



## Saving Children Strengthening Families

St. Genevieve Welcome Center  
Katiola, Cote d'Ivoire

*Through **Travel Côte d'Ivoire** cultural exchange tours, Koné Consulting has sought to establish a long-term relationship with the St. Genevieve Welcome Center, with the goal of providing on-going resources for the children and community it serves as well as providing our own community here in the states an opportunity for greater understanding of this part of the world.*

### Over 100 Children Rescued from Abandonment

The St. Genevieve Welcome Center in Katiola, Côte d'Ivoire was founded in September 2011 by Father Germaine Coulibaly Kalahari with one goal in mind: help every child from his tribe in danger of infanticide or abandonment.

Before founding the St. Genevieve Welcome Center, Father Germaine conducted a survey in the surrounding villages and found that twins, children with disabilities, and children whose mothers died in childbirth were killed because area tribes still believe such children are "snake children" - evil spirits which will bring disaster and havoc to the tribal community.

Now in its 9<sup>th</sup> year, Father Germaine and Abiba Koné, a social worker for the Center, have set up a vigilance committee in different neighborhoods who report cases of child endangerment, as well as check on expectant mothers to provide education and aid as needed.

The number of children being served fluctuates at around 20-25 children, ages 3 to 25; with about 75% living on-site in a single-family style home consisting of one boys' dorm, one girls' dorm, and Father Germaine's quarters. Those not residing at the Center have been reunited and are living with their stabilized families, while still receiving services.

St. Genevieve provides excellent care, including housing, medical care, education and social services. In addition to providing ongoing care for the children, the St. Genevieve staff also conduct community outreach and education related to the ongoing practice of infanticide.



*Tour Leader Alicia Koné walks with one of the children during a visit to the village.*

The village is very supportive of their work and recently donated over an acre of land to St. Genevieve for a larger facility where all the children can live together, and their families may visit to maintain a relationship and work toward reunification.

Our December 2019 delegation raised \$8,000 to aid in building a fence to protect the Center's acreage, as well as needed medications, school supplies and hygiene products.



## Funding and Needs

The Center relies entirely on donations. Although affiliated with the local Catholic archdiocese, to supplement donations, St. Genevieve currently farms their land and harvests millet and other grains for sale, as well as producing and selling honey, shea butter, and peanut paste.

Our Travel Côte d'Ivoire guests may bring two 50-pound bags on flights to CI. This allows us to bring much needed over-the-counter medications and school supplies to help the St. Genevieve Welcome Center.



A member of our **2019/20 delegation** helps sort school supplies, books and backpacks.

Lower left: **Sweet Success** A booth set up at a market selling the orphanage's honey and other goods. Photo is courtesy of St. Genevieve's Facebook page.



Christina Watson, KC's Business Manager, carries a duffel bag loaded with supplies during a recent trip to Côte d'Ivoire.

*The St. Genevieve Welcome Center is a licensed, non-denominational, non-profit, social and educational assistance center by the Côte d'Ivoire Department of Charitable and Educational Social Affairs of the Ministry of Solidarity, Family, Women and Children. The center is open to children of all genders, nationalities and races.*

## Understanding Infanticide and Abandonment – A Cultural Perspective

Among tribes such as the Senoufo of Katiola, misfortune, whether illness, death or other events, is rarely considered to have occurred completely naturally<sup>1</sup>, thus when families are unable to get basic needs met, the adverse impact of a child with disabilities, twins (two mouths to feed) or the loss of the mother in childbirth, long-held beliefs and customs regarding evil spirits have significant impact on how these children are regarded.

It is helpful to understand the impact of underlying political, social and economic factors which may have contributed to a region's tribal practices and traditions. As explored in Unicef's April 2012 article, "Children Accused of Witchcraft – An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa," political unrest such as "civil wars, coups d'état – have caused considerable loss of life. As a result, there are a large number of children that are straining the capacities of their relatives. These children are a particularly vulnerable group."<sup>3</sup>

Without adequate resources, support or information around disability, "children with disabilities are explained within the context of indigenous African religions, animism and folk culture,"<sup>2</sup> making way for the practice of abandonment as a means to ensure the community as a whole does not become further burdened by the needs of a few.

Negative perceptions and persecution toward individuals with disabilities is not unique to this area of the world; history is full of examples such as Judeo-Christian western culture's "religious or moral model of disability defined individuals with disability as evil, devil, products of sin or the results of witchcraft," and as recently as the 20th century, "the medical model defined disability in terms of disease and impairment."<sup>4</sup> The practice of infanticide is now illegal throughout Côte d'Ivoire, and education centers, such as the St. Genevieve Welcome Center in Katiola, are leading the change.

<sup>1,3</sup> UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa*, April 2011, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e97f5902.html> [accessed 3 April 2020]

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.humanium.org/en/ivory-coast-education-disabled-children/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/32394665/The\\_stories\\_of\\_snake\\_children\\_killing\\_and\\_abuse\\_of\\_children\\_with\\_developmental\\_disabilities\\_in\\_West\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/32394665/The_stories_of_snake_children_killing_and_abuse_of_children_with_developmental_disabilities_in_West_Africa)