

BENIN EDUCATION FUND (BEF) Newsletter - fall 2004

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

2003-2004 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Assisted 100 high school students with small scholarships (for tuition and school supplies, including books),
- Maintained four houses in Natitingou for rural students moving into the city to attend high school,
- Rented a housing facility in Cotonou for university students from poor families,
- Sponsored three primary schools by recruiting and paying four full-time teachers to supplement schools where needed,
- Provided health education to female students in the program, focusing on AIDS and birth control (with the help of a local Peace Corps Volunteer), and
- Offered tutoring for students planning to take the required national school exams.

In total, we raised about \$10,000.00 and spent about \$20,000.00 in order to meet the needs of the students. The additional money came from the personal funds of the founder. The **results** from the school year were very encouraging, especially on the national exams:

- For the BAC (high school exam), 100% passed, the first time since BEF was founded in 1998.
- For the BEPC (middle school exam), 90% passed, or all but one student.
- For the CEP (6th grade exam which allows access to secondary school) our students had an 80% success rate.
- There were zero pregnancies during the year, unlike previous years, in part because of the help BEF provided in integrating health and career education into the program for the girls.
- Our five graduates who went on to study at the university level also did very well. For example, one is pursuing medical studies. Another has obtained a small university scholarship and is doing a great job learning to be self-sufficient.

Overall, we can claim a very successful school year.

NEWS FLASH! SPECIAL SOCCER EVENT HELD IN BENIN

BEF sponsored a five-day soccer tournament in which nine towns participated. Most of the players were high school students. The Ministry of Youth and Sports contributed soccer equipment for the event. This was the 2nd year in a row that BEF has organized and sponsored a tournament. It increases the profile of BEF in the community and encourages students to remain in school so they can play team sports.

FUTURE PLANS

For the current school year, our budget is estimated at \$30,000. Our high school program has grown from 100 to 141 students since last year. In addition to the existing programs, we will be adding a couple of new programs:

- 1) **Nursing school:** We plan to recruit a maximum of three students who would like to become nurses and pay for their three year training program. In return, the graduates from the nursing school would be expected to work for five years in rural clinics where it is often difficult to find medical care. Salaries for the nurses will be paid by the local jurisdictions. BEF has negotiated

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with the local government representative ("maire de la commune") who will be responsible for placing the nurses in the various medical clinics based on need. The annual fee for each student will be \$700.

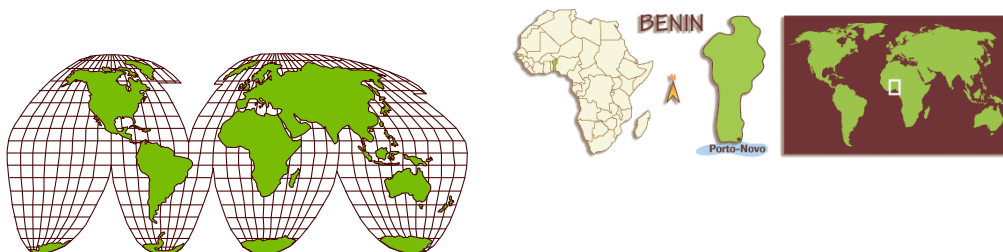
- 2) **Vocational schools:** We will start providing tuition for students wanting to opt out of the formal education route and go into vocational schools. Only a small number of students will be selected each year, as the tuition fees are much higher than for the traditional schools.
- 3) **Local corporate involvement:** BEF is working hard to get the local community involved. We will be seeking donations from local private companies (such as print shops) for notebooks, pens, and other school supplies.
- 4) **University studies:** We plan to allow individuals to sponsor university students on a case-by-case basis with a minimum of \$500 annually. On average, the cost of tuition and housing is \$1000 per year.

Some issues that remain:

- **Health education** remains a very key issue, especially for girls. Their lack of financial resources makes them vulnerable to exploitation and more likely to become pregnant or contract sexually transmitted diseases. Education regarding AIDS and other health issues needs to be an integral part of the BEF program.
- **Parents** bring very little support (financial or emotional) to their kids and this presents problems, as BEF mainly provides assistance for school fees, supplies and housing. Food and other needs are expected to be met by the parents. BEF will have to provide a coaching program to teach parents how to better support their kids' education.
- **University** level assistance in the form of **grants** for those students who successfully complete secondary school is not currently available. BEF would like to provide small scholarships to these students, but cannot do so because of lack of funds. This is especially critical for female students as they struggle to afford basic necessities.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- **Add to our mailing list** - Forward our information to friends who may be interested in learning more about and contributing to the Benin Education Fund.
- **Donate** - Send a tax-deductible contribution to help us kick off the school year.
- **Volunteer** - Build your resume! Help with PR (e.g. writing newsletters) and web site updates.



Benin Education Fund (BEF)
www.benineducationfund.org

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone numbers: _____

E-mail address: _____

Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities and/or special events.

Enclosed is my gift of:

___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$125 ___ \$250

___ \$500 ___ other \$ _____

Send completed form and donation to:

Benin Education Fund c/o
Alphonse & Karen Kouagou
4110 Bennett Drive
Annandale, VA 22003

Checks should be made payable to “Benin Education Fund”.

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