



WHITAKER
PEACE & DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVE



2022 Annual Report

Seine-Saint-Denis France



PEACE IS CONTAGIOUS

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Introduction

This report presents the first initiatives undertaken by the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI France) to contribute to the empowerment of young people and women in Seine-Saint-Denis, in 2022. Based in Aubervilliers, our ambition is to provide concrete solutions to the problems identified locally.

WPDI has, for the past ten years, implemented peacebuilding programs in contexts marked by poverty, conflict or violence. Our approach is based on the values of inclusion and non-violence, as well as the empowerment of individuals. Peaceful conflict resolution and entrepreneurship are at the heart of our strategy, which relies mainly on education and learning as vectors of resilience. We believe that our priority groups, young people and women, are key changemakers who's contribution to their communities dynamic is essential for sustainable peace.

Our programs are based on trust in the potential of individuals, which we believe is adaptable to Seine-Saint-Denis. We understand this territory well, with a population that has historically suffered from economic and urban marginalization. Seine-Saint-Denis, despite its geographical proximity to the capital of one of the richest countries in the world, faces issues similar to territories where WPDI has been implemented for the past decade. Indeed, our experience in the United States and Mexico, as well as in Cape Town, in South Africa, in similar contexts of fragility are identified with a certain number of common markers: longstanding poverty, a young demography and high youth unemployment, gender inequalities and violence against women, social isolation, the lack of economic opportunities and public services, violence, the lack of prospects and feeling of humiliation, etc. These factors are multiple and many actors are working to tackle them. Our contribution will focus on offering training and resources allowing individuals to work on the transformations they wish to see happen, in other words, to ensure that our beneficiaries are, in fact, the first partners of our action in their territory.

Adaptability and commitment on the ground are therefore at the forefront of our action in Seine-Saint-Denis where we now work daily with vulnerable people in order to give them the tools to develop professionalizing and mediation skills. In turn, with these tools, they will become actors for positive change in their city. This report covers the first initiatives that we deployed in the department, with a particular focus on training in conflict resolution or actions aimed at aspiring entrepreneurs. We also detail the establishment of our community learning center in Aubervilliers. Another key aspect has been our networking efforts with key local stakeholders.. Our work therefore mainly consisted, in 2022, in establishing, in the department, a presence that we hope will last and which has already raised interest from local stakeholders. We hope that this interest for our programs will keep growing.

Key Achievements



1 Community Learning Center
which will open its doors in 2023



17 Trainees
in Conflict Resolution Education



1 Business Plan Competition
was organized
15 entrepreneurs pitched their projects and joined our business program
3 winners have been selected to receive a small material aid



20 Youths
benefitted from our Conflict Resolution workshop on the International Day of Peace

Who We are

The Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI) was founded in 2012 by artist and social activist Forest Whitaker, who is UNESCO's Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation as well as a member of the United Nations Advocacy Group for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A Journey, a Vision

As a teenager in the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles, Forest Whitaker witnessed the violence associated with drug traffic, and how young people had only two options: to be a victim, or to be a delinquent. Struck by this injustice from which he was lucky enough to escape thanks to the education given by his parents, his desire to act was amplified when he met former child soldiers in Uganda, who were also deprived of their childhood through violence and conflict. This is how Forest Whitaker developed his vision which will become that of WPDI: by giving tools to young people and vulnerable populations, it is possible to build peace and appease communities.



A Franco-American Leadership

Executive Director of WPDI since its creation in 2012, Caroline Descombris directly assists Mr. Whitaker in the steering and management of WPDI, where she has found the means to concretize her commitment to the values of peace and solidarity. For the past 20 years, Ms. Descombris has worked as an international civil servant at UNESCO, an UN body, which has hosted WPDI's headquarters for the past 10 years. She has a track record of delivering high-level missions in the Office of the Director-General, the Office of Strategic Planning or the Social and Human Sciences Sector.

For Caroline Descombris, who is of French nationality, the launch of WPDI in Seine-Saint-Denis, is an opportunity to put, as Vice-President of WPDI France, her vast international experience in the service of a territory whose stakes and challenges she understands well.



