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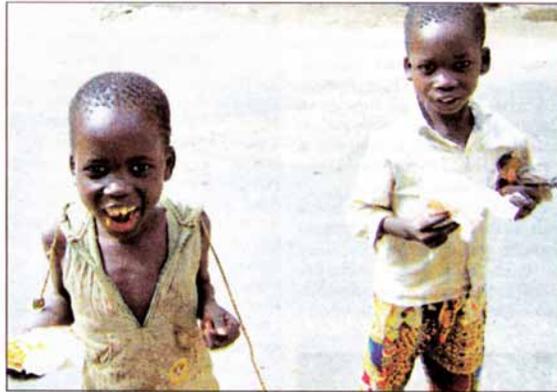
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Local humanitarian helping kids half a world away (p.1 of 2)

by Sue Ann Rybak

Mt. Airy resident Luke Klein's life changed dramatically when he was visiting Senegal, West Africa, in 2003 after an encounter with two little boys living in squalor on the streets of Dakar, the nation's capital. "I have a clear memory of that moment that is captured in this photograph of the two boys enjoying pastries," he recalled. "A friend and I were spending a relaxing morning on Dakar's Avenue Pompidou, near the Place de l'Indépendance. It's a bustling downtown neighborhood, and we



These two boys whom Klein met are an example of the more than 50,000 young boys dressed in ratty clothes and begging on the streets of Senegal's cities.

were just chatting with street vendors as we sipped our morning coffee when two boys approached us rather tentatively, clearly hoping that we would give them some food or money."

Klein, 40, who spent the first 10 years of his life in Chestnut Hill, said that he and his friend greeted the boys and asked how they were doing. "As we talked with them, we were still holding our little paper bags from the nearby pastry shop, each with the pain au chocolat that we had bought for our breakfasts," he said. "We realized that these boys would enjoy the pastries far more than we would, so we handed them our bags. These may have been the first pains au chocolat that these boys had ever eaten, and they were overjoyed as they bit through the buttery pastry into the chocolate center.

"They thanked us profusely, and we gave them some money before moving along. In addition to food, I tend to give money to the begging children. I know that the money may end up in the pockets of an-

other, and it may be a rather ineffective way of helping the children, but it's just too difficult to see children standing before you in ratty clothes begging on the street and not give them something."

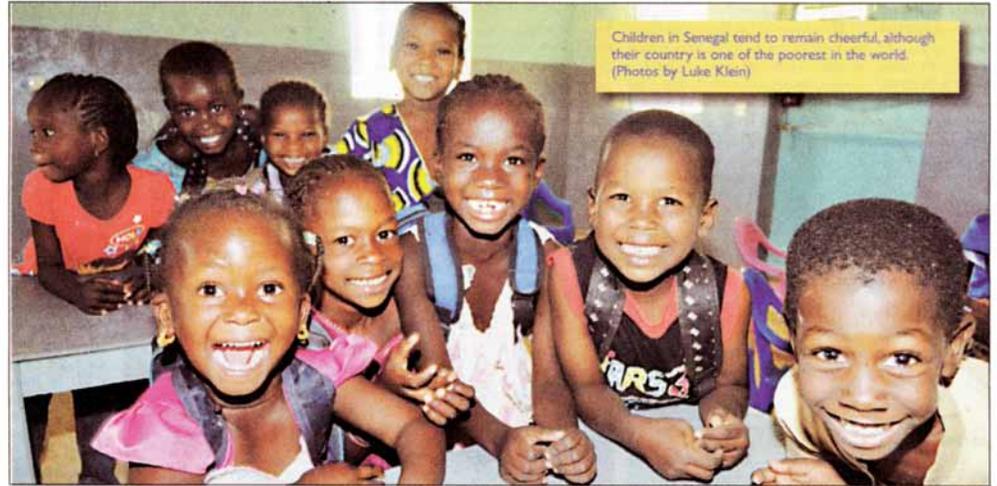
Klein, who has been traveling to Senegal on a regular basis since 1999, is the director of technology and marketing at the Family & Play Therapy Center in Mt. Airy, which offers therapy services as well as onsite and online postgraduate training for therapists. Klein and his partner, Nathalie; his daughter, Gisela, 7; and Nathalie's daughter, Maya, 8, are members of the

Frankford Monthly Meeting.

