



December, 2023

On a Recent Trip to Rwanda, Shelter Them Board Members Were SHOCKED by Living Conditions in Gateko!!

That's right, readers, these Board members were shocked! And they were amazed! Dazzled! Excited! Surprised! Enthusiastic! Proud, humbled, and over the moon. They could not believe the transformations that have taken place since their last visit to Gateko village in 2018.

Sharon Robson, Secretary of Shelter Them Poverty Relief said, "In 2018, I saw poverty, sadness and desperation everywhere I looked . . . However, on this trip I saw so much love, joy, and hope for a bright future." Here is a partial list of accomplishments that have occurred since 2018:

- ✓ A completed community centre
- ✓ A thriving Early Childhood Development Centre with nearly 100 students, 3 to 6 years of age
- ✓ A reliable source of fresh water for the ECDC, the Gateko community, and surrounding villages
- ✓ A paved road running through the community
- ✓ A Farming and Savings Cooperative which continues to grow as members move towards economic self sufficiency
- ✓ A new drying facility to increase the Cooperative's crops and profits
- ✓ 29 students enrolled in secondary school, nine more studying in university and college, and two university graduates
- ✓ Free medical insurance for vulnerable families
- ✓ 19 new houses built for 19 families, and rental accommodation for five more families.

No wonder that Sharon and others who had not been in Rwanda recently were so amazed. And we need to keep in mind that these transformations occurred during the COVID pandemic, which devastated lives at home and around the world. People in Rwanda might have been expected to surrender to the pandemic, but instead they continued to work to build an independent and sustainable future for themselves.

There are many to thank for this remarkable transformation. We could thank Tao Gauthier, Shelter Them Country Director and Jules Higirow, his predecessor. Or Julius Twahirwa, Education Coordinator, who is responsible for ECDC programming as well as primary and secondary school oversight. Or Sylvine Mukagatete, Community Support Manager, who supervises individual and family counselling, emergency support, housing, and cooperatives. We could thank the Board members of Shelter Them Poverty Relief for designing the fundraising activities which enable these improvements. Or we could thank you, our sponsors and supporters. Daphne Wells, Shelter Them Board member, fundraiser extraordinaire and sponsor of two children in Gateko, also visited Rwanda for the first time since 2018, and she said, "It just amazes me what \$40 a month can do!" See? She was amazed, excited, and over the moon. So are all of us at Shelter Them who are so grateful for the kindness, generosity and loyalty of all of our supporters. You are literally saving lives. SHOCKING, BUT TRUE !!

The Three R's – Reduce, Repurpose, Realize a Dream!

Shelter Them is pleased and proud to announce an agreement with the Electronic Recycling Association (ERA) which provides reconditioned computers and other electronic equipment to registered charities, non-profits and educational institutions. Since 2004, ERA has been a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing electronic waste by collecting, cleaning, and donating that equipment to organizations in need. (You can learn more about their work by going to their website, www.era.ca.) When Shelter Them reached out to ERA in search of computers to provide our students in Rwanda a fair playing field to advance their education, ERA was glad to form a partnership with us.

As you know, the mission of Shelter Them is to provide young people in Rwanda with the tools they need to enjoy a productive, independent, and sustainable future. The greatest tool to provide that future is education. However, most students in Rwanda do not have access to the equipment that will help them to achieve their goals. And of course the computer, which we in the developed world take for granted, is not easily available to the young people who Shelter Them serves.

Providing the equipment our students need has been a long-term goal of Shelter Them. For example, many of our supporters in Newfoundland will remember our program called “Chromebooks for Kids”, which we ran last Christmas. (Donations are still welcome. See the Education Program on our website, www.sheltherthem.com.) Even more than our primary school students, secondary and post-secondary students require computers, especially laptops, to meet the needs of higher education. While much of ERA's equipment is free, there is a \$100 upgrade fee for higher end laptops. ERA has agreed to fast



track ten such laptops, and many more will be needed later. Here are just some of the young people in Gateko who just want a fair chance to realize their dreams. Can you help? Then please go to our website and make a donation. Maybe you are able to fund the full cost of one of these computers, but any amount will help. Like all young people, our students in Rwanda have dreams for a better future. You can make it happen. (If you want to see and hear these young people up close, please view the video at <https://youtu.be/LvCSCmzK40s>.) Thank you for helping these young people to realize a dream!

Save the Date, Ontario!

The date has been set for the Shelter Them Gala in Ontario – Sunday, June 2nd, 2024. The ticket price will be \$90 per person. The theme is being kept under wraps for now, but you can bet it will be fun. So make plans to attend, to meet up with old friends, and to support a great cause. See you there!

The Gift That Lasts

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Shelter Them believes this to be true, and never more true than when we take time in this upcoming holiday season to reflect back on the past year. We have had so much opportunity to see the horrific damage done by weapons of destruction. But education is a weapon of *construction*. It is a weapon that can build lives, not destroy them. As we approach this season of giving, please consider giving the gift of education, the gift of hope. We all know about the horrors in Rwanda's past, but unlike

the countries we read about in our newspapers and see on our televisions today, Rwandans have put those horrors behind them, and are working hard to build a much happier and productive and sustainable future. And Shelter Them is working right along with them.

To succeed in that goal, Rwanda needs an educated population who can work to achieve a better future that will last. It needs people like the young adults who we have highlighted above. But for the goal to last, it also needs the children like the ones you see below, pictured enjoying the Shelter Them Christmas party last year. Rwanda's goal is admirable, but it will not be easy, and it will take time. And it will require the continuing help of people like you, who have so generously supported the work of Shelter Them through this past year. So we take this opportunity to thank you again for your kindness and your generosity in supporting the work of Shelter Them. Murakoze! All of us at Shelter Them wish you and your family a happy and safe Christmas season, and a healthy and happy 2024!

