



Awa Diarra and Baba Wagué Diakité with mudcloth created by Master Class students

KO-FALEN CULTURAL CENTER USA ❖ ANNUAL REPORT 20/21 ❖ MALI

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Greetings Ko-Falen friends in U.S. and Mali,

With COVID-19 protocol firmly in my mind, I managed to make my annual trip to Mali. My 3-month stay was extended to 4 months, as we understood that accomplishing the tasks this year would be complicated with additional COVID education and safety supplies to be dispensed at our Tutoring Center and food distribution to families. Indeed, food insecurity raised its head again this year in Mali, and so we at Ko-Falen re-instated our "15 Families" Food Program. This was a program created in 2013 to fill the gap in food security during the collapse of the Mali economy due to terrorist incursions in the North. 15 Families were identified within our neighborhood, and we were able to supply these families with 100 kilos of rice and 100 kilos of green millet. This year, the need was even more widespread and urgent. We created a small fundraiser which raised enough to supply 30 families with 50 kilos rice, 50 kilos millet and 50 kilos beans. Thanks to our KF Executive and Advisory Boards teaming up with friends, our students at the tutoring center and their families benefited tremendously. Our food program also helped other families in the neighborhood. Ko-Falen is a community-friendly organization that understands that a healthy community raises healthy children. Food and learning go hand in hand.

Our programs in Mali are running smoothly, with French, English and math/algebra/physics continuing to bring our students top honors in their schools. They have truly become leaders. Our Entrepreneurial Art Program with mudcloth (*bògòlanfini*) has become a hit. The younger students look forward to this practice, and the Master Class of upper school and graduated students have really refined their craft! In addition, Ko-Falen has caught the attention of a well-known mudcloth practitioner, Yaoussa Traoré,



Mudcloth by Makan Traoré, Kani Diallo, Baba Wagué Diakitè, Ballamine Ballo and Mohamed Traoré

who was trained by her grandmother, the famous mudcloth artist Nakunte Diarra, whose work is included in numerous museums in the world. I was pleased to meet and work with Yaoussa this year, and have her share her knowledge with our students. We look forward to continuing this relationship. ***Stay tuned, as we will have an Online Sale of our students' work this summer, as well as work by Yaoussa Traoré!***

The beehive cannot reach the fork of the tree without a rope. I credit all of these achievements to Ko-Falen's boards in the U.S. and Mali, our donors, volunteers and friends of Ko-Falen. Thank you!

Baba Wagué Diakitè
Founder & Executive Director
Ko-Falen Cultural Center

KO-FALEN CULTURAL CENTER 2020/2021

*Ko-Falen Cultural Center
seeks to promote
mutual understanding
and respect between
people of different cultures
through art and education.*



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STUDENT STORIES



Hello Ko-Falen friends and Board members, I would like to introduce a very special student at our Tutoring Center. Her name is Awa Karambe. As a 4-year-old, she started pre-school at Ko-Falen Tutoring Center. However, it was not an easy first 3 months, because she stuttered so badly that she would burst into tears and cry all day. But with the encouragement of the Ko-Falen team, Awa Karambe has gained confidence and is less shy. She has made friends and students put a lot of effort into patiently holding conversations with her. Now here is what Awa has to say:

"My name is Awa Karambe, a student of Ko-Falen since I was very young. I thank my teachers, my fellow students and Ko-Falen Board members and donors. I never thought I could have friends and be accepted because my speed of speech is so slow. But that doesn't matter to me anymore because of the unconditional love I have been receiving. Just for your information, what is worse for someone who is sad, is telling her to be happy. In contrast, help her to be less lonely with a little bit of love. Today, I am definitely a better student than those many years ago. I am indeed 16 and passed my exam into high school this year. When I am lucky in the future, I want to counsel parents and their kids just like Ko-Falen intermediary Baba Wagué. Don't feel sorry for me, because things are looking bright. I speak a little better and I am happy. Love back to you also." –Awa (left)



