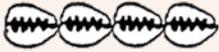




# BURKINA CONNECTION

A NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR THE MEMBERS OF FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO



2019 Vol. 2



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## PRESIDENT'S YIRI



*I'd put on some Tom Petty (if my speaker had batteries), and get 100% lost in the stars.*

Dear friends,

Whenever I start to think about Burkina, I see the stars.

I lived just south of Kongoussi, which meant as the Harmattan started to blow, the irrigated gardens just aside Lac du Bam began to produce. By daba and lots of labor, out came tomatoes, sweet potatoes, koomba, and more green beans than anywhere in the country. Those plentiful nights, as the heat was kicking up and dust was falling, I'd bring a cast-iron-pan full of cooked vegetables and sauce arachide out under my hangar. I'd put on some Tom Petty (if my speaker had batteries), and get 100% lost in the stars. The image is just there, in my mind, forever.

Thank goodness.

Burkina gave me a world of gifts. And as I take up, very gratefully, the position of President of Friends of Burkina Faso, I think it's another chance to say thank you. It's also a tall order. Burkina, at the tail end of 2019, has a very different feel than Burkina at the tail end of 2010 when my Peace Corps term came to a close.

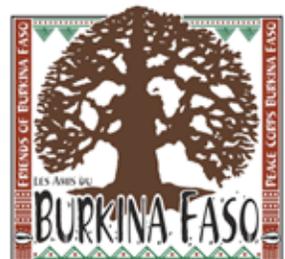
I've served on the Board of FBF for 4.5 years. I hadn't thought I'd be further stepping up at a time where the threat of terrorism was so prevalent and with the United Nations estimating 500,000 people are internally displaced -- people who we, the FBF community, \*know\*. They are our neighbors, counterparts, brothers, sisters, real and adoptive families, and more. Our extended community has mourned the loss of members in just the past few months, and we think of them now.

*Continued on p.2*

**This holiday season you can support us when you shop!**

Shop for everyone on your list at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). You shop. Amazon donates.

**amazon**smile



## PRESIDENT'S YIRI *Continued from p.1*

What does this mean for FBF?

First, it means solidarity. I want our members to keep Burkina Faso in our hearts always. We can show hope, care, and support. If, like me, you've meant to send that WhatsApp message, make that call, or share your thoughts on someone's Facebook wall, now is the time. This can be among our immediate FBF community, and of course, to those living in Burkina. On est ensemble, on est tous de la même zaka.



*On est ensemble, on est tous de la même zaka.*

Second, it means new ideas. The Board and Projects Committee are thinking through new ways to act, thinking about what risks we need to take as a funding organization, and even learning how to talk together about the challenges. Aspects of life in Burkina, which many of us held up as models of strong community across ethnicity and religion, are threatened. Both our actions and our words to support Burkina carry new meaning.

Lastly, it means balance. It means taking in to account our ongoing years-long collaboration with organizations like NEEDED who support women's education in the Ouahigouya area and weighing the importance of such long-term investments in people against the realities of insecurity, uncertainty, and displacement in the day-to-day.

I don't know what every FBF member is feeling at this time. I do know Burkina Faso will benefit from our support in the many ways we share it. Your words of encouragement in response to our election emails were wonderful. Please keep sharing those sentiments and suggestions with us. Our active membership is more important now than ever – to show Burkina that it's not alone in this challenging moment.

For me, at this time, I remind myself of the stars. I remind myself of eating on a natte under my hangar, counting how lucky I was (and still am) for a crew of colleagues and friends of such variety and such integrity, and how bright they continue to make my life.

***Wend na n mang d sora. Wend na n paas panga.  
Hèrè ka khè ni ow yé.  
Allah hokku njaamu è cellal.***

*Aaron Buchsbaum, '08-'10  
Board President*

# You've Got Mail

Click above to read the  
**2019 Fundraising Letter**



## Peace Corps Kids Book Project

Documenting the stories and experiences of multicultural people and families who were born of the intercultural experience that is the Peace Corps.

