



Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival



Annual Report: 2018 / 2019

Written by

Griot Chinyere Artistic Director

Contributions from

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The Shanti-Chi remit is to promote, preserve and celebrate the ancient oral traditions of storytelling – You are invited to join our aims, build a platform upon which this art can evolve to nurture confidence in our story, our heritage and our culture.

Over the past 9 years the Shanti-Chi vision has grown from strength to strength. We deliver all your storytelling magic and basic expedition needs. We are trained oral historians; capturing the story of the individual, the family, the community (in whatever form that may take). We are professional storytellers working with the ancestral patterns and energies, which govern a story structure. This puts us in a unique position to create bespoke stories for all occasions, rituals and ceremonies.



Shanti-Chi presents the Nne Agwu (Mother of Divine Nation) storytelling festival, the brain child of award winning Griot Chinyere Artistic Director of Shanti-Chi. A great thank you from the heart and soul to all the storytellers, drummers, musicians, healers, stall holders, yoga teachers, volunteers and very importantly all our visitors, customers, sponsors and participants that make the Nne Agwu Afrakan storytelling festival a success. Giving thanks to everyone for the trust they have placed in this vision. Their energy, positivity and commitment keep the cogs moving. Every vision needs a team for it to come to fruition. The Nne Agwu storytelling festival is a testament to the team effort.

The Nne Agwu management committee are volunteers and work hard to ensure this vision comes to pass. Our Chair **Sandra Agard** an experienced professional and engaging storyteller will be stepping down after 3 years and we give thanks for her support. **Itricia Byer** our health and safety coordinator kept a breast of health and safety updates and training on behalf of Nne Agwu. **Khunum Peters** our Treasurer, arrived with no experience or any idea of the role of a treasurer. His role is to keep financial records. He has taken up the numerous training opportunities Nne Agwu offers, to develop in his skills in the role of treasurer. He makes up the annual accounts with hands on support. The committee are on hand to support the growth and progress of all the members. **Nkechinyere Nwobani-Akanwo** an essential member has

been supporting quietly in the background and as our official photographer, capturing beautiful moments and stepping forward when we need her.

Ashanti Hoyte our secretary took on the role in 2014, seized the opportunity to be part of a legacy building organisation, “one that wants to give people the opportunity to tell, share, express, write their own stories”. Her role is to



record the minutes of each meeting we have throughout the year, which is the formal story of how we organise the festival and work together as a team. She sends the minutes to the committee members, arranges and inform members of meeting dates and times, sends out reminders and keep them informed of any changes. The secretary is our email correspondence with certain organisations and individuals Nne Agwu committee communicate with, following up and keeping the committee informed. The secretary also assists with banking matters, keeping the statements and keeping us updated on how much we got (or haven't). She works closely with the

treasurer. She has held this post for 4 years and grows into it organically, learning her skills as she grows.

Akeba Coubry came to Nne Agwu 3 years ago with no events management skills just a great deal of enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. Now she is our events coordinator for Tasting the magic, an event organised as a prelude to the annual Nne Agwu Afrakan storytelling festival. Tasting the magic gives our audience a miniature experience of the summer extravaganza and promotes story writing competition. 2018 it took place at the bears Woods scout camp located on 18 acres in Croydon. A beautiful part of the English countryside and close to London. We offer this unique experience for free to engage our target audience with activities in the natural environment. The last Tasting the Magic initially set to go on in early March however due to adverse weather the pipes burst the venue was not able to accommodate us. Team however pushed on and acquired a new date in May. The community expressed great interest in attending as well as several entrepreneurs booked a stall place. Six of the eight, having had a taster went on to book a stall for the 4-day Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival in July. The committee as well as additional volunteers work hard to create a beautiful space to welcome our community: a number of families, single people, couples,



young people and elders. Some returnees and some new to the experience. We also had healthy vegan food provided by Sensa caterers, healthy cakes from Vegansational and snacks by Ankh Well Being Centre. Tasting the Magic evening kicked off with call and response, majestic storytelling from Griot Chinyere and the winning stories of children who entered the storytelling competition were performed by the committee. The evening was closed with singing dancing eating and talking around an open fire. There was much excitement skipping on the air.