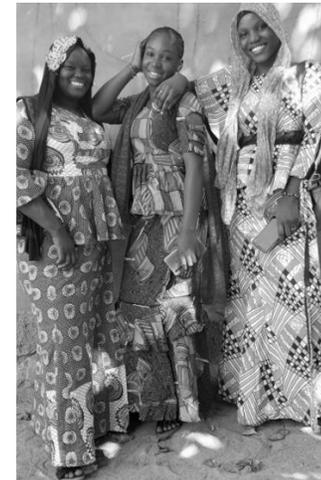
"Hello I am Fatoumata Sissoko. Though I started my schooling late, I have now passed into high school this year at the age of 18. First, I was embarrassed to be in the same class with students that I am older than, but in time that didn't matter because the wind of knowledge blows on all heads the same. I am Ko-Falen and without you I would not have made it this far. When I finish my education, I would like to have my own health clinic to help the poor like Ko-Falen does. Thank you!" -Fatoumata (right)



"Good-day everyone, I am Farima Diakité. I began my studies at Ko-Falen Tutoring Center even before I started my schooling. I have been with Ko-Falen for 13 years now. I am 17 years old and working on my baccalaureate from high school this year 2020/2021. Wish me luck! Regardless of the satisfying success Ko-Falen Tutoring Center has given me, I still come to the center daily to learn more of my favorite subjects, Mathematics and Physics-Chemistry, so I stay tuned. Beginning last year, Modibo our French language teacher, chose me and a couple other students to be in a teachers' training program at the tutoring center. I have been occasionally teaching our 3rd and 4th grade classes. Sometimes, I even teach math to our 6th and 7th grade students. This is very exciting to me because I want to become a teacher after I graduate--possibly returning to Ko-Falen to give something back to the organization. As a little girl, I lost both of my parents and had no idea where all of this help was coming from to me, but now I know. Thank you all for helping me Ko-Falen donors, the board in Portland and the volunteers. Without you, my life could have been a broken story. Much love and stay well." -Farima (left)



"Heeelow!! My name is Koumba Sene Diallo. I am 16 years old. I have been going to Ko-Falen since I was very, very little. I appreciated the encouragement of the Ko-Falen organization as a whole. Thank you for paying my tuition. It is so cool here at Ko-Falen. I have good friends. I am also proud to announce to you all that I passed my exam to high school this year. Ko-Falen is so awesome. Here are my friends; we all go to Ko-Falen. Thank you for your kindness and for helping us. We love you." -Koumba (center right)



"Good afternoon, my name is Amina Ballo. I am almost 13 years old and I am in 8th grade at Ko-Falen Tutoring Center. Our classes have been helping us a great deal. My favorite is English class, but the mathematics and French classes also helped me a great deal. My many thank yous to the board members in Portland because your creation here in Bamako has been helping many children like myself to a higher level of education. My reading has improved as well as my mathematics and English. Thank you to our teachers here and to Tonton Baba Wagué to have the courage every day to teach us. I also look forward to coming to Ko-Falen to see friends and classmates. I have many friends here. I appreciate the friendly and secure environment around us. Thank you for supporting us. You gave our heads knowledge and we give you love back from Mali." -Amina (left)

FAMILY STORIES



“Greetings to Ko-Falen donors and board members in Mali and USA. Like many of us, I am also a single mother of boys. But it’s my two sons Mohamed and Makan Traoré that have been going to Ko-Falen. My third son has been handicapped for life. Before I found out about Ko-Falen, I had no hope. It’s so hard to control the boys’ behavior and keep them from being in trouble all of the time. Then I reached out to Ko-Falen when they were 7 and 9 years old, and it became a perfect communal circle for us. Ko-Falen worked so hard for us and now my boys

have dropped their bad behaviors and take their classes seriously. Now my 19-year-old is in 9th grade and his 17-year-old brother is in 9th grade as well. Years ago I was worrying that Ko-Falen wouldn’t accept them because of their ages, but Wagué said, "It’s not about our children’s ages, it’s about keeping them safe, close by and teaching them to become functional world citizens." Now they use Ko-Falen as their second home. They are very big in mudcloth making classes. Now they are happy to be joining the upper school Entrepreneurial Skills-Building master class. I thank Ko-Falen for paying my children’s school tuition for the last 8 years. Thanks also for the grain distribution for me. Six years ago we were with the lucky recipients and this year again we received 3 sacks of grain. All this help allows me to pay more attention to my sick child.

