

EXPANDING LIVES

November 2017

EL in Numbers



Girls have attended EL's Chicago conference



Girls have benefited from Young Girls Conferences



Scholars have completed post — secondary education



EL scholars have completed Masters degrees

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Assamaou, Dorcas, Ines, and Mariama—our 2017 participants—represent our 10th year of programming and our eighth group of girls leaving their homes in West Africa for the trip of a lifetime. Our summer program provides the type of international experience that American and European students have taken advantage of for years. During their six weeks in Chicago, they gain independence, learn a new language, take risks, experience a new culture, try new things and learn to solve new problems. Our goal has always been to encourage the type of personal growth that inspires girls to continue learning and to use their skills as leaders in their home communities.

Ten years is a long time in the life of a nonprofit. We got our footing in large part from the sponsorship of Niles Township Schools' Dance Marathon during our second year as an organization. We have survived this long because of donors like you and your belief in our girls. Expanding Lives provides a service not available elsewhere. While many organizations provide scholarships to young people in Africa, few prepare and expect their participants to take the helm. Your support for the last 10 years has sent the message to teenage African girls that they are powerful leaders. Your support helps them to become role models, building up other young girls to do the same.

Ten years is also a long time in the life of a young woman. We have stayed motivated through the challenges of homesickness, language and cultural barriers, visa procurement, the financial hurdles of university tuition, marriages, and babies. Salamatou, a participant from

our first year (2008), recently welcomed a healthy baby with her husband, but she continues the long and arduous road to becoming a doctor. She has learned she can still have a family and be a member of her community, while following her own ambitions.

In our early years, the girls were unable to define a leader. Many felt women could not be leaders. We would spend several sessions identifying leaders and leadership skills. Now, before the Niger participants have even taken passport photos, they meet Aicha (2010) at her office as an accountant and learn that she will be filling out their visa applications. Roumanatou (2009) takes a break from writing her masters thesis on women cooperatives in agriculture to tell them that they will be afraid changing planes in Paris, but they will do it and brag about it later. Assamaou (2010), dressed in her military uniform, navigates them through the airport and assures officials and girls alike that they will return and they will return stronger than ever. Our new Assamaou, who lives in a rural community made up solely of people from her family, said, "We are part of them now. I will be just like them."

We have done some great work in 10 years, but there is more to come in the next decade.

Leslie Natzke

Executive Director

YOUNG GIRLS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE (YGLC)

For the last five years, Expanding Lives' participants in Niger have held Young Girls Leadership Conferences for girls beginning junior high school. Because 58 percent of girls 15 and older in Niger are married, this demographic of students is especially at risk for being pulled out of school. YGLCs, organized and led by our scholars, are held in different villages and towns each year, usually the home villages of our scholars. Since inception, 115 young girls have attended so far (32 girls in 2017), with more attending each year.

Our senior participants teach leadership skills, peer mediation, adolescent girls' health, yoga, and English. This is also a great opportunity for the most recent Expanding Lives scholars to learn from some of our earlier participants. Rachida (2016 EL scholar) attended the conference to observe and prepare to teach and encourage younger girls during her school breaks. She noted, "At the end, a father stood up and said how happy he was with us, how he thought we were courageous and strong. I felt like a leader in a group of leaders. I can't wait until next year when I can teach."

"These young girls are very motivated to continue their studies and help their communities."

According to Maria (EL scholar 2010), "The conferences help our young sisters to be acquainted with and have confidence in topics they didn't know existed. By the end of the conference, these young girls are very motivated to continue their studies and help their communities. We noticed that at the end of the conferences, a lot of the parents have a better understanding of why and how to keep their daughter in school for the long run. At the end of the conference, it is great to hear parents say that they want their daughters be like us, that we are models for them."

Expanding Lives' impact stretches far beyond our participating scholars. As leaders in their communities, they go on to reach dozens of other girls, helping to encourage their peers and sisters to stay in school and succeed like they are doing.

Your investment in Expanding Lives can not only help our scholars, but also impact their wider communities through our Young Girls Leadership Conferences. **It costs about \$125 to send one girl to the conference.** Donate to Expanding Lives and help us reach more girls in rural Niger.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? – NAFISSA (2008)

"I was one of the first girls to attend the excellent conference in Chicago. Right after the conference, my father died. I completely lost all hope of finishing high school. But thank God for the support, both moral and financial, that I continued to receive from Expanding Lives! EL helped me with tuition, my computer and the cost of using a lab for my bachelor's thesis study. Afterwards, I went to my village, and with a microfinance loan from EL, I was able to get a motorcycle so that I could intern with UNICEF. My job is to travel to different rural villages with supplies and information for pregnant women. Without Expanding Lives, I could not be the responsible woman I am with a noble calling and a guaranteed future. Words escape me. I dreamed of being educated. Expanding Lives enabled me to realize my dream."



