

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, November 2016

Kindergarten at the Centre!



Former Association student and aspiring teacher of the Centre, Ouma, teaches newly arrived orphans to count, read, have fun, and sing!

Ouma, 17, was welcomed in February 2010 to the campus initially rented by the Association in Zinder. She was one of the first 20 girls to bring the *Au Coeur du Niger* concept to life, a programme aimed to educate and train orphaned children. Seven years later, Ouma is in her second year at the College, studying to become a teacher in order to pay forward what was given to her as a direct result of all the support coming from Switzerland and beyond! Ouma is always keen to assume her role as an apprentice kindergarten teacher after her morning classes at the College. One day she will sign an employment contract with the Association.

Thanks to sponsorships in Switzerland, France, and England (yes, a very generous sponsor in England is not afraid of borders!), these young girls receive national curriculum schooling at the *Au Coeur du*

Niger Centre and thus avoid being married at the age of 13-14 years or having their youth nipped in the bud by an encounter and subsequent unwanted pregnancy. Ouma is lucky to have a grandmother who believes that a better life is possible for her granddaughter than the one she had! Ouma returns proudly home to her grandmother on Friday nights with a salary that empowers her towards independence and the ability to live with dignity among her sisters and brothers. Most other girls do not have this chance and go about every day begging, selling small products, or selling their young bodies in Zinder's sandy lanes for a few pennies.



At only one year of age, Little Hamida wants to learn!

There is no age limit to learning! The adorable little Hamida - one year in October and the most recent baby to be born at the Centre, wants to learn quickly, and makes sure we know it! Her young mother, Balkissa - is training to be a secretary at the Centre. Following in her mother's footsteps, Hamida seems to be dreaming about her future role as Director of the Centre, keeping a tight ship with her baguette!

When babies and young children in underdeveloped countries are mentored and put into stimulating situations, they can grow and flourish with trained adults and the other children that surround and encourage them!



Bachir, proud of the young steer financed by his own hard work!



Bachir with his young wife (his right), in the sewing room at the Centre!

Bachir has grown since we first met him ten years ago on the sandy streets of Zinder. It was a sweltering 50°C day! The mycosis that had devoured his skull is completely gone, the only trace of which is the cap or hat he wears to protect his fragile scalp after the two skin grafts he underwent in Benin in 2011.

Thanks to the help of people who were moved to the point of action by Bachir's disease, he was cured and made able to start his life as a young man! Bachir has been so grateful to be able to work and find his place in society. His dream was to marry, have children, and support his family. Never wanting to study, he was a "real" street boy! Knowing that it was important to respect his desires and needs, I left him free to make the choices and life experiences that seemed right for him. I am so proud of the way with which he has managed his life. Today he grows tomatoes and lettuce, and works part time at the local market of Zinder, thanks to the steer he was able to buy with his own means and to a cart he shares with a neighbour! Bahir hopes to buy his own cart for even greater independence. During his last visit to the Centre with his young wife Balki, 17, (Bachir is 20), he asked me if she could join the Association girls in the sewing room to earn a little money for their household. I was delighted, and she began the next day sewing, knitting, doing embroidery, and making heart-shaped soap. Recently, Bachir has been proud to come with Balki, who was pregnant with their first child. Sadly, she lost her baby at term. The presence of the other mothers and married girls is a source of courage and strength, hopefully for a second pregnancy!

I like to think and say that it is "because of" Bashir or "thanks" to Bashir that I became aware, ten years ago, of the needs of all these young children left to themselves in the streets of Zinder, looking for a little food, a little water, and a lot of attention, affection, and coaching! Since then, I returned annually to Zinder to try to find a solution to the mycosis that slowly gnawed at Bachir's scalp and down his neck. Thanks to the caring and professional presence of Sister Dolorès and Sister Josée when they were still in Zinder, Bashir received the care he needed throughout his long treatment.

She was 5 years old

The little Mariama joined her ancestors when she was only 5 years old.

A young mother in her twenties arrived one hot morning in October 2015 with a little girl in tow. She was four years old and there was such a pure and soothing innocence on her face. I immediately wanted to welcome her to the Centre so she could attend school and live surrounded by little comrades like herself! The beginning of her life had already been so difficult. Every time a child is welcomed at the Centre, a small inquiry is carried out to ascertain whether the child is really orphaned and in need. This young mother had already rubbed shoulders with death when a car accident claimed her husband's life in 2013. Out of a deep need, she had entered into a new marriage with a man who would rape a girl the following year and be imprisoned.

At the beginning of the school year in August 2016, little Mariama did not show up at the Centre. Weeks passed and we finally learned that her mother had taken her to her native village over the summer (150km from Zinder) to visit her sick grandmother. I urged the staff to arrange a visit to the village so that Mariama could return to school as soon as possible. The weeks passed.... Again, I had to insist and persist in repeating that this little girl must be brought back to the Centre as soon as possible! Finally, I was told that Mariama and her mother had returned to Zinder weeks ago. A house call (she had moved in the meantime) was immediately arranged but took place a few days later. When

the directors of the Centre went to Mariama's house, they found people praying for the little girl's salvation. She had died the day before, after a bout with malaria that she had contracted in the village. Her young mother had not thought it necessary to bring her back to the Centre for treatment; instead, she prayed for God to heal her. Mariama had a lovely little space between her two small front teeth. She was something of a "Lola", like a sweet and light little Lolita when playing innocently with her comrades in the Centre. So, for the good of all the other children and girls, I will continue to insist that my team pay more attention to absences. It can save the lives of little Angels.



Some of the children, girls, and staff at the *Après-demain* Centre

Upcoming events

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| Friday, December 2, 2016 | Craft Market in Romont, 5pm – 9pm
Courtyard of Romont castle |
| Saturday, December 3 | Craft Market in Romont, 10am – 9pm
Booth with handmade items from Niger |
| Saturday, December 3 | Christmas Market in Semsales, 11am – 7pm
Great Parish Hall |
| Sunday, December 4 | Christmas Market in Semsales, 10am – 5pm
Booth with handmade items from Niger |



I wish you all a very beautiful end of the year and a luminous time of Advent!

The 195 orphaned children, albinos, child-mothers, and the 27 local employees at Zinder's "*Après-demain*" Centre wish you the happiest of holidays and a joyous 2017!

With our warmest wishes for health and peace!

Isabelle Macheret
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Zinder Niger, November 2016