[www.peacecorpskids.com](http://www.peacecorpskids.com)  
[@peacecorpskids](https://www.instagram.com/peacecorpskids)



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

We are constantly looking for blog and newsletter content. Send your submissions to [newsletter@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:newsletter@friendsofburkinafaso.org) or [communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org).



# CONFRONTING A NEW REALITY

by Anne Spear, Ph.D., '08-'10

For the past several years, and more acutely during the past several months, those of us who are “friends of Burkina Faso” have been struggling to understand the situation that many of our former host villages, families, friends, and colleagues now face. The World Food Program (WFP) reported back in September that **1.5 million people are suffering from food insecurity** in the country, which is facing a “unprecedented humanitarian emergency.” Facing attacks from multiple groups and killing those who do not submit to their demands, more than **550,000 people are displaced**, and the number is growing every day. While **there is a full-scale humanitarian response**, I am sure you are wrestling with many of my thoughts as the situation continues to look more and more dire: What can I do in the face of such a complex problem? I will be honest, avoiding facing it, and going on with my life here in D.C. was the most comfortable solution until jihadist groups visited my host village.

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in a northern village 15km from Ouahigouya called Tangaye, from 2008-2010. I lived with a host family. For the past ten years, I continued to visit and build relationships with the villagers and others across the country. I can no longer go visit my host village and it is no longer safe for the villagers to stay. Or for families in many more villages around the country. On Saturday, September 8th, 2019, a group of terrorists came to Tangaye to find the mayor who had fortunately left from the regional city of Ouahigouya. As the pattern goes, the next time the terrorists come back, and they will be back, and they will take over and kill people.

***I was moved to act.  
I could no longer stick my head in the sand.  
I did not want to regret not doing  
something during this time.***

Friends at the U.S. embassy in Ouagadougou have advised me to use the trusted connections I have at the local grassroots levels to get food, shelter, and education as quickly as possible to families. While the international response has funding, it is often consolidated and cannot move rapidly to respond to newly displaced persons. A week after getting the news, I started training for a **half Ironman** on December 15th, 2019 (NO, I have never done a triathlon!!) to **raise funds** and awareness to help local associations in the North of the country support displaced families.

*Continued on p.4*



*On a training bike ride, rocking my Burkina Faso bike shirt in October 2019*



*Displaced family entering market area in Titao in September 2019*



*Me and her host family: Abi, Aissata (side) and Fatimata (baby) in June 2019*

# CONFRONTING A NEW REALITY Continued from p.3

I ask you to support the families that took care of countless other volunteers and me. Your donations will be sent to the [Association for Education and the Environment \(A2E\)](#), who will disperse funding to displaced families in the North and Sahel region. I have worked with A2E for the past ten years and trust them due to their transparency. The association has access to villages, such as Titao, where aid workers are not yet able to reach. A2E works with USAID, UNESCO, the World Bank, and other international development organizations, thus has experience and oversight. They will report back on the families and villages you are helping with your contributions.

In addition to your financial contributions, follow me on Instagram [@ironburkina](#), as I tell the story of my training journey from training on a *K-mart special* mountain bike -- which has not been easy (but I am raising money, not spending money!) -- to being sponsored by [TYR swimming](#) who donated a training swimsuit (I was swimming in a bikini) and tri-suit for the race. You can purchase a TYR swimsuit, knowing they support Burkina Faso!

I also give updates on the situation in the North. Pass the information on to your communities, so our friends in Burkina Faso know their situation is known to the world.



Read Anne's recently published research "Teachers As Change Agents? Assessing Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to Sexual Gender-Based Violence in Burkina Faso."

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Anne Spear served in Burkina Faso as a Girls Education and Empowerment (GEE) volunteer in the northern village of Tangaye from 2008-2010. She recently completed a PhD in International Education Policy at the University of Maryland, where she was an instructor in the Leadership Studies Minor. Currently, Dr. Spear is applying many of the values and skills she learned during her time in Burkina Faso to help people get along and be more successful working in groups and teams in the workplace. She is co-founder of an on-the-go training company, Epiko, to teach how to work with others in an increasing global, virtual world. Follow Anne on Instagram [@ironburkina](#).