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SPONSOR A SCHOLAR



Assamaou walked two hours each day to get to and from school for four years. **Mariama's** rural school only has half the classes that she needs to pass her national exams and graduate. **Dorcas** was able to go to school with her brother's help, but since he passed away, her father wants to take her out. **Ines's** father left when she was very young, but her mother worked excessively hard to get the money for Ines to go to school.

To become an Expanding Lives sponsor, contact Heather Mangan at heather@expandinglives.org

The odds of these girls finishing their education are not in their favor, but, through the Expanding Lives sponsorship program, you have the opportunity to change that.

Only half of Beninese girls are enrolled in school, and in Niger, only 1 in 50 go to school.

Despite those statistics, though, these four scholars, have overcome incredible challenges and were accepted into the 2017 Expanding Lives program. They are the first in their families to go to high school and

they are in the top percentile of their class. They have big dreams to be a nurse, a gynecologist, a teacher and a journalist.

This year, Expanding Lives is setting up a sponsorship program that allows our donors to help support one girl with educational expenses, such as school fees, books, pencils, and even transport to and from school. As a sponsor, you'll receive updates and photos from your girl and learn how she is progressing. Not sure if you'll be able to support a girl — you

might be surprised. Less than \$25 a month is enough to support one girl through a year of high school. Able to contribute more? Just over \$100 per month is enough to help a girl through a year of university studies.

Without the help of Expanding Lives and our dedicated donors, Assamaou, Dorcas, Ines, and Mariama may not receive an education. You can make their greatest dreams a reality. By becoming an Expanding Lives sponsor, you can help a young women to avoid becoming another statistic.

YOUR IMPACT MATTERS

Expanding Lives is an all-volunteer staffed organization, which means that, unlike bigger nonprofits, more of your donation goes directly to support our girls and continue our mission. Here is a list of how far your donation could go:

- \$20** Purchases school supplies in-country
- \$50** Provides tutoring for girls in their exam year
- \$125** Sends one girl to an EL Young Girls Leadership Conference
- \$200** Provides a new laptop for a university student
- \$250** Provides one year of high school fees and support
- \$500** Provides transportation & supplies for a Chicago Conference participant
- \$1250** Provides one year of university tuition and support

BE A SPONSOR FOR CHANGE

1%

OF GIRLS IN NIGER
FINISH HIGH SCHOOL

VS.

100%

OF EL PARTICIPANTS

<1%

ATTEND POST-
SECONDARY SCHOOL

VS.

100%

OF EL PARTICIPANTS

DONATE AT
[EXPANDINGLIVES.ORG/DONATE](https://expandinglives.org/donate)

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

On my first day with Expanding Lives, I didn't really know what to expect, so I sat down at a table next to the four girls from Niger and Benin. Inès walked right up to me, said hello, and offered me part of her breakfast. With her beaming smile, it was impossible not to feel comfortable. This moment was not an outlier. Every morning when I walked into our classroom, I was greeted with kind faces and genuine smiles.

Meeting the girls like this, it was hard to imagine them as anything but happy. As time went on, I began to hear more of their stories from back home. When I learned that Assamaou had to walk an entire hour to get to school, I was taken aback. Learning about just how hard Ines had to fight to stay in school when it became hard to afford, I was equally disturbed. It was eye-opening to me. Before volunteering at Expanding Lives, I had heard the statistics. Technically, I knew that only 8 percent of girls in Niger enrolled in high school. I heard the numbers. I just didn't understand them until I saw the people affected with my own eyes.

After taking 12 years of history in school, I thought I would've known something about the history and culture of African countries. I thought I would've known something about what is going on there today. Before this summer, I didn't know anything at all. Worse than that, I didn't realize there was information I was missing out on. Now, I am aware of what I don't know. I know what information I need to seek out and what I need to make an effort for change. I am so thankful that Expanding Lives gave me an opportunity to see that for myself.

— Sophia Cinquemani, EL Volunteer

CONNECT WITH US

expandinglives@gmail.com
(773) 459 - 9969

expandinglives.org



Mail Donations to:
Expanding Lives
5541 N St Louis Ave
Chicago, IL 60625

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klrodriguez.com