

Alice, Côte d'Ivoire

Alice, 16, lives in Akouedo, a suburb of Abidjan (a big city) in the Ivory Coast. She has two brothers, who are 8- and 4-years-old. Her eight-year-old brother goes to school. Neither of them work.

Alice attended the second Children's World Congress on Child Labor in New Delhi, India, in September 2005, and the first Children's World Congress in Florence, Italy, in May 2004.

Like her mother, Alice has never been to formal school beyond nursery school. Her mother is illiterate and works at home. Her father, a mason, completed secondary school. Her paternal grandfather was unable to send her father to university. Like many children in the Ivory Coast, Alice did not have the opportunity to continue in the formal school system due to inherent expenses. "Education is just too expensive," Alice said. It costs 50,000 Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) francs (\$91 US Dollars) to enroll a child in school for a year. Alice's father was unable to afford to educate her beyond nursery school. He was unable to buy paper for her to write on.

After nursery school, Alice was free at home. Her friends went to the garbage dump to earn money. She needed money and wanted to be with her friends, so at age 8 she started working at the dump too. She collected bottles, shoes, and plastic bags, and sold them directly to people who came to the dump. She did not report to a boss. She worked 8 hours a day, from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. and from 1 - 5 p.m., six days a week. She took an hour break for lunch. The dump was near her house, so Alice went back and forth on foot. She made about 1,000 CFA franc (\$1.80 US dollars) a day for the goods she sold. Alice worked for three years, from age 8 to age 13. She did not like working in the dump, but she needed the money for food (especially lunch) and clothes. She had one meal a day.

One day, Alice discovered a non-governmental organization called Africa Rescue and Assistance (ASA), which teaches children over the age of 14 to read, write and sew. In the Ivory Coast the legal minimum age for work in is only 14-years-old. However, primary education usually ends at age 13. As a result, some children start working at age 13. ASA's programs seek to prevent youth from prematurely entering the workforce. Surprisingly, primary school is not required in the Ivory Coast and while, in principle, public school is tuition free (students do *not* have to pay for entrance, books or uniforms)



Alice, 16, Côte d'Ivoire, Children's World Congress on Child Labor and Education, New Delhi, India, September 4-8, 2005

for grades 1 and 2, students must still pay for some school supplies, including photocopying paper.¹

Alice asked her father for permission to study at ASA. At age 13, she stopped working and came to the center, where she learned the alphabet. She is now in her third year of studies supported by ASA. Her teachers are very proud of her. She even convinced ten of her friends to leave the garbage dump, where they all used to work. "The children who go to school are fine. The school is helping those who have left the dumping ground," Alice said. However, ASA has a limited amount of space for students. There are only two classrooms for 100 children. In 2004 ASA had 100 children, and in 2005 they had 150 children in the center. Some of Alice's friends returned to the dump.

ASA no longer receives a grant from the German Embassy to maintain the center. Therefore, ASA is asking for help to build more classrooms and schools. Alice will finish her training at the Center in June 2006, and must find an opportunity to practice what she learned at school. It will be difficult because ASA has received no further support from any organizations.

When she grows up, Alice would like to work in a non-governmental organization that helps children who do not have the means to realize their potential. She dreams of coming to the United States to continue learning to sew. She would like a sewing machine.

¹ Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2004, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41599.htm>, Internet accessed September 2005.