

## Get Involved: Raise funds for EL and Meet Fellow Supporters

Expanding Lives depends on individual donations to fund our programming. Not only that, EL is uniquely volunteer-led and managed. This means 100% of any donation goes directly into supporting the education and leadership development of young women. There are numerous ways to be involved in our fundraising efforts. Here are some of our upcoming events:

### Nov. 29, 2016 | Giving Tuesday | Conference Funding | \$25 - \$1,000

Visit our website to contribute to our goal of raising \$6,000 to help our scholars in Niger and Benin host two local conferences. Each conference will bring together EL participants, community leaders, parents, and teachers (male and female) to aide more than 30 girls with the support and skills needed to succeed in school. \$100 raised sends one girl.

### Dec. 8, 2016 | The iO Theater | Shrink Plus Holiday Fundraiser | \$12

Join us for a night of laughs with Shrink Ray'd, a comedy duo comprised of best buddies Nico Carter and Brandon Shockney. All proceeds benefit EL. To purchase tickets, visit <http://www.ticketfly.com/search/?q=shrink+plus+chris+farley+cabaret>

### Dec. 16-24, 2016 | Lincolnwood Town Center | Holiday Gift Wrapping

Let our volunteers take care of your holiday gift wrapping! Sign up to help and/or bring your gifts in to receive our holiday touch. Contact Juliana Liscio [julianaliscio@gmail.com](mailto:julianaliscio@gmail.com) for more information.



### EL Host Charity Bingo Event

A HUGE thanks to all who came out to celebrate and fundraise for Expanding Lives at Hamburger Mary's in Chicago! There were tons of great prizes thanks to all the local Chicago businesses that donated. Look for another BINGO night at Hamburger Mary's this winter/spring.



NOVEMBER 2016

# EXPANDING LIVES



Your donation gives these girls a voice in places not traditionally open to them.

Your donation allows them to be active participants in their communities.

## In This Issue

How We Do It – Voices from EL



Spotlight Issue: Child Marriage



Get Involved

Expanding Lives supports the education of West African young women who are among the first in their families to attend high school.



**Our Mission: Expanding Lives provides education and leadership experiences to young women in West Africa and young people in the United States.**

One of the first pieces of advice I was given when founding Expanding Lives was, "Make a strong mission statement and stay true to it." While our mission has changed slightly in the last nine years, our focus has stayed squarely on pragmatic action towards developing leaders. Leaders provide people with the chance to take a risk on something new; discuss how those unique experiences apply to life; add lots of information and the tools to find more; and have them work through all of this with people of vastly different backgrounds.

The result is a new voice in the community with the knowledge and confidence to work with others to solve problems - a voice that may previously have been ignored. A true leader who understands empowering others completes all of us.

A few years ago, we changed our mission statement to include three specific actions. Each time our board has to make difficult spending choices, we look to these points to assure that we are true to our mission. I continue to be proud of Expanding Lives' work. And I hope you are as impressed as I am by the roles our participants and volunteers take in their communities. But don't take my word for it. Listen to their strong voices. And once you have, please consider donating to continue our programming both here and in West Africa.

