

**Girls’ Computer Literacy and Community Leadership Program**

*Using technology to help girls express themselves creatively*

*About FAVL*

**OUR COMMITMENT**

**Friends of African Village Libraries is committed to long-term management of and support for small community libraries in rural Africa.** Our goal is to establish long-term relationships with community libraries, rather than provide an initial donation and move on to another village. This is why the number of libraries in our network is small, as they are carefully managed to ensure their continued success. Burkina Faso alone has thousands of villages with primary schools and no libraries; the needs are immense, the means to address the need are limited.

**OUR MISSION**

We believe that every child and adult should have the opportunity to pick up a book and read. FAVL is dedicated to increasing access to reading material and other information in rural villages in sub-Saharan Africa. FAVL-supported libraries serve all members of the village community. One core public is the local community of readers- schoolchildren, adult learners, and other persons committed to reading. Most children, particularly in rural areas, have little access to books. While they may go to school, they will probably have little opportunity to read age-appropriate material. There are very few books available in rural schools. FAVL emphasizes books that are highly demanded by local readers: African novels and storybooks, children's books with village themes, and local language materials for the newly literate village reader.

Children, young adults, farmers, weavers, traders, and others in very poor villages should have similar access to information- through books and other media- as people in developed countries. FAVL operates under the belief that true development can only happen when people are empowered by access to information and the habits of reading and critical thinking. FAVL strives to include in every library collection as much relevant, useful information as is available - whether about building a compost pit, a chicken coop or treatment of dysentery.

**CONTACT**

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*Project Narrative*

**SUMMARY**

High school girls in the town of Houndé will participate in an essay contest about the importance of technology, leadership and girls’ education. From the applicants, 50 girls will be chosen to attend a 5-month long computer class, in which they will to learn basic computer skills (using a mouse, typing, etc.), programs like Microsoft Office (Word, Publisher, Excel) and internet navigation. They will also be trained in the basic maintenance and troubleshooting for desktop computers, printers, cameras and scanners. When the course is completed, they will use this knowledge to create their books of own poems, novels, illustrations, etc. The purpose of the books will be to entertain, educate and empower other girls and women in the community.

As part of the writing process, girls will be encouraged to work with local health clinic staff to create stories with messages about women’s health issue. Through these books, the girls will work to debunk common healthcare myths and begin an open dialogue that helps females of all ages make informed decisions.

In addition, the girls will also participate in a career panel in order to learn about potential career opportunities. Discussions and brainstorming sessions will empower the girls and help them to think outside traditional mindsets and rigidly defined gender roles. The panel presenters will encourage them to explore options that were previously unthinkable for women in Burkina. These discussions will be an additional inspiration for book topics for the girls.

After they have gathered information and decided on a topic, the girls will create their books. They will work with the personnel at the multimedia center to use their newly-acquired computer skills to produce books. The final versions will be printed in the center. They will then be distributed to village libraries in the area and will also be available for purchase by the public and local organizations that are committed to empowering girls.

**COMMUNITY BACKGROUND**

The village of Houndé is located in the southwest of Burkina Faso, and it enjoys a warm, sunny climate as well as (possibly) too many mangoes. Generally politically stable and with an economy built around agriculture, the Burkina Faso’s southwest is a calm, often idyllic, corner of the world. However, despite the many positive features of the area, villages in the region face many education challenges. Schools are overcrowded, classrooms are often filled with as many as 120 students and the number of teachers is insufficient. Most villagers are undereducated and many are completely illiterate, which often leads villagers to be apathetic towards the already underfunded and overburdened school system.

To complicate matters even further, long-standing gender inequality has meant that girls often do not have the same educational opportunities as boys. Girls are often alienated from decision-making processes and their opinions are rarely heard or taken seriously. It is not unusual to encounter girls who refuse to speak without their hands held over their mouth. In most small villages, the illiteracy rate is even higher for women than man, and it is rare to find a woman who speaks French. The Burkinabè government has taken many positive steps in this regard, but much is still needed in order to eliminate these problems.

At the moment, there is limited computer access in Houndé and virtually no computer training for local high school students. However, technical skills are widely sought in larger cities and are important for students who wish to continue their education at a university.

The area has been fortunate to have a long-standing relationship FAVL, as the organization has been working with Houndé (as well as nearby villages) to help fill the holes left by public education as well as to offer access to books. Since 2001, FAVL has established and helped manage 13 village libraries throughout Burkina Faso. We have worked hard to overcome cultural norms that discourage women from reading and try as much as possible to stock village libraries with books that reflect the lives of both men and women in the communities.

We want to take this a step further by working with local high school students in Houndé to create books written in both French and local languages on topics that are important to girls and women. It is important to give them the opportunity tell their own stories, in their own voices. The locally-produced books will be available at village libraries in Burkina Faso in order to empower women and allow them to begin dialogues on issues that are important to them. The finished books will also be available for purchase online or in our hard-copy catalogue.

**OUTCOME**

The desired outcome of this project is to training 50 high-school aged girls, in groups of ten in 5 month-long training programs. The training will cover story development and illustration techniques as well as technical skills on computers, scanners and printers. Each girl will be fully integrated in the process of editing, formatting and ultimately printing her work. They will be encouraged to make decisions and to confidently express them. In collaboration with the center staff, the girls will create, edit and publish at least 50 new novels, graphic novels, short story collections, picture books or information pamphlets. These will be works written by girls for women and girls in the community. Thirteen village libraries will receive 10 copies of each finished product to be available for library patrons. The books will be available for both individuals and organizations online and through a hardcopy catalog.

The program will not simply teach computer skills to 50 girls, but also empower and encourage them to express themselves with confidence. They will see the importance of participating in the community and national dialogue about women’s issues. In addition, their technological literacy will make them more attractive applicants for university, and ultimately, for future jobs.

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

The 50 girls who participate in the training will directly receive skills and knowledge that will help them tackle the complicated issue of gender equality. They will learn basic computer manipulating skills and begin to understand the publishing process as they produce their own creations. Creating these books will help girls to develop technical skills, express themselves better, practice critical thinking and become a force of positive change for girls and women in their communities. Because the finished products will be shared with village libraries, the books will improve the literacy of women, girls, and even men, in villages all over Burkina Faso. These books will help Burkinabè girls to have access to relatable books and be inspired to add their own voices to the national conversation and to begin to make more informed decisions about their own lives.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

The 50 girls who participate in the training will leave with a better understanding of story development and a grasp of computer manipulation and basic maintenance for technological equipment. Thanks to a partnership with FAVL, the books will be available to villagers for years to come. The books will be for sale online and through a hardcopy catalogue.