

ANNUAL UPDATE

July 2020- June 2021

Introduction

This fiscal year started during the COVID-19 pandemic and began in fear and panic because of this very infectious and deadly virus. Repetitive lockdowns and COVID-19 preventive measures were quickly put in place by the Rwandan ministry to try to control the progress of the disease and save lives. The coming of the Delta variant worsened the situation, increasing the number of deaths. The majority of YEGO's beneficiaries were affected by losing the opportunity to earn a living and having to face a pandemic that had no cure. They were afraid of a disease they couldn't see and didn't know where they could catch it. They were in a state of panic and had no food. The number of hungry people increased. This situation caused a lot of panic, worry, anxiety, trauma, and depression among the people of Rwanda. As YEGO Rwanda has limited resources, only the hungriest beneficiaries received help.

The challenge now is that if the infection rate of the virus continues to rise, Rwandan hospitals with very limited medical facilities and resources may become overwhelmed, and infected people's access to medical treatments may become very difficult.

The zones followup

There are six zones: four women's zones, one girls' zone and one boys' zone. During the period of the pandemic, YEGO staff kept in touch with their beneficiaries by phone to inquire how they were doing. They provided comfort, counselling support and distributed food to the hungriest of them. Only a few home visits were paid to very sick women who needed the staff's physical presence, food and prayers.

Women who made a difference

During the pandemic, YEGO staff were able to identify a few women whose stories we have a lot to learn from. Thanks to their trauma healing, resilience, endurance, creativity, love of justice, stamina and hard work, they were able to make a great difference in their homes, zones and communities. I hope you will enjoy reading the following stories.

Ruth is 55 years old and a survivor of the 1994 Genocide. During the Genocide, she lost her husband, three children and her siblings. She was raped and got infected with AIDS. She later had a boyfriend, and they had a daughter Berthe. Ruth decided not to marry him but to remain single and raise her daughter. Ruth got in touch with YEGO Rwanda and participated in the first healing retreat. It was decided to support Ruth with counselling and food and provide her daughter with educational support. Ruth sells tomatoes on the streets out of her basket to make a living. But as this is illegal, she could not continue doing this. She also attempted making envelopes out of old journals to sell them to shoppers. This

business wasn't sustainable because of stiff competition. Later she lost her capital. As the situation was getting out of hand, in consultation with her daughter, she decided to start a new business of charcoal selling. But Ruth did not have the capital.

Her daughter Berthe, who has been part of YEGO Rwanda's therapeutic music and dance program, saved all the money she received as support for transportation. She made her savings over two years on her account and was able to rescue her mother. She gave her mother 20,000frs (\$27 CAD). Ruth then began her charcoal business, selling bits of charcoal out of a big bag. Now, after 7 months, she is selling charcoal out of 10 bags. Now they have what they need but still need some counselling support and school fees for Berthe.



Ruth selling charcoal

Eliane is now 60 years old. During the 1994 Genocide, she lost her husband and six of her children. She survived but had a baby due to rape. She was never comfortable with her daughter, who she called Agnes. But after attending YEGO Rwanda healing retreats in 2015 and 2016, her attitude about her child changed. She started accepting her daughter and caring for her. She began developing love for her daughter and doing good things for her. She struggled to raise her due to poverty as most of her friends refused to support her because of the idea that Agnes was a product of one of the criminals who raped her mother.

Later, Eliane remarried. In this new marriage, they had five more children. The second husband disliked Agnes and harassed her. He finally asked Eliane to chase her away from their home.

Eliane decided not to send her daughter away, but to stand for her. Instead, she decided to divorce the man. She left him and went to live with her daughter but also took her other five children. But life became very challenging for Eliane, especially with lack for food for her children and no money for house rent. YEGO Rwanda supported her by providing counselling, food, and school fees for three of her children, including Agnes.

Agnes was brilliant at school. At the end of her secondary school in 2018, she was one of best performers on the national exam. She later won a foreign scholarship for university studies in the USA. While she was there studying, she took small jobs during her free time, and managed to save money. Last month, thanks to her savings, Agnes was able to buy a house for her mum within the city of Kigali.



Counselling services

Since March 2020, out of more than 240 women and youth beneficiaries, YEGO Rwanda staff have identified three women very sick of natural diseases and six infected by COVID-19. One woman had bone cancer and died yesterday. Another has improved and one is struggling with AIDS. All six with COVID-19 were admitted to three Kigali hospitals and have fortunately recovered and are back home with their families. We are in touch with them by phone and continue to provide them with counselling and food support.

