

City of Portland
Office of Economic Opportunity
Natural Helpers 2024
Cohort Biographies



Amevi Assoutovi

Community Health Outreach Worker, City of Portland

My name is Amevi Assoutovi, I am a 37-year-old individual from Togo, West Africa. I hold a Master's degree in Telecommunication Networks and Mobility, a Bachelor's degree in Informatics and Telecom Networks, and a BTS (Brevet de Technicien Supérieur) in Telecommunications. My professional journey includes serving as a computer science professor at ESGIS private university in Lome, Togo, and managing the department of schooling in the same institution. In addition to my academic and professional pursuits, my commitment to social causes began during my time in middle school, where I started as a peer educator focusing on raising awareness about the AIDS virus and promoting preventive measures. Subsequently, I collaborated with the National Anti-drug Committee in Togo, working to educate the public about the dangers of drug use and abuse.

Driven by a desire to make a positive impact, I founded the non-profit organization JAD Jeunesse Anti Drug (Youth Against Drugs), dedicated to assisting individuals in overcoming drug addiction. Over time, our efforts expanded internationally, leading to the establishment of HOPE OF AFRICA in Brazil, aimed at aiding the homeless population.

What does Economic Opportunity mean to you: Economic Opportunity, to me, signifies the chance for individuals to access avenues for financial growth and prosperity, ultimately enhancing their quality of life.

Favorite Quote: Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value. (Albert Einstein)

What was the last thing or situation that made you laugh? As I was leaving the office and heading towards my car, an unexpected mishap unfolded. I slipped and found myself on the ground. To my surprise, two of my colleagues witnessed the incident. One of them rushed over to help me up but ended up slipping herself. In a hilarious turn of events, a third colleague joined the rescue mission, only to experience the same fate—slipping and falling. In the end, I, the person who initially needed assistance, found myself helping them all to their feet. It turned out to be a comical sequence of events that brought unexpected laughter to the office surroundings.

Who do you consider a mentor (Living or non-living)? A mentor is a more experienced or knowledgeable individual who provides guidance, support, and advice to someone less experienced or knowledgeable. A mentor typically shares their expertise, insights, and experiences to help the mentee develop skills, navigate challenges, and achieve personal or professional goals. This is why I consider living a mentor.

Name a City of Portland organization that inspires you: City of Portland RESETTLEMENT Programme.

What impact do you want to leave on the community of Portland: In my role as a City of Portland Community Health Outreach Worker, I am dedicated to contributing to public health and fostering equity in healthcare. My diverse experiences and commitment to social causes drive my passion for making a positive difference in the lives of others. Through my work, I aim to leave a lasting impact on the community by promoting health and well-being. Inspire hope within my community.



Belinda Vemba

Immigrant Welcome Center, Maine Maternal Task Force

Hi everyone my name is Belinda Vemba and I am from Angola. I am super excited to be joining the program. I would say my love for the human race has always been my driving force to pursue change around I always joke and say that Advocacy chose me and not the other way around haha.

I consider myself to be a community leader because of the work I do around our communities I am also a member of the Maine Maternal Task force and I am A Parent Ambassador.

I am a mother to 3 amazing kids alongside my supportive husband who makes life so easy for me. *The City of Portland has the most vibrant human beings I have ever met and it speaks through the works they do here in the city.*

The Welcome Immigrant Center, In Her Presence and the Greater Portland Family Promise are true examples of what hope stands for. These three organizations are what we call community, fighting to make sure we leave no one behind.

We all deserve a fighting chance and that comes with Economic Opportunities, when this is available to everyone then we have Freedom. I don't have a mentor yet, but I would say I look up to Micky Bondo from In Her Presence, she is what we call a force of a woman.

My favorite quotes are: They tried to bury us but they didn't know we were seed, Dino Christainopoulos

I come here alone but I stand for many, unknown.



Cadeau Assoumanti

Community Program Manager, Gateway Community Service Maine

Cadeau Assoumani has consistently demonstrated a profound commitment and enthusiasm for serving our community by advocating for the underprivileged and working tirelessly to improve their well-being. Through work and volunteer efforts at organizations such as HOPE Acts, Salvation Army, Welcoming The Strangers, Cumberland County Public Health Department, The Opportunity Alliance, and Gateway Community Services Maine, Cadeau has made a positive impact on the lives of people in Portland and its surroundings. He has unwaveringly supported those facing homelessness, and individuals affected by COVID-19, assisting community members in applying for EAD, connecting job seekers with employers, aiding new arrivals in navigating the system, assisting those who lost their jobs due to delayed EADs, helping people struggling to afford basic needs, and advocating for patients burdened with medical bills. Furthermore, he has been instrumental in linking community members with vital resources.