**SUPPORT  
DISPLACED  
FAMILIES**

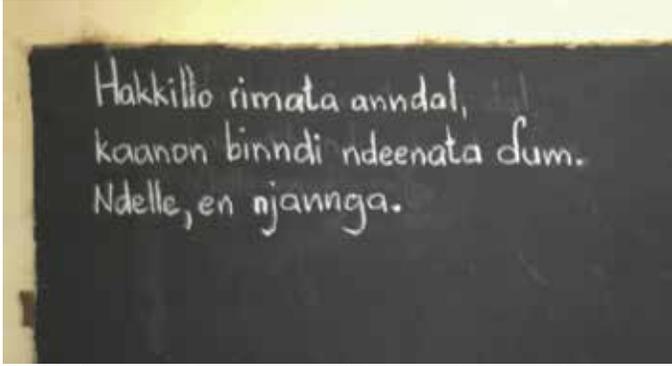


### Recent headlines paint a bleak picture of the current realities in Burkina Faso:

- Mine workers demanded more protection before deadly Burkina Faso attack
- 'Three-country crisis' across central Sahel puts whole generation at risk
- UN warns Burkina Faso could become 'another Syria' as violence soars
- Le Burkina Faso entièrement déconseillé aux voyageurs

# BILINGUAL SCHOOL BEGINS ITS SECOND YEAR

by Tom Vollrath, '67-'69



From left to right: 1) Message in Fulfulde on a classroom blackboard states, "Intelligence is the mother of knowledge. And writing can safeguard it. So let's learn to write." 2) Students gather at the Singoghin bilingual school. 3) Jacques Phillipe Banse makes a site visit on behalf of FBF. (Photos: J.P. Banse)

For the last two years, FBF has partnered with [SEDELAN](#) and [ABADAS](#), two non-profit organizations that are fully committed to building a bilingual school for young Peul children in Singoghin, located in the southeast of Burkina Faso near Bittou. The first of two envisioned school buildings -- equipped with two classrooms, a faculty office, a well, and latrines -- was completed this year. More than 100 students are now attending classes at the CP level. Construction of the second school building is planned for 2020.

Following government regulations, the first year of instruction in bilingual schools takes place using the local language. The rationale is that the use of the local language facilitates early learning and smooths the transition from home to the school environment. The use of French is then progressively introduced into the curriculum over time. In the Singoghin school, the use of Fulfulde/French is to be deployed at an 80/20 ratio during the first year of instruction. During the second year, by contrast, instruction takes place at a 20/80 ratio. After studying six years at the elementary educational level, all students, irrespective of whether they attend bilingual or exclusively French-speaking primary schools, must take and pass final exams to receive their Certificate of Primary Studies.

**Applied research shows that the initial use of the local language in the classroom does not delay learning, as is often assumed. Rather it leads to faster acquisition of the skills and aptitudes needed for success in formal education.**

FBF member, Desire Banse, recruited his brother, Jacques Philippe Banse, to periodically visit the Fulfulde/French, bilingual school; monitor developments; and provide FBF with third-party feedback. Philippe graciously agreed. Philippe has established contact with teachers, students, parents

in Singoghin, the contractor building the school, and administrative leaders in Bittou. Recently, he journeyed from his home in Ouagadougou to Bittou where he met Amidou Balbone of the mayor's office, who oversees educational institutions throughout the province. Monsieur Balbone informed Philippe that he had contacted

the Ministry of Education requesting that it assign two Fulfulde-speaking instructors to the school. Philippe then mounted a motorbike, enabling him to traverse the marigot

separating Singoghin and Bittou to reach the school. Upon arrival, he met Zacharia Reweogo (one of the teachers at the school), students attending classes, mothers of enrolled children, and both the Vice President and Secretary of the newly created Parent Teacher Association. Following his visit, Philippe sent FBF a project report and forwarded photos and a video of the school site and some of the students. In Philippe's report, he stated that "the student parents unreservedly expressed their willingness to support any activity directly or indirectly affecting the Signoghin school, including the construction of housing for the teachers." Philippe promises to provide FBF with additional field reports. His findings will help determine whether FBF will approve additional support early this next year.