Kamaria Broodie volunteered her skills and services to the Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival as the volunteer co-coordinator. She has been part of the management team since early 2017 and had never been camping before joining our team. Her background is accounting and has many years of managing staff in her accounting roles and also as a director a small

independent school in North London. For the 2018 Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival we implemented a new recruitment process. The volunteer's positions were advertised and interested individuals were asked to complete the application process that consisted of sending in a CV and cover letter. All applications were read and all successful applicants of which there were 12 were invited to the training session held on 8th July 2018 and all unsuccessful applicants, of which there were 6 were informed individually and reasons given. Unsuccessful applications fell under 3 categories: One - if the applicant had a dependent accompanying them to the festival 15 years and under or a fragile elder. We wanted to avoid putting volunteers in the unfair position of ever having to choose between their dependent or the festival; Second - if the applicant was unable to attend training as it has become apparent that training is vital to the smooth running of the festival and the confident contribution volunteers can make. Third - if we felt the applicant's health issues would be aggravated by volunteering. The work is demanding and 90% of the work is conducted outdoors under all weather conditions.

The training consisted of: 1) An introduction of team building exercises so management and volunteers get to know each other and learn how to work together; 2) The erection of two different types of tents and an introduction to the various tent systems on the market. Griot Chinyere chose these tents as they covered the widest range of aspect one might meet when erecting a tent. The group was divided into two, giving everyone an experience with both tent styles. After each activity the process was discussed to enable a deeper



learning. What went well and what could be improved. Tents were taken down, folded and returned to their bags/cases correctly; 3) Learning the right conditions for fire building - choosing the correct wood for chopping. How to chop wood? How to use an axe safely? How to build an effective fire? How to maintain and guard a fire? and How to put a fire out; 4)

Customer service training which consisted of role play helping us to consider the best way to deal with difficult situations. We gained insight into what it means to be unhelpful. Explored how to bring our best self to the space even under the most challenging of circumstances. Showing the most effective and ineffective ways of handling any given situation. Training was carried out by Griot Chinyere who has expedition leadership qualifications and experience spanning 12 years and workshop facilitation skills spanning over 30 years. A good day was had by all. This was our best year in volunteer performance and effectiveness. The feedback was great. We continue to improve the quality of volunteer training may extend it to 2 days.

Griot Chinyere Nwaubani is an international storyteller, creative facilitator, theatre director and writer. She has travelled across Africa, Europe and the Middle East planning and delivering creative based group work with professional and non-professional members of the community across the generations; elders, adults, young people and children. The global communities she has worked with and for have taught her a lot about local forms of creative expression. Griot Chinyere has been involved with producing, researching, developing the Nne Agwu vision for over 10 years and it was 2010 after qualifying in the Expedition leadership that she mustered up the courage to present the first ever Afrakan storytelling festival to her community.



Griot Chinyere's task is to ensure the evolution of the Storytelling festival remains in alignment with its core values and aims; to create a space in nature where we can come to share, learn about and create our heritage and culture using the oral traditions; to gather outdoors, as we do back home, to celebrate, preserve and promote our culture. In that vein; raise funds to run

the festival; scout for suitable venues; engage appropriate creatives; structure and programme the festival; delivery of expedition leadership training for volunteers; writing up contracts; booking marquees; works with marketing and publicity and writes promo videos; keeps the website updated; deliver storytelling performances and workshops during the festival; overall director and producer of the festival with team support; engages the finest artists who this year were: Breathing Fire playback theatre, El Crisis. Aamasade Shepneki, Ken MaCalla, Nicky Norton, Theo Calliste, Amantha Edmead, Ngoma Bishp, Sandra Agard, Eli Anderson, Jali Bakary.

Nne Agwu is a member of GAVS a voluntary organisation that offers free training to its members which enables the committee to build self-esteem and confidence so the ambition of the work is plausible. The vision is to bring African culture to forefront of the lives of us in the Diaspora. 2018 was the 7th annual storytelling festival produced by Shanti-Chi where we created a little African village in the English countryside at bears Wood campsite.

