

YEGO RWANDA ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

INTRODUCTION

2020 began like any other year. At the eve of the new year, so many Christians were in their homes with their families, and others in their churches to pray and wait for the new year. But in March 2020 the new year turned out to be a bad year due to the Corona virus which occurred in the middle of the month and destroyed many human lives along with the world economy.

YEGO beneficiaries were severely affected - losing their jobs and opportunities for work, and living in fear. Many single women and vulnerable beneficiaries have young children. They lost opportunities to go out to work and earn a living as they stayed home with their children, hungry under the lockdown. They contacted YEGO Rwanda for help.

With support from YEGO Canada, funds were used to provide food to a total of 30 families during the lockdown, plus 15 families received support just before COVID-19. There were many who needed food but YEGO Rwanda could only support the neediest families - particularly vulnerable single women.



EDUCATION

Education is key to YEGO Rwanda because it equips and empowers children, youth and women with knowledge and skills to better understand the world they live in and guides them toward independence and self-reliance.

GATESI DAYCARE

The Gatesi Daycare was founded by Athanasie and Emmanuel Gatera. It takes care of 28 children of vulnerable single women, many of whom are supported by YEGO Rwanda. The main objective of this daycare is to provide care to the least privileged in our community, providing them with an educational foundation and a conducive environment for growth and healing.

This year YEGO Rwanda has sponsored 10 vulnerable children aged between 2-6 years whose mothers are single and poor. This allows the women to get out to work at odd jobs so they can sustain their households and support their children.

The sponsoring of these children covers:

- care during the day
- teaching of elementary subjects such as counting, English and French
- breakfast and lunch
- school uniform



SPONSORSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND UNIVERSITY

This program continues to empower children and youth with knowledge and skills for their future growth, self-sustenance, healing and wellness. YEGO Rwanda currently sponsors a total of 31 vulnerable children and youth:

- 10 children in daycare
- 3 students in primary school
- 17 youth at secondary school
- 1 young adult at university

Due to COVID-19, the schools were closed in March 2020 and the children came home for the lockdown. The reopening of schools and universities is planned for September 2020 in case COVID-19 subsides.

Some schools and universities have organized online classes for their students. But this was only possible in cities, such as the capital city of Kigali where Internet is available, not in villages. Our sponsored children could not benefit from online teaching as the schools they attend did not have the means to organize this online program.

DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL MATERIALS

This year YEGO Rwanda provided scholastic materials to a total of 42 vulnerable youth: 17 sponsored youth (mentioned above) and 25 from the dancing group. Students are not allowed to attend classes without school supplies.

SANITARY SUPPLY DISTRIBUTION

A couple of years ago, YEGO Rwanda started a sanitary supply distribution program to help young ladies in Gishore secondary school from missing classes for days because they lack menstrual hygiene products. We thank Anne Hill and Beth Holmes for their help with the sanitary items.

We have put this item in the budget so we can continue donating sanitary items in schools to support these needy girls. We plan to have the sanitary items made locally through YEGO's sewing program, but first we need to find the proper design.

COMPUTER ASSISTED LEARNING PROGRAM

This program empowers youth and women with skills in computers and English to help them acquire knowledge and access job opportunities.



Graduation of the first class of the Computer Assisted Learning program took place at Masaka. Dr. Kae Neufeld and Athanasie Gahondogo, board member of YEGO Rwanda, officiated at both the graduation and enrolling of a new group of students. Four students received certificates of attendance and eight received certificates of completion. Those who attended were one woman, nine girls and two boys. Dancing and singing helped celebrate this special event.

SEWING PROGRAM

YEGO Rwanda launched a sewing program on March 4, 2020 for vulnerable girls and women to help them acquire skills to create their own work and earn a living. There are women who struggle to put food on the table or rent a house. YEGO hopes to equip these women with sewing skills so they can earn a living, but due to COVID-19, the program has been postponed until September when we hope the schools will be reopened.

Dr. Kae Neufeld and Athanasie Gahondogo cut the ribbon in the presence of a community representative for the official launching of the new sewing program.



DANCE AND MUSIC PROGRAM

Rwandan traditional dance and music is a therapeutic program organized by YEGO Rwanda to help youth develop their talents, break their isolation, connect with each other, develop friendships and heal. This year the dancing group was composed of 25 youth dancers.

The dancers welcomed guests from Canada and the USA, who enjoyed dancing with them. But with the coming of COVID-19 and the lockdown, the dance and music program was postponed until the government allows such programs to resume again.

This year we plan to consolidate the dancing group to ensure that after two years of intensive practice the youth can start dancing in dance clubs for a living. We also plan to get them to learn how to play different Rwandan musical instruments to help them become professionals.

It was sad to lose Honorine in May this year. She was one of our best dancers who died a sudden death. YEGO community has been in shock due to the loss of this young and dynamic lady. Honorine is pictured third from the left in dance uniform with her friends ready to perform.



SPORTS MINISTRY

YEGO Rwanda has been working with Masaka local administration and five schools within and outside Kigali. YEGO has been donating sportswear, balls and other items to promote sports for good health, unity, reconciliation and talent development among youth. But due to COVID-19 and the closing of schools, this sports activity could not take place. We are waiting to see if the schools will open again in September 2020 to resume this work.

