



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau with



June 2018

Completing the school
year as the rainy season
sets in!

Helping Skilled Professionals Become Teachers *by Emily*

The purpose of our vocational school is to give our students practical skills and abilities that they will use on the job each day, so the school has really concentrated on hiring teachers who are skilled in their fields. However, because of the lack of teacher training programs across the country, most of them have little experience teaching and no formal teacher training.

Our co-worker Jenna works with the teachers throughout the school year, but three times a year the whole staff dedicates several days to intense training with the goal of making big steps forward. Last week was our final staff training week of this school year. We brought in several speakers from the community to talk about leadership and sharing God's truth with our students clearly and tactfully. We also had several breakout sessions for administration and teachers. Jason and Jenna worked with the administration, doing Excel training and taking part in planning meetings for the next school year, and Jenna and I worked with the teachers.



Teachers and administration at the vocational school.

and, with little to no planning or forethought, simply gets through whatever portion of the material they can before the government says it's time for the students have an exam to finish the school year. So working with our teachers to divide their material to fill the allotted time gives our school the huge advantage of being able to systematically cover the course material well by the end of the semester.

Another important area where we've been working with the teachers is evaluation and grading. Often in Guinea-Bissau a student's grade for an entire year of school is just based on the results of two huge tests (midterm and final), with some bonus points added on to the final grade if the student has had a good attitude or has come most of the time or is likable. Obviously we want our grading to encourage



Welding program staff (Amona, Jason, and Cirilo) talking through some curriculum changes.

In the teacher training we talked about and practiced how to take the material that has to be covered in a semester and break it down into what will be covered each week (including teaching, practice, and evaluation). I know that seems like a basic teaching skill, but many of our teachers have seldom had the privilege of seeing good teaching in action. In the vast majority of the classes they have attended the teacher just opens the book on the first day (usually after weeks to months of teacher strikes)



Emily leading the discussion during one of the teacher breakout sessions.

Helping Skilled Professionals Become Teachers (cont'd) by Emily

student success, so we've been working with our teachers on how to use homework, smaller quizzes, and projects throughout the year to help students prepare for larger tests, and to give a more balanced (and far less subjective) final grade.

I love the privilege of equipping our staff to effectively pass on their knowledge, giving our students skills to support their families and help develop their country.

Back At Full Strength by Jason

One of the hats I wear in Guinea-Bissau is that of a solar electricity "guy." Being "the guy" doesn't necessarily mean you know lots, just more than anyone else who's handy! The vocational school (including our welding production) operates almost exclusively from an off-grid 13.8kw solar power system. It's sometimes restricting to try not to use lots of power when the sun is low, but we work at a rhythm that includes doing manual work early and late to save our welding for the higher-sun times. It's a far more reliable system than the generator that would be the alternative if we didn't have the system.

However, from time to time, it does need attention. The solar panels are divided into four groups, each group fed into its own controller to provide power to the system. The system is inside my workshop, so I can keep tabs on it. For a while it has seemed like one of the controllers was underperforming (they should each be roughly the same) and then when I came back to Guinea-Bissau last October, I noticed that it often wasn't working at all!

Thankfully, we recently got a replacement controller and after some head scratching on my part (it needs to be connected differently than the one it was replacing), got it

working and the system back to full strength! Good thing, too, as the beginning of the rainy season means cloudier days!



The white controller replaced a fourth that had failed, which had killed 25% of our solar energy harvest!



A disc sander is useful for all kinds of finishing and smoothing operations on metal and wood.

Grateful by Jason

As I recently glanced through photos of the equipment that my shop here in Guinea-Bissau started with, I was once again reminded how thankful I have been and am for the faithful support of those who have given, prayed, and encouraged. Your support has allowed us to continue expanding our ministry's practical capabilities here. The equipment that started the shop journey was simple, and matched my lack of metalworking experience at the time. As the years have gone by I've learned more, and we've been able to add new equipment and capabilities. Now, it's pretty infrequent that we can't figure out some way or another of getting any given thing done-including making new tools when we don't have a way to bring them over. Here's a disc sander I made recently from a surplus motor I'd sent over years ago. I already wonder how I did without it all this time!



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