Counselling has helped the beneficiaries of YEGO Rwanda – women, girls and boys. Most of the women who attended healing retreats have healed, recovered hope, and are eager to work hard and earn a living. But COVID-19 has added another layer of trauma and has been a stumbling block in people's lives. But YEGO staff have kept touch with them, to encourage them and address these issues in their talks. They were also able to provide counselling support to abused children, street children and to others – women, youth, men and families - who were living in panic or had lost their dear ones to COVID-19.



Brandine with Athanasie and Emmanuel on her wedding day

The impact of past healing retreats on traumatized girls has also been great. The girls who have healed were able to make important decisions in their lives this year. In fact, in 2021 we celebrated the weddings of four young ladies. YEGO Rwanda staff were happy to attend these weddings and see these former beneficiaries healing, transformed and marrying to create their own families.

Brandine, pictured here, is one of the pioneers of our healing retreats. She invited Athanasie and me to stand as part of her family at her wedding, as she is an orphan. She was excited to see us at her wedding and we were happy to be part of the celebration.

Food distribution to vulnerable households

Each month we supply food to ten of the neediest families. We do it on a rotation basis, one zone after another, until all the needy households within the six zones are served. Then we start over again. But we strictly observe the health safety measures against COVID-19. I have added some pictures to give you an idea of what this is like.



Gatesi Excellence Daycare

Gatesi Excellence Daycare has been doing well. It now has 81 children, with 5 staff who take care of them daily. The children at Gatesi Excellence Daycare completed their second quarter on July 9th, one day before the recent lockdown. It is a joy to notice that the children went home and none of them had caught COVID-19. They came back to study for the third term, ending on September 17, 2021.

Most of these children come from vulnerable families with malnutrition. But we have made efforts to ensure the children get healthy nutrition when they are at school. We offer them a very healthy breakfast of porridge made from sorghum and soja which are very nutritive. We have very recently added milk to their menu to help them heal from malnutrition and have good health.



Children drinking porridge at Gatesi Excellence Daycare



Gatesi staff getting to know each other

Education support



University graduate Bea on graduation day

YEGO Rwanda continues to provide educational support to vulnerable children in primary, secondary and university. The education has been very much affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns. But currently, the sponsored students have gone back to school, and they are studying. We are proud to report that the one of our single university students, Bea, has completed her three-year Bachelor of Hotel Management degree. She graduated on August 19, 2021. She now has a job working in one of the big hotels in Kigali. She is now happy to support her sickly mother and eight siblings.

YEGO Rwanda staff vacation

The staff took a five-day vacation from June 17-22 at Kingfisher Resort located 60 kms north of Kigali near Muhazi lake. The staff had been working hard, going through challenging times and needed time for relaxation. Divine, Athanasie and Emmanuel had a great time of relaxation together within this very beautiful place located close to the lake.



Divine, Emmanuel and Athanasie at Kingfisher Resort

We used two hours a day to reflect upon our YEGO Rwanda work and plan for the future of our ministry.

We used the rest of our time for personal retreat and relaxation. In having our personal time for meditation and contemplation we were also able to de-traumatize ourselves from the traumatic effects and stress received through our counselling services and work. We returned home very relaxed and refreshed and determined to do more to make a difference for our people.



Conclusion

July 2020 to June 2021 was a year unlike previous years. It was a year of grief, worries, more trauma, despair, and lack of necessities to many people. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, many YEGO Rwanda programs could not be implemented such as dance and music, healing retreats, general assemblies, Christmas parties, computer-assisted learning and sewing programs.

But in consideration of the progress currently made in vaccination by health authorities, we hope that early next year COVID-19 might have come down. So, at YEGO Rwanda, we plan to have our cancelled programs resume. We are touch with Dr. Kae Neufeld, our key partner and facilitator in conducting healing retreats. She is willing and planning to come back next March 2022 to help facilitate our three healing retreats.

All these transformative projects are made possible because of the support we receive from our YEGO Canada board members, St. Andrew's United Church, and friends across Canada and the USA. We are very grateful to you all. Thanks a lot for making a great difference among vulnerable Rwandans. God bless you all.

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