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## Jason & Emily Atkins

### Networkin' by Jason

I always love the opportunity to learn something new! Before we left Bissau, we were able to get a good start on another project: connecting the computers in the different buildings of the center via fiber optics! The computer network that serves the school has worked 98% problem-free since we installed it several years ago. However, we've extended it to a few other buildings in the center through temporary wireless links that haven't proven to be ultimately reliable. As the network has expanded both physically and in importance, we needed to make it more stable. It now needs to connect several buildings, and has the additional responsibility of providing internet to 10-15 people each day.

We have the ability to connect to the youth center's network through the internet to help fix the inevitable problems that pop up while we're here in the U.S. This ability has been critical to keeping things running smoothly while we're away. Last time we were home though, a wireless link failed in a way that left us unable to remotely connect to help fix problems with the computers in the classrooms. We attacked the network project to eliminate this kind of instability and to expand the network into the other buildings in the youth center. This expansion will give better internet to the guesthouse, connect the new classroom in the second story of the shop building, and connect the recording studio so we can switch to computer based recording and editing!

Connecting computers together isn't anything new, but the distance between some of these building is longer than you can do with normal copper network cable – so I got to dive into a new challenge! Fiber optics are the next step up, but they're much harder to work with and generally many times more expensive. Fortunately, after some hunting on eBay over a few weeks, I was able to snag the gear we needed without spending too much. Emily brought some smaller parts and a 28 lb. spool of fiber optic cable over in her luggage when she returned to Bissau in May. She's a trooper, huh? I did some reading online, and felt nervously ready to tackle our new technology!

The first step was the one that took the longest. We don't have any underground cable conduits connecting the buildings in the center, like you would have in a commercial setting here in the States – so we had to bury our own! We found some rolls of water tubing in the local market, and the workers spent several days digging trenches between all of the buildings. We didn't want to bury the fiber cable directly in the ground, because a mis-aimed shovel in the future might undo all of our hard work!

Once we had our tubing connecting all of the buildings, we had a new challenge. The tubing was long single sections between the buildings – but we needed to be able to get the cable through it. I remembered hearing about a way to use compressed air to run fiber lines in the past, so we decided to improvise a system like that and give it a try.

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We cut up a piece of foam about the size of the inside of the tube, sewed some very light thread into it, and set up for the first trial run. The tube was about 100 feet long. We dumped a little baby powder into the tube to help things slide, popped the foam end in, held our hand over the end of the tube to direct the air in (while still letting the foam pull the thread through) and gave it a good puff of air from the compressor. Amazingly, the thing took off and started pulling the thread through!

We were pretty excited to see our foam "cork" shoot out the other end! We used that thread to pull a stronger nylon rope, which we then used to pull the actual fiber cable. The whole procedure was interesting and more than a little nerve wracking, because if fiber gets bent to sharply, the glass fibers will crack and break, ruining them – so we had to be mighty careful!

The final step was to crimp special connector ends onto the bare fibers in the cable. It was all new to us, but with the help of some specialized tools and some videos online, we gave it our best effort. The real moment of truth came when we had finished two ends of one of the links and had to plug them in. We didn't have any way of knowing up until that point if the fiber had broken when it was being pulled, or if our connectors were installed correctly. Fortunately, the first time we plugged them in, the lights indicating the link was working properly flashed immediately, and started working flawlessly! Relieved and excited, we moved on to finishing the other projects that had to be done before coming home.

The link we completed was the most important one of the bunch, assuring the ability to stay connected to the internet, so I can work on the computers while we're away. The cable tubing has been run between all of the different buildings, so when we get back we'll pull the fiber for the rest of the connections and finish the project off. Hopefully it will work so well it will soon be forgotten so it can go on serving the center for many years to come!

### Continued Provision by Emily

Since we've been home, several people have asked us about our funding. We realized that we haven't really said much about it for the past year and half, so we thought this would be a good time for an update.

When we left for Africa this last time (June 2009) we only had about 50% of the monthly support pledges that we needed, but because of the generous gifts of several people and congregations we had enough cash in our account to make up the difference for one year. Since our teammates, the Wilsons, were leaving Guinea-Bissau in July 2009 we high-tailed it over there to make sure we were ready to take over for them when they left. We planned on coming back at the end of that year to raise more support.

While we were in Bissau we were blessed with several new people joining our support team. It's been so exciting for us to see the ways that God has asked different people to get involved in what He's doing half-way around the world. Our monthly support pledges have increased from 50% to right around 72%!!!

So, over the past year and a half, through a combination of frugality, new pledges, and unexpected blessings, we've always had enough for the things we needed. We have had to pass up some projects and ministry opportunities that we would have loved to be involved in. While we're home our goal is to finish off our fundraising and head back to Guinea-Bissau with 100% of our monthly budget pledged.

We have had the opportunity to speak at some different churches and we have several more scheduled before we head back. We're hoping that you'll pray with us while we're home that God would bring the interested partners to finish our monthly fundraising and return to Bissau fully funded and ready to roll!

*Jason + Emily*



Nine months pregnant and ready to meet our baby girl