

Free Net Distribution



Guinaw Rail Sud, Senegal

June 24-26, 2010

INTRODUCTION

On June 21, 2010 I traveled from Indianapolis, Indiana to Madrid, Spain where I met the other members of my distribution committee. Our group consisted of myself, Elise Johnson* (age 17), Claudia Paya Ten* (16), Diego Ducay (16), Sophia Ten (16), Dr. Rosa Ten* and Virginia Ten RN. We arrived in Dakar, Senegal the evening of June 22 and were met by Babacar Diatta (Chairperson for our distribution project) and Mamadou "Lamine" Mbaye, the Deputy-Mayor of Pikine, Senegal.

*Speak French Fluently

Problem with Net Count

Our 1,000 nets were allocated to us from a supply already stored at the Peace Corp in Dakar. We were notified of this arrangement in early May 2010. Jane Kuelsheimer, our liaison at AMF confirmed with Christopher Hedrick, Country Director of the Peace Corps Senegal (+221 77 637 4704) of the Peace Corp in Senegal, that we could store the 1,000 nets at the Peace Corp. office until the first week of June. When Lamine went to pick up the nets and count them, only 798 nets were available. Chris Hedrick, assured us that the additional 202 nets would be delivered to the Guinaw Rail City Hall and Mayors Office before our distribution started on June 24. The 798 nets were kept in locked storage in the Mayor's Office at the Guinaw Rail Sud City Hall until our arrival.

Organizational Meeting—June 24, 2010

We met at the Mayor's Office to outline the distribution strategy the morning of June 24. The Mayor greeted us and we immediately set to work with Babacar and Lamine. Dr. Major Siny Marone had compiled the list of net recipients based on records for expectant mothers and their mandatory prenatal examinations. By late afternoon we had accomplished our goals but it was already evident that the work pace would be much slower than we had anticipated.

Defined Process of Distribution:

Dr. Siny Marone had also already given tickets to these target groups to receive their net(s) on the distribution days. We would match their ticket to their name on our list the day they were scheduled to pick up their net(s)

The recipients of our defined target group included approximately 1,000 children under age five and pregnant mothers from a total of seven districts in Pikine. During the meeting, we also arranged for a group of local actors to perform a skit about the dangers of malaria and the proper usage of the mosquito net. Because we were short 202 nets, we shortened the distribution to two days (400 nets to be distributed day one and 398 nets to be distributed day two.) We limited the distribution location to the reception area of the Mayor's office for ease of set-up and accurate record keeping.

Day 1 of Distribution-June 25, 2010

We met at the mayor's office at 9:00am to prepare for the distribution scheduled to begin at 10:00am. Approximately 50 people had gathered near the entrance of the office. We quickly untied the strings holding four bundles of nets together and organized them on the desk. This is the work station where we would cross-check the recipient's ticket against our master list.



The first 50 people lined up outside were then invited into the reception area to take part in the "opening ceremony" for the net distribution. The mayor gave a short speech in native language of Wolof to the people and then he allowed me to say a few words.



Malaria Education

I delivered a short message in French (translated into Wolof) about the worldwide effort to fight malaria and how important it was that they had come today to learn how to protect both themselves and their children. I thanked them for coming because it is only with the recipient's dedication to proper usage of the LLIN that a distribution is effective and that we will be one step closer to eliminating malaria in Africa and worldwide if they follow our instructions. We also had the theater troop perform their 15 minute skit to these large groups in the reception area. Laughter filled the room at some points as the recipients were engaged in the performance but there were also some serious undertones to the skit that drove home the importance of the mosquito net and its proper usage.



Net Usage Demonstration and Theater Skit

More Education

Originally we had planned to distribute pamphlets with instructions for proper usage but we discovered that many recipients were illiterate. With this realization, we relied on verbal instructions to groups of approximately 10 people as they came through the lines. Points we stressed: how to define malaria, its symptoms, its dangers, the availability of treatment and the importance of proper net hanging and usage in the home. I spoke to as many people one-on-one to stress the importance of proper net usage—I especially enjoyed talking and interviewing the children about the benefits of sleeping under a net at night.



Speaking individually with net recipients to make sure they understand the importance of proper usage. I also was interested in their personal stories about malaria striking their home.

Net Distribution Begins

We distributed 400 nets over a span of 4 hours cross-checking the recipient with our master list.



Day 2 of Distribution-June 26, 2010

Day two of the distribution went a lot smoother than Day one. We were more organized and familiar with our routine and had also learned by this time several aspects of Senegalese culture, including the heavy protocol and the slow pace of work. We also learned the gratefulness and friendliness of the people and their warm hospitality. Everyone in our distribution group tried to learn to be patient and open-minded and to adjust to the Senegalese style of doing things. One touching story I recall was when a small boy came in with his ticket at the end of the distribution and we were unable to provide him with a net. I wanted so badly to go to the local market and buy him a net but I realized that just ONE net would never be enough. I could buy 1,000, 10,000, 1 million nets and it still would not be enough but, no matter, this is why I keep working to raise funds through the Against Malaria Foundation...so that this boy, and others like him, can grow up and enjoy life. We distributed the 398 nets in just over three hours.



Net Distribution Team (Left to Right): Virginia Ten, RN, Dr. Rosa Ten, Diego Ducay, Sophia Ten, Claudia Ten
and



Elise Johnson

Summary and Follow-up—Week of June 28

We followed up by visiting the homes of 25 net recipients. All of the nets seemed to be in good use and hung properly except for one or two homes we visited. The first of these homes was of a woman who had not yet opened her LLIN. When we asked her why she had not yet opened her package, she replied that there were no mosquitoes in her house at the moment. We successfully convinced her of the dangerous and sometimes invisible presence of mosquitoes. We then opened the net and hung it over her bed. The second home was of a family with a father, a pregnant mother and 2 small children. The new net was hung over the parent's bed. We suggested that they hang the net over the children's bed and perhaps the mother could sleep with the children. The husband answered very quickly that this option would not be possible because his wife "needed comforting at night..." Dr. Ten immediately stepped in to convince him otherwise!

CHALLENGES

- Getting the "officials" to stay on schedule.
- Determining the most efficient way to distribute the nets and how to implement effective traffic/crowd control during the distribution.
- Telling recipients with tickets that we had run out of nets.
- Trying to communicate with Chris Hendrick at the Peace Corp. to get the additional 202 nets delivered. Because we had distributed 1,000 claim tickets many people were disappointed. Unfortunately, to this date, the nets have not been delivered to the Mayor's office as promised. People still ask when their net will be available. Chris Hedrick moved out as Country Director of the Peace Corps in Senegal and he put Jane Kuelsheimer and me in touch with another volunteer, Adrien Thelin who was also just finishing his rotation-duty in Senegal. In Adrien's last e-mail to me dated July 13, 2010 he said that a new person, Nathaniel Miller (Phone #77.329.3526) would be in charge of following up with me regarding the nets. Adrien wrote:

Elise, we will get your 200+ [nets] to the mayor office in Pekine. Nathaniel will inform you when this happens.

Sincerely,
Adrien Thelin

I never heard another word from anyone at the Peace Corps.

Submitted:

Elise Johnson

Indianapolis, IN