

# Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



## **Burkina Faso**

Vocational Training –  
Great Expectation

## **Madagascar**

Testimonies from  
Tsiaro and Tahina

## **Health Care**

Ismaila's courage

## Editorial

### Vocational training in West Africa

Informal training for young people is a perfect reflection of the socio-economic and cultural realities of West Africa. In many regions, the remoteness, lack of opportunities, poverty and dropping out of school lead some often very young learners to pick up a trade on the job. Whatever their chosen occupation is, they learn by observing and gradually acquire solid know-how at a lower cost. For craftspeople, it's a way of getting help while passing on their knowledge. This method, which is both practical and specialised, allows traditional knowledge to be handed down without theoretical concepts. Although we are aware of the need for skills and knowledge to be officially certified, we encourage vocational training in all its forms, considering the individual circumstances of each apprentice and their surrounding environment. In this edition, discover the journeys of Awa, a young woman from Burkina Faso, and Laouali, from Niger, both on their way to becoming self-sufficient.

In Madagascar, Sentinelles offers courses tailored to the needs of young people who don't meet the admissions criteria for formal training. But in this country, as in West Africa, there are many inequalities in vocational education that still need to be addressed. An integrated and collaborative approach, involving organisations like ours, the private sector, governments and local communities, is vital for meeting their needs.

Education, health care and economic resilience are at the very heart of our activities. To support them, two outstanding artists, Cédric Pescia and Nicolas Comi, will be joining forces on 19 January for an exceptional concert. Don't miss out on what promises to be an unforgettable experience. Mark your calendars!



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### ----- SAVE THE DATE ----- TALENTS FOR HOPE

**Cédric PESCIA and Nicolas COMI**  
**join forces for a concert in support of children**  
**in major distress**  
**Casino de Montbenon - Salle Paderewski - Lausanne**  
**Sunday 19 January 2025 at 5 p.m.**

Tickets available from 19 November 2024 from: [monbillet.ch](https://monbillet.ch)  
 or by telephone: **024 543 00 74**

Don't miss this musical event, which promises an unforgettable evening of music, emotion and solidarity.



**Marlyse Morard**  
Director

**Sentinelles**  
for the rescue of wounded innocence

**A smiling future as a legacy**

With a bequest, you continue your **commitment** to children who have suffered and people in great need.

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[www.sentinelles.org/nous-soutenir](https://www.sentinelles.org/nous-soutenir)





## Switzerland Arrival of a young girl from Burkina Faso

Grâce, a 14-year-old girl suffering from a serious spinal malformation, has arrived in Switzerland to undergo surgery. Unfortunately, the complex operation cannot be carried out in her own country. She is expected at the HUG in the paediatric orthopaedic surgery department for her medical treatment, which should prevent her from becoming paraplegic.

After two days at the Riviera Chablais hospital for an initial check-up, Grâce was taken to the Maison de Terre des hommes Valais in Massongex, where

she will stay whenever she is not in hospital. Initial examinations at the HUG have shown that unfortunately her condition is more serious than expected. It isn't 'just' a question of an operation, but first Grâce has worn a cranial halo: this is a metal circle attached to the skull by pins that are placed in the external table of the bone, enabling traction to be exerted on the skull without acting on the jaw bone. This circle is connected to weights, which are gradually increased to stretch the spine over a period of six weeks, before the operation to straighten the spine is performed.

Grâce is incredibly brave, and we wish her all the best.



## NIGER Laouali, the first carpenter in his village

Laouali lives in a rural commune with his family, around one hundred kilometres from the town of Zinder in Niger. Laouali was referred to Sentinelles by the National Hospital in Zinder in 2013. He had a noma that left his jaws completely constricted. He was operated on in Niamey, but the operation did not achieve the desired result. In the end, he gave up on any further operation and says he is happy with the way things are.

In order to ensure he would be fully integrated into the local community, Laouali took a carpentry course at the age of 14. He then joined a carpentry workshop in Zinder where he learned how to make sofas and beds. Laouali went through difficult times after losing his father several years ago. He had been very close to his father, who used to take him to the markets to sell kola nuts.

A process is now underway to set up an IGA (income-generating activity) for him. He has been given a toolkit and equipment and is now making beds, stools and wardrobes in his village, where he is the first carpenter. It's a great success.



## BURKINA FASO

### Shaping one's future

**In Burkina Faso, so-called traditional informal apprenticeships, which consist of practical training in a workshop, are still the preferred way for young people to acquire skills to help them enter the world of work. It is estimated that around 150,000 young people a year are trained in Burkina Faso's workshops.**

As part of its programme, Sentinelles supports children with noma or other facial injuries throughout their childhood and adolescence, firstly from a medical point of view, and then by also supporting their education and/or vocational training. The aim, as far as possible, is to achieve their social and professional integration before closing the case. Many teenagers around the age of 16 take practical training courses in a trade (sewing, welding, mechanics, etc.). These courses are relatively long, lasting between two and four years, in a workshop, but trainees get an opportunity to go straight into a job, usually in their local community. Workshops are chosen in agreement with the

teenager and his or her family. Sentinelles pays the training costs as well as the materials needed, when the family cannot cover them. On average, training costs amount to around CHF 100 per year, a sum that is still out of reach for most families' budgets. Sentinelles supports young people throughout their training by making regular visits to the workshop to ensure that they are being properly integrated, and that the quality of the apprenticeship is being maintained. Here are just a few of the nine young people we worked with last year, to give you an idea of their successes as well as the difficulties they encountered.

