

## BENIN EDUCATION FUND (BEF) Newsletter – 2007



**MERCI!** BEF has had a wonderful year and we thank everyone who has donated.

**If you have not yet made a donation and would like a tax deduction for 2007, it is not too late! You have until January 15, 2008.**

– Alphonse and Karen Kouagou

### **BENIN EDUCATION FUND (BEF) HIGHLIGHTS**

During the 2006-2007 School Year, BEF raised \$50,000 and provided education assistance to 220 high school students, 20 university students, and 5 vocational school students. For high school and vocational school students, we covered all student expenses, including tuition, books and supplies, health education, 12 rental facilities to house students from rural towns, sports activities, and after school programs. The average cost per student was \$200. We used remaining funds to pay for 4 full-time primary school teachers and 2 administrative staff to run the programs in Benin.

The school year ended with a BEF boys' and girls' soccer tournament in August. The tournament generated a lot of excitement and press for BEF, including newspaper articles and radio announcements. Approximately 3000 spectators traveled from miles away to attend the final in Tampègré, a town with just 300 residents.

### **RECENT NEWS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

#### ***As luck would have it...***

In April 2007, the Benin Education Fund got lucky! BEF founder Alphonse Kouagou purchased a \$35 raffle ticket for a fundraiser aimed at helping local charities in the Washington DC area. He won the \$20,000 top prize and donated his winnings to BEF!

#### ***BEF students star in cultural documentary***

In fall 2007, the Discovery Channel and Half Yard Productions, Inc, conducted a cultural study in Northern Benin. Several BEF students participated in the documentary, a study of the Otammari tribe that focuses on scarifications of the face and coming-of-age ceremonies. Many inhabitants of the Atacora province (Northwest of Benin) have similar scars.

To thank the community for their participation, Half Yard Productions, Inc., donated \$5000 as well as a generator that will provide electricity to a computer center for BEF students. The crew also helped fund an operation for a village boy who was crippled and could not walk. They have all promised varying levels of future involvements in the Benin Education Fund's activities (fund raising, volunteering, etc.).

Our sincere thanks to Discovery Documentary, Half Yard Productions, Inc, and the filming crew for their contribution. The film is scheduled for release in February 2008 and will air on the Discovery Channel – stay tuned!

#### ***American volunteers assist BEF***

**Claire Applegarth** volunteered for BEF for 5 months in 2007. She lived in Natitingou and spent her time teaching (English and health issues), writing proposals for funding, and

**The Benin Education Fund is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in 1998 that provides children in rural West Africa the opportunity to attend school.**

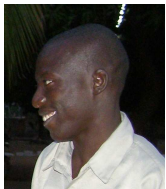
developing BEF programs. In a relatively short time, Claire had a tremendous impact working with the students on health education and many other activities. She returned from Benin to start her graduate studies at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Thank you, Claire, for your generosity!

**Laura Crawford** is a Peace Corps Volunteer assigned to BEF who began her service in September 2006. She regularly works with BEF students on health education and issues. She partnered with BEF to organize a successful AIDS-DAY Parade on December 1, 2007, to raise awareness. Laura also provides assistance to several local communities. This year she helped build an outdoor classroom for adult women to help them learn to read. She also develops nutrition programs for children and assists the local medical clinic.

**Richard Siegler** is another Peace Corps volunteer who regularly assisted BEF over the last year. He helped develop a plan to open a student library modeled after a similar library he created in southern Benin (Bohicon). The library will be independent and student-run, and give students a place to read, study, and access text books and other learning materials.

## BEF SCHOLAR PROFILES

**Chastine Chabi** was one of BEF's first scholarship recipients. She graduated from high school in 2001 and is now pursuing a medical degree at the University of Benin in Parakou. Chastine has just started her final year of medical school and hopes to open a private clinic in the Atacora province to give back to the community and BEF students. She also hopes to continue her involvement with Benin Education Fund students, particularly coaching and mentoring young women.