Watch this video showing construction of the bilingual school, now in its 2nd year of operation.

[WWW.FRIENDSOFBURKINAFASO.ORG](http://WWW.FRIENDSOFBURKINAFASO.ORG)



# A BONUS YEAR FOR POSTSECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

by Suzanne Plopper, '67-'69

Congratulations go out to 30 young women in northern Burkina Faso who received postsecondary education/training scholarships this year, thanks to our generous donors and favorable US dollar – CFA exchange rates over the last few years. This year's donations support scholarships for three young women to enroll in university: one in English, one in modern literature and one in finance and accounting; and to 15 young women to enroll in primary school teacher training.



Oumou Ouedraogo, Scholarship Recipient

Thanks to favorable exchange rates over the past nine years of this project (Postsecondary Education/ Training for Girls in Burkina Faso), we can grant another twelve scholarships: eleven to young women enrolling in midwifery training and a fourth university scholarship to a young woman studying modern literature. It is the practice of FBF to calculate the cost of all scholarships based on 500 FCFA = \$1 US to ensure that we will always be able to meet our obligations to the young women to whom we offer scholarships should there be a drastic drop in exchange rates. We experienced such a decline, below 500 FCFA to the dollar, only once so far in the life of this project. Exchange rates have otherwise been very favorable when we have transferred scholarship funds to Association NEEDED.

This year, the decision was made to use the funds accumulated from favorable exchange rates to fund additional scholarships according to NEEDED's perception of the best use of these education/training funds. The choice was to support one additional university scholarship and midwifery training for 11 young women. According to NEEDED, the government of Burkina Faso has recently announced a major goal to improve the outcome of midwifery and nursing training by requiring the BAC for acceptance into training. Hence, upon completion of their training, midwives' and nurses' diplomas will be the equivalent of a university degree; and 2) by raising the academic requirement of paramedical school instructors to a masters level. The government is also making a significant effort to extend midwifery services farther into rural areas. Thus, the timing of FBF's accumulated scholarship funds supporting midwifery training fits well with these government priorities.



Sharing school lunch at Lycée Moderne

We are pleased to report that all 43 of the current FBF scholarship recipients completed the 2018-2019 school year. To date, we have supported postsecondary training/ education scholarships for 203 young women, out of which only four have either failed or have dropped out of their training. In each of these cases, NEEDED has either assisted the student to enroll



Lambs Project Participants

in a different training program or, in two cases in which the student dropped out of training, NEEDED worked with the institution to identify another female student in the same year of study and needed financial help. The remainder of the scholarship was transferred to that individual.

Our generous donors also contributed \$4,026 toward School Lunch Project at the Lycee Modern de l'Amitie this school year. This covers noon meals for 52 village girls for the entire school year.

And finally, this year FBF supported our last group of young village girls entering primary school through the Lambs Support Girls' Education Project (Projet Mouton Ecole). With this, FBF has supported the entry into primary school of 4095 village girls over the past 18 years. The one hundred girls we are supporting this year are from four villages.

We continue to partner with GlobalGiving in raising funds for the Postsecondary Education/Training for Girls Project and the School Lunch Project at the Lycee Moderne de l'Amitie. Check out these projects here.