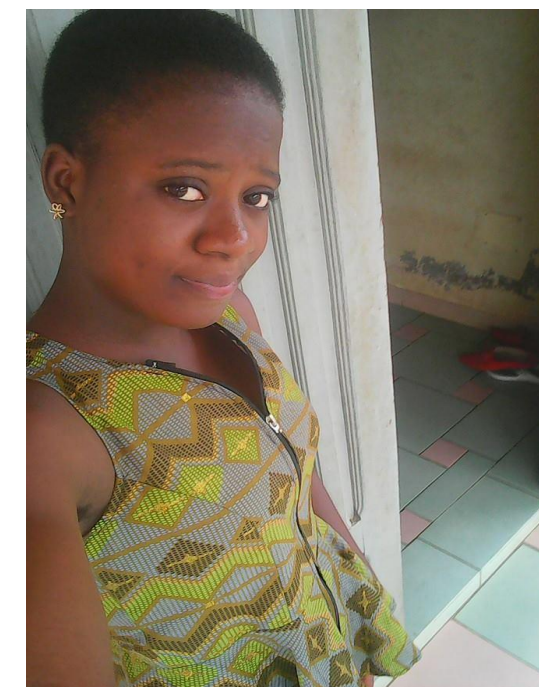
Leslie Natzke. Executive Director

## How We Do It – Voices from EL

**1) Leadership conferences in the US for intelligent, but disadvantaged, young women from Africa.**

*Arafath Binouyé (Benin 2015):*

*The Chicago conference helped me so much in every way. I speak freely in public without embarrassment. I have a lot more self-confidence. I have pride. I feel at ease speaking English. I am more determined to change the life of other girls.*



Arafath is in her junior year of high school in Ouidah, Benin.

## Stay In Touch

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Like and Follow us



Mail Donations to:

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## You Can Make A Big Difference With Just A Few Clicks!

### Amazon Smile - [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com)

Use Amazon Smile with your Amazon login and password, choose Expanding Lives as your charity, and earn money for girls' education in West Africa every time you shop on Amazon.com!

### Good Search - [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com)

You can donate to Expanding Lives every time you search online! Create a free Good Search profile and choose Expanding Lives as your charity, then every time you search, Expanding Lives receives a donation. Thank you!

Learn more or donate online:

[www.expandinglives.org](http://www.expandinglives.org)

Expanding Lives is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax deductible.

## Peace be upon you...

Can you say, *As-salaamu alaykum*? If you met one of EL's participants from Niger, chances are that is how she would greet you. A traditional Arabic greeting meaning *peace be upon you*, you can reply with *wa alaikum assalaam* (and upon you be peace).

It is common to hear such phrases throughout Niger, a predominately Muslim country, and the religion practiced by many of EL's participants. Like all religions, Islam has a rich and diverse history and culture. We are constantly benefiting from the diversity of EL's participants and volunteers. Together we learn from one another. If you are interested in learning more here are some suggested sites:

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)  
<https://www.cair.com/index.php>

Islamic Networks Group  
<http://www.ing.org/>

The Islam Project  
<http://www.islamproject.org/>

## How We Do It, continued...

Romaine Sahossi (Benin 2016):

*In Chicago, I love the welcome that we received from all of the volunteers. I appreciated all the classes and outings. There were so many new experiences that I cannot fully describe all of what we gained here. What I found the most interesting was living with girls from Niger. They were great! I would like to thank all the people who make this program happen. The only thing left is for us to transmit what we learned to other girls here at home and WE WILL DO IT!*

Romaine is in her final year of high school in Ouidah, Benin.

### 2) Follow-up with educational and project support in their home countries.

Aissa Yaou Madougou (Niger, 2010):

*[Expanding Lives] helped me so much to finish high school and continue to higher education. From start to finish, it was Expanding Lives that allowed me to get my master's degree in accounting and auditing. With Expanding Lives' help, I found an internship with Catholic Relief Services that eventually led to my current job. Honestly, words escape me. I hope Expanding Lives continues to be successful and lasts forever.*

Djamila Harouna (Niger, 2012):

*Without Expanding Lives' support, I could never achieve my dream of becoming a health agent.*



*I received a scholarship from the state, but it does not cover all my studies, my food, transportation, kerosene. The money is also paid so late that they threaten to make me leave school. I have five younger siblings, and my father could never pay for my studies. I have the work ethic and the desire to go far, and if I succeed, I can assure that my siblings don't have to suffer for their studies the way that I have.*

Djamila is in her second year of university in Nutrition in Niamey.

