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2024 ORNAMENTA F. NEWSOME FELLOWSHIP

May 21st will always be a memorable day for me as this was my first day as an Oramenta Newsome Community Development fellow at the Anacostia Business Improvement District (ABID). Before visiting Southeast Washington, DC, specifically Anacostia in Ward 8, I had heard many negative stereotypes about the area. However, my perspective changed when I walked into Paola's for a sandwich. A man passed by with his pregnant dog and stopped to inform the lady at the counter that the dog was almost due and that he would let her know when she could get a puppy. This simple, neighborly interaction reminded me of Nairobi, Kenya, where I am from, and I instantly knew I would love Anacostia.

During my assignment to the Anacostia Business Improvement District (BID), I contributed to efforts addressing the unique challenges of this historically underserved area. Despite facing economic and social obstacles, Ward 8 boasts a rich cultural heritage. The Anacostia BID has successfully supported local businesses and preserved the area's character, recognizing its potential for growth and transformation. This culminated in Mayor Muriel Bowser designating Ward 8 as DC's Arts & Culture District under the Art to Go-Go initiative on February 23, 2023. Additionally, I played a key role in convening stakeholders to drive the 295 underpass project, aiming to transform the space into a vibrant hub promoting public safety, emotional well-being, and community engagement.

Additionally, the role of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has been crucial in these efforts. As a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), LISC has championed this cause by partnering and providing funding for organizations like the Anacostia BID. They have also supported local organizations' capacity by providing summer fellows as a way to honor the late Oramenta Newsome. LISC provides funding for us fellows, further contributing to the positive changes in the community.

During my fellowship, I was actively engaged in projects focused on collaborating with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to facilitate the revitalization of the 295 underpass and develop a wayfinding plan for the business corridors along Marion Barry Avenue. Additionally, my responsibilities extended to administrative tasks encompassing the digital assets project. Acting as a liaison for small businesses and agencies, I served as a resource for diverse needs. The Anacostia Business Improvement District (BID) has been recognized for its dedication to promoting art in all forms, including the city's official music, go-go. Through innovative initiatives like Art to Go-Go, the BID has fostered inclusive economic growth, celebrating the community's culture and history. By supporting small businesses and artists, the BID has created a vibrant and welcoming environment. Specifically, Art to Go-Go empowered artists by providing resources

like materials and a platform to showcase and sell their work at the Giant BBQ, contributing to their economic success.

Similarly, the mobile kiosk offered a platform for various business owners to promote their products and services at no cost, allowing them to retain their profits entirely. These initiatives exemplify the Anacostia BID's commitment to bolstering economic opportunities for Anacostia residents. As a result, these efforts will contribute to the advancement of both economic and community development in the Anacostia area.

I am deeply thankful for the enriching experience of serving as a fellow, a path that resonates with my vision of pursuing a humanitarian career rooted in my identity as a Kenyan political activist and Pan-Africanist. My internship with LISC at the Anacostia Business Improvement District (ABID) has not only ignited my passion but also equipped me with invaluable insights. Understanding the establishment and impact of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) in empowering communities, alongside recognizing the pivotal role of NGOs like ABID in fostering grassroots initiatives for small businesses, has reinforced my dedication to championing economic empowerment for societal advancement. Engaging in meaningful conversations with individuals like Carlos Chase, the Art to Go-Go shuttle driver, has afforded me a deeper understanding of the socio-political fabric of Anacostia. Reflecting on Ashley Templeton's poignant words, *"This is their home—Anacostia stands apart from downtown. With the community at the forefront, we must allow this to guide and influence our approach to economic development in historic and indigenous areas. It is essential to foster economic growth while preserving the rich history and culture integral to these areas."* this has been truly enlightening. These experiences have underscored the pivotal role of organizations like ABID in shaping the Anacostia ward and confronting pressing issues, especially the economic disparities impacting black women in the community. Furthermore, participating in seminars, such as the one at Forbright Bank, has expanded my understanding of navigating bureaucratic complexities in the DMV area. This first-hand exposure has been instrumental in broadening my perspective, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to intern at LISC. I am eager to apply what I have learned to my grassroots initiatives aimed at economically empowering Africans on the African continent. I firmly believe that my journey here was not a matter of chance but an integral part of my destiny.