**WHAT’S NEXT FOR LITERACY IN RURAL HAITI?**

**The Matènwa Community Learning Center**

**The Problem**

**Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, and it has the lowest literacy rate in the Western hemisphere,** with only 60% of adults able to read and write. One of the reasons for this low rate is that the current educational system requires students to learn in French, which is spoken by only 5% of the population. There is no requirement to master literacy in Creole, the language spoken by all Haitians, even though early learning in one’s mother tongue is the basis for comprehension and intellectual growth. In addition, the majority of teachers are untrained, and corporal punishment and verbal humiliation are common forms of discipline in class. Finally, children are often hungry when they get to school, further inhibiting their learning. As a result of all of these challenges, many children perform abysmally on national exams, thus cutting off their opportunities for further education and employment.

**A New Approach**

To address these problems, Chris Low, an American educator, and Abner Sauveur, a Haitian teacher, co-founded the **Matènwa Community Learning Center (MCLC)** in 1996. The Center is located on the impoverished rural island of La Gonave, which is home to about 120,000 people. **Its unique educational program is based on core principles that offer a fundamentally different approach to learning**:

1. Elementary grade classroom instruction is delivered in Creole. Thus, students learn to think, read, and write in their native tongue. French is taught as a second language.
2. Students learn in an environment that prohibits corporal punishment and promotes mutual respect and dialogue between school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, with an emphasis on respect and equal opportunities for women and girls.
3. Elementary grade students learn to read by writing and illustrating Mother Tongue Books in Creole to be read by their classmates. These books are age-appropriate and culturally relevant. In this way, children solidify their reading skills, and develop their creativity through storytelling and art.
4. Teachers follow a curriculum that includes art, music, and physical education as well as organic gardening that promotes concrete skills as well as food security.
5. Teachers receive training to insure that excellence in educational content, communications, support and positive reinforcement is sustained in each classroom.
6. Parents and community members are encouraged to replicate the practices of mutual respect and group-level problem solving that is practiced in the classrooms.

Over the last 20 years, MCLC’s programs have evolved to include a best-practices elementary school with a full breakfast program and summer camp, a high school and an emerging Institute of Learning. In addition, MCLC sponsors activities designed to help families improve their food supply and their health: family gardens and chickens for food, cisterns for potable water, first aid - including a nurse, modest economic development initiatives featuring artists, and emergency support - as necessary/available. Parents and community members engage in problem-solving discussions about how to address their economic, social, environmental and educational issues.

**The Results**

**By 2014, MCLC was educating 260 children in Matènwa, and third graders were outperforming their peers on literacy tests in Creole**. They read an average of 73 words per minute and scored 100% correct answers to comprehension questions.In contrast*,* 3rd graders elsewhere in rural Haiti read an average of only 23 Creole words a minute when reading a short story and gave an average of 17% correct answers on comprehension questions.

**In addition, MCLC began to show that its model was replicable**. In 2012, it won a worldwide grant competition for All Children Reading innovations fromUSAID/Australian Aid/World Vision. The Matènwa model was introduced in five schools on La Gonave, where first and second grade students' reading averages were 0 words per minute (wpm). After the intervention, these same children scored 26 wpm and 34.5 wpm at the end of second and third grade, respectively. Their comprehension scores moved from zero to 40 percent. By 2016, MCLC had brought its model to **40** schools, serving **over 4,000** students on La Gonave and trained teachers coming from schools in Jacmel, Cap Haitien, Kenscoff, St Marc, and Hinche. MCLC was awarded Haiti’s first-ever national award for Excellence in Education demonstrating excellence in pedagogical innovation.

**MCLC’s Vision for the Future**

**MCLC wants to make literacy available to all of Haiti’s people.**  It has established the Matènwa Institute of Learning for that purpose, with the Matènwa elementary school as its demonstration site. The Institute will host administrators and teachers from La Gonave schools and conduct on-site classroom observations and training for these schools. By 2024, a 200-school network of Institute-trained educators will exist across La Gonave and in a few key regions throughout Haiti. The Institute will reach 800 teachers and administrators and 18,000 children**.** The Institute will also assist a few schools across La Gonave and Haiti to become Matènwa Model Learning Centers themselves. These centers will help to assure that high quality programs spread across the country.

MCLC also is nurturing and expanding its own programs in Matènwa. The Matènwa Secondary School is reaching Grades 7 – 12 in 2016; in September 2017 it will become a full 7 – 13 grades high school serving 175 students**.** It will offer technology know-how, practical summer internships, and skills for adult life. MCLC will also strengthen its current community initiatives, including economic development options and community problem solving. Throughout all its work, MCLC supports Haiti’s embrace of the United Nations “Rights of the Child” manifesto; these include rights to education, to nutrition, to social services, to have your voice heard, and to be protected.

**Resources**

**Friends of Matènwa is a U.S. – based non-profit organization formed to secure funds for MCLC as well as for other organizations in Haiti that improve educational, social and economic opportunities.** FoM has successfully raised a core operating budget each year for MCLC, receiving support from individuals, U.S. government agencies, private foundations, schools and churches. FoM collaborates with like-minded organizations to co-fund the “Matènwa approach”. All the key components of MCLC’s existing and future programs require additional and ongoing funding. These budgets include:

Matènwa Elementary School: $200,000 per year (includes breakfast program and summer camp)

Matènwa Secondary School: $100,000 per year (to include technology, design lab, and

summer career internships)

Institute of Learning: $200,000 per year (includes teacher training and outreach)

Community Projects: $50,000 (includes health, water, gardening, emergency responses,

and public education)

**Ways You Can Help**

**Friends of Matènwa has set a two-year fundraising goal of $1,500,000 celebrating its 20th Anniversary Year. Your gift will help to reach that goal**. You may designate your gift for a specific program or “as needed”.

* Leadership Gift $10,000 and above
* Sustainer Gift $5,000 - $9,999
* Supporting Gift $2,500 - $4,999
* Friendship Gift $1,000 - $2,499
* Other donations gratefully received.

**Thank you for being a vital friend of Matènwa.**

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