor pay and no support</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Humiliation</li> </ul>

**WORKLOAD/ INEQUALITY**

*“Sometimes on the night shift we have two CNAs for 60 residents. How can we give them the care they need?”* **Evelyn Smith**

Certified Nursing Assistants give basic care under the supervision of a nurse. However, the level of duties and tasks for nursing assistants depends on the work environment, which tends to differ from one nursing home to the next. Typically, nursing assistants are the staff members who provide the most direct care to nursing home residents—helping residents to eat and bathe. Seventy-three percent of the nursing assistants reported unfair workload. Weber, in a 2002 article, reported that some 54% of (nursing) homes provide less than the minimum recommended two hours of attention a day per residents. Based on this pilot study, the Greater Boston nursing homes would fail in providing the recommended time for direct patient care.

Below are Haitian CNAs perspectives of the workload at the nursing homes.

**Table 2: Workload/ Inequality Interviewees**

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ They (the nursing home administration) give you too many residents to take care of. You take care of 14 residents during a shift (of 8 hours).</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is too much favoritism. (Some) nursing assistants very often do not do their jobs or make a lot of major mistakes and administration never reprimands them. But if you are Haitian, it is a totally different approach they take. They file complaints against you.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The floor should have 5 people (CNAs) and they put only 4 people (CNAs).</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You do more and more for the nursing home. Too many patients. You are asked to give medicine to patients or the nurse simply puts the medicine in front of the patients.</li> <li>▪ Administration fires people too easily.</li> <li>▪ Too many patients. In an 8-hour shift, you get 11-15 assignments. Out of 11-15 you may get 7 or e8 residents for complete care where you have to do everything for the patients (brush their teeth, wash them, feed them etc.).</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nursing homes are constantly short staffed. Five people are doing the work of 7 people.</li> <li>▪ Administration takes advantage of the Haitian CNAs – they know that they stay on a long time.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The CNA is always working under a lot of pressure.</li> <li>▪ Some nursing homes treat CNAs like slaves.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We need help from the head of the union to have a meeting with the director to talk about these problems. No one is listening to us. The nursing home administration says that there is a budget cut. We don’t know when the budget increases or decreases. Since 2001, they have been talking about budget cuts and reducing the number of employees that work on the floor.</li> </ul>

## JOB STABILITY

*“What you will notice about the care staff of Wakefield Nursing Home, aside from their (Haitian Nursing Assistants’) obvious love for and commitment to the residents of the facility is that the majority of them are immigrant women from Haiti”* **Eddie Benoit**

Despite the working conditions, the Haitian CNAs tend to stay on the job for many years. One interviewee reported that it is an honor to be taking care of older people. Another one added: “...*who could be your mother and grandmother?*” Others simply have gotten used to the workplaces and simply resigned.

**Table 3: Job Stability**

Interviewees	
4	▪ It is a pleasure to work with the elderly. The patients talk to me about their problems and they kiss me sometimes.
5	▪ I love taking care of old people. I treat them like babies (meaning that she takes special care of the residents).
6	▪ The (CNA) job is a humanitarian job. Haitian CNAs give a lot of themselves to the job; they apply a lot of understanding.
7	▪ The Haitian CNAs usually stay in the job for a lot time. Other CNAs move on (but Haitians stay).
8	▪ The CNAs is always working under a lot of pressure.

## FINDINGS SUMMARY

There are clear indications that the majority of the CNAs interviewed believe that they are treated unjustly by the major health care systems. Whether they voice their opinion or not depends on the number of years at the job and also their age. The younger CNAs, the ones who might be better candidates for opportunities to pursue a career in the health field, tend to have a stronger voice. They provided highly descriptive details on the level of disrespect, workload and wage dissatisfaction.

The disrespect from the nursing home administration is expressed in the way they are reprimanded in front of the residents, in the hallways and the lack of consideration for their reports on various challenging conditions that exist. In addition, they feel that the administration violates their trust when they arrange to have them work certain hours as overtime, only later to readjust their regular hours. Disrespect from the patients who are very much alert come in the form of racial slurs and lack of tolerance.

The CNAs describe the workload as a scheduling issue. The nursing home administration schedules an insufficient number of nursing assistants to work the shifts. Interviewee #9 said “we need help from the head of the union to have a meeting with the director to talk about these problems. No one is listening to us. The nursing home administration says that there is a budget cut. We don’t know when the budget increases or decreases. Since 2001, they have been talking about

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## AFAB’s Graduation June 22, 2006

by Karen Bazile, Adult Ed  
Coordinator

This year’s graduation ceremony was held at AFAB, unlike previous ceremonies, which took place at the Codman Square Great Hall. Despite location change, the graduation was a joyous occasion – with about fifty students present that evening, along with family, friends, and of course the instructors. Unfortunately, the majority of morning students couldn’t attend because the event was held in the evening—but they received their certificates this fall.