**Nicholas N'Da** was a secondary school student (BEF Scholarship beneficiary) with a passion for farming and animal husbandry, so he asked BEF for help to transfer to a special vocational school. He knows all about agriculture through his father, a lifelong subsistence farmer. Nicholas has slightly different aspirations though: he yearns to run a commercial farm. A few years ago—with BEF's help—he transferred to CETA, a technical school that provides hands-on education in farming, animal husbandry and veterinary care. Since transferring, Nicholas has become an exemplary student. He spends his vacation months running a small farm to supplement his scholarship, and he recently completed a 4-month internship at the world-renowned Songhai farms, which practice and teach sustainable agricultural. In 2007, Nicholas earned the prestigious national scholarship to continue his studies at the National Agricultural Institute in southern Benin (Sekou). He will graduate with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. He is already looking for land in Benin and trying to build a team to launch his own commercial farm as soon as he graduates.

## FUTURE PLANS

The hardest part about managing BEF is to prioritize the infinite needs and possibilities! Our main focus is secondary students who would be unable to stay in school without additional support. We fund each student for approximately 7 years through high school graduation. Our top priority is school fees, books, and housing. However, students often have other needs that can impede their educational progress, including medical issues.

Even though secondary education remains our primary focus, we continue to seek ways to help young people—especially young women—combat poverty and abuses; remain healthy and strong; develop a means to support themselves; reach their full potential; and give back to their families and communities.

### ***Preparation for National Exams***

As we look to 2008, one of our main goals is to help the students to have a strong finish to the school year and succeed in their National exams, which are required to continue on to college. As funds allow, we will provide supplementary tutoring for students in exam years.

### ***Health education***

Peace Corps Volunteer Laura currently works with BEF students, particularly girls, to educate them on personal hygiene and sexual reproductive health with a focus on HIV/AIDS prevention. BEF hopes to develop partnerships with local NGOs to continue and expand this work once Laura's volunteer service ends.

### ***Sports activities***

The BEF annual soccer tournaments generated so much interest that there is now one high school girls' team and several high school boys' teams who practice every weekend. We hope to expand the program to the younger grades as well. We plan to recruit 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders to play soccer weekly, and identify secondary students to coach them. We will also improve the local soccer fields in Tampégré and other towns so kids can play on a quality field near home.

Our goals are better student health and self-confidence through exercise – but there's another goal too: keeping young students motivated in school. To participate in the BEF soccer league, students will have to maintain good grades! Of course, soccer is not for everyone. BEF will also encourage participation in volleyball and tennis, both popular in Benin.

### ***Computer center for students and community***

BEF continues to seek support for a technology and learning center in Natitingou, where most of our students attend school. We already have a building, several computers, and the generator donated by Half Yard Productions, Inc. We still need approximately \$40K in start-up expenses, including refurbishing the building and installing internet connectivity. The center will consist of computers with Internet access, photocopy machines, telephones, and a small library. It will serve BEF students and the wider community.

The estimated population of Natitingou is one million people and approximately 60 percent of the population is under the age of 25. There is currently one Internet café with 8 computers. Most BEF students do not have access to computers and cannot afford to pay the small fee for the Internet café. Since textbooks are expensive, most schools do not have an adequate supply of books and student learning is limited to copying notes off the blackboard.

A BEF Technology and Learning Center would have a significant impact on the BEF students and the community. Students could learn basic computer skills, participate in on-line Internet training courses (BEF would work with partner NGOs to provide distance learning), and conduct research. The center will provide students with resources and computer skills that are sorely needed to succeed in the job market and university studies.

**HOW YOU CAN HELP**

**Network** – Share your connections. Forward our information to others who may be interested in learning more about the Benin Education Fund.

**Donate** – Send a tax-deductible contribution. Please use the form below for checks or money orders. In addition, you may now donate online through the BEF website. [Click here to donate online.](#)

**Volunteer** – Build your resume! Help write newsletters, update the website, or organize special events.

*(Please mail the following form to us along with your gift and comments. Thank you.)*

**BENIN EDUCATION FUND (BEF)  
Response Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Contact information is optional. However, if you provide a mailing address, BEF will send you a letter confirming your tax-deductible donation.)*

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Phone numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my gift of:    \_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_ \$150    \_\_\_ \$500  
   \_\_\_ \$1,000    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I am interested in volunteer opportunities.

\_\_\_ I am not making a donation at this time, but please keep me on your mailing list.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to “Benin Education Fund.”**

Send completed form and your donation to:

Benin Education Fund c/o

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