

**RDDC and The Association of Benka-Fissa
Launch a Dance & School Program For
Children in Guinea**



September 14, 2011

When you walk into the barren stone building called “Maison des Jeunes” (Youth Center/House) lacking electricity, furniture and plumbing, you would think it was deserted and abandoned for years. But, at 9:00am each and every morning, it fills with 24 street kids who have come to pass their long, isolated days with acrobatic lessons...and now school lessons.

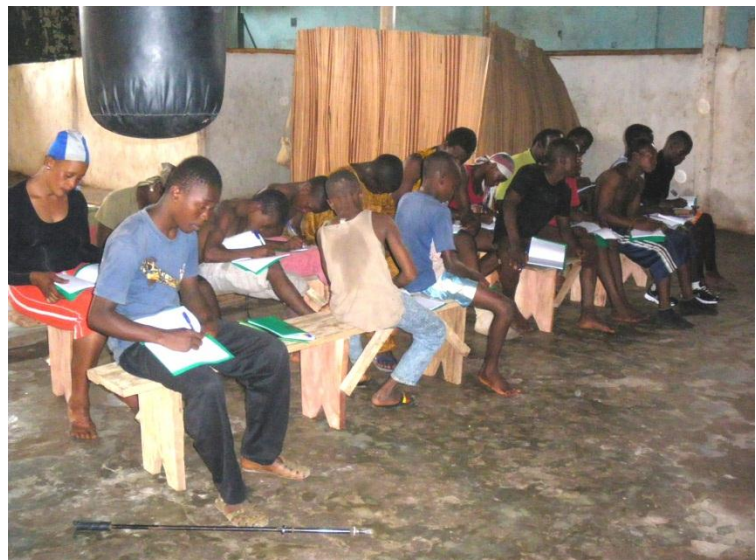


On August 3, 2011, The Rebecca Davis Dance Company (RDDC) and the Association of Benka-Fissa officially launched their partnership creating an ongoing dance and academic program in Kindia, Guinea. The program’s first cohort serves mostly boys from the ages of 10 to 19 years who face economic and social challenges each and everyday. The Association is designed to provide unique opportunities to keep such children safe by involving them in productive physical and mental activities. Six days a week, the students attend a four-hour training program

of classical ballet, modern dance and acrobatics; thereafter, they attend two hours of academic lessons after receiving meal provisions.

One of the first girls who entered the program is Fatoumata Kombassa. At the age of 20, she is one year older than all the other participants. She has never attended school in her life, but she is interested in dance and therefore willing to come to Maison des Jeunes daily. After three days, this diligent, strong young woman was given an exercise book for the first time and asked to read the French alphabet. She did not recognize any of the letters and stared blankly at the page. However, after continuing to come every day for two weeks, Fatoumata can now read the alphabet and write six words...in addition to doing a single pirouette!

The RDDC is excited to be working alongside a Guinean organization that shares its mission of developing talented youth into educated, multi-skilled professionals capable of improving their own living standards over time. To this end, the academic program is designed to reinforce basic reading and writing skills in French



while also incorporating lessons on entrepreneurship, youth leadership and English language. Michel Mansare is the Educational Director and lead teacher of the RDDC academic program.

Working alongside Ibrahima Bamba (BBL) and Ibrahima Mara of the Association of Benka-Fissa, the joint program has recently received office space at Maison des Jeunes in Kindia and has acquired school materials for fifty students. The empty, raw building now fills with chalk boards, exercise books, benches and work tables everyday at 1:00pm as the children move from their dance-

acrobatic classes to their academic school lessons. This hollow building now bursts with creative physical and intellectual expression generated from the bodies and minds of young people. Just giving these children the slightest opportunity, the smallest glimmer of hope, results in an abundance of learning and the potential for a stable future.

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During the initial launch of the program in August, daily dance classes were taught by three RDDC instructors: Rebecca Davis (USA), Tracy Vogt (USA) and Eugene Dushime (Rwandan Dancer & Rwandan Program Director for RDDC). Rebecca and Eugene will return in October to build programming capacity and deepen the technical dance training component.



This program plays a critical role in implementing RDDC's current strategic plan of developing educational opportunities alongside dance training in the company's three focus countries: Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Guinea. Moreover, the program in Guinea involves a team of four local staff and is an important step in providing employment opportunities inside the country. The Guinean team consists of: Ibrahima Mara, Ibrahima Bamba (BBL), Michel Mansare and Rene Ifono. Given the passionate commitment and local expertise of

the in-country team, RDDC is optimistic the program will grow and continue to serve more and more children in Guinea.

If Fatoumata is an example of what a motivated young person can accomplish in two weeks when given access to education, imagine what can be accomplished when hundreds of children have the same opportunity over ten years? It just requires all of us to believe in the human potential of one another.