

# BENIN EDUCATION FUND (BEF)

## 2018 NEWSLETTER



Dear Friend of BEF,

We are happy to send you our annual newsletter update. It is hard even for us to believe, but this year BEF celebrates 20 years! Our local staff recently pored over our files and confirmed that **since 1998, BEF has helped over 6,400 Beninese girls and boys stay in school.** And we could never have done it without YOU. Thank you!

This past year, BEF supported 55 University students (15 of them graduated) and 66 secondary school students. As always, these are students who have been strong academically but find themselves unable to stay in school without financial aid and other support. **We – and they – are so grateful for every dollar you give.** With your help, BEF provides scholarships and educational support and sets students up for success: by offering a laptop to each university student, by caring for students' health, by creating a welcoming learning environment for each student, and more.

As we look ahead to our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration to be held in 2019, we are reflecting on how we might have an even greater impact in Benin. We also hope to make BEF activities visible to our sponsors and to our donors to come. We are pleased to have several new staff members on board, bringing their experience, energy and creativity. You can read more about them below.

Many of you give every year and we are so grateful. We hope you'll consider a gift again this year. As always, our board donations cover administrative costs, so **100% of your donation will directly fund our programs.**

Many thanks as always for your support,  
Jenny Malseed, Alphonse & Karen Kouagou

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### ✦ BEF PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS ✦

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For the school year 2017-2018, BEF continued to pursue its primary goal of providing scholarships and educational support to girls and boys so that they can stay at school till they graduate as long as they maintain good grades. We also provide housing to those who don't have family where they attend school, and other support needed on a case-by-case basis. Last year, BEF increased the number of the girls enrolled in high schools and paid graduation fees of those who completed their university degrees. Other activities included:

- **Reached out to former BEF beneficiaries** who are now working professionals, to create a network of in-country supporters and ask them to give back by volunteering or donating;
- **Staff participated in a civil society workshop** in Natitingou, to raise youth awareness and help them to take part in community work and development.
- **Launched a project to redesign the main library in Toucountouna**, to make it more attractive to students and increase their interest in reading. The project is a partnership between the Mayor's office in Toucountouna and the Belgian government. BEF was selected as a technical partner for the library portion. We are not currently receiving any funds from this partnership, but it is good visibility, and leverages our expertise and that of our students.

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## ✦ MEET OUR STUDENTS: BEF SUCCESS STORIES ✦

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Congratulations to former BEF beneficiary **Prosper Doko!** Prosper (3<sup>rd</sup> from left) and his team recently won first prize in a UNICEF-sponsored hackathon focused on technology solutions to help children in Benin. You can watch him speak about it on national TV:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DStBXCiULLA>

According to Prosper: “The project [is] a voicemail service in local languages to remind rural women about doctors’ and immunization appointment dates for their children aged 0 to 6, and to teach them

good health and nutrition practices following a baby’s birth. It can also be used to update rural populations in case of an epidemic.” Prosper writes that “55% of women and 32% of men are illiterate in Benin. Many NGOs and projects work with rural communities but unfortunately are confronted with linguistic barriers and unavailability of people during certain seasons. Our goal is to inform, teach, and reach the rural populations whatever their location or language. The project is flexible and can easily adapt to other areas (e.g. health, agriculture). In this case, the application will be installed in hospitals or social health centers. We won first prize, which is laptops and 6-8 weeks with Etrilabs Cotonou (an incubator).”

**Prosper** was born and raised in northern Benin, in the Atakora region. A brilliant student, he earned his baccalaureate in 2011 at age 17, but found he was unable to afford university. With BEF’s help, he enrolled at the Ecole Polytechnique d 'Abomey-Calavi and earned a degree in Computer Engineering and Telecommunications. Passionate about new technologies, he has worked on projects ranging from desktop software development to android applications and websites. We are so proud of you Prosper!

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## ✦ DONORS AND PARTNERS ✦

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Much of BEF’s annual budget comes from individual donors making contributions of \$50-\$5,000. This year two Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) from Benin joined our donor group: Mark Kolhman and Richard Rapiere. In addition, Richard is currently visiting Benin with family and offered English Learning tools to BEF students for whom English has become a priority as they seek to enter the job market.



generously donated a portion of sales to BEF.