Economic Opportunity means: Providing fair access to resources, education, and employment for all, enabling people to achieve their potential and contribute to society.

My Favorite Quote is “A Ship Is Safe In Harbor, But That Is Not What The Ships Are Built For” Someone I consider as Living Mentor Uwase Sylvie

Name a City of Portland organization that inspires You: Gateway Community Services Maine

What impact do you want to leave on the community of Portland: I desire to make a positive change in the community of Portland and its surroundings, focusing on promoting growth, resilience, and well-being. I seek to empower individuals, offer support, and inspire hope for the future. Specifically, my goal is to contribute to making a better Portland where every member feels appreciated and respected, regardless of their background, status, gender, disabilities, beliefs, or circumstances.



Divine Selengbe

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Specialist, City of Lewiston

I am Lewiston's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist. I graduated from Lewiston High School and obtained a Bachelors in Communications with a focus in Public Relations and Marketing from Thomas College. I grew up in Lewiston and wanted the opportunity to give back to my community as a full circle moment" for me. I joined the Lewiston team after serving at Prosperity, ME in Portland where I enjoyed making a difference in the lives of immigrants



Doris Rodriguez

Community Liaison, Lions Club Board Member

Tell us about yourself: My mother and father are from Puerto Rico but I was born in New York specifically from Spanish Harlem, I call myself a New York Rican. I lived there for 27 years before moving to Massachusetts for another 27 years before settling in Falmouth, Maine. I am bi-lingual in Spanish and English. I loved history growing up and I never wanted to be a teacher because I couldn't be in a classroom. But now, I've become a teacher of life. I learned at a young age that prejudice exists and creates barriers for people, I think people need the tools and resources to survive it while we address it.

Any family or interesting info that you wish to include: I have an adopted son with special needs- autism and fragile x syndrome. He's 6'5 and works in the community. He's so proud to be working and I push him every day because he matters. I love to bowl, swim, walk around and meet people and invite them to church. We have potluck on Saturday's and run a clothing ministry.

What does Economic Opportunity mean to you: Economic opportunity is for people who are new to the country who are seeking a way to better themselves and families. Also, people who are part of generational poverty and don't know how to get out. We have to make sure we provide information that can help them make their dreams come true. I'm a stickler for people learning English. That's the greatest access to economic opportunity and mobility.

Favorite Quote: "All things are possible if you set your mind to it."

What was the last thing or situation that made you laugh? Watching an old comedy movie or people watching always makes me giggle. Also, kids, I love being a nanny.

Who do you consider a mentor? Pastor Harry Sabnanie and Pastor Gration Perera. I go to them and I can just be myself. I can tell them anything and they don't judge me and they give me great advice.

Name a City of Portland organization that inspires you: The Lions Club- volunteer work in the community and provide funding to the community. We work heavily with our Military veterans and youth. Worldwide chapter so I am proud to be a board member.

What impact do you want to leave on the community of Portland: I want people to not remember as solely a person but as a person who gets things done. And I never turned them down. I just love people in general.



Emilia Franco

Community Liaison, Student, Former VP of Angolan Community

I'm a soul having an experience in this physical beautiful world, so I try to make each experience an opportunity to learn and share love. I have a daughter she is the best accomplishment I have done in my life, she makes me laugh and smile every day.

Economic opportunity for me means that people have an equal opportunity and basic needs fulfilled and supported. When people have their basic covers they have more time to create and dream. One of the people I consider mentor is my mother first, she always made sure that I had enough support so I could go to school and dream about becoming someone who can make a difference in the world. With time I got to know someone I consider a mentor Oprah Winfrey, she makes the life of people around her better by showing them that everything is possible when you believe and work for it.

I want to impact my community in the positive, by pursuing my dream, goals make it a realization so others can see that it is possible. Some organizations that inspires me in Portland are, Portland Empowerment and MIRC because they support the community and families.



Guy Mpoyi

Senior Human Services Councilor, City of Portland, Community Garden Assistant Specialist, Bus ambassadors

I am originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I moved to Portland in 2018 and joined Cultivating Community in 2019. I love gardening and helping people who speak limited English find access to fresh food and land – I also work as a Senior Human Services Counselor with the City of Portland and I am a Community Transportation Leader at the Greater Portland Council of Governments. In this role, I advocate for accessible transportation for the immigrant community. I also am a member of the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee. I speak and read English, French, Lingala, and Swahili.



