

Friends of the Buea School for the Deaf, Inc., (FoBSD) Annual Report 2010

Friends of the Buea School for the Deaf, Inc., (FoBSD) was founded in the fall of 2007 as a non-profit organization for the purpose of supporting the goals of the Buea School for the Deaf (BSD) in Cameroon, Central Africa. FoBSD is **“committed to gaining both moral and financial support for the work of educating deaf children in an area where there is limited financial backing from the government.”** We chose to accomplish this by focusing on BSD, established by Mr. Aloysius (Njok) Bibum and his wife, Margaret, deaf graduates of Gallaudet University, Washington, DC. The US federal tax identification number of FoBSD is 26-0765074.

In this report, we would like to describe some of the specific goals and activities receiving our attention during 2010. In line with founding documents of FoBSD, one goal is to educate **“the general population about the rights of deaf children to have opportunities for self actualization...”** This has happened in both planned and unplanned ways.

In May 2010, a fundraising dinner was held in the home of one of our board members. Most of those attending were part of the Cameroonian American community. The presentation was conducted by two deaf persons, one who was previously on the staff of the Buea School for the Deaf where he taught sign language to parents of deaf children. The second presenter had spent five months as a volunteer teacher at BSD. One of the most notable results of the event was the change in understanding of those in attendance. One person commented, “I never dreamed deaf people could achieve like this”. Another wondered, “how many potential leaders have been overlooked because no one thought they could be educated”. Another attendee, Dr. Beatrice Warney, is the president of a non-profit organization, Nascent Solutions, focusing on aid in Africa. Based on the presentation, Dr. Wamey committed her organization to a donation of \$2,000 to FoBSD in support of deaf education at BSD. She stated that even though her organization was set up to assist the poor, she had not previously thought of children with disabilities as among the most overlooked of the poor.

An event at a local restaurant in the fall of 2009 drew a small crowd of attendees. A deaf faculty member from Gallaudet University was inspired to attend. As a result of learning more about FoBSD and its work to further the educational goals of BSD, she offered to sponsor a similar gathering at her home in the spring of 2010. Her efforts and those of her husband, a deaf lawyer, attracted a different group of supporters, mostly from the deaf community, who were not previously familiar with the work being done by Aloy and Margaret Bibum. Through events like this, we are gradually enlarging our scope of interested individuals.

Throughout 2010, board members and other supporters of BSD collaborated with four different classes at Gallaudet University to help ensure that young deaf adults have the opportunity to think more broadly about the needs of persons with disabilities worldwide. We made presentations in their classes and worked along with them, supporting small group involvement during the year. One class, a graduate class in social work, has participated for several years and targets ways to bring about systems change for social justice. They, along with each of the other three classes, also engaged in various forms of fundraising during the semester. Two groups of students focused on the rights of children. A third undergraduate class studied about Cameroon, its customs, economy, government, and specifically about the work being done by BSD in this context. The class culminated the semester by sponsoring a mini-conference on campus and having, as guest speaker, an employee of the World Bank from Cameroon. As he left the event, it was clear that not only attendees had gained a better understanding of needs and efforts to find solutions, but the speaker had gained insights about the challenges of his country regarding persons with disabilities. As a result of this effort, an article about BSD was published in a national newspaper in Cameroon.

Another of the purposes of FoBSD is to **“work toward capacity building with BSD staff and administration in carrying out the goals of effective education and access to all walks of life for deaf persons.”**

The school was formed in 2003 with 13 students in attendance. Parents and local officials were skeptical about the need and the ability to produce results. The encouragement of “friends” at FoBSD has been a bedrock for Aloy and Margaret Bibum as they developed an advisory board, a Parent Teachers Association (PTA), and a separate advisory board to guide construction of the new school campus. These three steps, in turn, have generated growing support from families of deaf children and from segments of the broader community.

Knowing from past experience how difficult it would be to garner local financial backing, there continued to be a sense at BSD that full dependence on help from outside Cameroon would be essential for the school’s success. Members of FoBSD urged BSD administration to persist in asking for help from corporations based in the area and to continue to approach departments of the government for support of their efforts. There have been some successes after what often seemed to be calls that “fell on deaf ears”. Recent contributions from corporations have included desks, shelving for classrooms, bunk beds (students board at the school), and money to create a sign language video to use in training parents of the students. There is the hope that assistance will also be forthcoming in bringing electricity to the school.

