

December 15th, 2010

Dear Friend of Bahia Street,

As President of the Board of Directors for Bahia Street here in the United States, I feel very privileged to be able to write you this letter. Privileged because it is not every day that I have the opportunity to share with friends, colleagues and strangers a piece of my heart.

First I would like to say thank you to Nancy Bacon who has been Bahia Street's Program Director for over five years. Nancy has contributed so much to Bahia Street during our time of growth. Her intelligence, laughter and knowledge will be greatly missed. She has moved on to pursue other professional goals. We are excited to see the contributions she makes in the future in the world of social change and development. Thank you so much Nancy!

A few years ago, when I first learned that the first Bahia Street graduates had been accepted to college, it brought tears to my eyes. Now, two Bahia Street graduates have graduated from university, twelve other are now studying at university, and soon we will see many more graduates!

People have asked me what the Bahia Street girls who do not go to university are doing. First let me put this in context: the majority of African-Brazilian women in Brazil still work as domestic servants and live in extreme poverty. In Salvador, the majority of people also work in the "informal economy," selling things on the streets and scrapping a living in any way they can. None of the Bahia Street graduates are working as domestic servants and none are working in this informal economy. Several have started their own small businesses, some are working in shops, some are doing clerical work, and some are working in offices. All of these jobs require a high level of literacy, numeracy and frequently computer skills, none of which they would have without their schooling at Bahia Street. Their impact will be large because there are very few African-Brazilian women working in these fields. Because Bahia Street girls are electing to forestall having children until they get older, their ability to engage in the professional world is even greater. It means a great deal to me to be able to be involved in any way I can with this remarkable transformation.

The quality of work Rita and the rest of the staff are doing in Salvador is absolutely amazing. This is demonstrated by the community created at the Bahia Street Center and the numerous lives changed for the better as a result. Erin, the current English as a Second Language teacher, wrote recently: "I did not actually realize until a few weeks ago that there are evening classes every night of the week (at the Bahia Street Center). It seems people are always at the center until at least 7 or 8 (until 8:30 on Fridays). I was surprised to hear that many of students come every night. The center

has created yet another community at night for those who have either graduated from Bahia Street and are in high school, or for older women somehow affiliated with Bahia Street. It has been so interesting reading research regarding the politics of the education system here, and at the same time confronting the realities of the education system in these girls' lives. Bahia Street utilizes the incredible space as often and productively as possible. Everyone is there because they've chosen to be there--some studying for university, others perhaps for work, and others for various individual motivations. It's so easy to teach English to them because they all come engaged and excited, ready to learn.”

I feel so very proud of every contribution I have been able to make over the years to Bahia Street. The remarkable work Bahia Street does is dependant on you, me and the rest of our donors. It is our contributions that allow the young women to enter university, get good jobs, and break this cycle of poverty once and for all. I hope you feel the same joy and pride that I do every time you reflect on your contributions to Bahia Street. So please join me this year in giving what you can. This is one very important thing you and I can do together to dramatically change lives and make this world a better place in which to live.

Thank you, and I wish you all the very best in the coming year.

Moshe Hecht
President of the Board of Directors
Bahia Street