

Enrollment at BSD Soars



Students and Staff of Buea School for the Deaf

Since the founding of Buea School for the Deaf in September of 2003 enrollment has jumped from just 13 students in the first year to a current enrollment of 84 students, including 49 boys and 35 girls. That makes an increase of 19 students from the 2006-2007 school year. One of the things that Mr. Aloy N'jok Bibum, Co-Founder and Director of Buea School for the Deaf, feels is important is that deaf children be identified and educated as early as possible. When the school first opened many of the new students were found through the efforts of Mr. Teke Elias, Outreach Coordinator, as he went from village to village identifying deaf children and encouraging parents to bring their children to BSD. "It is important to meet with the parents to encourage them to send their deaf children to school. I bring pictures and information with me so that families can see the work being done here and how BSD can benefit their child. I enjoy the job because it allows me to build relationships with the parents of

our students."

As for the 30% increase from last school year to this school year Mr. Bibum says the growth can be attributed to many factors including increased community involvement by BSD staff and students, publicity through home visits as a part of the International Deaf Children's Society project, as well as increased awareness through general advocacy efforts of the BSD staff. He is also proud to say that much of the work to recruit new students is being done by parents of students already enrolled. "Parents now are starting to see the benefits of the education their child is getting at BSD. When they are satisfied with the work we are doing here then they support our efforts by encouraging other parents with deaf children to visit BSD and learn more about our school. Our job here isn't just educating students but also educating the community and I believe the increase in enrollment is a reflection of the quality of education and advocacy that we are providing."

Calendar of Events:

January:

10th: Classes begin

February:

11th: National Youth Day

March:

7th: Girl's group drama

8th: International

Women's Day

17th-24th: Term 2 exams

28th: School term ends,
students return home

April:

14th: classes resume

Special Interest Articles:

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A New Home for BSD



Since the founding of Buea School for the Deaf in September of 2003 the school has been renting building on a 2-plot piece of land in the Bomaka quarter of Buea. In the last four years the school has grown so much that the current building is no longer big enough to comfortably house all 84 students and so Aloy Bibum, with the help of Friends of Buea School for the Deaf, a sister organization based in the United States has been working to get the students and staff of BSD into a new building all their own.

So far 5 plots of land (7300 square meters) in the Wokoko area of Buea behind the University of Buea has been selected and the process of securing the land has started. Thanks to the proposal writing skills of Doris Stelle and Aloy Bibum, and to support

from former Gallaudet University President, I. King Jordan, the school received a \$30,000 from the Johnson Foundation that will allow them to put enough money down for the land and begin building.

The hope was to have the land secured and begin building in time for students and staff to move to the new school for the 2008-2009 school term, however, for the 2008-2009 school term. However, it was not possible to move this quickly. BSD will continue to rent the current building for classrooms and an additional location for dormitories during the current year. As a first step in using the new land, BSD will build a caretaker's house, which will become central to kicking off the agricultural training program while the buildings are being constructed.

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International Deaf Children's Society Project Update

In February of 2007 Buea School for the Deaf began a project funded by the International Deaf Children's Society, now known as Deaf Children Worldwide, to provide sign language classes to parents of BSD students. The original plan for the project was to hire deaf Cameroonians to be home support workers responsible for leading the sign language classes. Unfortunately the school found a lack of qualified deaf adults living in proximity of BSD students' families so the staff of BSD took on the responsibility instead led by Margaret Bibum, the director of the project. Mr. Ernest Tsala is the project leader and is assisted by Mr. Teke Elias, Mrs. Gertrude Vibu, and Mr. Oneghe Arrey in leading group parent meetings and

making home visits all over Cameroon to teach parents sign language.