Joaquina Nunes

Yetu Consultants, Language Partners LLC

I am a dedicated and passionate individual committed to making a positive impact in the community. With a background in Cultural Broking/Interpretation and Case Management, I have devoted my career to



fostering inclusivity, equity, and economic empowerment. Collaborative initiatives that drive positive change and strengthen our community's social fabric are where I thrive.

My family is the cornerstone of my motivation, providing unwavering support for my endeavors. As an international student in the USA, I am grateful for the financial backing from my siblings, showcasing their care for my education and well-being. Beyond my professional life, I am an outgoing person who finds joy in spending time with loved ones. These personal connections and interests fuel my drive to contribute meaningfully to the economic and social well-being of Portland.

Economic Opportunity, to me, extends beyond financial prosperity. It embodies the belief that everyone, regardless of background or circumstances, deserves a chance to access resources, pursue aspirations, and contribute to the community's economic growth. It's about creating a level playing field where talent and determination are the key drivers of success.

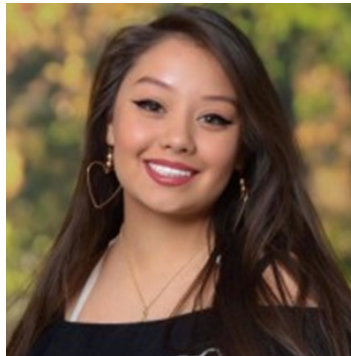
Abraham Lincoln's quote, "Whatever you are, be a good one," resonates with me, emphasizing the importance of always giving our best, regardless of our location or role.

A recent amusing incident involved a client's text claiming to be in Montreal, causing concern. Upon investigation, it turned out to be a mix-up with Montreal Street, becoming an inside joke that reminded us of the power of humor in fostering good-natured rapport even in serious business.

My brother, Pedro Nunes, serves as a profound inspiration. His commitment, determination, and transformative leadership qualities, including conflict resolution, networking prowess, and innovative thinking, have profoundly influenced my professional and personal development. His emphasis on setting a clear vision, navigating challenges diplomatically, and leveraging networking opportunities has been invaluable.

I draw immense inspiration from MANA, an immigrant-led organization committed to promoting social and personal empowerment for immigrants. Witnessing their transformative impact on the community fuels my aspiration to contribute to similar positive change.

In envisioning my contribution to the community, I strive to empower individuals, bridge gaps, and create opportunities for collaboration and growth. My goal is to leave a legacy of a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient community for generations to come.



Kasandra Thach

Student, Founder of the Portland Butterfly Project

Pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Clark University, Kasandra Thach demonstrates a unique blend of academic excellence and a strong commitment to community service. As a former core leader in Maine Youth Justice (MYJ) and board member of Maine's Children Alliance (MCA), she has actively contributed to initiatives dedicated to bettering the lives of Maine's children, youth, and families.

Inspired by her experiences with MYJ and MCA, Kasandra founded the Portland Butterfly Project! The project originated as a mission to supply essential items to the unhoused community and has since evolved into a comprehensive resource guiding individuals toward crucial support and educational opportunities.

Recently honored as a hometown hero alongside her mentor Ali Ali, this recognition reflects Kasandra's dedication and impactful work within the community. She emphasizes the shared honor underscores the positive influence and inspiration drawn from her collaboration with Ali. As she looks forward to joining Natural Helpers, Kasandra is excited about the opportunity to enhance her leadership skills and further contribute to assisting those in need. Kasandra hopes to ensure that every person irrespective of their background or living situation, has the opportunity to rewrite their story and emerge as the leaders they can be.

What Economic Opportunity means to me: Economic opportunity, in my view, represents the potential for individuals to enhance their financial well-being and ability to thrive. I believe education and employment to be the primary avenues for fostering economic opportunities in today's world.

Favorite Quote: "If you believe it will work out, you'll see opportunities. If you believe it wont, you'll see obstacles."

Last situation that made me laugh: I couldn't help but laugh recently as I danced in the heart of Boston, all in an effort to bring smiles to my students and the bus workers. Funny thing is, I'm not a morning person, but the mission was accomplished!

Organization that inspires me: I am most inspired by Maine Youth Justice, because it is a dynamic organization in Portland where a diverse group of youth leaders collaboratively works towards creating positive change. Their collective efforts reflect a range of ages and experiences, showcasing the power of a united, multi-generational leadership.

