



The Newsletter of the Friends of Guinea
Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea

Ebola Relief Fund Update

By Hannah Koepl *FOG Communications Assistant*

Volume 1, Issue 40

February 15, 2015

Unfortunately, Ebola is still on the fore front of Guinean news, but progress with relief funds has shed a positive light.

The National Peace Corps Association's relief efforts have allowed thus far 24 projects, impacting 120,000 people in the three affected countries. Funding from many efforts campaign and other efforts, including donations from FOG and its members has allowed a total of \$47,000 to be donated to local NGOs. World Connect matched the second round of funding and allowed the backing for an additional 8 projects.

The CDC reports as of Friday

January 16th the following numbers for Guinea: 2,825 total cases, 2,525 laboratory confirmed cases, and 1,829 deaths.

On Friday January 16, 2015, Kristin Caspar, the Guinea and Ghana country desk officer, sent out an update on PC Guinea's reopening. No date is set but they are still hopeful about sending the stage group G-27 and G-28 within the months to follow.

Guinean officials opened schools on January 20th but there has since been a visible bump in new cases. La lutte contre Ebola continue. On est ensemble et on gagera!



FOG Is Now on Facebook!

By Teresa Pope *FOG Advocacy & Communications Chair*

Friends of Guinea rolled out our official Facebook page at the end of January. It is a great place for FOG members and anyone else interested in learning more about Guinea to network and share information. Please "LIKE" FOG on Facebook, post your thoughts and questions about Guinea, and check in often for FOG up-

dates. Due to high turnover in the FOG leadership staff, it has been almost 2 years since the last edition of this newsletter was published. While you are on FOG's Facebook page, let us know what you think of this new newsletter!

<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofguinea>

Special points of interest:

- *Ebola Update*
- *RPCV's: Where are they now?*
- *A message from Country Director Doug Teschner*



RPCVs: Where are they now?

By Adrienne Epstein *RPCV 2012-2014 FOG Special Correspondant*

Any RPCV will tell you that, despite best laid plans, it proves difficult to keep in touch with not only host country nationals, but also fellow former Volunteers. Even in this day with smart phones and Facebook, we can lose track of each other. FOG contacted three RPCVs – Michael Milligan, Juliette Keeley, and Carlos Rocha – to ask about where they've ended up and how Guinea played a hand in getting them there.

FoG: To start, can you tell us your village, years in Guinea, sector, and stage?

MM: I was a physics Education volunteer in Cissela from 2003-2005 (G6).

CR: I was a physics Education volunteer in Timbo from 2012-2014 (G22).

JK: I was an Education volunteer in Labe, Guinea, from 2011 to 2013. As part of the G-20, I was primarily a math teacher but also taught English and basic computer skills to 6th through 11th graders.

FoG: What have you been doing since Guinea? What are you doing now?

MM: I applied for grad school when in Guinea, which was difficult given the lack of telephone and Internet connectivity. I went to graduate school for a degree in international and development economics at the University of New Mexico. After this I was an assistant professor of economics at Pusan National University, South Korea, for 2 years and then was able to enter the United Nations through the Young Professionals Program. I worked for 2.5 years at the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva, Switzerland and for the last six months have been working for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago.

CR: A month before finishing service we were evacuated, I got off the plane in Paris, bought a bicycle in Austria and biked around Europe for 3 months. Afterwards I spent some quality time with family in South America, I have applied to one graduate school fellowship program and am waiting to hear back from them. In the meantime I am



wandering, in a limbo, trying to figure it out what to do with my life, maybe I will go back to Guinea and become a mango exporter!

JK: Upon returning from Guinea, I joined the New York City Department of Education, where I have worked on implementing a new type of assessment in about 100 schools, evaluated schools' technology readiness, and managed logistics for qualitative evaluations of principals in over 1,200 schools. But my heart still lies with Guinea and its success, so I have applied to Master programs in international affairs, with a focus in international development and African studies. While I wait to hear back from these programs that will hopefully enrich my understanding of African and American foreign affairs and send me back to Africa, I still remained connected to local community development. As part of the *Brooklyn and Queens RPCV Chapter of New York*, I look for community service opportunities in community gardens, soup kitchens, school beautification, and home construction, enlisting returned Peace Corps volunteers to continue their commitment to service back at home. Since September

2014, I mentor a public school 11th grader, Esmeralda, as part of *Sponsors for Educational Opportunity*, an intensive mentoring program that follows low-income minority students from 9th grade to the end of college. This program allows me to offer individualized help on college and career readiness, such as coaching on resumes, mock interviews, and the college application process. SEO has enabled me to build a mentor-mentee relationship with Esmeralda, similar to the teacher-student relationships I strove to develop with my students back in Guinea.

FoG: Looking back, how much has Guinea influenced your life?

MM: Greatly. I had time to read suitcases full of French literature. I made many friends and many more memories. I learned how to teach, which is useful in so many walks of life. Peace Corps on my resume certainly didn't hurt anything. I learned great thrift and that I don't at all need the trappings of modern Westernized life to be happy. And I now extract maximum nutrients from my chicken.

CR: I think I became a better listener a more patient person, although I have not been back enough time to know how it has affected my life. I thought I would become more appreciative of the things I took for granted here, however life in Africa was so full and joyous, that I am not sure who has it better. I am very grateful to have had a wonderful service and the chance to see a piece of Africa, when people ask how was my experience, I say it is the best experience I have ever had.