When Mrs. Vibu explained her role in the IDCS project and the importance of the home visits she said, "My job is to go to the homes of parents every two weeks and help them improve communication with their deaf child. I enjoy encouraging the whole family and even friends to participate and learn so the deaf child can socialize with as many people as possible and won't feel oppressed at home. I feel teaching in a group setting is best because everyone can encourage each other and if one family member is missing the others can help catch them up. My favorite part of the job is seeing how the family improves over time and how they are excited and

My favorite part of the job is seeing how the family improves over time and how they are excited and motivated to learn sign language"

-Mrs. Gertrude Vibu



Above: Mr. Tsala leads a sign language class in the village of Ikata, below: children in Ikata practice new signs.



Motivated to learn sign language." Due to limited staff resources the completion date of the project has been extended to allow more parents to benefit from home visits and group meetings. Once the school year ends the staff will begin another phase of the IDCS project where instructional sign language DVDs will be produced to give to parents of BSD students free of charge to help them in their efforts to improve communication with their children. The DVD will focus on everyday scenarios such as going to the market, church, and household activities and will include BSD staff

members as well as actual parents of BSD students as the actors.

When asked how BSD plans to continue offering sign language classes after the IDCS project ends Mr. Tsala said, "When the IDCS project ends we will not give up our efforts. We are already looking into how to extend the IDCS project and if need be we will look for other sources of funding. This project is very important because it helps our students to communicate with their parents and siblings and be included in everyday life in their homes."

FOBSD

Intern Meredith Rarick spoke with Teresa Arcari, the President of Friends of Buea School for the Deaf, Inc. about the history, function, and importance of the organization to Buea School for the Deaf.

MR: How many members does FoBSD, Inc. have?

TA: As of the spring of 2008, our newly-formed non-profit organization has approximately 45 official members, although many more people have made significant donations to BSD through us. We continue to encourage individuals to send in the \$10.00 membership fee. By increasing our numbers, we can demonstrate to funding organizations that our 501(c)(3) has strong support from the broader community.

MR: What are the goals of FoBSD, Inc.?

TA: A core group of individuals

felt that it would be important for our loosely-formed group of "Friends" to gain the status of a tax-exempt organization, recognized by the federal government. This would promote a greater number of supporters to make donations to BSD. This status will also enable us to solicit grants from Foundations and Corporations. Our group is committed to educating about the need for excellent educational opportunities through BSD in Cameroon and to seeking broad sources of much needed financial support.

This commitment was made to Aloy and Margaret when they were in the United States last year to receive their award by the Gallaudet Alumni Association. At that time, we also set plans in motion to act as a local screening committee for applicants who want to volunteer or intern at BSD. Two of our board members are from Cameroon and two have already



spent time as a volunteer or intern there and are in a position to help provide an orientation for those who are accepted by BSD.

MR: Why is the work being done by FoBSD, Inc. important to BSD?

TA: The administration and staff of BSD encounter many challenges in finding enough support for their wonderful school. Aloy and Margaret continue to do outreach and provide information to the Cameroonian community about expanding opportunities for deaf children. They also have made contacts in Canada, England, Holland, Germany and other locations to gain support for deaf education. FoBSD can now become a strong advocating organization in the United States, among other sources of funding that already exist. For example, one of our members, Doris Stelle, on her own initiative and with the encouragement of I. King Jordan, was successful in writing a proposal to the Johnson Scholarship Foundation here in the United States. This effort gained a

\$30,000 grant that will help to purchase land for an expanded school. It's this combination of individual creativity and the support of a recognized 501(c)(3) that can help BSD to make the progress that it envisions.

MR: Can you tell me about your personal experience with BSD and how you came to help found FoBSD, Inc.?

TA: I, personally, have been privileged to know Aloy and Margaret from the time that they were students at Gallaudet University and later became well-known for the contributions that they made to the Washington, D.C. community while employed at Deafpride, Inc. I fondly remember a dinner in their honor in the fall of 1995 as this committed couple set out to make a difference in Cameroon, Aloy's childhood home. It's inspiring to see where this commitment taken them and to appreciate the great strides made at BSD in the five years since it has been established.

New Home continued

Mr. Bibum hopes to be out of the temporary building and into the new school by September 2009.