The evening’s program included a reading of AFAB’s mission statement along with that of the Adult Ed Program, which were read by Eleonore Cazeau, a morning ESL-3 student.

After the reading, Yanel Francois, another Morning ESL-3 student, spoke about his experience as a student at AFAB, discussing how AFAB enabled him to improve his English by allowing him to communicate more comfortably. He says that now he feels prepared to enter into a GED Program.



Karen Bazile & Chiraq Marielle

Philoxia Dormeus, an evening ESL-1 student offered up a song sung in English before each instructor was

given a moment to share a few words of encouragement with their students. Instructors praised students for their efforts in coming to school consistently and pushed them to not give up.

Carline Desire, AFAB’s Executive Director, followed with a few words for the students, expressing how proud she was of them for making it this far. She also charged them to continue to fight for their rights as immigrants.

After this, the evening ESL-1 class presented a gift to their instructor Julie Fils-Aime.

Finally, certificates were presented to students, beginning with the Pre-ESOL class and going up to the ESL-3 class.



Eleanore Cazeau, Yanel Francois,  
Judith Clervil

Karen Bazile, the Adult Ed Coordinator, had the honor of handing out the Perfect Attendance awards to a several deserving students—those who went to school rain or shine.

Karen then made a few announcements about upcoming summer classes, an available

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Karen Bazile & Alma Chery

## AFAB WISH LIST

Computer  
Computer software  
Monitor  
Printer  
Books  
Book shelf  
Calculators

### UPCOMING EVENT:

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
PREVENTION FORUM**  
Saturday,  
October 28  
9:00 am to 3:00 pm  
Haitian Multi-  
Service Center  
185 Columbia Rd,  
Dorchester

## AFAB's Graduation Continued

apartment at KAFANM, and a women's support group. The celebration continued with some good Haitian food brought by the students, and dancing to Konpa music. ▲



ESL Participants



Anne Ecclesiastes

### AFAB'S PROGRAMS:

The Adult Ed Program will be offering ESOL classes, which will begin on Tuesday, September, 12, 2006.

The following classes are available:

Kreyol Literacy, Pre-ESL, ESL-1, ESL-2, ESL-3

English classes:

Tuesday and Thursday mornings 10-12 p.m.  
or evenings 6-8 p.m.

Kreyol Literacy:

Monday and Wednesday afternoon  
from 4-6 p.m.

The Domestic Violence Program is offering "Reach 2010," a 3-week HIV/AIDS prevention workshop for Haitian women.

Starting September 11, 2006 to  
September 27, 2006  
every Monday and Wednesdays  
from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

## Working Conditions

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budget cuts and reducing the employees that work on the floor."

Despite the level of challenges, the Haitian CNAs generally stay on the job. All of the interviewees have been on the same job since they started (from 5 months to 30 years). To earn extra money, they take on part-time jobs and work with agencies on temporary assignments. Throughout the interviews, the women explicitly connect discrimination at the nursing homes specifically against the Haitian ethnic population. However, they continue to work hard because the CNA job is stable and there are plenty of overtime opportunities that allow them to meet their economic aspirations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The women interviewed unanimously agreed that the nursing homes should implement policies to address the problems they face at the workplace. They acknowledge that the CNA job should be valued; taking care of older people is a noble act.

*For more information, or for citation of full article, contact Carline Desiré, at AFAB.*

AFAB's

**11<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GALA**

WITH **EMMELINE MICHEL**

**Saturday, October 14, 2006**  
**7:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.**  
**John Hancock Hall**  
**180 Berkeley Street, Boston**  
**Tickets: \$60**

## AFAB-KAFANM SERVICES:

**HOUSING AND HOUSING ADVOCACY:** KAFANM provides six housing units, one transitional unit, and a community center. AFAB assists newly arrived Haitian immigrants in applying for public housing benefits and facilitates workshops on housing issues such as tenant rights, home buying, etc.

**ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS:** Our adult education programs provide individuals with the fundamental skills necessary to secure gainful employment and to better integrate themselves into society.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:** Our youth programs enrich the lives of our students through the delivery of solid academic and social skills. They prepare students to face life's challenges and bridge generational and cultural gaps within the Haitian community.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION:** AFAB affirms the right of abused women to be safe and to prosecute their offenders when necessary. A cornerstone of our mission, domestic violence prevention advocacy programs provide essential support to domestic violence survivors and their families while they attempt to regain control of their lives. In collaboration with CCHER and other Haitian agencies, AFAB also works to educate Haitian women on the link between HIV and domestic violence. The Haitian Round Table on Domestic Violence meets every first Wednesday of the month with different providers joining forces in the fight against domestic violence.