A note from the university candidates and their parents: *Les filles et leurs parents adressent leurs sincères remerciements à Friends of Burkina Faso et ses partenaires.*



# MORE GOOD NEWS FROM THE FIELD

by Leslie Berger, '81--'83



Visiting cowpea fields in Sena (Photo: D.I. Kiba)

The agricultural season has drawn to a close in Burkina Faso, and for the third year running FBF have supported farmers in the Manga region. In 2019, 225 new farmers were trained in improved crop management techniques for growing corn, cowpeas, rice, and soybeans. This brings the total over three years to 900 farmers across 39 villages in the south-central area, with 60% of the farmers being women. According to officials from AIVDPL, the grassroots organization implementing this program, it is not just the farmers themselves who are benefitting from this training. The livelihood of whole families and whole communities are benefitting through improved access to nutritious food supplies.

In the 2019 season AIVDPL officials delivered 12 training sessions which took place at a selection of villages where demonstration field plots were created. Holding the training sessions at the demonstration field plots allowed farmers to see for themselves the results of using improved seed and applying organic manure at appropriate times during the crop year.

One of the highlights of this year was the participation of Mr. Kiba Delwende Innocent, Agronomist, and Soil Scientist at the Institut National de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INERA). Mr. Kiba agreed to offer his time without remuneration, to provide the team with technical advice to improve the results achieved by the farmers. So far Mr. Kiba has made two trips to Manga, in June and in August to coincide with critical times in the crop year. His final visit will take place in November to talk about the yield results achieved this year, and to advise on next year's program.

In August, Mr. Kiba met with the AIVDPL project team and government officials, leading one of the training sessions which took place in Gago, near Manga. The following is a summary of points raised during this training session, which included 20 farmers (ten men, ten women).

## Opportunities:

- Farmers felt that the project raised awareness of best practices across a number of issues, including the best planting date for each crop, seed planting density, techniques for applying organic fertilizer. They all felt they were learning and benefiting from the advice given.
- Farmers have a strong preference for maize (corn) as maize responds well to the application of fertilizer, so they are getting great yields. The proceeds from selling some of this maize are helping to increase farm income.
- This group includes a women farmer from the Peulh group. This is seen as a positive step since they are not usually associated with crop growing, and may not otherwise have access to training.

## Challenges:

- There is sometimes conflict between male farmers and their wives about sharing manure if the women do not own livestock. The women were advised to collect manure wherever the animals were going for water, to allow them to manage compost supplies
- The rain started late this year and was interrupted, leaving long periods of drought. Some farmers felt that this reduced yields somewhat.
- Some farmers reported infestations of armyworm caterpillars, which led to yield losses. The team encouraged the farmers to contact them if they observe this in their crops so they can provide advice and support.

In addition to leading this training session, Mr. Kiba met with the mayor of Gago and a

*Continued on p.8*



# MORE GOOD NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Continued from p.7

group of farmers who participated in the project during 2017. The mayor mentioned that he regularly engages in specific project activities, such as the distribution of the inputs. He felt that this helped him to engage in the field with farmers. He lamented the fact that the government did not have the funding to manage the farm extension function and that this project partially filled this gap.

Some interesting points were raised in the meeting with farmers who participated in the project in 2017. One woman farmer mentioned that she was pleased to be able to produce maize and soybean. She was now able to use the soybeans for making soubala and brochettes, which have a high market value. Another woman said she hadn't realized the benefit of applying manure to cowpeas, and now that she was doing so, she was getting higher-yielding crops. Another farmer said his rice yields were up to three times higher due to good cropping practices such as optimum seeding and fertilizer applications. The beneficiaries from 2017 have continued to produce manure; however, they would like to have further support to help them to access seed and chemical fertilizers.

The project team will investigate this further to understand if the problem is lack of access to these inputs in local markets, or if the problem is due to lack of funds to purchase inputs. The expectation from the AIDVPL team is that some of the extra income coming from improved crop sales might be used to fund these inputs for the following year. This will be discussed with the AIDVPL team.

Mr. Kiba made the following recommendations to help strengthen the project outcomes.

