



May, 2023

***Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world
- Nelson Mandela***

This issue of the Shelter Them newsletter is focusing on education, and the importance of education to the children in Rwanda who we serve. At the top of the home page of our website, you will see three words: Empowerment, Hope and Transformation. These words encapsulate what Shelter Them is all about. We strive to empower the children and adults we serve to give them the tools and the hope to transform their lives. Education is the cornerstone of our work with children, because education is the most powerful tool to build a productive, independent, and sustainable future.

You will read about how education is improving the lives of all our children, from preschool, through primary and secondary school, to university. Our goal is to provide every student with the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Please take the time to see how we are achieving that goal, and to learn how you can help our kids on their journey. It is an exciting adventure!

Join Our ECDC Club



A good education starts as early as possible. Since the vulnerable and disadvantaged families who we serve, often headed by single mothers, cannot afford the cost of private and expensive early childhood education, Shelter Them in 2021 built our own Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC) in the village of Gateko, in Bugesera District. At the end of 2022, there were 89 students three to six years of age, enrolled in our ECDC. The play-based program, designed by our Education Coordinator, gives these youngsters the basic skills to prepare them for primary school. They are also provided with exercise and two nutritious meals each day, because healthy minds need healthy bodies.

Why is early childhood education so important?

- Because kids stay in school longer
- Because they are more likely to be employed in high skill jobs
- Because their future earnings are increased by as much as 25%
- Because in developing countries, improved nutrition enables children to achieve their full physical, cognitive, and social potential.

Do you want to help these children to have a fair start in life? Then you can join our ECDC Club. The **Every Child Deserves a Chance Club**. Here is how it works. We ask members of the club to commit to providing \$15 per month to go exclusively to the operating costs of our ECDC in Gateko. \$15 doesn't seem to go very far for us these days, but in Rwanda, \$15 per month can provide a miracle.

- \$15 will provide the books and toys and learning tools that will start these kids on their adventure in education.
- \$15 will provide the salaries for the teachers and caregivers and cooks and cleaners who provide a safe, clean learning environment for the students.
- \$15 will provide the food to give these children nutritious, well-balanced meals each day.
- \$15 will pay for all the cleaning products that will provide our kids with a clean, hygienic environment in which to learn, and that example will be a model for cleanliness and hygiene in their homes.
- \$15 per month can transform the lives of these young children, not just now but for the rest of their lives.

Do you want to transform a life? If so, please go to our website at www.shelterthem.com and join the club.

Let's Raise the Roof!



In our last newsletter, you saw the foundation for the new primary school which Shelter Them is building in Gateko. But these youngsters are impatient! They want to see walls and have a roof over their heads when they reach primary school. They are excited because they heard about our “Chromebooks for Kids” campaign which ran in Newfoundland over Christmas, 2022.

Through the generosity of our supporters, we were able to purchase eight new Chromebooks, and another two were donated. They are being used now by the older ECDC children and hopefully they will be used in our primary school once it's completed. Our ultimate goal is to have at least 30-35 Chromebooks to develop some online learning opportunities, thereby increasing the quality of education offered to our children. Would you like to contribute to this program? Then contact David

Jenkins at davidjenkins@shelterthem.com. Or could you make a donation to speed up the construction of that roof and those walls? If so, please go to our website, www.shelterthem.com, and donate. These boys and girls want to get on with their journey - to education and to an independent and productive future!

Water, Water Everywhere

We are pleased to report that the water project that was delayed so long because of COVID is now fully operational. Thanks to the continuing generosity of our supporters, including a significant contribution from the Gay Lea Foundation, the village of Gateko and our ECDC in the community centre has a reliable source of clean, fresh water. You might be wondering, what does this news have to do with education? Well, take a look at the village's previous source of water.

In the past, children had to walk an hour each way, twice a day, to collect dirty water from this source. Instead of being in school, they had to collect water that often made them sick. Instead of staying in school where they could build a future, they were forced to live a grinding life day after day with no foreseeable hope for change.



