

Allyson's Report – Fall 2016

The four goals for my 3 week trip to Burkina Faso in August 2016 were:

1. host an official launch of the "Manuel de Formation sur L'utilisation des Blocs Cubes" – our Training Manual on how to use the building blocks;
2. conduct the second session of the "Train-The-Trainer" workshops for 10 inspectors and educators;
3. visit the summer camp that we sponsor in Hounde; and
4. connect with our partners who provide care and support for the children that we support.

1. Official Launch

It took years of planning and months of intensive work with local partners along with the support of a generous Toronto-based sponsor, for Etienne Gnomou and I to write the manual on how to use the building blocks. This was an essential part of the Building Blocks Burkina (BBB) Program as having a written directive would enable the Burkinabe educators to become more "self-sufficient" and to carry on the program locally.

The book launch for the manual on August 20, 2016 was the event that marked the culmination of all that very hard work and it was an overwhelming success! It was held in a relaxed atmosphere in a café and a meal of traditional dishes was served after the ceremony.

Gaston Kabore, a beloved Burkinabe film maker and long-time supporter of our work in Burkina Faso was our official patron.

Nouss Nabil, who is married to Gwladys, our director at Souman Nafaman provided welcome musical interludes during the ceremony.

Key Guests included:

- The Director of Formal Education from the Ministry of Education;
- Moussa Dak Ettayebe, from the Canadian Embassy, who is working with the Ministry of Education of Burkina Faso on the development of their new curriculum materials;
- inspectors, school directors, educators, child care workers from both private and public sector institutions; and
- several members of the press.

The Director of Education spoke eloquently about the need for improvement in the quality of early childhood education in Burkina Faso. He expressed his appreciation for the work that BBB has been doing over the past 5 years calling BBB's approach of providing high quality teaching materials to preschools

“innovative and relevant”. He went on to say that the overwhelming task of providing age appropriate teaching materials was indeed a challenge, and that the ministry recognized BBB’s approach as a partial solution to this deficiency in the present system.

I was deeply touched by the support that Gaston and Nous brought to the ceremony. Gaston gave a heartfelt speech about the importance of quality early childhood education and how BBB’s innovative program has already made a difference in improving the quality of many preschools by providing age appropriate teaching material for the children and much needed training for the teachers. Nous sang three of his songs, accompanied by his traditional violin in a moving performance.

2. “Train the Trainers” Workshops

Ten inspectors and educators participated in the “train-the-trainer” sessions that I conducted in Ougadougou. This was the second workshop for these individuals. They were chosen because they had demonstrated an interest in, and understanding of, the child-centered approach to teaching young children in the initial workshops. The two-day workshop served to reinforce their understanding and skills. They will participate in a third session that I plan to conduct in February 2017 following which they will be in a position to be able to start training classroom teachers throughout the country themselves.

3. Summer Camp

The summer camp was a tremendous success again – it seems to get better each year! It is a profound life changing experience for these children to be in camp. This year, a total of 47 children and young adults attended the camp coming from Ouagadougou, Dedougou, Boromo, Hounde and from Souman Nafaman, our Home in Bobo Dioulasso.

Camp Activities included:

- planting and protection of trees (this year 450 trees were planted)
- workshops, (making yoghurt, making soap)
- sports: soccer, martial arts
- cultural evenings: dance & music performances.
- a fair with a village community.

This year in addition to these activities, we initiated support courses for all children in preparation for the school year. Six academically qualified individuals,

(1 professor and several higher level students) provided support in the following subjects: mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, French, German, life and earth science, philosophy and drawing (for younger children).

The camp was basically run by campers: Denise organized the daily schedules and activities. Parfaite (yes, that's her name) cooked 3 meals every day for 47 people, with a roster of sous chefs and organized baking for afternoon snacks - only once was the meal not on time. Yvette organized sports and leisure activities. Benoit was on site the whole time and on a few occasions had to discipline the older children - but it seems from the reports I got from many of the participants, it was a fantastic experience for all.

4. Connecting with Partners

Ouaga – The four children we provide financial support for will continue to be fostered by Michou and her brother Marcel. We are also paying the tuition fees for Aisha's tuition to get her elementary teacher training certificate. She starts in October 2016.

Sindou – Maurice continues to run a tutoring program (4 times a week) for students of all ages, as well as a "club" (3 times a week) for younger children. Both these activities take place in the preschool building which is empty in the afternoons. They make use of the blocks kits that we donated to the preschool 3 years ago. Parents are asked to contribute a token amount for the tutors, who are teachers from the preschool and are available in the afternoons. It is a potential model for other communities in that the program makes use of existing space and as well provides the teachers with extra work & income which most need.

Hounde – We sponsor 10 children who are mostly at the high school level now. Two of our sponsored children graduated from high school and are continuing their studies with different sponsors from France. We are taking on one young woman, the cook at the camp, who is repeating grade 10. We have a total of 5 fully sponsored children for whom we provide room and board, tuition, clothing, health care, school supplies; and 4 partially sponsored children for whom we pay tuition and school supplies. I am happy to report that Yvette passed her BEPC (grade 10 exams) and also that Jeanne and Charlotte had a successful years. The 4 children who failed their year will be given one more chance.

Gaoua - Jerome is in his second year at Teacher's College and is doing practice teaching. He will graduate in June 2017, if all goes well.

Souman Nafaman – I was happy to find that Gwladys' health had improved and she had regained her sparkle and strength. The home was closed for the summer, however a few of the children were tutored to help them catch up in some subjects and four of the older girls attended the camp in Hounde. A rich and rewarding experience for them.