- Get interested youth involved in the project team as trainers

so they can benefit from the experience of the older generation

- Provide training to the farmers to help them understand the nutritional importance to their families of eating cowpeas and soybeans so they will keep some of their production instead of selling all.
- Encourage farmers who conduct the demonstration plots to organize additional sessions and encourage them to speak directly to their peers; encourage women farmers to lead meetings at demonstration plots.
- Raise awareness of the importance of crop rotation especially with regard to having legume crops in their rotations
- Raise more awareness on the quality of organic matter for improving soil fertility
- Organize the farmers and put them in touch with input sellers

Mr. Kiba's visits have been invaluable in providing a third-party evaluation, which has given the FBF project committee new ideas for improving the outcomes of this project in the future. He has also provided much appreciated technical input to the AIDVPL team and directly to the farmers. His visits with government officials have given added credibility to this project.

The rain started late this year and was interrupted, leaving long periods of drought. Some farmers felt that this reduced yields



Accompany the team on a field training session



Patrice Yameogo, head of AIVDPL, Gérôme Rouamba, the mayor of Manga, Delwende Innocent Kiba

somewhat.

- Some farmers reported infestations of armyworm caterpillars, which led to yield losses. The team encouraged the farmers to contact them if they observe this in their crops so they can provide advice and support.

In addition to leading this training session, Mr. Kiba met with the mayor of Gogo and a group of farmers who participated in the project during 2017. The mayor mentioned that he regularly engages in specific project activities, such as the distribution of the inputs. He felt that this helped him to engage in the field with farmers. He lamented the fact that the government did not have the funding to manage the farm extension function and that this project partially filled this gap.



# PROMOTING HEALTH & WELL-BEING IN KOUKOULDI

by Stephanie Slater, '07-'10



Our project began after I returned to Koukouldi to visit my counterpart, Etio Pauline Kangoro, and friends from my two years there as a PCV.

Over the years, Pauline kept me informed through frequent correspondences about her continuing efforts to educate and provide health assistance to villagers. Upon my return to Burkina Faso in December 2018, I was delighted to discover that there had been an impressive amount of development in Koukouldi since I was last there. The road through the village is now paved, bringing more cars and

commerce to and through the area. Electricity has come to the village, leading to more shops, buvettes, and a restaurant that serves chicken that now is well-renown throughout the region. There is also a credit union and a new school to accommodate an expanding youth population.

One of my regrets from my Peace Corps service was that I had not done more to address issues related to hygiene, defecation and their impacts on health. During my Peace Corps service in the village, I had access to one of only three latrines in Koukouldi. Upon my return, I was pleased to learn that a number of families had built latrines (under the aegis of a USAID project) in their compounds. Unfortunately, some of these latrines had collapsed due to heavy rains, displacing some from their homes.

As Pauline and I made the rounds visiting friends, the two of us spoke about the need for everyone to have access to latrines. Our discussion motivated the two of us to meet with influential members in the village to determine what could be done. The outcome of ensuing discussions led to the creation

of the “Latrine Committee” and a commitment to marshal the necessary resources to build latrines in family compounds. Pauline assumed leadership of the Committee. In addition to myself, other members include Kanzié Bébebékina, the women’s President; Bago Isidore, the President of the village development council; and Bangoro Béyon Paulin, village chief who often addresses land-right issues. Bado Moïse, a local mason with building and business experience, as well as Zongo Zouli, the head nurse of the clinic, served as advisors to our Committee.

The Committee publicized the latrine project by visiting three churches and a local mosque, plus meeting with village chiefs who helped identify potential project participants. Selected families demonstrated their interest and commitment to the project by digging holes for their pits, providing needed sand, gravel, and water, and assembling bricks. The latrines were built as families finished digging their holes and deposited needed raw materials. The Committee held two trainings for those with new latrines, one on how to care for and maintain them and the other on the importance of handwashing and hygiene.

With initial financial assistance from the Friends of Burkina Faso, the project adopted a 3-stage approach to the construction of the latrines in the village. The first stage was completed in June/July of 2019 with the completion of 17 latrines. The second stage, completed this Fall, resulting in another 24 latrines built. The third phase will begin in the coming weeks and aims to construct an additional 19 latrines.

