

## BENIN EDUCATION FUND – FALL 2008 NEWSLETTER



Thank you to our generous donors—you have helped over 450 students stay in school since 1998!

The 2008-2009 school year begins in October.  
Please donate today!

--BEF Volunteer Board Members Alphonse and Karen Kouagou,  
Jenny Kyne Malseed, Matt Sokolowski, and Joan Libucha

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### ✦ BEF CELEBRATES 10 YEARS ✦

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In 1998, Alphonse and Karen Kouagou launched BEF to cover tuition and fees for a handful of needy high school students from Alphonse's village. Since that time, the number of individual donors and volunteers has grown significantly and the program has supported over 450 students.

While many education programs shy away from adolescents—and the inherent challenges of working with them—BEF believes that in order to reduce poverty it is critical to guide and support young adults. BEF continues to make a multi-year commitment to fund high school students through graduation, and in some cases university studies, as long as they maintain good grades.

We are now seeing the fruits of our long-term investments. As of the school year ending in July 2008, a total of 163 students have passed the B.E.P.C., the national middle school exam which allows students to pursue a number of careers including primary school teaching. A total of 55 students have obtained French Baccalaureate diplomas, a rite of passage to college.

We also have several students who advanced beyond high school: ten students have earned Bachelors degrees, five have a Masters degree, one earned her Doctorate in medicine and one has an Associate degree. Five more have graduated from trade schools in agriculture and nursing, and several have joined the military.

**SAVE THE DATE ✦ Friday October 17 ✦ 5-8 PM ✦ Washington, D.C.  
BEF 10-Year Anniversary Celebration and Fundraiser at Busboys & Poets**

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### ✦ PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS ✦

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During the 2007-2008 school year, BEF sponsored 225 high school students, 25 university students, and 5 trade school students. Our primary school program delivered supplies to two schools and funded three teachers.



[www.benineducationfund.org](http://www.benineducationfund.org)

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High school students continue to be BEF's main focus, and we have increased the percentage of girls in the program to nearly 50%.

In addition to scholarships, tutoring, and housing, we provided health care, health education, after school programs, sports activities, and English classes for our high school and trade school students.

Our goal is for all high school students to graduate and pass the French Baccalaureate exam, commonly known as the BAC. Each year we provide supplemental tutoring to all students who are preparing for the BAC. With a BAC, one can find work in many professions including teaching, bookkeeping or administration. The BAC is also required for university entrance.

This year, 11 of 31 students who sat for the BAC passed the exam, a 35% pass rate. While we always wish it would be 100%, it is consistent with Benin's national pass rate of about 36% this year. The government uses exams to control the number of students entering the university annually. As our students come from very disadvantaged backgrounds, the fact that they can keep pace with the national average is worth celebrating! Students who do not pass the exam are eligible to try again a second time or to pursue vocational education or employment opportunities.

BEF's 25 university scholars received basic tuition and fees, plus housing assistance for those who needed it. We expect that eight more BEF scholars will earn a Bachelors or Masters degree by the end of 2008, in disciplines ranging from medicine to finance.

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### ✦ NEWS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ✦

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#### *Grant Received*

In June 2008, BEF received a \$10,000 grant from the International Monetary Fund's Civic Program (<http://www.imf.org/external/np/cpac/index.htm>). The funds will go towards 2008-9 programs, with \$5000 to books and \$5000 to scholarships for 25 girls who attend the Lycée des Jeunes Filles in Natitingou. The school's Director recently expressed her sincere appreciation for BEF and was moved to tears when she thanked BEF for providing last-minute funding to an additional 19 girls last year after the scholarship program that had supported them ran out of funds.

#### *Website Updates*

Our website has a new look! Check out [www.benineducationfund.org](http://www.benineducationfund.org) for photos, student testimonials, staff and board member profiles, and more! BEF thanks volunteer Jon Kind for his assistance with the site development. Thank you also to Pablo Durana of Half Yard Productions, Inc., for creating a short video about BEF. The video is available on our website.

#### *Local Staff Update*

After two years as our local representative, **Jocelyne Mondja** is headed to Burkina Faso to pursue an advanced degree in Environmental Management. Jocelyne was a BEF scholar who returned to Natitingou to work with us. She has been an incredible asset to BEF, serving

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as an administrator, leader, mentor and inspiration to so many of our students. We wish her well!

We are pleased to welcome **Diane Becoude**, who will be taking over Jocelyne's role. Diane is also a BEF scholarship recipient who has just completed a Bachelors degree in Finance and Hospital Management.

Diane will be joined by **Philippe Owa**, another former BEF scholar. Philippe will handle the accounting duties for BEF. Philippe recently earned his Masters degree in management, accounting and finance.

### *Peace Corps Volunteer Update*

**Thank you, Laura Crawford!** Laura served as a Peace Corps volunteer from September 2006 through August 2008. During her service, she taught BEF students—particularly girls—about personal hygiene and sexual reproductive health, with a focus on HIV/AIDS prevention.

**Welcome, Mariana Beardsworth!** Mariana begins her 2-year Peace Corps service in August 2008, and plans to work closely with BEF students and staff. Mariana is a recent graduate of Stanford University. She speaks French fluently and is aggressively learning local languages in Benin. She is an avid sailor and loves soccer, having coached soccer teams while at Stanford. Mariana previously worked at Teach AIDS ([www.teachaids.org](http://www.teachaids.org)) and volunteered with hospitals in and around Stanford. We are thrilled to have her!

### *New Board Member*



We are pleased to welcome Matt Sokolowski to the BEF Board. Matt served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Segbana, Benin, from 1998-2000. Matt brings a great deal of nonprofit management experience to our team, having designed financial and operational systems for several nonprofit organizations. He is currently a partner at The Owner's Representative, LLC, where he acts as a consultant Chief Financial Officer for multiple nonprofit organizations. Matt has a B.A. in American Studies from The George

Washington University.

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## ✦ CONTRIBUTE TO BEF ✦

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**There are many ways to support our programs:**

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

**Volunteer** – Build your resume! Help write newsletters, update the website, or organize events. Contact us if you would like to volunteer.

**Donate** – Send a tax-deductible contribution! BEF is a US-based 501(c)3 organization, so all donations are tax deductible. Your contribution will go directly to needy students. We are run almost entirely by volunteers, which keeps administrative expenses extremely low — less than 5% of our budget.

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### ✦ BEF RESPONSE FORM ✦

*Please mail or email the following information to us along with your gift and comments. While contact information is optional, it enables us to send you a letter confirming your tax-deductible donation.*

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Enclosed is my gift of:

\$150: a high school student's tuition and fees for a year

\$300: a high school student's tuition, fees, expenses for a year (includes books, uniform, and school supplies)

\$1000: a college student's tuition and basic expenses for a year

\$2000: a primary school teacher's salary for one year

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer for BEF. Please contact me via phone/email (circle one)

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

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

### DONATE VIA CHECK:

Send completed form and your donation check  
made payable to "Benin Education Fund" to:  
Benin Education Fund c/o Alphonse & Karen Kouagou  
4110 Bennett Drive  
Annandale, VA 22003

### DONATE ONLINE:

[Click here](#), or visit our website at [www.benineducationfund.org](http://www.benineducationfund.org)

*Note: The link above will take you to BEF's PayPal account page. Follow the instructions to make a donation via credit card or through your PayPal account, if you have one. We use PayPal for online donations because it is secure and there is no minimum monthly transaction requirement. If you have any questions or concerns about using PayPal, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

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