

Fall 2011.

The summer of 2010 marked an exciting new beginning for BSD. Three buildings were constructed on land purchased with the financial backing of the Johnson Scholarship Foundation and donations by Dr. I. King and Mrs. Linda Jordan. Significant funding for the actual construction came from the Handsel Foundation and the Obakki Foundation. These steps toward creating an all-new school setting exceeded everyone's expectations. By the spring of 2011, BSD had successfully contracted the digging of a borehole water well. Children and staff were delighted to now have several water taps on site fed by a large storage tank of potable water. The latter was made possible through funds from the Handsel Foundation and the Rotary Club of Poulsbo-North Kitsap, both of Washington State.

Meanwhile, negotiations were under way with AES-Sonel, the power company in Cameroon, and the Charitable Foundation of the Energy Bar Association (CFEBA) here in Washington, DC. With FoBSD as an intermediary, CFEBA agreed to pay half of the cost of bringing electricity to the school site. AES-Sonel then made a commitment to fund the remainder of the cost in recognition of the educational and charitable purposes of BSD. This past summer, AES-Sonel reached its goal by bringing power lines to the BSD campus. Lights are being added to classrooms bringing deaf children increasingly into a more modern learning environment.

Imagine the challenges faced during the past year as construction progressed bit by bit. Buckets of water for every need had to be carried to campus by students during the first seven months of the school year. Pictures also show packed clay or muddy areas around the school depending on the season, and rocky ground where children play after school hours. Flush toilets and showers are yet to be hooked up. Sleeping quarters have been very basic and studying after sundown had to be carried out by the light of oil lamps. In spite of the remaining huge challenges, students have demonstrated their desire to make the most of the opportunities being provided.

This fact was demonstrated again earlier in the summer, when 11 of 12 students eligible to take the First School Leaving Certificate exam passed. The exam is one that measures achievement according to national standards. In an area where a common belief is that educating deaf children would be impossible or useless, the achievement demonstrates that children with disabilities have every right to be given recognition and prepared for an independent adult life. Reaching these milestones would not be possible without the consistent work of students and the admirable commitment of teachers to provide a deaf-friendly learning environment.

BSD was also fortunate to have the support of a Peace Corps volunteer, Hailey Fox, who brought her expertise to the teaching staff during the past two years. Hailey's tour with the Peace Corps ended in June of this year. Another American volunteer was Josh Whitener, who also worked with the children and provided valuable IT assistance for approximately a year and a half. In addition to these two volunteers, there have been an

increasing number of deaf and hearing volunteers in recent years from other countries. Such widespread support lends credibility to BSD as a fledgling organization.

During August, building began on a kitchen and dining room, bringing an additional small comfort to students, not to mention to dedicated cooks who have managed meal preparation for more than 100 students using several large cooking kettles under an outdoor shelter. There are plans to paint buildings and to do landscaping which will transform appearances from “hard scrabble” to inviting. In the longer term, construction is planned for permanent dorms and additional classrooms specifically for “college” (secondary level) students. With the tremendous progress made in just one year, FoBSD and BSD have every confidence that new benchmarks will be achieved in the months ahead.