The project has been an impressive achievement in my view. It resulted in many individuals in Koukouldi gaining access to latrines. Its success has been due in large measure to the dedication and hard work of Pauline and her colleagues on the Latrine Committee. They generated interest in the project, managed implementation, and educated folks about the importance of cleanliness. Building latrines and informing villages about the payoffs of adopting sanitation and hygiene best-practices will continue to have a positive impact on the health and welfare of village residents for years to come.



Follow us on

facebook.

# A TRIP TO TIJUANA

by Kate Larose, '02-'04

Last December, I awoke to the heartbreaking news that another person had died in U.S. custody. Little Jakelin was seven years old and survived a 2,000-mile trek north only to die within hours of arriving in the United States. I felt helpless at that moment and decided to take the only action that seemed possible: [I planned a trip to Tijuana.](#)



Kate and Milton at the border wall.

Thanks to generous donations from family, friends, and strangers, we were able to raise \$3,000 to help with critical needs. Thanks to the help of a Mexican Uber driver (who donated his time for the week after seeing the conditions at one of the shelters), we were able to spend the money wisely by getting the best deals on medicine, food, and blankets. As we whizzed around the city, negotiating prices in markets, pharmacies, factories, and wholesale suppliers—all in a language I could barely understand—I was continually reminded of my experiences in Burkina.

This is how I came to know Milton, a student leader from Nicaragua, whose activism and deep values of social justice have earned him a death sentence if he returns home. Despite being an asylum seeker himself who was alone and scared in a foreign country, Milton spent his days helping others. One day we had just come back from purchasing blankets and were dropping them off at the shelter in which he was staying. Milton had been hit by the flu and was especially looking forward to being warm that night on his bed of plywood. A family approached us as we unloaded the car. He handed them a blanket—his blanket—and they walked away. He told us that they were grandparents caring for their toddler grandson and sleeping on the streets because they didn't have money to stay in a shelter. And that they needed the blanket more than him. Again and again, Milton's character shined through in instances such as these.

Thanks to a suggestion from an RPCV's husband, we were able to connect Milton with Al Otro Lado, a

humanitarian organization that explained the process for requesting asylum and helped him get a number to wait for his turn. Six weeks after we returned to Vermont, he called us in a panic. His number would be called that day, and he was terrified of what would come next. We later learned that his next month went like this: he presented at the border, was taken into custody, and placed into the "icebox" for two weeks. He was stripped of his warm clothes and placed in a freezing room, crowded to the brim. The lights were on 24 hours a day, and guards would wake people up every hour in just one of the many psychological efforts to break people down. There were no showers, and the only water source was a toilet tank. Then he was shipped off to a state prison in Arizona. On the drive, the guards stopped for lunch and locked people in the van- all windows rolled up- for hours. (He said they were starting to asphyxiate when the doors were finally opened.) At the end of the month, he arrived at Otay Mesa Detention Center, a for-profit detention center, which is where he would stay for another seven months.

It was filled with its horrors, and Milton said the letters he received from people around the world (including many Burkina RPCVs!) gave him and others reasons to hope during those dark times.

On October 2nd Milton received the news that we had been praying for: his asylum was granted! He boarded a plane for the first time and arrived here in Vermont. Settling in has been a whirlwind of appointments. And he's also started English

*Continued on p.11*



# A TRIP TO TIJUANA

Continued from p.11



Milton was invited to share his story with Vermont's Lt Governor while touring the state house.

classes, applied for work, made snow angels, experienced sledding, a ninja warrior course, and Halloween, toured the Vermont legislature and countless museums. And every day he comes home and tells me about the amazing people he's met. "Americans are kind, beautiful people," he says.

Last year I felt helpless. This year I feel hopeful thanks to the countless RPCVs who helped Milton on his journey to freedom. At this moment there are 52,000 other people in need of freedom, too. [Here are a few ways you can take action](#) (no trip to Tijuana necessary).

