

## BENIN EDUCATION FUND – FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER



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

The 2009-2010 school year begins in October. Please donate today!

Dear Friends: BEF's wonderful success stories would not be possible without you! We hope you enjoy this annual program update – and please join us to celebrate if you are in the DC area. - *BEF Board Members Alphonse and Karen Kouagou, Jenny Kyne Malseed, Matt Sokolowski, Joan Libucha, Richard Siegler, and Raluca Angelescu*

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### ✦ ANNUAL EVENT REMINDER ✦

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✦ **SAVE THE DATE for BEF Annual Happy Hour Fundraiser** ✦

✦ **Thursday, October 8 ✦ 5:30–8:30 PM ✦**

✦ **Skye Lounge, 19th & I St. NW, Washington, DC ✦**

✦ **Donation \$20 at the door (includes raffle tickets) ✦**

Join us as we celebrate 11 years of working together to support students in Benin.

All proceeds go directly to scholarships and educational support. Come out and show your support for the kids.

[Visit BEF's photostream](#), including photos of last year's gala.

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### ✦ PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS ✦

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#### **Jules Ponty, 15 National English Spelling Bee Winner**

Jules finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in Benin's 2009 National Spelling Bee. Since joining the Benin Education Fund, Jules has always ranked first in his class and has had the highest grade point average of his entire school.

*“My name is Jules Ponty. I am 15 years old and come from the village of Dikokore. I am in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a public high school in Natitingou (CEG2). I live with my father and stepmother. Sadly, my father lost his job as a security guard and I hardly see him anymore. I do not have electricity and so I study by a Kerosene lamp. I work hard and have received several academic awards. In January 2009, I participated in an English spelling bee contest organized by the Peace Corps in the Atacora region and came in first. I heard about the spelling bee only three days in advance and I didn't have 65 cents for the photocopies of the study guide. The day of the test, one of the other students let me borrow the notes 10 minutes before the contest began. I like to study English, but I don't have a chance to practice speaking. I believe BEF will soon have an English club, which would be great. My secret to success is to pay attention in class and apply myself to do my homework. The most important thing is determination.*

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### Six BEF Scholars Launch a Primary School Outreach Campaign

During the 2009 summer break, six BEF scholars aged 16-22 had an idea: they would launch an outreach campaign to increase primary school enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year. This dedicated group targeted families in two remote townships – areas where most people practice subsistence agriculture and prefer to keep children home on the farm even though primary school is free. The outreach goal was simple: enroll 100 additional students in primary school. The student volunteers – who turned down our offers to award them even a small stipend for their efforts – began by visiting each town's chief to explain their mission. They then scheduled visits with each family in the evenings, sometimes spending the night. We will learn the results of their efforts once the school year begins!



#### **Myriam Bada, 18 High School Graduate and Aspiring Doctor**

In July 2009, Myriam was among 14 of 88 students from her high school who passed the highly competitive national baccalaureate exam, thereby earning her high school diploma and the rite of passage to pursue higher education.

Myriam lost her father at a young age and her mom is self-employed, earning less than \$300 annually. Myriam has two other siblings. She has a quiet personality but is personable and hard working. BEF began supporting Myriam when she was in her last year of middle school (3eme in the French system) – she was a bright student with a good work ethic but struggling to afford school fees. Since joining the Benin Education Fund she has ranked first in her class every year except one when she suffered from a recurring illness. Even then, she still managed to finish in the top 5. Myriam now hopes she can pursue her dream (pending funding) to become a doctor specializing in pediatrics and help reduce the child mortality rate in Benin.

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### ✦ NEW SCHOLARSHIP FUND TO SUPPORT MEDICAL STUDENTS ✦

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BEF is creating a special fund to support students who wish to attend medical school and return to rural areas to provide much-needed healthcare. Several BEF scholars – like Myriam Bada, above – have expressed their desire to become doctors and help their communities.

BEF has already had success supporting medical students: Chastine Chabi, one of BEF's first scholarship recipients, completed medical school last year and is now a practicing doctor and hospital director in the small northern town of Cibly.

Medical school costs about \$1500 a year over seven years. We are seeking donors willing to commit to multi-year donations to sponsor a medical student. **Please contact us if you would like to contribute to the fund.**

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### ✦ WHY DO YOU SUPPORT BEF? ✦

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Says Richard Siegler, Volunteer Board Member and returned Peace Corps Volunteer, "I worked with the Benin Education Fund in Natitingou in 2006 and 2007. Of all the groups I worked with, BEF is one of the very best - I've never seen another organization that does so much for so many people, while making their funds stretch so far."