Community Outreach

Our Ambition

It is in the Villette-Quatre Chemins district, at the crossroads of the towns of Aubervilliers, Pantin, La Courneuve and Parc la Villette, that the first WPDI France Community Learning Center will open early in 2023. Six staff members will be mobilized to provide services for the local population. Through this center, WPDI France intends to provide training programs to young people and women in vulnerable situations.

The establishment of the center is essential for the realization of Forest Whitaker's commitment to serving a vision of peace and prosperity that relies on the capacity of individuals to inspire positive change, even in the most difficult environments.

Building a Local Presence

For the past months, we have started to build our presence in Aubervilliers. We have already started to deliver activities including in the eight districts of the territory and we regularly take part in meetings organized by the city and other local organizations.

WPDI aims to have a strong local and territorial anchoring, and our team works directly with local actors of the territory to better identify issues that trigger conflict in order to determine collective solutions.

For our implementation in France, we have greatly benefited from the support of the City of Aubervilliers and from our partnership with OMJA.

Seine-Saint-Denis

Seine-Saint-Denis is a territory that faces many challenges, most of which are familiar to us given the organization's extensive experience delivering programs in conflict-affected areas across the globe.

The different issues facing the people of the department are similar to what we have seen in industrialized or developing countries: poverty, urban violence, insecurity, social exclusion of young people, problems of gender equality, or difficult relations between different cultural groups within the same territory.

Seine-Saint-Denis, for example, has the highest poverty rate in metropolitan France (28% compared to 14% for the whole territory in 2017). In 2022, the unemployment rate remains, at 10.5%, one of the highest in France, not to mention that the youth unemployment rate is estimated at 35% by the department in 2020. **This situation is all the more worrisome as the population of the department is the youngest in metropolitan France.**¹

Our ambition is to move forward gradually in the department, it being important for WPDI to study the context and its challenges, then to test our tools and find our place among the various stakeholders in the department. Taking into account the local actors who have already expressed an interest in our project and a desire to support it, our implementation in the town of Aubervilliers, in the Villette-Quatre Chemins district, will place us astride two communities of communes, Plaine commune and Est Ensemble.



Our Priority Groups

WPDI's Community Learning Centers across the globe are open to all community members, with an emphasis on empowering underprivileged women and youth.

Women

The number of women receiving the RSA (minimum state aid for those out of the workforce) is higher than that of men in the territory. Returning to work is also more complicated for women due to difficulties in finding childcare arrangements. The training program available in our Community Learning Centers enables these women, who have been out of the workforce for a long time, to acquire skills that will help them increase their employability.

Youths

School dropout is a scourge in Seine-Saint-Denis. We have identified needs and subsequently designed activities adapted to young people to enable them to become positive changemakers in their communities.

Our Conflict Resolution Education and Business and Entrepreneurship programs are primarily open to young people aged 18 to 35.



¹Source: INSEE.

Vectors for Change

WPDI's Community Learning Center

Thanks to our partner, BNP Paribas, we benefit from a completely renovated 120 sm2 center, including two training rooms, spacious office space for the team and a reception area open to visitors. The center is in the heart of the city, in the Quatre Chemins district. We are located at a very busy crossroads in Seine-Saint-Denis. It is welcoming, warm and very accessible by public transportation. **It will be formally inaugurated in early 2023.**



Disseminating Transformative Capacity

Conflict Resolution Education

After five months of field presence to identify needs, meet with local authorities and various civil society actors, we have tailored our Conflict Resolution program to meet local needs. This training was very well received, especially by OMJA. This 70-year-old organization is a key stakeholder in Aubervilliers. It brings together 1,200 young members aged 10 to 25. The OMJA enrolled 7 of its employees, including 4 district directors, into our training to build their capacity in conflict resolution.

Beyond OMJA, beneficiaries who first enrolled in our business and entrepreneurship program also benefited from this training. Other participants joined the training, having learned about it through visual communication that we had put up across the town of Aubervilliers. 17 youths started this training in December.