-----

Kate Larose was a Community Health Volunteer in the village of Tioyo. She and her family live in Saint Albans, Vermont. You can find Kate on [Facebook](#) or contact her via [email](#).



## Fundraising Event

### Save the Date

Thursday, December 12  
7p.m.  
Potomac, MD

**Complete the  
online registration  
[HERE!](#)**

A formal invitation will  
be sent to you in early  
December.

*Hosted by His Excellency Seydou Kabore,  
Ambassador of Burkina Faso to the U.S.A.*

Visit <https://communitybuildinggroup.org/events/> or email Kathleen McDonald for more information.

## ABOUT US

Friends of Burkina Faso is a 501(c)3 nonprofit affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association. We maintain a **network** of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and friends of Burkina Faso. We provide funding and assistance to **support projects** in Burkina Faso. We strive to **improve social interaction**, communication and information exchange. We **educate** others about the country and culture of Burkina Faso.

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# meet the board

▪ **Aaron Buchsbaum** ▪ I served as a community health volunteer (Sabce '08 – '10), living just outside the green bean capital of Burkina Faso (Kongoussi). I was always amazed by the hard work and easy, welcoming atmosphere that the people of Burkina made. I've continued to work in international development, currently with the World Bank, on health and education initiatives. I live in Rockville, Maryland.

▪ **Faissal Ouedraogo** ▪ Born and raised in Burkina Faso, I attended university in the U.S. before returning home to live and work, helping solve water and energy-related issues and promoting rural development. I enjoy playing and watching basketball and soccer, and I am excited to be back on the FBF Board.

▪ **Suzanne Plopper** ▪ I served in as a maternal child health volunteer (Ouahigouya '67-'69), returning to Burkina in '81 working with a primary health care project. I spent the next 24 years as a trainer in reproductive health 28 countries. In retirement, I volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused and neglected children. Since 2002, I have led FBF's project collaboration with Association NEEDED.

▪ **Leslie Berger** ▪ My Peace Corps experience was managing a rural credit program for farmers and small business enterprises (Kaibo '81-'83). For the past 26 years, I have lived and worked in the UK as an agricultural consultant, raising a family and, for some of this time, managing a family farm. I am thrilled to work with a motivated group committed to making a positive contribution to the lives of the Burkinabe people.

▪ **Jennica Betsch** ▪ I served as a preschool volunteer (Kaibo '16-'17) until the Peace Corps' evacuation in 2017. I am currently an International Development and Public Policy grad student at the University of Chicago and write for the Chicago Policy Review. I hope to one day return to Burkina Faso to live and work alongside my community.

▪ **Kristin Lavoie** ▪ I am a K-12 teacher-librarian and an adjunct professor at Wayne State University where I received a Ph.D. in Learning Design and Technology in 2016. I am connected to Burkina since 2010 when I first met my husband, Mike Lavoie† (RPCV '75-'77), and was instantly drawn to his enthusiasm and love for all things Burkinabe.

▪ **Caroline Chambre Hammock** ▪ I am a non-profit leader with experience and passion tackling complex social problems. I served as a Community Health Development Volunteer (Mahon '02-'04). I have worked for NGOs in NYC and NC developing and leading programs aimed at ending homelessness and improving health outcomes.

▪ **Etienne Yonly** ▪ I am a long-time FBF member and a former member of FBF's project committee. I am currently a senior contracts and grants specialist at USAID. I am a strong advocate for Peace Corps and its return in Burkina Faso. Working at USAID, I see first-hand the importance of having a champion in-house to speak for you.

▪ **Kristen Combs-Bicaba** ▪ I am a TEFL RPCV (Kalsaka '98-'01), Burkinabe by marriage, and self-employed, providing administrative/operations/marketing assistance to small businesses and nonprofits. I look forward to being an empty nester in 2023 and hope to retire to our beautiful home in Saaba one day, but currently reside in Nebraska.



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