Challenges

There is a need to free up the artistic director (and main storyteller) during the festival itself and appoint a dedicated production staff equipped with production skills. 2017 festival we had Euton Daley as our site manager who was the main point of contact and that made the difference. As we grow we find larger venues, the larger layout of the site will be enhanced with radio links (mobile reception is often poor in the woods) and there is much time lost with sending runners between the two areas. We have discussed this matter for the last 3 years but budget has not allowed it thus far. Last year the venue was close to a residential area hence the time curfew of 10am which meant around the fire time stopped early.

From a creative perspective funding is always an issue. We always aim to compensate artists and volunteers for their talent and services. We do offer all volunteers training in how to be a trustee, financial training, bid writing training, fundraising training, free entry to festival, a chance to participate in workshops. and a great family vibration. We need funding to develop our offer to our customers, to build an effective marketing strategy, to increase our customer base, to build



human resources department, to develop team members and emerging artists. To pay a full-time artistic director, marketing director, creative learning director, office manager and fundraiser we need to raise £300,000 a year. That would also pay for office space.

Every year we face challenges to overcome. Our big challenges this year, and has been every year since the inception of the Afrakan storytelling festival, are the land owners, venue managers. This year Bears Wood campsite wrote to us after our tasting the magic event, months after we had paid a deposit, designed and distributed flyers, stating they were going to cancel the festival. The reasons they gave were all fabricated and we challenged each and every one of them. In the end sense and divinity prevailed and we were given the site at a reduced rate due to the stress they had caused us.

In 2019 there will be a break from running the festival. We will focus on raising funds to train storytellers and acquire land. Land acquisition will help us avoid annual encounters such as last-minute cancellations by landowners and manager. This very big undertaking requires commitment to the vision. This land is to be a permanent space representing a village for the diaspora of African heritage in Britain. We need between 40 and 200 acres which will cost anything from £60,000 to £600,000 and then some to develop it. If anyone has skills in acquiring land we can then focus on raising funds to develop the land. We have identified a couple of funders that can help us with that journey. We would like members of the community to offer £10 a month or join one of our membership packages found online, to support this vision. This is a long-term vision for the generations to arrive. We need to have a 900-year plan.



Having our own site would enable: the volunteers and staff sufficient time to set up and after the festival clear the site without incurring major costs; the delivery of training throughout the year that would make a direct contribution to the festival; the Development of an appropriate infrastructure; the creation of beautiful signage displaying on the site to help participants navigate easily; appropriate provision is made for adverse change in weather conditions; Artists to have sacred time to plan during the festival itself and lead up to the festival on site; the team to develop organically and naturally and offer

storytelling, creative and spiritual retreats and venue hire to organisations whose aims and objectives are in keep with the Nne Agwu festival; the village vibration to be a permanent fixture.

Achievements

We were successful in developing the artistic elements:

- Storytellers modernised ancient & traditional, experimenting with the oral tradition, making stories relevant to a modern diaspora;
- Emerging artists had the unique opportunity to learn their art form from masters and felt safe to create new work in front of a live audience;
- Griot Chinyere was enabled to begin the journey of sharing the collection of African stories gathered over decades of travel and research;
- Artists shared skills in music, singing and story techniques with each other;
- Artists and participants continued work for the second year, with wood carving artist Ken MaCalla to create original totem pole as a piece of public art.
- Quality artistic interaction due to the commitment of the artists involved and their willingness, professionalism and improvising skills;
- Having an annual theme enabled potential participants, to attach to something familiar and create a unifying centre point.
- Well trained and effective volunteers ensured the safe and successful delivery of the festival;
- The feedback highlighted the need to sustain and maintain an outdoor arts space that supports the creative well-being of the melanin rich Diaspora;
- The venue was family friendly, children and young people had freedom to roam in nature without the safeguarding issues of stranger danger in a shared public site.
- Layout was clear, separating accommodation from creative artistic spaces.
- The exclusivity of the site gave everyone a sense of calm and freedom.



