



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau,
West Africa

January 2024

The team from Simpson Park Camp was a huge help this month—check out the progress!

Short-Term (But Big) Help *by Jason*

We had an action-packed two weeks with the 2nd annual Simpson Park Camp short-term mission trip this month. Together we were able to move several projects around the construction site forward, do some training with my guys on laying floor tile, and enjoy the company of some wonderful guests, including Emily's dad's first visit to Guinea-Bissau!

Work highlights from the trip include:



It's exciting to see some of the shop walls going up, and we're so glad the camp team was here to be part of it!



The team helped make several batches of both cinder blocks and compressed adobe blocks. Thousands have been made, thousands more will be before we're done!



We had already poured three of the five sections of the machine shop slab when the team arrived, and they helped us complete the last two!



The Haskell & Son paint crew did a fabulous job painting the first guest bungalow, inside and out!



A great crew ready to attack the afternoon after a delicious lunch made by Emily!



Gardening specialists, the Dewings, helped Emily install some new drip irrigation systems to keep up with the watering around the site.



Emily's dad, Chuck, was the fearless leader of the project to tile the guest bungalow, working with Michael T. and teaching several of my guys along the way.

Appreciating My Community *by Emily*

One thing I love about having visitors from the U.S. is the opportunity to see Guinea-Bissau for the first time all over again through their eyes. The vibrant colors on people's clothes, the constant greetings flowing back and forth between me and everyone in my neighborhood as I walk to my destination, the piles of garden produce on tables in the market, the beautiful cursive everyone writes in... Our visitors notice and comment on all of those little things, bringing them back out from the background of everyday life, and letting me see and appreciate them all over again.

Over the past several years the number one thing that American visitors comment on is the beautiful sense of community they feel here. Every time they do, I know that I needed to hear that admiration again, because honestly, most days, living in community is hard.

We are 17 and a half years into this adventure of making Guinea-Bissau our home, and it's still difficult for me to deal with multiple interruptions every day during homeschool from people selling things or needing things or stopping by to visit unannounced. I don't always react well to people's bossy advice about every aspect of my life. I sometimes dread people stopping by the house everyday looking for bandaids or advil or money to pay for a doctor's visit or to buy medicine at the pharmacy. I don't always feel like I have time to drop everything to sit with friends, neighbors, and church members who are sick or have had a death in the family.

Sometimes my rugged American independence springs up, and I struggle to embrace the radical availability that is so natural for my Guinean friends here. Sometimes I only see the work involved in community and forget how wonderful it is that they are also radically available to me.

When I was preaching three nights in a row in a city an hour and a half away in December a friend told me she would be going with me each night so that I wasn't on the roads late with no one to talk to. When my friends found out that I was going to be cooking for 30 people over a campfire in January they all volunteered to spend the morning cooking with me, and when I told them I had it under control 5 of them showed up to give me a hand anyway, just in case. Friends here have plunked down next to me when I was picking lice out of my toddler's thick, curly hair and grabbed a comb. They have gotten up in the middle of the night and driven Jason and I all around the capital as we visited more than a dozen clinics to try to get pain medicine and an ultrasound when Jason had a kidney stone in the middle of covid (a 13-hour adventure that started at 2 am). They have asked me how I was doing, expecting to get a long answer rather than just a "fine."

Living in community is certainly not easy, but it is good.



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