“

I am very happy to participate in this training. We learn to manage conflict differently, and I now use the tools we were given on a daily basis, whether it is in my professional or personal life. I used conflict analysis with my husband for example. I learned a lot of things at the emotional level as well: how to identify emotions, understand them etc. This training is very enriching, and the trainer has succeeded in uniting the group.

”

Abirami, 36,
Director of a youth
structure in Aubervilliers



Testimonials from Participants

"This was a good introduction to conflict mediation. Brainstorming to identify group dynamics was useful and the examples given were realistic..."

"It was interesting to frame certain aspects of conflicts and how to address issues through mediation"

"Satisfactory in the sense that we have learned a lot."

Business and Entrepreneurship

We held a "Pose Ton Idée" ("Share your idea") event with the support of the Time2Start incubator, which has extensive experience in implementing such programs. This initiative consisted of canvassing entrepreneurs seeking to raise funds for their projects. Once selected, they were invited to pitch their concepts to a jury. The most promising projects were selected to subsequently receive material assistance determined with them according to their needs (tablet, computer, etc.).

We launched an online announcement, with a questionnaire for applicants to share information about their projects. We obtained 32 registrations and 15 people were selected to come on stage and present their projects in three minutes, in front of a four-person jury:

- **Fanta Cisse**
Hypnotherapist and Life Coach
- **Véronique Tel**
Ramp Ops Agent FedEx
- **Youssou Barro**
Music Producer & Movie Producer
- **Valentine Goret**
Project Coordinator at WPDJ Headquarters

This jury was mainly composed of people from Seine-Saint-Denis, and had achievements that could inspire our candidates. **Three social entrepreneurship projects were selected and awarded. The 15 entrepreneurs selected upstream will be supported for one year** and will have the opportunity to participate in our business program starting in the Spring of 2023.



International Day of Peace

On September 21, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace, we organized a workshop on the management of emotions and conflicts, within the Jacques Prévert Center located in the Quatres Chemins district. This event made it possible to announce our presence in the neighborhood and to give young people aged 10 to 18 the benefit of a workshop entitled “Look at how he talks to me”.

“

This workshop explains how the way we speak can start a conflict using examples from everyday life. We learn tools to suffer less from verbal abuse, and also to make others suffer less (and even do good if we want!). We learn to make the difference between the facts we observe and the judgment we have on what we observe. We come out with more power over our environment and ourselves!

”

Juliette Hanrot,
CRE trainer

20 young people participated in this workshop.

Incidentally, it is at the end of this workshop that the director of OMJA asked us to train his team in order to strengthen their social mediation skills.



Focusing Our Efforts

After 10 years of existence around the world, launching a program in France represents a major step for WPDI, considering the many challenges at hand. We had to build a network of local stakeholders with whom to collaborate. We also had to find a place that would allow us to quickly welcome our beneficiaries. Despite this, we managed to ensure a regular presence on the ground and to participate in key activities and meetings organized by the city of Aubervilliers’s service for NGOs.

Our presence is now acknowledged in the territory, being among the only ones to offer complete training in social mediation.

Early Successes

Thanks to our work with local organizations, the city’s service for NGOs, and the network of the project manager in charge of managing the installation of our programs in Seine-Saint-Denis, we have succeeded in recruiting beneficiaries motivated by our approach and eager to learn more during social mediation trainings and for the social entrepreneurship program.

