

Fallers in West Africa

The 4th in a series about two young women from East Falls who volunteered for summer 2008 with Explorers Sans Frontières in West Africa

by Lara Lechtenberg

As the holidays came to an end, we at Explorers Sans Frontières (ESF) have been thinking more and more about the kids we met in Senegal last summer. It was been important to us to keep perspective during the holidays: while many kids here are without the newest toys this winter, many more around the world will go without food, medical care and school. ESF is constantly thinking about the Senegalese children we met on our adventures, and it's our New Year's resolution to never forget their stories.

Here is the story of one boy whose story so affected us, we named one of our programs after him:

In the overcrowded, underfunded Hôpital Régional de Thiès, it was obvious they needed lots of help. In the stifling pediatric ward, we became close with one little boy, Abdoulaye Sal. He was terminally ill with liver cancer and had for weeks received no treatment other than diuretics, all while his family was charged daily fees for his hospital bed. Though understandable that the public hospital could not provide adequate care for a cancer patient, we were frustrated that they hadn't discharged him to pass away in peace at home with his mother and uncle who traded shifts every day at the hospital.

Unsatisfied with the non-care he was receiving, we tried to pay for a transfer to a private hospital. His doctors said it wasn't worth it, but with a student nurse named Hadijja, we coordinated a meet-up with Abdoulaye and his uncle outside the hospital. We paid his fees and jumped in a taxi, hoping for treatment to extend his life or at least make his death more com-



Abdoulaye & his mother at the Catholic Hospital, St. John of God in Thiès.

fortable.

With that search, we were fortunate to meet the doctors at Le Centre Médico Social Bartimée and l'Hôpital Catholique de Saint Jean de Dieu, both of which tried their hardest to give Abdoulaye all the tests and treatment he needed. The needed chemotherapy that wasn't available in Thiès, so on the way to our flight back to the US, we accompanied Abdoulaye and his uncle to a hospital in Dakar to start chemotherapy—mere hours before our flight departed.

Though we were able to pay upfront for a significant amount of the boy's medical bills, the costs mounted quickly and we learned through our contacts at the hospital that on June 21, 2008 he had passed away. Through a friend interpreting over the phone, Shonta, president of ESF, was able to speak with the boy's uncle, who did not stop expressing his gratitude for how we tried to get his nephew the care he—and all terminally ill children—deserved. Despite the suffering we witnessed, we were blessed to have met Abdoulaye and his family.

The Abdoulaye Sal Project was created in this young man's memory so that ESF can help more children like him. Your tax-deductible donation for this project will be used in good faith and ESF will work to improve the lives of children like Abdoulaye through direct care and support services. (Visit www.explorersf.org for more info!)