We thank Geoff and Shirley Wilfong-Pritchard and Christine Magill for their donations of sportswear and other items that have enabled us to support these five schools and Masaka local administration (which became the best soccer team last year).

CHRISTMAS PARTY 2019

The 2019 Christmas celebration was a special day. This party took place Dec 23, at the regular Kigali Parents School hall. In attendance were 43 children, three staff and two guest speakers - Pastor Pacifique from Kigali and Mrs. Jenifer a YEGO Rwanda board member.

The party was a time for beneficiaries to meet, enjoy and celebrate together and connect with each other. The speakers encouraged the youth to learn and emulate the following advice if they wish to be successful in the future:

- avoid indulging in bad behaviour and habits that destroy their lives
- make good decisions for positive directions so they can overcome traps and obstacles
- avoid being tempted by those who want to trap them into bad actions
- be content with what they have
- leave laziness and work hard to earn a living
- avoid negative influences and addictive behaviours that may affect them in the future



STAFF HOLIDAY AND RETREAT

YEGO Rwanda's staff - Divine, Athanasie and Emmanuel - took a 5-day holiday at the Benedictine Catholic Sisters' guesthouse in Rubavu (near the Democratic Republic of Congo border) from January 16 to 21, 2020. The purpose of the retreat was to rest, reflect on the work of YEGO Rwanda, and plan three healing retreats for March 2020.

The staff enjoyed this holiday – the conducive environment, good rooms and delicious meals. The main dish enjoyed by the staff was rice accompanied by little fish called "Isambaza."

WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS



On February 26, 2020 Susan Dueck from Edmonton spoke to 101 teachers from Kigali Parents school on the topic of stress. The presentation was well received. The teachers enjoyed the presentation and asked for another one next year.

COUNSELLING FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN

This year YEGO Rwanda provided counselling services to a total of 147 persons:

- 12 Computer Assisted Learning students
- 60 women
- 15 boys
- 60 youth

We provided counselling through one-to-one visits, group counselling and telephone calls due to COVID-19 which restricted our movement and physical closeness.

HEALING RETREATS

This year three retreats took place over three weekends from late February to mid-March at Gihindamuyaga, a monastery located three hours away from Rwanda's capital city, Kigali.

Retreat 1: The Elite Newcomers' Retreat, Feb 28 – Mar 1, 2020

The first healing retreat was organized for women with traumatic issues who had some level of education and wanted to form their own cluster. Overall, 16 women attended. In addition, there were three staff, two supporting staff and members of the core group, plus Canadians Dr. Kae Neufeld, Susan Dueck and Mackensy Cumin.

The drive to Gihindamuyaga was characterized by incessant rainfall. However, the ladies were reassured and welcomed by wide smiles from Kae, Susan, Mackensy and Emmanuel.



It was indeed a breakthrough to see women who were shy at first and did not know each other, open up and start having conversations with each other as the days went by. The retreat went well. It was restful and characterized by the sharing of life stories, music and dance. The ladies shared their stories way past midnight. It was lovely to see them express themselves and bond.

Kae, Susan and Mackensy led sessions on compassion, forgiveness and finding peace. They also read from children's storybooks on being human and filling invisible buckets to signify treating others with compassion and love. The ladies were overjoyed by the chance to share their stories and be vulnerable.

They said they felt lighter in their hearts, and were so pleased to be given the opportunity to attend such a transforming and life-changing retreat.

At the end of this first retreat, the women gave a parting gift to the team - Kae, Mackenzie, Susan, Emmanuel and Athanasie. It was a gift of traditional dancing and singing, and one of the women gave a heartfelt speech. On their return trip, the women had already created a Whats App group, the most

popular internet-based form of communication in Rwanda, so they could keep communicating with each other as they go on with their lives.

Retreat 2: Returning Women and Girls, Mar 6 – 8, 2020

The second retreat attracted 22 women who had attended a previous retreat. Also present were YEGO Rwanda staff members Divine, Athanasie and Emmanuel Gatera, translators Grace and Mercy Gatera, and facilitators Kae, Susan and Mackensy. This 2nd level group of women on their healing journeys was invited to be empowered and mentored into an advanced 3rd level group that will provide leadership and follow-up work to retreat participants in their zones, both within and outside Kigali.

The women congregated at the Nyabugogo bus park on March 6, and had a 3-hour bus ride to Gihindamuyaga, where they were welcomed by Kae, Susan, Mackensy and Emmanuel who had come there a day before. The ladies introduced themselves by saying their names and their favourite colours. Since all the women were previous retreat participants, there was an air of freedom and comfort, as the women were already familiar with each other.



After settling in and having lunch, Kae started the sessions with a teaching on self-love, compassion, healing, forgiveness and faith. Mackensy and Susan led sessions on trusting in the Lord's ability to provide.