Next Generation

The whole purpose of storytelling is to pass on values, habits, ideologies, morals and lifestyles to the next generation for the well-being of our future. What we as a committee have talked about is shadowing / mentoring. Asking the next generation to take on key responsibilities in the management committee and we will guide them. Two years ago, it was Akeba training to

manage Tasting the Magic and coordinating stalls. Last year we had Khunum who took on the role of treasurer. This year we affirm we will have a young warrior taking up the post of chair. A great opportunity to develop leadership skills. With time the elders will become more of an advisory council for our next generation while they take the reigns.

Kakum National Park

Griot Chinyere and Kweku Donkoh the director for Our Afrikan Heritage Culture have maintained a creative connection between England and Ghana over the last 6 years. As a partnership between Nne Agwu and Our Afrikan Heritage Culture grows we feel ready to cement the partnership, in 2021 by taking the festival to Kakum National park Ghana. The vision is to bring a community of people who want to invest in Ghana and its future; a community of people who want to develop relationships with Ghana, a community of people who just want to visit Ghana and see what it has to offer. What better way to do that than with the Nne Agwu Afrikan storytelling festival. We want to bring the stories of the African in the diaspora and share them with the Africans on the continent. We want to invite a diverse group of people from all over the world to share in this unique experience. The hope is to narrow the divide between the Afrikan on the continent and the Afrikan in the diaspora

Kakum National park is one of the most beautiful places in Ghana. It is ideal for the Nne Agwu storytelling festival needs to: impart knowledge and skills; rejuvenate and promote mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. The festival is to be a creative healing space of beauty, power and accessibility.



Events - Let us continue to inspire visions through oral traditions! Shanti-Chi hosts a range of events throughout the year, in London, in the UK, in Africa, for adults, for families, one offs and regulars, there really is something for everyone to enjoy in some of the world's most stunning landscapes:

- **The Griot Way storytelling Training** offers an inner-standing of African storytelling; it's structure, its symbolism and the role of ancestral energies in storytelling;
- **Feminine Rise Energy Ghana Retreat** offers a space to Reconnect and Realign the Divinity within, during a 9-day meditation with a series of activities to enable the meditation;

- **The Free Spirit Ramblers** monthly meditation walk is a simple ancient African practice for developing calm, elegance, connectedness, and embodied awareness;
- **Find your peace, find your piece** is a solstice retreat for Global Majority melanin rich Leaders who are looking to amplify the impact they are making on the world;
- **Libation for Liberation** is a giving thanks to our ancestors for their guidance and protection ceremony.

Securing Funding will help us to:

- Plan and deliver the next Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival 2020 in the UK;
- Plan and deliver the 2021 Nne Agwu Afrakan Storytelling Festival in Ghana;
- Secure land to create an African village vibration on the landscape of Britain;
- Plan and deliver regular festivals that all the artists feel proud to be part of and be properly remunerated for;
- Design activities specifically for the increasing number of young people, children and teenagers, attending the festival while continuing to develop the inter-generational events for families to play and learn together programmes and to broaden what is on offer for them;
- Work with melanin rich community to embrace camping as a well-being tool;
- Update the equipment we already have and invest in robust long-lasting materials;
- Keep the reputation of the Nne Agwu festival growing and support its ability to contribute to other festivals such as the Oxford Green Week festival by delivering 'Nourishing Tales', an interactive African-Caribbean storytelling session in one of their public parks;
- Develop links and partnerships to further the Afrakan storytelling and to promote the festival;
- Develop more outdoor events in parks and woodlands in London and the surrounding areas that promote the oral traditions;
- Develop the skills and ability of the Nne Agwu committee so they fit the ambitions of the festivals' growth.
- Enable the acquisition of 40-200 acres of freehold land in Britain to have a permanent place to run all our regular and one-off eclectic events throughout the year.
- Achieve our ambitions, improve our offer and fulfil our mission.

Shanti-Chi aims always to provide a creative space where we come together to full joy community, and express ourselves freely, learning new things and embarking on new challenges, whether that be as a family, a couple, an individual, a school or organisation, in a museum, forest or prison block. Our programs are designed to ignite creativity and explore a plethora of subjects, they are flexible and can be tailored to meet individual and group needs.



Join us and become part of the magic that is Nne Agwu