The plan for the new school is to start slowly with the main building of classrooms that can serve as both classrooms and dorms until the rest of the compound can be finished. Once the entire project is completed the school will have classrooms, boys and girls dorms, administration offices, a kitchen and dining room, an infirmary, and rooms to house interns and volunteers. There will also be enough

land remaining to develop a small farm that can not only be used to educate students about local farming techniques, but can also serve as a source of food for the school. Mr. Bibum describes the new facilities as the 'perfect place' and is excited about the opportunity to allow the school to grow without having to worry about running out of space for all of the students once BSD moves to its new home.

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National Youth Day 2008

On February 11th the entire student body and staff of BSD participated in the National Youth Day celebration that took place in cities all over Cameroon. Schools around Buea practiced for weeks to get ready for the highlight of the festivities, the march-past the grandstand where the governor and other important political figures looked on. This year was especially exciting because the students got new official uniforms made for the occasion and the staff had uniforms made as well.

When it came time for the march-past BSD students and staff represented the school very well and many in the crowd were surprised to see that BSD had so many pupils. The nursery students were the first to march and the secondary students followed a little while later. Onlookers were impressed with the students' marching and cheered and congratulated the group on a job well

done. Head boy, Elvis, talked about the importance of BSD participating in the Youth Day festivities, "It is important that the deaf youth in Cameroon aren't ignored and we have an opportunity to show people that we can march alongside the other students. It was also good to see how everyone applauded our nice uniforms and marching skills."

After marching the group went together to a nearby restaurant where they enjoyed a delicious meal of jollof rice with chicken as well as sweet drinks for all of the children, quite a treat. It was important for the students to join the other youth of Cameroon in enjoying a day fully devoted to celebrating them. The afternoon was spent relaxing and taking pleasure in the company of each other while also enjoying the opportunity to have a break from school.



Elvis leads the male students in the march-past.



Students enjoy food and drinks as a part of the NYD festivities.

International Women's Day 2008

The 23rd annual Cameroon celebration of International Women's Day was held this year on March 8th, 2008. To celebrate the occasion 17 students and 7 staff from BSD traveled to Bongo Square to enjoy the dances, competitions, speeches, as well as participate in the march-past for the first time in BSD history. Not only did the students and staff participate in the march-past but they also had

gowns made of this year's national fabric for the occasion, a first for the students.

When asked about her experience at the IWD celebration, head girl Manga said, "This was the first time that students from BSD participated in the march-past and I enjoyed seeing the looks on people's faces when they saw our group of deaf women. It is important for us to be



Female students and staff dressed in their IWD dresses prepare to attend the celebration.



Male students work hard to prepare lunch and decorate the school to celebration IWD.

involved in Women's Day so that other people realize that deaf women can do things like everyone else." A highlight of the marching experience came when the group from BSD passed the grandstand where the announcer was saying many positive things about the work being done at the school.

While the girls were enjoying themselves at the celebration the boys of BSD, led by Mr. Teke and Mr. Ernest were busy cooking lunch and arranging the dining room for when the girls arrived back at the school. When the girls arrived they were greeted with colorful signs and a beautiful

dining room with tablecloths, flowers, and a nice hot meal. The boys served drinks as the girls enjoyed the delicious meal of rice with groundnut soup and fried fish.

After lunch the festivities continued as Mr. Ernest led the students in several boys versus girls sports activities including relays and soccer. While the boys won every event the girls put up a good fight. It was a very successful day and both girls and boys enjoyed the special occasion and the opportunity to recognize the important roles that women play in Cameroon and all over the world.

Lending a Helping Hand

Another very important aspect of the success of BSD is the work being done by interns and volunteers. In January of 2006 Cheryl Shahan had the opportunity to volunteer with BSD for five months and when asked about her experience she said:

"My experiences of volunteering at BSD are still with me today after being there two years ago. The founders, students and staff were just awesome. I'm not sure who learned more, me or them, or simply that we all taught and learned from each other. The experience gave me a re-newed purpose for teaching/learning, hope for Deaf Education and a reason to go back to school. I am a firm believer of volunteering and interning experience for people who are committed to sharing their skills with BSD which is why I am part of the Friends of BSD (FoBSD) and the chair of the Intern/Volunteer

Committee for FoBSD to assist the Bibums on our end here."