Retreat 3: The Inaugural Men's Retreat, Mar 13 – 15, 2020

Kae, Pastor Werner De Jong from Edmonton and Emmanuel held YEGO's first retreat for men. This retreat was highly anticipated not only by both the YEGO Rwanda and Canada teams but also by the men who were attending it. The day dawned bright and rainless as the men headed to Gihindamuyaga. Despite the looming threat posed by the swiftly spreading COVID-19, the excitement was palpable.

Kae gave a quick introductory session to get the men acquainted with each other. It gave them the opportunity to meet, share their stories and heal. Most of the participants had been experiencing issues with family, education, drugs and addiction. They needed support. The young men enjoyed having a safe space to share their experiences, learn skills to better understand the issues they were going through, and develop tools to deal with their addictions.

Emmanuel gave a presentation on the root causes of the Genocide in 1994. Werner taught on the power of stories, giving a lesson on Joseph's life, challenges and God's plans for him to save his people from famine in Egypt. He also gave a brief sharing session where the participants were awed by the openness that was displayed in his lesson.

There were two sharing sessions where participants shared their stories, feelings and identified how they felt. After dinner the first night, a quick prayer was held, after which the young men had a game of cards before they called it a night.

This retreat was peppered with 30-minute sessions of intense football (soccer). The young men also enjoyed craft sessions including building tall towers in teams of two, using clay and match sticks. These craft sessions allowed them to unleash their creativity. Late on the second day of the retreat, the men hosted a talent show to showcase their different talents. There was a lot of comedy, dancing, singing and laughter.

They were all pleased at how they were able to make memories and leave their past behind due to the retreat. They now have a What's App group where they keep in regular contact.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND FOOD SUPPORT



This year was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic in the middle of March 2020 which has ravaged the world in a very short time. This pandemic brought on many challenges such as job loss, hunger, fear, fragility, insecurity, despair and death. Rwanda has not escaped this tragedy.

Many Rwandans have been hit hard by hunger and job loss, especially families with sole providers. The majority of YEGO's beneficiaries are single mothers who have been struggling to get food on the table since they were unable to work due to the lockdown. Thanks to YEGO Canada's support, YEGO Rwanda was able to supply 30 beneficiary families with food.

YEGO Rwanda earmarked funds from the July 2019 –June 2020 budget which were not used because of the coronavirus lockdown and allocated them for food support. The distribution was carried out by YEGO staff members Emmanuel, Athanasie and Divine. Mercy Gatera took pictures.

The team used Emmanuel's RAV4 car and took five days to accomplish this work. Due to COVID-19 preventive measures, the food was dropped off near or in front of homes, sometimes on street corners, while still respecting the privacy of the beneficiaries. The staff also reached a few homes of beneficiaries who were mentally unwell or physically weak. Along with the food items, every family received hope-centered counselling and prayer.

Each family received the following items:

- 5 kg rice
- 5 kg maize flour
- 5 kg beans
- 5 kg sugar
- 1 unit soap
- 1 unit salt
- 1 litre oil



COVID-19 difficulties for YEGO Rwanda guests

COVID-19 came and quickly spread in Rwanda in the middle of March 2020. This coincided with the time Kae, Susan, Mackensy and Werner were still in Rwanda to help facilitate the healing retreats. As Susan and Mackensy left early, they returned home to Canada while international flights were still allowed.

Werner and Kae, who spent more time in Rwanda while facilitating the men's retreat, experienced difficulty as their plane tickets were cancelled without forewarning. They were alarmed as they wondered if this meant that they would not make it to Canada. Luckily, they were able to get tickets on the last flights leaving Rwanda. We are thankful to God for making this work.

The pictures below show Divine, Athanasie, Gloria and Emmanuel saying farewell to Mackensy, Susan, Kae and Werner as we were seeing them off at Kigali International Airport.



CONCLUSION

The first three months of 2020 were very busy and challenging, but full of lessons and experiences.

Lesson 1: It is so important to take a rest to plan the retreats, and before very intensive work such as holding three healing retreats in March.

Lesson 2: Young men face serious issues, as women and girls do. They also need healing retreats to heal.

Lesson 3: Educated women are wounded psychologically just as any other person. They struggle with stress and traumatic issues and want a safe space to meet as a separate cluster to share their stories, learn from one another's experiences and heal.

Lesson 4: YEGO Rwanda needs to plan for more support to feed hungry families. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the need through the lockdown and loss of jobs.

YEGO Rwanda thanks YEGO Canada and St. Andrew's United Church in Edmonton for their great support. We also thank Kae Neufeld, Susan Dueck, Mackensy Cumin and Werner De Jong for coming to Rwanda in February and March 2020 to help facilitate our three healing retreats. We thank Christine Magill for her advocacy and for supporting us through proceeds of the sale of her book, *The Hope that Remains: Canadian Survivors of the Rwandan Genocide*. We thank all of our friends and donors from Canada and the US who also stand with us, pray for us, and financially support YEGO Rwanda to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable Rwandans. May God bless you all.

Emmanuel Gatera
Executive Director / YEGO Rwanda
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P. O. Box 5536 Kigali – Rwanda

Tel: +250 788301878/0788759414 | Email: YEGOrwanda11@gmail.com

YEGORwanda.net