These two boys are an example of the more than 50,000 young boys dressed in ratty clothes, carrying empty cans, and begging on the streets of Senegal's cities. Yet, few Americans know about the crisis in Senegal or have even heard of Senegal. Klein said that Senegal, despite widespread poverty, is a progressive, majority Sufi Muslim country with a long history as a stable



The majority of Senegalese are Sufi Muslims, the most liberal branch by far of believers in Islam.



Children in Senegal tend to remain cheerful, although their country is one of the poorest in the world. (Photos by Luke Klein)

and peaceful democracy. The National Assembly of Senegal is made up of 43 percent female representatives. They are ranked sixth in the world for having the highest female representation. The United States, by contrast, is ranked 100th in the world, with only 18 percent.

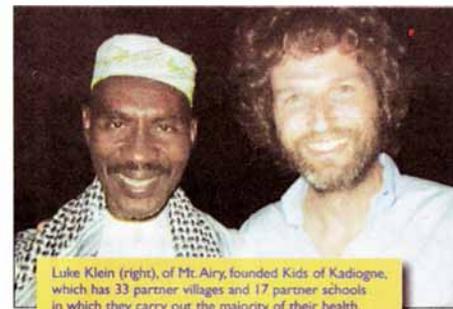
"The majority of Senegalese are Sufi Muslims and followers of an interpretation of Islam that is unique to Senegal," he said. "Sufis seek to create a direct, personal connection with God through meditation and self-discipline. It is extraordinary to witness how effectively Senegalese Muslims carry their faith as a constant reminder to live in peace and to care for those in

need."

Klein said part of the current crisis stems from an abuse of the old and honorable Sufi tradition of studying the Quran under the guidance of a teacher called a marabout. He explained that for centuries, boys and girls have studied the Quran, memorizing the text and seeking to understand it, taught by a local marabout in a religious school called a daara. He noted that boys were often sent to a daara in a distant village, where the children studied for years under the care of a marabout away from the distractions of everyday life.

"These students, called talibés, would help support the needs of the daara by working in the marabout's fields throughout their course of study," Klein said. "The daara would also be supported by the local community, as children would collect contributions of food and money. As daaras began to open in cities, the practice of collecting donations turned into begging. Today, many children are sent out to beg for food and money in support of the daara. As temptation is always inherent to money, this symbolic gesture has become a genuine source of income for greedy, false marabouts."

Today, there are more than 50,000 boys



Luke Klein (right), of Mt. Airy, founded Kids of Kadiogno, which has 33 partner villages and 17 partner schools in which they carry out the majority of their health, education and agricultural programs.

begging on the streets of Senegal's cities, often sent from faraway villages by parents who have been misled about conditions that their children will face. Often, corrupt marabouts will beat and punish the boys if they do not bring in a daily quota. Thousands of boys run away from these corrupt marabouts and are left to fend for themselves on the streets.

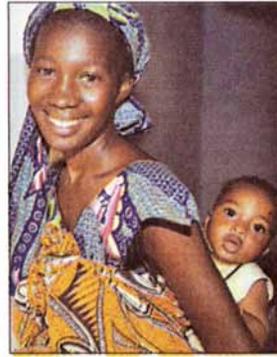
Klein knew he had to act. With the help of Dr. Mamadou Sow, a professor at Temple University who grew up in northern Senegal, Klein co-founded Kids of Kadiogne, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the education and health of children in northern Senegal, in 2006. Klein said that although Senegal has many of the ingredients necessary for future success, its stability is fragile.

Senegal is among the poorest countries in the world, with a median income of \$1.10 per person per day. The country suffers from very high rates of infectious disease, including malaria, bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, dengue fever, yellow fever, schistosomiasis, and meningitis. A large part of the problem is that a quarter of the population does not have access to clean drinking water, and half of the population does not have access to sanitation facilities.

Klein, who has been traveling in Senegal since 1999, said that while the government is focusing on cracking down on corrupt marabouts and implementing overall reform, his organization focuses on the basic needs of the children. "We have really tried to work with local people in the villages to identify the needs that they have that we are in a position to be able to help with," he said. "By listening to the needs of the people, we are able to design projects with them in collaboration."

Sow, who grew up in a family of cattle-herders in northern Senegal has worked with Klein to build a reliable network of trustworthy

people in Kadiogne, a small village in northern Senegal, and the surrounding region. Kids of Kadiogne has 33 partner villages and 17 partner schools in which they carry out the majority of their health, education, and agricultural programs. Recently, the organization has launched a hunger program in Dakar.



