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Young Nigerian CEO of Traffina Foundation bags Obama Fellowship



By Nndi Chukwu

For the last 4 weeks, Chinomnso Traffina Ibe of Ofeuzo Egbu in Owerri North local government in Imo state, has been part of a group of 25 young African Leaders from 20 Sub-Saharan countries studying community and nonprofit organizations at Wagner College, in the New York City borough of Staten Island. The Wagner College cohort is part of U.S. President Barack Obama's Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, which has placed 500 men and women

in programs at 20 colleges and universities across America this summer.

Chinomnso is the founder and CEO of the Traffina Foundation for community health and CEO of Moms & Newborn Nigeria. Both organizations seek to reduce the high maternal and infant death rates in Nigeria and throughout Africa. Together, they have designed and produced a unique, colorful, disposable lifesaving kit that contains 18 essential items to help women during childbirth. The contents are consistent with World Health Organization recommendations for sanitation and emergency care at childbirth. These Clean Delivery & Newborn Kits are distributed at no charge to pregnant women living in poor rural communities during childbirth, including internally displaced pregnant mothers in Northern Nigeria. The organizations provide free pre-natal & post-natal care services, monitor women with life-threatening complications from pregnancy, train midwives and other health care workers to provide quality maternal and children's health services, and organize free medical missions. The two organizations not only save lives but create employment opportunities for the women and girls who produce and distribute the birth kits in various states in Nigeria.

Each Mandela Washington Fellowship institution focuses on one of three areas: public management, business and entrepreneurship, or civic leadership. Wagner College, the only small college selected for the Washington Fellowship is chosen by the U.S. State Department for the civic leadership curriculum because of its groundbreaking Port Richmond Partnership, which links Wagner professors, classes and students with 20 different community agencies, schools and churches in a nearby Staten Island community. Wagner College President Richard Guarasci laid out the basic theory underlying the Port Richmond Partnership and everything else his school does to engage with the community in a constructive, collaborative way:

"We believe that true leadership has less to do with power, rank or authority and more to do with the ability to bring together diverse groups of people in a common purpose and a shared vision of a better world."

"Coming to Wagner College has helped me see how much the life of each one of us is linked to the life of all of us," Chinomnso said. "There has been so much value added to me and my work by my professors, my mentor, the collaborators and coordinators of the fellowship, the other Mandela Washington Fellows, and everyone at Wagner College. Everyone is willing to help us grow, and that is what I and the other Fellows need. I am not just lucky to be here — I am blessed to be at Wagner."

Wagner's Mandela Washington Fellows, as the 25 young leaders are called, spend parts of their day engaged in classroom lectures and discussions. They also visit many different kinds of community organizations in the field to see first-hand how they operate. This week, the Fellows visited Lifestyles for the Disabled, a Staten Island facility that helps equip developmentally disabled citizens with work and life skills. The Lifestyles campus includes a café, commercial greenhouses, a laundry, building maintenance shops, a woodworking shop and a radio station, all run by the program's participants with help from staff and community volunteers.

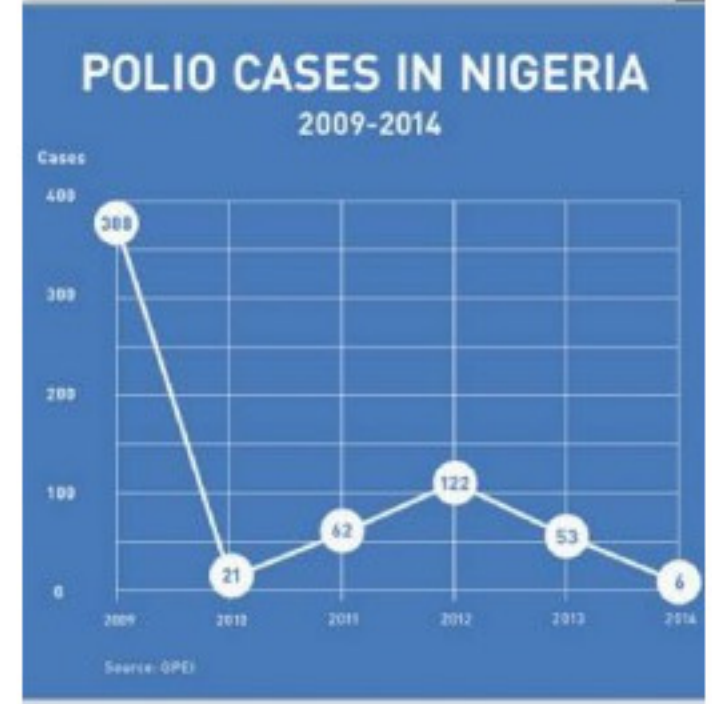
"The visit to Lifestyles was one of my best moments on Staten Island," Chinomnso said. "It's so inspiring to see how they provide quality learning experiences that help all their participants, regardless of their disabilities, to become productive members of society and live their lives with as much dignity and independence as possible. Lifestyles is one organization that I have seen that focus on the abilities of individuals, rather than their disabilities."

Chinomnso shared a few thoughts about how her experience as a Mandela Washington Fellow would inform her work back home in Nigeria

"Getting back home as a transformed civic leader, I have to share my knowledge with my colleagues and other young people as well as get my communities more involved," Chinomnso said.

"As one of our professors says, there is much need to train and educate everyone to be responsible for their destinies and their society. With this, I can better apply all that I learned to strengthen the structures of the organizations I lead. We will expand the work we do to more states in Nigeria as part of our strong commitment to reducing maternal and child mortality in Nigeria and throughout Africa

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