Now look! Some of these young boys and girls in our ECDC had to be persuaded to drink from the faucets, because all they had known in the past was that water could make them sick. Now they wash in clean water before every meal, and enjoy a cup of cool, clean water whenever they wish. And they are in school where they belong, building their future.

This could not have happened without the kindness and generosity of our Shelter Them supporters. Thank you.

Say Hello to Our Newest University Graduate



So far, we have talked about the education of our youngest students, but Shelter Them believes that all children should have the opportunity to achieve to the very best of their abilities. So please congratulate Khesia Niyonsenga, our second young adult to graduate from university. Eight other students are either currently enrolled in, or are about to begin, various university programs in Rwanda.

Khesia has recently graduated from the University of Kigali with a degree in Business Management and Accounting. She was born in the small village of Nyamugali, one of eight children. She says she had no hope for her future because her parents could not afford her school fees and materials. She says, "In 2016, the Shelter Them sponsorship program changed my life... I thank Shelter Them for giving me hope for the future and to achieve my dreams. I will always keep Shelter Them sponsors in my prayers."

Khesia understands the importance of the Shelter Them sponsorship program to her success. Would you like to become a sponsor? For \$40 per month, you can provide for all of the needs of a child like Khesia. But the greatest gift is the opportunity for every boy or girl in the program to achieve to the best of their ability. Not every child will be a university graduate, but every child will be given the tools and the hope to achieve their own independent, productive future. Sponsorship transforms lives. For more information about sponsorship, visit our website at www.shelterthem.com, or contact David Jenkins, our sponsorship coordinator, at davidjenkins@shelterthem.com. It will transform your life too!

A Great Education Needs a Dedicated and Impassioned Teacher

Jules Higiro has been working to improve the lives of children in Rwanda even before Shelter Them was founded. When his sisters, Jocelyne Alexandre and Josephine Murphy, visited Rwanda from Canada in 2005, Jules and his mother had organized a feeding program in Kigali for street children orphaned by the genocide against Tutsis. Josephine and Jocelyne started Shelter Them to provide funds for that work, and Jules became Country Manager in Rwanda. He has held that role ever since, until the end of last year. Tau Gauthier, the man who Jules selected as his replacement, has taken on that position.



To know Jules is to know that he is a very modest man. When he was asked to reflect on his time with Shelter Them, and to highlight his accomplishments over the years, he was very reluctant. (That is why it has taken until May to acknowledge his contributions!) So, he talked about the importance of the move from Kigali to Gateko, and all the benefits that resulted: the community centre and houses that Shelter Them built, the ECDC, the new well, the farming and sewing cooperatives, the *vision* of Shelter Them. He never talked about himself. He gave all credit to the *team*, in Rwanda and in Canada. He said, “This is what makes Shelter Them to be unique. We are really a family.” And he is correct, up to a point.

But every team needs a captain, and every family needs a guardian, and to the kids we have served over the years, that person is Jules.

When Shelter Them teams visited Rwanda from Canada, and there was an event scheduled, team members had to get used to waiting for Jules, who needed just a few more minutes to help a woman or a child who just showed up and he could not turn away. He could never bring himself to say anything bad about any of the kids. When asked about a teenager who had gotten himself into some serious trouble, Jules would tell the team that the boy had just been “naughty”, and he would change. That naughty teenager is now working for an NGO like Shelter Them, working for children who had been just like him. When Jules was late to a meeting of the farming cooperative in Gateko, he just had to stop when he saw a young girl, who was clearly



sick, sitting by the side of the road. He was late for the meeting, but that was when our sponsorship program expanded to include children from Gateko. Every day, Jules has worked tirelessly on behalf of children and families in need. And they love and respect him for it.

It is hard to imagine Shelter Them without Jules, but the work will go on because Jules created the vision and formed the team. When he said that Shelter Them is a family, he also said, "Let us keep that same spirit." And we will. Jules will make sure of it, because he will remain a member of the Rwandan Board of Shelter Them. He will never be able to leave completely. He's a part of the team!

Every child deserves a champion – an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.

- Rita Pierson