Lessons Learned

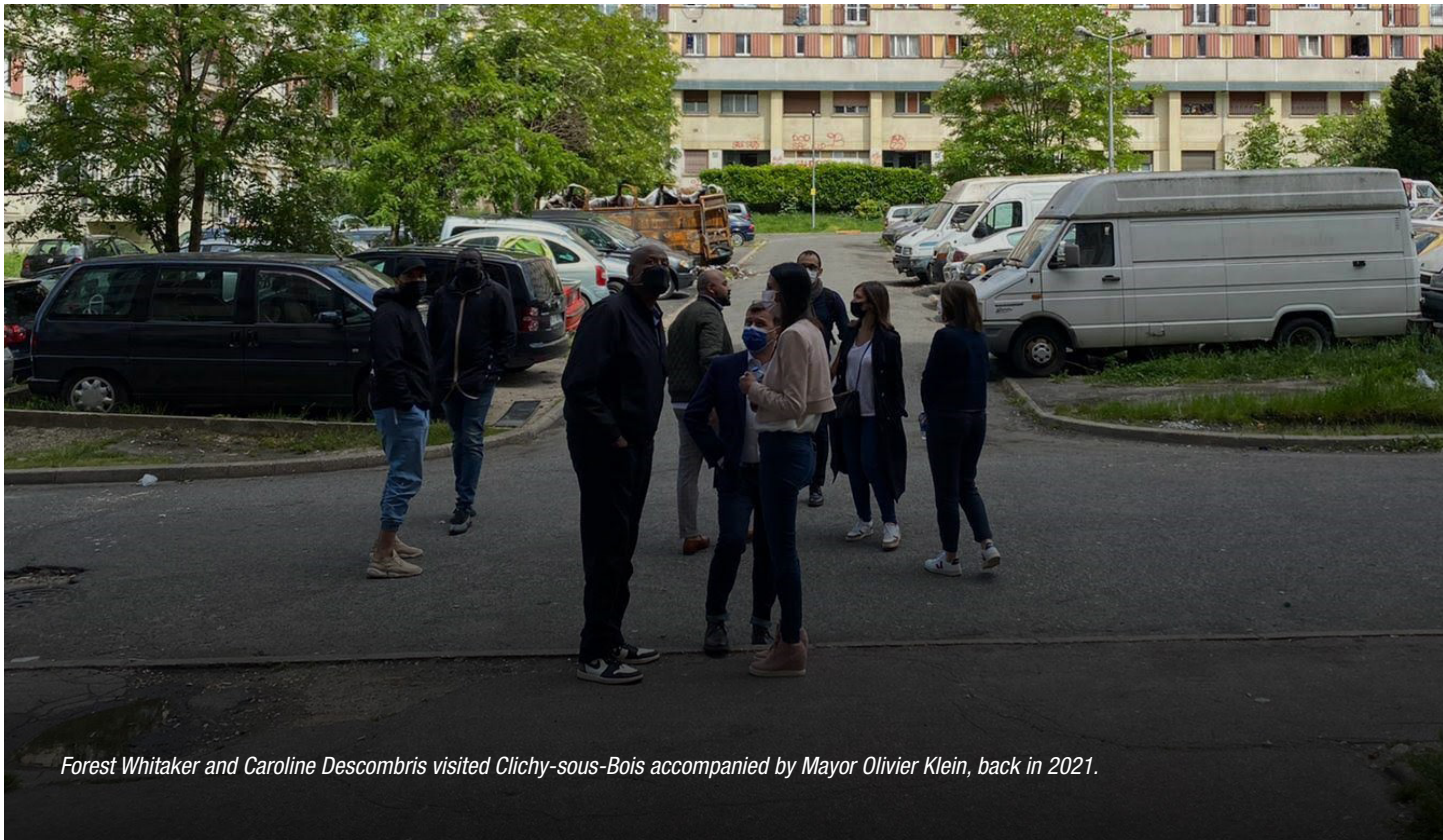
Our installation in France, more particularly in Seine-Saint-Denis, has been tailored to local needs and realities. Opening a center in Aubervilliers makes sense to fully participate in the social cohesion and local development of the territory.

Since the launch of our entrepreneurship program and training in conflict resolution, we have been in great demand from young people and social workers who wish to take part in our workshops.

Our first steps in Seine-Saint-Denis have demonstrated that there is a strong demand for skills in social mediation and social entrepreneurship in the neighborhoods we serve.



Aminata Sidibé (center), project manager for the deployment of WPDI in Seine-Saint-Denis, took part in a discussion group with local inhabitants, the police, elected representatives and the technicians of Aubervilliers to identify concrete requirements for WPDI's successful operations in the area.



Forest Whitaker and Caroline Descombris visited Clichy-sous-Bois accompanied by Mayor Olivier Klein, back in 2021.

Partners



BNP PARIBAS



AUBERVILLIERS





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