

ECS's History

Ethiopians began migrating to the United States and Western European countries in the early 1970s, primarily for opportunities to attain higher education. Some immigrants started an entirely new life in their host countries, but most returned to Ethiopia after completing their studies. The largest Ethiopian immigration exodus did not start until the mid 1970s and early 1980s. According to a study conducted by an Ethiopian scholar, in 1981, for instance, there were almost 3 million African refugees worldwide, 59% of which were Ethiopians (Getahun, 2007). Later on, the number of immigrants astronomically grew as the country's political environment deteriorated and civil war erupted in many parts of the country.

Of the millions forced to flee Ethiopia in the mid 1970s and early 1980s due to the political change, Santa Clara County became home to approximately 25,000 Ethiopians. In addition, in the 1990s, hundreds more recipients of the Diversity Visa Lottery made San Jose their home largely because of the already existing large population of Ethiopians, opportunities for employment, the region's suitable weather, and its diverse population. To begin meeting some of the needs of these impoverished people, Ethiopian Community Services, Inc. (ECS) was established on April 5, 1991, as a not-for-profit community organization.

Since its inception in 1991, ECS has gone through several turbulent times. Despite the odds, it has proven its resilience and kept its doors open to all community members, providing various services for over three decades. We still exist due to the hundreds of volunteers from different walks of life and the many private and public organizations and individual donors, and we are thankful for all the support and help they have provided. Although it has not been smooth sailing to make it this far, we salute those who never gave up on the dreams and hopes of the founding members to make ECS a community center and a central hub to work together for the betterment of every community member.

Through the years, the Ethiopian Community Services has developed strategic plans and well-thought-out service areas and programs that focus on improving and enhancing the lives of different cohorts - the young, the old, and everyone in between. Although Ethiopians are

known for their resistance to seeking help even amid major crises, our volunteer Board has made an outstanding effort to reach out to the community members who would shy away from acquiring help and create programs that serve everyone. The existing seniors' nutrition program, the Amharic language lessons, the free legal counseling services, the upcoming computer literacy program, and many more are a few to mention.

In its significant effort to become more inclusive and bolster community participation, the ECS Board of Directors amended the organization's bylaws in 2021, adopted a resolution for the organization to become a member-based organization, and have managed to add hundreds of members to its membership list since then. In addition, the ECS Board has created various communication mediums, including Telegram, Viber, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, and has been revamping and transforming its website to make it more interactive and useful for all age groups. Furthermore, ECS has improved its working relationship with all the faith-based organizations and sister organizations in the community..

Despite the challenges related to resource limitations, volunteer burnout, and misperceptions, the Ethiopian Community Services has been trying to provide services in areas such as education, immigration, health, mental health, civic engagement, interpretation, translation, housing, resource connections, and much more. ECS also created job opportunities for four community members.

It is crystal clear that running a community agency of this magnitude requires the support of all community members to help or be helped. We need all the support and assistance we can get to address the rapidly growing needs, and we call upon all community members to become members, to participate in our efforts to positively impact the lives of those in need and make a difference.