JK: I did not truly understand how Guinea influenced me until I returned to the United States. Of course, Guinea has humbled me in the face of abject, entrenched and systemic poverty. Guinea has offered me an unparalleled perspective on the true meaning of basic rights: access to basic amenities, political stability, education, and health. Guinea has also shown me how people survive and thrive in the face of adversity, continuing to live their lives despite corruption, violence, or mass outbreaks like Ebola. I carry Guinea's lessons with me, and try to remember them as I am faced with the sometimes petty concerns of westernized life, the markers of corruption in the United States, and the limited view of Africa and Islam in the media. Beyond my perspective, Guinea has also greatly influenced my career choice: I want to make it my life's goal to repair the inequalities created by the accidents of birth, especially in the field of education, which I consider to be the greatest engine of socio-economic advancement. Why should Guinean students be denied the opportunities awarded to American students solely because they are born into a system of dysfunctional schools, incompetent teachers and poor economy? This is a lofty and unwieldy goal, I know, but Guinea has ignited the fire of indignation in me.

It is always fascinating and inspiring to speak with RPCVs, to see their different winding paths since we all converged in a beautiful place in West Africa. Our love for Guinea and its effects on us for years to come will always tie us together!

A Message from the Guinea Country Director By Doug Teschner

I was pleased to be asked to contribute to the FOG newsletter and send greetings from Conakry (as well as Kankan and Dabola where I started writing this). I arrived in Guinea on July 13 (just 17 days before the evacuation) and have enjoyed my time here -- although not as much as if we had Volunteers! Everywhere I go, including this past week in Haute Guinea, I hear positive stories about Volunteers and their great impact in Guinea going back to 1962.

I come from a big Peace Corps family, the first to join among nine Volunteers, staff, and staff spouses spanning 3 generations. Guinea is my fourth Peace Corps country -- I started out in Morocco as forestry Volunteer back in 1971. More recently, I was the Country Director in Burkina Faso from 2008-2010 and then Ukraine from 2010 -2014.

When not overseas, New Hampshire is home, and my wife Martha and I have two grown children. I am also a lifelong hiker, skier, and mountaineer and have hiked up the Chien Qui Fume near Dubreka 3 times so far and also got to the top of the Dame de Mali (not yet Mt. Nimba).

While the PCVs are gone for the moment, PC has kept all the staff on board and is committed to reopening the country as soon as possible. In the meantime, our staff are collaborating closely with the CDC (many of whom are

RPCVs, including some from Guinea!). We have hosted 6 trainings for health care workers in our office and, most exciting, we are using our network of nationwide community contacts to help "sensibilizer" about Ebola. In December, we trained 272 Community Educators (mostly former counterparts) who are now back in their communities and have reported educating more than 28,000 people with no significant resistance.

Numerous cases are already being reported where our community educators (CE) and those they educated have played a key role in saving lives, reducing transmissions. Some examples:

- In Popodara (Labe pref), the CE contacted health officials when community members he had trained brought possible EVD cases to the CE's attention. One person was found positive and sent to Conakry for treatment; she was cured and is now back home.

- In Wonkifong (Coyah pref), a CE convinced a French teacher, whose mother was killed by EVD, to be tested, and he is now receiving treatment. The CE and local prefet organized a group of youth who are identifying all contacts and encouraging them to seek care, with no resistance reported.

- In Nyandankoro (Siguiro pref), a youth leader and community members who had been trained by the CE saw an ill man in a taxi and insisted, despite the taxi driver's protest,

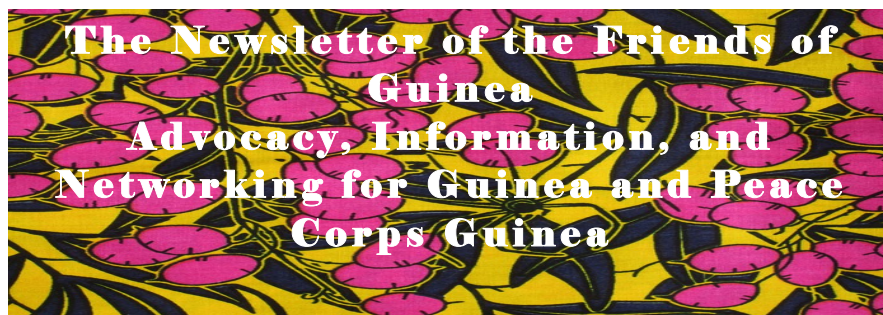
that they remain in the car and proceed to the health center where a nurse (who was trained by the PC CE) called the Red Cross who arrived to find a dead body which they safely removed.

- In Gbozileta (Nzérékoré pref) the CE convinced a family to allow their dead daughter to be tested and, when she was found to have Ebola, the family agreed to a safe burial and family follow up for 21 days. The CE is following up with 83 contacts, doing "what we can to keep them calm."

- In Kolon (Boffa pref), the CE found resistance because an opposition politician told them Ebola was not true and was being used to by the ruling party to delay elections. However, with time and persistence, the CE was able to convince people and they accepted his information.

This would not be possible without all the work PCVs have done in these communities in the past and all the good will and positive contacts you made. In sum, PC Guinea, as well as the staff in Sierra Leone and Liberia, are fully committed to supporting the CDC which has been great to keep staff working and productive as well as knowing they are contributing to the effort to fight Ebola.

So we are busy, but always thinking about our RPCVs. In PC, we are all part of something bigger than ourselves, and we are all in this together. Share your positive energy, and I promise to do the same.



Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former Guinea Peace Corps Volunteers, Guineans inside and outside of Guinea, and others interested in promoting the cause of Guinean development in the world at large. We are a country-of-service affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association.



Do you want to contribute a piece to the next newsletter? Contact Fog Communications Assistant Hannah Koepl at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