The Impact I want to leave: Having once been unaware of my own potential, I am now dedicated to ensuring that every person, irrespective of their background or living situation, has the opportunity to rewrite their story and emerge as the leaders they can become. My passion lies in fostering empowerment in Portland, emphasizing the inherent strength within our community and the distinct potential each individual possesses. I strive to provide our youth with the tools not just to survive, but to truly flourish. Through genuine connections, mentorship, and collaborative efforts, I aspire to create a community where every member, particularly our young ones, feels valued and empowered to make meaningful contributions



Linda Nag

Community Liaison

Tell us about yourself: I am originally from South Sudan and currently work as a Certified Nursing Assistant and as a mother of two amazing children. I came to Maine at 17 yrs old, at the time I didn't speak english so school was an experience. I attended portland high school and went on to receive a degree in Medical assistance from Southern Maine Community College.

Any family or interest info that you wish to include: I am the elder of 5 girls in my family, they are my community. We didn't know alot about the resources in Maine, I'm glad that I got to become more involved. I think it's really important that people share resources with those who may be in need and I want to do that. I would love to return to school and get my bachelors in business, I currently own my business.

What does Economic Opportunity mean to you: It means creating opportunities for generations to come. I want to make sure my children don't have to worry about stable housing, I want to build long term security.

Favorite Quote: It's not about where you are from, it's about where you are going and if you have a vision."

What was the last thing or situation that made you laugh? My kids make me laugh, I enjoy my time with them but I also enjoy my peace and quiet time as well.

Who do you consider a mentor (Living or non-living)? I've never had a mentor, I'm excited for the opportunity provided by the City of Portland to receive one.

Name a City of Portland organization that inspires you: I've worked hard my entire life to support my family, I haven't had the opportunity to get to know the organizations, I'm looking forward to doing that and getting more involved in community initiatives.

What impact do you want to leave on the community of Portland: It doesn't take much to kind and support others, help one another. Everyone's going through something. I just want to be kind. I never want to be the reason someone's day is ruined.



Sara Giovanna Fitzgerald

Community Health Outreach Worker, City of Portland

Twenty years ago, I arrived in Portland from Arequipa-Peru on a work Visa. During that time, I became fluent in English, earned a degree from USM, and began a career as a legal assistant in a small law firm, all while raising two wonderful children as a single mother. I currently work as a per diem CHOW for the City of Portland. I am also a Spanish interpreter for House of Languages and Language Partners, and I am a Notary Public.

Economic Opportunity means to have the chance to grow professionally and financially. I believe connections move the world around. Access to resources, education, and healthcare are important aspects of economic opportunity and everyone has the right to be connected, respected, and understood. A proverb that has resonated with me throughout my life goes: "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a person to fish, and you feed them for a lifetime." My first job in the US was working at McDonalds. Over the years since, I have done everything from cleaning houses to starting my own business. A year ago, I decided to leave my career as a legal assistant and seek new opportunities within the growing Spanish-speaking community by putting both my immigrant experience and language skills to work supporting the needs of others.

My hope is to teach people to fish by sharing my life and professional experience to help others within my community. When I am not busy with my children, I participate in a Yoga group led by Maria Rosita from Peru. In this yoga class, I have made great friends who bring a smile to my face every time we meet for a good stretch. I also like to read, draw, and sing. I am a big fan of karaoke.

I was encouraged to become a Natural Helper by my mentor, Victoria Chicon. She is an inspiration! Her dedication and contributions to the community are unmeasurable. Like her, there are organizations that inspire and promote wellness amongst our community. Organizations like the ILAP, The Opportunity Alliance, Child Development Services, just to name a few. This is why I love Portland. It is truly a land of opportunity.



Victoria Hernandez

Community Liaison

My name is Victoria Hernandez. I am originally from a little Mission town called San Juan Bautista in California. I am half White and Mexican. I love helping and feeding people in any way I can. I love chasing after lighthouses and sunflowers. I am always up for a new adventure that I can have that adrenaline rush! I love traveling, dancing, meeting new people, and love to learn new things. You got to live life to the fullest.

I have three siblings and two sons ages 21 and 23. I have a partner that is from Guatemala. I am excited to start this program and learn more about myself and the calling God has on my life. To find purpose and pass that on to the Spanish community so we can all shine together. To be able to help them with the



resources that they need to be successful in what they want in life. I believe everything happens for a reason in this life, be it bad or good. "Count it all joy", James 1:2. Laughter starts in our hearts, happiness starts with one. I am all about fun and laughing about everything and nothing. I don't want to grow old. Haha

God is my mentor and he even laughs with me. I am grateful for this opportunity to be able to grow and learn from everyone! Thank you!