From the beginning, the local delegate of the Ministry of Social Affairs demonstrated commitment to furthering the purposes of the school. FoBSD is urging BSD and its supporters to press for the next critical step--to get this recognition shifted from the charitable arm of the Cameroonian government to recognition by the educational system that it is their responsibility to help fund education for deaf children.

With BSD’s success in maintaining enrollment at approximately 100 students for several years, they have recently moved to extend moral support and share information with deaf directors of several other small schools. These schools are often isolated and also struggle for resources. BSD’s administration wants to see them succeed because of the powerful impact that can be made by having deaf role models in positions of leadership. FoBSD fully supports efforts to collaborate on the broader scene of deaf education. We donated a small amount in support of the collaboration and hope to continue promoting these valuable efforts.

Within our scope of operations, FoBSD is committed to **“carrying out...activities consistent with and supporting the goals of BSD, including making distributions to BSD in furtherance of its charitable and educational purposes.”** As a fledgling 501(c)(3) organization, we have been blessed with the support of many large and small donors. During 2010, this financial commitment has made it possible for BSD to move from a rented building, which had become too crowded, to a new site. The campus has been transformed in a matter of months from an undeveloped plot of land, purchased the previous year, to three new buildings. The first classroom building of three large rooms was followed by a second with four classrooms. The third building, having six rooms, will eventually be used for expanded classrooms, but initially will serve as a teacher preparation room, a library, and dormitory space. FoBSD takes great satisfaction in its part in these achievements and in the fact that continued building projects are scheduled for 2011.

Our organizational donors and the support of a great number of individuals have made this rapid growth possible. As examples:

- A start-up grant of \$25,000 and a matching grant of \$25,000 was given by the Handsel Foundation of Washington State. (The Foundation also extended a second matching grant of \$25,000 received early in January, 2011, with generous indications of continued giving).
- The Johnson Scholarship Foundation (JSF) of West Palm Beach, Florida, gave \$15,000.
- Dr. I. King and Mrs. Linda Jordan made a significant personal donation of over \$5,000. (matched, by JSF, but matching funds were not actually received until January, 2011).
- The Rotary Club of Poulsbo North Kitsap, Washington State, donated \$5,800 toward bringing water to the school. This process has been long and complicated with a successful solution in sight as 2010 came to an end.
- Nascent Solutions, a non-profit organization focusing on Africa, donated \$2,000.
- The Obakki Foundation, located in Vancouver, Canada, gave a grant of \$25,000 to further the building process. These funds were not given through FoBSD, rather, directly to BSD. However, an agreement was made that the Handsel Foundation would match the \$25,000 through FoBSD, as mentioned above. We are grateful to these major donors for the unparalleled giving and confidence shown in the work of BSD.

Many other individuals through the year also responded to appeals and have made donations ranging from \$10 to more than \$2,000. Several schools joined the effort launched by FoBSD to “Build a classroom, For a Classroom, By a Classroom”. Initial schools participating are the

- Friendship Academy of Science and Technology, Baltimore, Maryland;
- Pope John Paul II School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;
- Missouri School for the Deaf;
- Ohio School for the Deaf; and
- Kendall Demonstration Elementary School, Washington, DC.

The overall financial picture of FoBSD during 2010 was as follows:

Beginning balance:	\$14,692
Donations received:	<u>\$127,414</u>
Operating funds:	\$142,106

Granted BSD for operating expenses:	\$37,467
Granted for new construction:	<u>\$86,218</u>
Total funds granted to BSD:	\$123,685

Operating expenses, FoBSD:	\$2,987
Balance in account, end of 2010:	\$15,434

As an all-volunteer organization, FoBSD used only 2% of all donations received for operating expenses during 2010. Most of this was the cost of transferring funds internationally. This means that 98% of funds used have gone to support construction and ongoing expenses of BSD. The procedures established require BSD to make requests to fund specific items throughout the year. Administrators send forward estimates of costs. FoBSD board members vote on allotments to be sent forward. FoBSD then receives documentation from BSD demonstrating how the money was spent. We trust these facts help demonstrate responsible stewardship on the part of FoBSD and look forward to continuing this successful collaboration on behalf of deaf education.

M. Teresa Arcari, President