### 3) Guided opportunities for American students to enhance global and local problem-solving capacities.

Alankrita Siddula (Volunteer, Jr Board, 2009):

*The exact wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills I've gained through my involvement with Expanding Lives is incalculable. For the past eight years, I have worked with EL, volunteering during the summer with the girls, working in a team to organize fundraisers with the Junior Board, and traveling to Benin. These various positions have been opportunities to be creative, to lead, to organize, to teach, and most importantly, to learn, from Americans and Africans alike. My experience with EL has also translated into being successful at work within clinical research, and has prepared me for my future career as a doctor.*

Sofia Ballicora (volunteer, 2015):

*I was excited to get a chance to use my French with native speakers and to meet new people. However, the experience went deeper than that. I did meet new people: four wonderful, intelligent Beninese girls named Rosine, Nynia, Pierrette, and Arafath, along with their teacher, Aimée. I not only had a chance to improve my French, but also learned about their cultures and issues that exist in Benin today. While these girls did come from more disadvantaged backgrounds, they are a shining example of resilience, hard work, and of all the positive things that Benin has to offer.*



## Spotlight Issue: Child Marriage

Too many young women in the world are struggling to overcome barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential. Child marriage is one of those hurdles that have far reaching consequences for girls and their communities. Child marriage is defined as any illegal or informal union that includes a boy or a girl under the age of 18. A widespread practice around the world, there are **15 million girls married before the age of 18** each year. In Niger, **76% of young women were married before they were 18**, and one in five adolescent girls gives birth each year on average.

Child marriage rates are a strong indicator of what life is like for girls overall in a given environment. Save the Children's *Girl Opportunity Index* uses a spectrum of statistics, including child marriage, to give a snapshot of how much control girls have over their lives. **Benin** and **Niger** rank 126 and 144 (dead last), respectively. This means that in these countries, being born a girl comes with a huge set of challenges. It means the very real possibility that you will marry in your early teens; that you will face an adolescent pregnancy in a place with soaring mother and infant mortality; that you will likely drop out of school; and that you will see no women in positions of power and leadership.

- **Girls with secondary schooling are up to SIX TIMES LESS LIKELY to marry as children compared to girls who have little or no education.**
- **Almost 60% FEWER GIRLS would become pregnant under 17 years in sub-Saharan Africa if they all had a secondary education.**

(USAID)

Not only do these staggering realities mean lives of poverty and struggle for girls, they also carry consequences for their families, communities, and countries. The majority of the 25 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are considered fragile states. Niger ranks highest in the world for child marriage rates and is among the poorest countries. Child marriage perpetuates a cycle of financial insecurity, poor health outcomes, and lack of female voice in decision-making.

Education is absolutely essential to delay marriage and promote healthy relationships and futures for girls. Research has shown that girls who remain in school drastically reduce the likelihood of early marriage. The benefits of education not only touch girls themselves, but also their siblings, families, communities, and countries. Girls who go to school learn to be more financially independent, raise healthier children, and live longer. Their families gain financial income through their enhanced skills and money management. Educated girls gain social status and begin to change social norms, demanding their rights be recognized. Education has a catalyzing effect for girls – directly impacting child marriage rates and going far beyond in outcomes for young women.

This is what EL is fighting for – for every girl to be afforded the opportunity to choose her own future and reach her full potential. Because when girls are educated, healthy, and making decisions for themselves, their communities and our world are the ultimate benefactors.

Sources used: *Girls' Education, Empowerment, and Transitions to Adulthood, 2012*, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). *Every Last Girl, 2016*, Save the Children.

## Imagine a young girl with the skills to be a leader

Leadership cultivation is a key piece of our mission, and for good reason. According to the National Democratic Institute, women in leadership positions are strongly linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure, and health standards at the local level. EL girls learn to be strong agents of change in their communities.

*I feel so proud that I could transfer what I learned... Working with this team really helped me to be see my leadership potential. Ramatou (Niger, 2012)*

Use your annual donation to cultivate more female leaders!