Without Ko-Falen, no one will help poor people like me. All help that comes from foreign countries for people is consumed by the privileged. Thank you again for everything Ko-Falen is doing for our community here.”
-Fatoumata Diarra



“My name is Wourya Diakité. I am the grandmother of Aminata and Aicha Guindo, both students of Ko-Falen. They were very young when they started learning at the center. Wagué—I was a younger generation friend of your mother and you know far well our style of raising children. But since then, the sun has a different way of rising. Respect for elders was a must. The eldest of each family had the last word. We were only worried then about occasional stubborn kids in the street that may influence other children. But what’s happening now, they all have cellphones—communicating with someone in Japan or in Germany. I love my grandchildren, but until they become responsible adults, I cannot rest. I am the only adult relative left in their lives. My advice to others of my age with children yet to raise: ‘Being old is not a reason



to settle down, unless someone else can do it for you.’ But when Ko-Falen saw my situation and recognized an old woman raising 2 very young girls, they came to my rescue. My two girls are now in 9th and 11th grade. And as for me, I am still healthy and checking the Tutoring Center 3 times a week to make sure they are always present in their classes. So I would like to thank the Ko-Falen boards in both countries.”

“Good afternoon, my name is Mohamed Dicko. I can say that I am the proudest and luckiest father for the last 8 years. My life is a lot different than all other students’ parents at Ko-Falen. I am originally from Timbuctou; my wife Aisha and our 4 children lived good lives in the desert. But slowly tension was bursting open like the desert flowers at sunset. We remained silent, living a squeezed life, hoping things would eventually settle itself. But as time progressed, the footprints of newcomers increased on our desert floor with new languages. This was enough warning for my family and I to hunker down even lower to the level of desert shrubs. But what we couldn’t take any more was the sounds of gunfire. This is when I led my family on a long journey, hopping from one squatting ground to another, finally seeking refuge in Gao, Mali in the North. There, we were welcomed with many words of hope and encouragement. But as soon as those words of promise came, they faded away like lightning, leaving us homeless in a town we were unfamiliar with. We moved from camping ground to camping ground again, with no food or money until we were finally in Bamako.

A father is supposed to be the last person to break tears in his eyes, for the sake of retaining strength in his family. But it turned out that my wife Aisha was the strongest. I held my head in my two hands and cried bitterly as if I was the little brother of my own children. The weakest moment indeed of my entire life. But it was also a necessary one. In Bamako, I got up early and headed to town, hoping to break the ice somewhere and get lucky with a job to feed my family—but no luck came. This rooting around extended into a phase of hiding myself in embarrassment from my family. My wife Aisha stood by me and my children all along.

One day, I was passing by a gentleman making mudcloth next to his compound wall. For the 3 years I had been in the neighborhood, I hadn’t talked to anyone and I had no friends. I am not sure whether or not I was singing, but the gentleman asked if I was singing and in what Malian language. I heard and understood in my head what he was asking, but I couldn’t speak the Bamana language of the South. Seeing that I was slow to respond, he introduced himself to me as "Baba". This was the first time someone outside my own house had approached me, regardless of the language barrier. Then I began visiting my new and only friend every day. Soon, I had seen enough of this gentleman’s heart and mind and I knew they were good. So I spoke honestly to him about my long hard life. Eventually, our friendship was strong enough that he bought food for my family from his own pocket and met my wife Aisha and my children. Baba Wagué has a good heart. When he met my children, he did more for them than I had done in years. He quickly enrolled the children in the Ko-Falen Tutoring Center, then began to find their birth papers and also enrolled them in the public school system. Today all three of them are in school.

About 6 years back, we received Ko-Falen food and again this year. Because of Wagué, I am finally integrated into my new community. I am no longer afraid. But also because of Ko-Falen, my family members are now citizens of our neighborhood community. I do not want to brag about Wagué, but everyone knows in our community that he is a true leader. He sits with us in our simple place, never showing us once he is higher than us on any level.

I would like to inform those who don’t know, the country of Mali has been known throughout history to show hospitality to their guests. I apologize for the fact our international problems have kept you away, but promise, it is just a momentary period—*In sh’Allah*. Thank you, Ko-Falen board members and donors. Together you changed my family’s life and may you be rewarded heavenly.... Blessings.”