#### **Awa, taking over her boss's sewing workshop**

Awa was 4 years old when we met her, suffering from acute noma and severe malnutrition. After initially receiving medical care, she underwent surgical reconstruction at the age of 10. Her medical problems were compounded by a difficult family and social situation. After her father passed away, she grew up in his extended family, living with several aunts and uncles. Awa did not really enjoy school and her progress was slow. When she reached her teens, she joined

her mother in Ouagadougou. At the age of 16, she told her mother that she wanted to start training in dressmaking. After finding a suitable workshop in her neighbourhood, she was able to start her training in 2021. We paid an initial visit after a few weeks, during which the workshop manager gave an account of Awa's learning progress, behaviour and attendance. She began by sewing buttons, then children's clothes. Learning to cut, a crucial and much more difficult stage, comes later. During each visit, Sentinelles staff conduct interviews with the child, her family and the workshop manager to understand any obstacles and what can be improved.

**Awa's training did not go smoothly. She lost her way following the initial assessments, which had been very positive. During subsequent visits, we noted Awa's efforts and progress in terms of commitment and development. During her second year of training, we financed the purchase of her own sewing machine.**

Over time, her boss has given her more and more responsibility, and when she's not there, she leaves her the key to the workshop and the responsibility for taking orders, managing the workshop and the other apprentices. During our last





visit, she told us that she wanted to prepare Awa to hand over her workshop to her in the near future. A great goal and a wonderful development for Awa.

### **Hamidou has fallen in love with tailoring**

Making clothes is also of great interest to boys. Three of the young people we are currently supporting have chosen to make it their profession. For Hamidou, it was love at first sight. He returned from a successful operation in Switzerland but has been unable to go home for the time being, because of the insecurity in the Sahel. He is currently staying at our reception centre in Ouagadougou.

**We looked for solutions with him and met the owner of a nearby tailoring workshop. From the very first day he tried it out, it was a no-brainer for Hamidou, who was delighted to be able to work with his hands. Although he had been out of school for years because of the closure of schools in his village, he has also started taking evening classes at a school close to our centre.** These courses are aimed at young people and adults who have not mastered the basics at school or who want to improve their skills. It's

essential, in fact, for Hamidou to learn to measure properly to make the right cuts. It's a real pleasure, and a real lesson in life, to see Hamidou commit himself to everything he does with courage and optimism!

### **Ali, on the road to overcoming his ordeal**

Ali\* broke away from his family and found himself on the streets before we tracked him down at SAMU social. He then wanted to join a reception centre, where he was able to start training in welding. He proudly shows off his progress during our regular visits. Once he has completed his training, this partner organisation will offer to help him set up his own business. It's a wonderful prospect for this very likeable young man, who has also had his share of hardships.

\* Given name



## MADAGASCAR

### Two boys in conflict with the law tell their story

**Tsiaro and Tahina (not their real names), the authors of these accounts, are two teenagers whom Sentinelles met when they were placed in the Centre de Rééducation Mandrosoa d'Anjanamasina (CRM) in Madagascar, a detention centre for the rehabilitation of young offenders. The vast majority of these young people come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are usually sent there for minor offences and left to fend for themselves. Without support, many of them when they are released, try or indeed do return to lifestyles that put them in danger. We support them inside the CRM and provide psychosocial counselling for their families on the outside. This support continues after their release and until they become independent.**

#### Tsiaro

'I'll be 16 this year and I'm the youngest of 4 children. My two older sisters are already married, and my older brother and I live with our mum. I had a pretty tough childhood: my parents often argued, and we rarely had a moment of peace within the family. When I was 10, they split up and my father left us. He lives with another woman in another part of town and doesn't come to see us anymore. Since then, my mum has had to bring us up on her own. I was able to carry on with my education because she was still working in a free trade zone', and she did an awful lot for us. I passed my Certificate of Primary Studies and the entrance exam for sixth grade, but my mum insisted that I continue at a private school.

My situation took a turn for the worse in 2022. The factory where my mother worked closed, and she lost her job. So, she decided to work as a washerwoman to provide for us. I also wanted to help her by doing odd jobs at weekends. In the end I had to leave school because she couldn't afford it. One day, while I was at my mother's cousin's house, I was tempted and stole a piece of jewellery. That's why I was sent to the rehabilitation centre. I was there for six months.

