

Koutiala Youth Project

Mali, West Africa

The first thing you notice as you enter the city of Koutiala, a town of 120,000 (over half below the age of 15), is the incredible amount of poverty. But over time you start to see past the poverty and begin looking into the hopeful eyes of the youth. A group that is balancing the traditions of the past as they march forward into the 21st century. A group that plays the game of soccer with anything that rolls. A group that huddles together under street lights to study for their exams.

A vision to reach out to these kids started to take form as international workers and visiting work teams at the Koutiala Women's and Children's Hospital starting posing "what if" questions. What if you had good soccer fields with organized practices and games? What if you had study tables and provided text books? What if you had a cybercafé? Over the past two years the framework for a youth center has begun to take shape built around the idea of using soccer and education initiatives to impact the youth.

Phase I– Tournament and League Development

Phase I is currently in its second year of being in motion. The second year has seen the league grow in duration and size with a second team added to the girls program. The championship game for the boys was played in the new government built stadium with the mayor giving out awards at the end of the match. Excitement for the girls program was generated through an exhibition match before the boys final. This past December the government granted official club status to the select program "The Ambassadors" making it the only Christian soccer club in the country. This opens the door for us to participate in government run tournaments and possible advancement in the national divisional league system. Through individual donations, we have expanded the practice field located on hospital grounds to accommodate the growing number of kids attending practices. We have also been able to provide some basic equipment for teams. **As we look forward, we realize that equipment such as cleats, shin guards, balls, and uniforms will be needed in order to keep up with the growth of the program. We pray that individuals, churches, and other organizations will partner with us to fill this need through donations of equipment or necessary funds.**

Phase II is to purchase property and build fields!

Help us help the Koutiala Youth Project