Lena Dunning traveled to BSD as an intern with the Social Work Department of Gallaudet University in January of 2007 and stayed for four months. At the end of her four-month stay Lena shared the following:

"I have completed my internship. My 4-month stay in Cameroon has come to an end. My experience has taught me that 'things in Cameroon are not easy,' but success can be found in collaboration efforts by reaching out to our immediate and global communities. One can dramatically affect both the lives of those in need as well as those who are blessed with the ability to provide. Despite the fact that my education requirements have been filled my work for this community will continue. My life has equally been affected by this experience and I will



Intern Meredith Rarick poses with the girls from a weekly group she led during her internship.

"I'm not sure who learned more, me or them, or simply that we all taught and learned from each other."

-Cheryl Shahan

conclude this entry with a comment from one of the numerous visitors "Life is simply what we share with others. By joining forces our impact can make a lasting difference for future generations."

Current intern Meredith Rarick also came for an internship through the Social Work Department of Gallaudet University and spoke of how the experience has impacted her view on the field of deafness and education in a developing country:

"Coming to Cameroon and working with BSD has shown me that the issues facing deaf children in developing countries are very different than those in the United States. There seem to be so many challenges and barriers to getting an education if you are a deaf child in Cameroon. Which is why the work being done by Aloy and Margaret Bibum and the staff of BSD is so important. I feel honored and blessed that I was given the opportunity to be a part of that."

Highlight: Ministry of Social Affairs

Gallaudet University intern Meredith Rarick had the opportunity to sit down with Valentine Asongtia FOREKE, the Delegate for the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) for the South West Province and ask him some questions about his work with MINAS and how his work impacts Buea School for the Deaf.

MR: Can you explain about the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)?

VAF: We are responsible for collaboration, evaluation and policy related to prevention and assistance to individuals, families, and groups with disabilities and other marginalized groups. As well as people with disabilities (PWD) we also work with children and the elderly. We work on prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency; children with social development problems as we try and integrate them back into society and the workplace. We also have the National Solidarity Office that controls all of the schools with people

with disabilities.

MR: What role does MINAS play in the education of deaf children in Cameroon?

VAF: Well there is currently no government school for the deaf in Cameroon so we work to encourage private people and organizations to create the schools themselves. We will from time to time give support in the form of money, materials, or training; maybe once a year or once every two years. The Control Brigade is the office responsible for all of the schools in the area, not just the ones working with people with disabilities. They are the ones who set up the rules for all of the schools. Then there is the Office to Protect the Rights of the Elderly and Handicapped. They are responsible for investigating what is going on in institutions working with the elderly and people with disabilities.

MR: Ahh I see. Can you tell me more about your personal experience working with PWD?



Director Aloy Bibum with Valentine Asongtia FOREKE

At the end of the day you find joy for being able to bring them a service that they didn't have before.

-Valentine Asongtia FOREKE



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VAF: It is very difficult. You have people who have been abandoned by their families and by society. They leave them to be cared for by the government and that is difficult too. We work with them to bring up their morale but with the limited social workers we have here we cannot always achieve as much as we would like. At the end of the day you find joy for being able to bring them a service that they didn't have before. You help integrate them into the community so they can become contributing members of society as well as having increased

their self-esteem. You feel happiness that you have been able to help them.

As is the case with many government offices in Cameroon, MINAS struggles to maintain programs for its target populations on a very low budget and a small staff. Despite these challenges the Delegate is able to maintain a positive attitude and is determined to do what he can to help those in need. It is people like Valentine Asongtia FOREKE that play an important role in the work being done by the Bibums and everyone at BSD.