That's where I met my social worker (AS) who works for Sentinelles. We were able to work out my life plan: return to my family and the decision to take a vocational training course. With the help of Sentinelles, I was able to do my first year in a training centre for construction workers. But I had to go through another ordeal because the centre had to close. So, I chose to continue with a training course in woodwork, which we found at an introductory centre, which will end in August 2024. After that, I'll be going to another centre for two years to get my first Certificate of Professional Aptitude.

**Thanks to the support provided by Sentinelles, my mother has started a business selling liquid soaps, which has made a big difference to our lives because she has found enough customers to sell her products. She's thinking of expanding this business so that she can put some money aside to help pay for my training.** I can't find the words to say thank you to my destiny, because were it not for having gone through the Rehabilitation Centre, which also moulded me, I can't imagine what would have happened to me and my family. I'm truly grateful for all the commitment and dedication the AS has shown in helping us move forward. Thank you to the Sentinelles team and especially to the generous donors who support us'





### Tahina

"I am 13 years old. I'm the second son in my family, and I have 3 younger brothers and a younger sister. My father is a radio repairman, but he had to take this job because of a head injury that prevents him from doing heavy work. This also forced my mother to take on a second-hand clothes business to make up the shortfall in income. My family is stable as far as relationships are concerned, even if I feel that my parents struggle to make ends meet.

I went to a state school for two years, but my father's accident turned my family's life upside down. I had to leave school and started wandering around the city's markets. One day I stole a jersey from a shopkeeper, a great temptation because I love playing rugby. The owner caught me and I was placed in the Rehabilitation Centre from May to October 2023.

While I was serving my sentence, I met a social worker from Sentinelles who often came to the CRM and would talk to me. I told him I'd like to go back to school. **When I was released, I went back to school at Le Petit Cours (Sentinelles' small literacy**

**and refresher course). I go there every day, we eat well there, we have a vegetable garden and take care of our vegetable crops. I'm getting back into studying, even though it's still a bit difficult. I've made new friends there and we get on well.** We play football or rugby before lessons start and during breaks. After discussions with my teacher and AS, I'm going to stay here again next school year to improve my knowledge. My dream is to become a driver/mechanic.

I have a problem with my arm, following a fall a long time ago. The head of Sentinelles told me that it could be treated and I'm ready for an appointment with foreign doctors next September<sup>2</sup>.

Sentinelles is going to help us build up my mother's business. I hope this will enable us to move to a new home. I'd like to thank the social worker, AS, who is looking after me and the whole Sentinelles team, who have changed my life and that of my family. I'm going to do a lot more to achieve my goal."

[1] There are several free trade zones with factories, mainly textiles, in and around the capital. These companies benefit from tax breaks and almost all their production is destined for export.

[2] Tahina has dislocated his elbow. We are organising a surgical mission as part of our health care programme, during which the doctors will examine him.



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## SWITZERLAND

### Ismaïla, a complex pathology

Ismaïla, a 12-year-old boy from Burkina Faso, came to Switzerland for surgical treatment for the after-effects of noma. He suffers from a constricted jaw (almost total inability to open his mouth).

After being admitted to hospital, the medical team gradually discovered that Ismaïla had a serious gastroenterological illness, which could be fatal if left untreated. He underwent numerous tests before the diagnosis was made: it was a chronic inflammatory auto-immune disease of the colon (ulcerative colitis) which causes diarrhoea, blood in the stools and is accompanied by severe joint pain (rheumatism) and lesions on the skin. It therefore affects his health at various levels and has an impact on his quality of life.

Fortunately, this condition was identified during his stay in Switzerland, because we were able to set up appropriate treatment for Ismaïla, which will have to be continued in his country, and even throughout his whole life. Treatment for haemorrhagic recto colitis is based on the prescription of anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive drugs, which regulate the functioning of the patient's immune system. Oral corticosteroids are also prescribed. The latter treatment continues for several weeks, or even months, and must be phased out gradually to avoid the risk of relapse. It is only when the corticosteroids are no longer being taken that an operation on the jaw constriction can be considered.

On his return to Burkina Faso, Ismaïla will be monitored by a local gastroenterologist and by our centre in Ouagadougou to ensure that he is in good health and that the treatment is having the desired effects. He is expected to return to Switzerland in two years' time for the surgical part of his treatment.

Ismaïla has been incredibly brave throughout all the tests he has undergone and the various stays in hospital, and we can only admire the way he keeps his beautiful smile. We wish him all the best for his health, so that he can resume his life as a child as soon as possible.

# Sentinelles

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Banque cantonale vaudoise, 1001 Lausanne:  
BIC/SWIFT BCVLCH2LXXX  
Swiss francs account: IBAN CH12 0076 7000 S045 9154 0  
Euros account: IBAN CH14 0076 7000 T511 2794 9  
Subscription: \$30/year



DONATION



Edition: 26'000 copies (fr/de/eng)  
Publisher: Sentinelles  
Layout: Judith Spinatsch  
© texts and pictures: Sentinelles  
Translations: Volunteers  
Impression: PCL Print Conseil Logistique SA