

Alliance aimed at connecting Utah and Africa

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photo courtesy of Warener Woodworth

Mobido Diarra, front left, Ouelessebounguo field director gives a soccer ball to some of the children in the village of Ouelesseboungou, a community outside of Mali, West Africa.

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Some BYU faculty and students are doing their part to make life better in a West African village.

Faculty members Warner Woodworth, James Kearl and Addie Fuhriman are involved in improving the quality of life for the people of Ouelesseboungou through the Ouelesseboungou Utah Alliance.

The Alliance was established by a group of Utah residents almost 15 years ago to help the people of Ouelesseboungou, a community in Utah's sister city of Mali in West Africa.

Mason Niederhauser, a BYU student and Alliance volunteer, said the Alliance receives support from faculty and students of BYU, mainly because of Woodworth, Kearl and Fuhriman's efforts to publicize the organization.

The Alliance teaches the villagers how to become self-sufficient, said volunteer Ned Prusse, 22, a junior from Dallas, Texas majoring in accounting.

Some members of the Alliance permanently reside in the Ouelesseboungou community teaching the natives how to dig wells, build schools, train village health workers, plant community gardens, increase adult literacy and encourage micro-enterprise, said Sara Field, the Alliance Coordinator. She said they are currently teaching the natives how to establish a village bank.

Field said the West African communities have made remarkable progress since the Alliance was

first established nearly 15 years ago.

The first goal of the Alliance was to provide the natives with their essential needs such as food, water and shelter, Field said. The Alliance taught them how to dig wells, because they were experiencing a drought at the time.

Now, the people of Ouelessebougou are learning micro-enterprise and business strategies. They have progressed substantially from their initial state mainly due to the fund-raisers that the Utah Alliance has coordinated, Field said.

The Alliance has done several fund-raisers including 5K runs and auctions. Last Saturday, the first annual 5K Fun Run/Walk was held in Utah County. Niederhauser said 200 runners participated, most of which were BYU students.

"The Ouelessebougou Alliance is very well known and supported in Salt Lake and Davis Counties," said Niederhauser. "They are hoping activities like this will allow the Utah County community to help in the aid of these West African villages."