We are also very grateful to Victor and Debra Lulla and Gilles Adamon, the founders of [Out of Africa](#). Out of Africa is a social enterprise that sells natural skin and body care products made from shea butter, which they source from Benin in collaboration with a women’s cooperative. In addition to creating jobs, Out of Africa also supports education. For the past several years they have

[www.benineducationfund.org](http://www.benineducationfund.org)

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## ✦ MEET OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ✦

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**Angele Tantoukoute** is a bright 22-year-old. She was born in Kotopounga, a small village 45Km from Natitingou. She attended secondary school at the Lycee de Jeunes Filles of Natitingou, where BEF sends many of its female students. Angele was an active student and always among the best students in high school and university. She recently graduated from Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature (ENAM) with a bachelor's degree in Diplomacy and International Relations. After graduation, she spent 8 months in Ghana to improve her English and study computer science. She is now volunteering for BEF until she can pursue a master's degree. She has many roles including promoting English as second language (ESL) learning among current BEF students. Angele dreams of working for an international institution like the United

Nations or World Bank. She is ingenious, entrepreneurial, and industrious, and she can work under pressure. Self-discipline is her principal strength. She is a fast learner, good team player and a highly motivated person. We are lucky and grateful to have her!



“My name is **Jules PONTI**, I'm 25 years old. I was born in Tampègré, a village in northwestern Benin. I am the second son in a polygamous family of nine children. I grew up with my mother who separated from my father when I was three years old. After I earned my certificate of entry to secondary school, BEF came to my rescue as they do for top students from poor families like mine. With BEF's help, I was able to continue my studies and in 2013, I earned my baccalaureate. In December 2016, I obtained my university degree in Public Health. Two months later, I started working with BEF as a volunteer in charge of the scholarship program and then in early 2018 as the manager of the volunteering club of BEF. In this position, I lead the volunteer activities with the beneficiaries of BEF, sharing and applying all the experiences gained at the university, where I had worked in many ways as a volunteer. I am a multi-faceted person, full of energy and with a set of varied skills. My dream is to continue my studies in a Master's Program and to become a high level specialist of public health. My best skill is my fluency in English and my aggressive approach to any assignment.” We agree!



**Yves Toudonou** resumed work at BEF in Natitingou last September 1<sup>st</sup>. Yves spent his career with the Peace Corps in Benin and offered to work for BEF upon retirement. He is based in the North of Benin with frequent tours to Cotonou where he has been talking and meeting with future partners and supporters. One major assignment is to provide leadership and managerial oversight to our staff and volunteers. With BEF's Board of Directors based in the US, Yves has established monthly phone calls to update the Board so that he can seek regular advice. His guidance is helping to professionalize BEF and the local office.

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## ✦ 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS ✦

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BEF is getting ready to celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary serving students in Benin. We believe that it will be a great event and we anticipate inviting local authorities from the Atacora and Borgou regions as well as friends and political authorities from Cotonou. There are some local NGOs in the region and we would invite them as well. We believe that it is an opportunity to make BEF known so that we can identify new partners and raise more funds locally to increase our impact. Stay tuned!

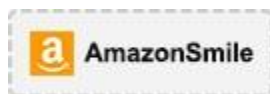
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## ✦ SHOP FOR BEF ✦

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If you shop on Amazon, use AmazonSmile to support BEF! AmazonSmile is a website operated by Amazon with the same products, prices, and shopping features as Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to the charitable organization of your choice. Simply visit [AmazonSmile](#) and select Benin Education Fund BEF. Each time you shop, make sure to sign on to AmazonSmile. That's it! We know 0.5% may seem small, but it adds up. **Through October 2018, BEF has raised nearly \$200 through AmazonSmile – enough to cover a high school student's tuition and fees for one year!**

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## ✦ DONATE ✦

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**BEF is a registered 501c3 organization. All donations are tax-deductible in the U.S.** Sample giving:

**\$100:** School supplies or healthcare for one student

**\$150:** A high school student's tuition and fees for one year

**\$600:** A high school student's tuition, fees, board, tutoring, healthcare for a year

**\$1500:** A college student's tuition for one year

**\$2500:** A medical school student's tuition for one year, including books.

### TO GIVE ONLINE:

1) **Visit our website at <http://benineducationfund.org/blog/donate>.**

*Follow the link and instructions to make a donation through your PayPal account, if you have one, or you can use a credit card. If you donate through a PayPal account, they will not charge any fees and 100% of your donation will reach BEF. We use PayPal for online donations because it is secure and there is no minimum monthly transaction requirement.*

2) **Visit Facebook and click the Donate button: <https://www.facebook.com/BeninEducationFundBEF/>**

*Note: In November 2017, Facebook announced that it will no longer charge nonprofits a fee for donations. So, if you donate through your PayPal account, 100% of your donation will reach BEF.*

### TO GIVE VIA CHECK:

Send your donation check made payable to "Benin Education Fund" to:

Benin Education Fund c/o Alphonse Kouagou

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