

Grand-Bassam, November 2024

Dear Donors,

Each time I sit at my desk, my thoughts fly to you, and I hope that the words I write find you in good health.

I was deeply touched by the many responses to my last newsletter, where I shared the story of Souman, the twin boy born with hydrocephalus seven years ago, and his older sister, Awa. Since the death of their mother and the disappearance of their father, Awa has taken care of all her siblings. Your kind thoughts, prayers, and encouraging words deeply moved me, and I even received offers to cover the cost of Souman's surgery. I want to express my heartfelt thanks for your overwhelming support.

Today, I am happy to report that Souman has successfully undergone surgery, and his health has greatly improved. Along with his twin sister, Djenatou, and their ten-year-old brother, Fadil, Souman is now attending school. They are proud, beaming students! Souman also receives kinesiotherapy to help him rediscover his gait. It may sound unusual, but he has to adapt to no longer carrying such an enormous weight on his shoulders, which makes walking a new experience for him. We've also found

a new home for the entire family. Awa and Samira, the older sisters, continue to work for a restaurant owner to earn some income, while their brother, Hamed, still works as a builder's assistant. However, their earnings barely cover the essentials, which is why our support is crucial. Watching this family grow and thrive brings me immense joy – and I thank you for making it possible.



Souman and his sister with lotti in the Center's beautiful garden



Souman standing happily in front of their new home



Our project is doing well. The hospice remains fully occupied, the outpatient clinic welcomes hundreds of patients daily, and the 35 children in our orphanage are well cared for.

This year, we were also able to enroll 800 children from the surrounding area into school. Moreover, two of our older girls are now fulfilling their career dreams. Sarah Danielle, 15, is attending a school for stylists, while 18-year-old Bintou graduated with her high school diploma and has enrolled in her dream program in architecture. Passing the entrance exam made not only her proud but all of us! We found her safe accommodation in a small shared apartment. Our little Bintou has spread her wings! We bade her farewell in our small chapel, where she asked for the blessing of “her” Maman. It was an emotional moment, as Bintou has been with us since she was four years old.

I still vividly remember the day the university hospital called us to say that a sick child had been left there. They had found her next to her mother, who

had died of AIDS, and didn’t know what to do with her. Bintou had spent an entire day alone next to her deceased mother before she was discovered. No one had cared about her desperation and tears. On top of that, she was suffering from Noma, a deadly bacterial infection that destroys facial tissue. She had a large hole in her cheek through which her teeth were visible.

Of course, we immediately took her in, provided medical treatment, and brought her to Burkina Fasoto a partner aid organization, where surgery was performed to restore her face as much as possible. Although she bears the physical scars of that illness, Bintou has blossomed into a strong, kind young woman. She had additional surgery here in Abidjan three years ago, and we plan another procedure during the summer holidays of 2025. Despite the visible scars and the invisible ones on her soul, Bintou’s strength and resilience are remarkable. She has endured so much pain and rejection, yet she continues to face the world with courage. We are incredibly proud of her.



Bintou, our proud architecture student

Some time ago, we started organizing weekly play-days with our children and the elderly residents in our village. Our goal was to teach the children how to interact with the older generation, and it has been pure joy! The children have found grandparents, and the villagers now have grandchildren. They often



Young and old playing together – what boundless joy!

cook together, make music, and dance, sharing an incredible sense of joy. Our dear Papa Gilbert, 74, loves games but is a notoriously sore loser. I was a bit nervous when I introduced him to five-year-old Ezechiel for a game of dominoes – What if the clever little boy were to win?

To my surprise, when Ezechiel beat him, Papa Gilbert laughed heartily and cheered for his small opponent, which made Ezechiel's eyes shine with pride. That image of them is something I won't forget anytime soon. The respect and love between the children and their new "grandparents" is heartwarming, as is the gratitude and affection from the elders to their new "grandchildren."

We often feel as though we live in an oasis. Our 7,000 square meter property is filled with peace and joy – what a blessing, especially when you consider the state of the world. War, hatred, and destruction seem to be everywhere. It feels like our beautiful planet has a fever. People are stressed, depressed, and mentally strained.

My heart aches when I read about how many young people in Europe are plagued by anxiety about the future. What's missing is what truly makes people happy: unity, togetherness, and compassion. Social connections, time for one another, and mutual care.





Our oldest and youngest, and two of our furry housemates

At Centre L'Espoir, we strive to provide all of this to those we serve. Above all, we give them hope. Hope that they will be cared for and treated.

Unlike in Europe, healthcare here is only available for those who can pay upfront. Those without money receive no medical assistance – not even for something as urgent as an ectopic pregnancy, appendicitis, sepsis or internal bleeding. This affects not only adults but also children and infants. No money, no treatment.

Here, our doors are open, and the first thing people hear is a warm “Bonne Arrivée” as they enter. In contrast, at public hospitals, patients are asked for money before they are treated – and those who can't pay are turned away, no matter how sick they are. I know I've said this before, but it's important to remind you of the dignity we provide here and, more importantly, how much of it is thanks to you, our dear donors. You make it possible for us to give our people hope, strength, and a brighter future.

Dear donors, dear friends, I know no stronger word than this: **THANK YOU.**

I sincerely wish you a blessed (pre)Christmas season and all the best for the new year.

With my deepest respect,

Lotti

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