A common sight on the streets and in the countryside of Senegal: a mom carrying a child on her back.

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"We have just launched a pilot program for a cafeteria located in a neighborhood where we have a connection to

honorable marabouts, who need assistance providing for their talibés," he said. "Café Tapalapa provides nutritious hot meals and a safe space for some of the thousands of children who spend their days begging on the streets."

* * *

Phyllis Taylor, a longtime resident of Mt. Airy who co-chairs Kids of Kadiogne, Inc., said one of the things she loves most about the program is how direct and locally-based it is.

"Luke spends a huge amount of time as the executive director and gets zero salary," she explained. "The board isn't paid, unlike some other nonprofit organizations. So people can be assured that if they make a donation,

it's going to go directly to the program. It's not going to be siphoned off by a CEO who is making \$400,000 a year.

"The reality of what is happening in Africa just seared my soul," said Taylor, a registered

nurse. She said that one of the things that really appealed to her about "Kids" was that "such a little amount of money and investment of time has an impact for generations. If you help one child become literate in the family, then often their siblings learn to read. It's an investment in the here and now, but it's also an investment in the region because it needs to stay stable."

Taylor said that while literacy rates in Senegal are improving, only about 50 percent of the population can read, and only a third of children graduate from secondary school. Klein said the community education center that the organization built in the village of Kadiogne includes two classrooms that provide additional space for the elementary school, which has sometimes had to turn away the youngest children because of lack of space.

Currently, the organization is in the process of creating the Emily D'Ancona Resource Center. Upon completion, the resource center will have the only print library in the region, including resources in French, English, Pulaar, and Wolof.

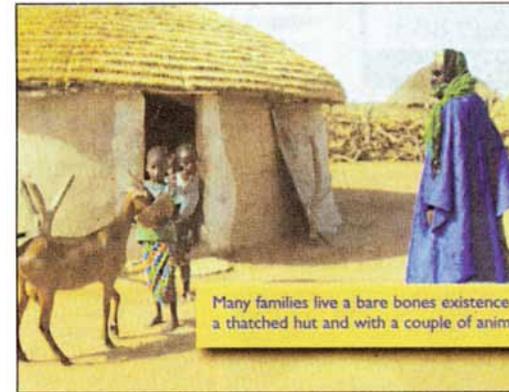
In addition, it will have the only internet-connected computer lab in the region. The resource center is named after a beloved member of the Germantown Friends School class of 1993 and a native of Chestnut Hill, who died tragically in a car accident in 2008.

Taylor said that \$10 can literally save a child's life by putting a mosquito net in his or her hands, thus preventing malaria. A recent article in the National Geographic said that "some 3,000 children die of malaria each day in Africa, one every 30 seconds." That's more than one million children a year. One of the most cost-effective ways to prevent malaria is by using a mosquito net. The article went on to say that using a mosquito net can "cut infections by half and child deaths by a third."

"One of the reasons I have supported this

organization is because it is making a profound difference," said Taylor, who has worked on issues concerning social justice for decades. "It is also sending a message to the Muslim world that we are not all ugly Americans. In terms of world relations, Senegal is really important. Here is an example of a Muslim country that values education, women, and democracy."

She said people will often ask "Why Senegal?" Taylor said that "although it is among the poorest countries in the world, Senegal is a peaceful, stable democracy in a troubled region. While our programs are aimed at meeting the needs of children today, it's with the goal of helping to create a brighter future for them and, thus, contributing to the stability of the region as well." And despite its poverty, Senegal is fortunate to have a more modern transportation and communication infrastructure that most countries in the region.



Many families live a bare bones existence in a thatched hut and with a couple of animals.

Klein added that when Senegal found itself on the border of the recent Ebola outbreak, the government mobilized the entire country in prevention efforts, and Senegal was the first country to be cleared by the World Health Organization as free of Ebola.

But in the words of Coumba Djen-

aba Bâ, a mother in the village of Diamel, which Klein particularly recalled: "We see change and development taking place around the world, but in the village nothing has changed. We work hard, and we do all we can with what we have, but we need assistance from the developed world if we are to improve conditions here."

Taylor said that Kids of Kadiogne, Inc. offers people a chance to make a significant difference in the lives of many children.

For more information, or to make a donation to Kids of Kadiogne, Inc., go to www.kidsofkadiogne.org or call 1-844-KADIogne. Checks can also be mailed to P.O. Box 18983, Philadelphia, PA 19119.