In a country where the average family's income is less than \$600 per year, the cost of sending a child to secondary school averages \$300 annually. Even public school students must pay for their fees, books, supplies, uniforms, housing, and transportation. BEF makes education accessible to high-performing students who

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would otherwise have no way to stay in school. **Every dollar** you donate to BEF goes directly to scholarships and educational support.

BEF makes a multi-year commitment to students: we support them through high school graduation as long as they maintain good grades. All of our students come from rural areas in the northern Atakora province of Benin, and we help the neediest: girls, orphans, and kids whose parents are subsistence farmers.

In recent years, BEF has increased its focus on girls; this year over 50% of BEF scholars will be girls. Educating girls has proven to give some of the highest returns on investments, yielding both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families, and society, including: reduced child and maternal mortality, improved child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women's domestic role and political participation, increased economic productivity and growth, and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and exploitation.

In a speech to his fellow Ghanaians in the early 1900s, the visionary educator, Dr. J.E. Kwegyir Aggrey, declared, *"The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women.... if you educate a woman you educate a family."*

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### ✦ ANNUAL PROGRAM SUMMARY ✦

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During the 2008-2009 school year, BEF sponsored 217 high school students, 25 university students, and 5 trade school students. Our primary school program delivered supplies to 3 schools and funded 4 teachers, reducing the student-teacher ratio.

In addition to scholarships, tutoring, and housing, we provided 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. With a BAC, one can find work in many professions including teaching, bookkeeping or administration. The BAC is also required for university entrance.



Though high school scholarships are still our main focus, the demand for university support continues to grow – a logical outcome of a successful high school program! Nine more students earned their Baccalaureates and graduated from high school this year, bringing our total to 66 high school graduates over the past 11 years. Currently we provide a small stipend to university students to cover a portion of their tuition. We seek partnerships and hope to raise additional funds to increase support to these outstanding students.

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### ✦ GRANTS AND PARTNERSHIPS ✦

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#### BEF Awarded Grant for Preventative Health Care

In June 2009, BEF was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the [International Monetary Fund's Civic Program](#). The grant will provide preventative health care for students, including physical exams, vaccinations, and distribution of mosquito nets to help prevent malaria. BEF has found that treatment of preventable illnesses is one of the best ways to help our scholars succeed, as many students miss school or even drop out due to prolonged illnesses that could easily be cured.

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### Female University Students Awarded Grant from the Swiss Embassy in Benin

A 2008 grant from the Swiss Embassy in Benin supported living expenses for four female university students. BEF is only able to cover a portion of university tuition, so the additional funds really made a difference to the girls – they were able relax and focus on their studies. BEF hopes to partner with the Swiss Embassy again this year.

### BEF Corporate Sponsor Profile: Out of Africa

California Inside & Out is based in El Segundo, CA, and produces as well as markets natural and organic beauty products. Their [Out of Africa](#) line of is made with significant levels of pure, unrefined shea butter from Benin and includes bar soaps, hand and body washes, hand and body lotions, hand creams, lip balms, body oils and 100% pure shea butter in tins. The products' packaging is very attractive, the scents are wonderfully fresh and the quality is first-class. Out of Africa donates a portion of sales to the Benin Education Fund and we are very grateful for the partnership. Visit [Out of Africa's website](#) to learn more, watch their video and purchase their fabulous California Inside & Out is products ~ your skin will thank you as will the children in the BEF program!

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### ✦ JANUARY 2009 TRIP ✦

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In early 2009, BEF Founders Karen and Alphonse Kouagou traveled to Benin with a group of BEF supporters including Board Member Joan Libucha. The group visited several schools and met with BEF staff, supporters, administrators, teachers, students, and community members. Several groups of students treated the visitors to theater, music and dance performances on a range of topics including what they have learned to keep themselves healthy and safe, how BEF helps them stay in school, and how BEF helps young people in Benin achieve their dreams.



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### ✦ HELP OUR STUDENTS ✦

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**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 ✦

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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 or e-mail 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, and expenses for a year  
(includes books, uniform, and school supplies)  
 \$1000: a college student's tuition and basic expenses for a year  
 \$1500: a medical student's tuition and basic expenses for a year  
 \$3000: BEF endowment – fund half a student's expenses in perpetuity  
 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:

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### 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:

Visit our website at [www.benineducationfund.org](http://www.benineducationfund.org)

Note: The donation link on our web site will take you to the PayPal web site. 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.