

AMAKURU

FALL 2022 NEWSLETTER



ONE DREAM

ONE TEAM!

Dear Friends,

Gregory Herrle (an AFJHAR board member), Lou Burnett (our friend & videographer) and I were humbled to experience our first visit to Journey House Actions (JHA) in rural Gashora, Rwanda in September. We are excited to share some of our experiences with you in this Fall 2022 edition of *Amakuru*.

We had so many memorable experiences with our friends in Gashora that it is difficult to convey all that the trip meant to us. A few summary observations follow.

- It was a blessing to build personal relationships with the JHA staff. The three of us agreed that no number of stories, pictures, videos or discussions can convey what we saw & experienced firsthand during our visit.

- Rogers Kimuli, Executive Director of JHA, has recruited a strong management team of young, dedicated & selfless leaders. They share a common vision & goals & they all shared how Rogers has personally transformed their lives.

- Rogers is very intentional about everything he does. Virtually all activities & discussions have a purpose & reinforce his long-term vision & message to build a sustainable organization & an inclusive & self-reliant community.



- Rogers & the other JHA staff do amazing work in transforming the lives of Gashora children & families. Rogers is an extraordinarily compassionate & selfless person who truly loves those most in need. He exemplifies being a servant leader.

- Several young people have significant responsibility & work quite hard. They are amazing leaders especially considering the enormous challenges they experienced earlier in life.

- Although JHA is an apolitical, non-religious organization, Rogers & most of the staff appear to have very strong faith that guides them in their work.

- Rogers is very cost conscious & abhors wasting money. We can be confident that our grant money is spent wisely.

We would like to thank all of our generous friends & donors for supporting our work in Gashora. Please know you are helping transform lives & change family histories.

Greg Herrle, AFJHAR President

MESSAGE FROM ROGERS

We were all incredibly excited for the arrival of Papa Greg (Rikundo), Lou (Munezero) & Gregory (Ngabo). They brought a wide assortment of gifts, toys & other material supplies, but what meant the most to us was their smiles. I call it “Smilism,” which is the thought that joy must come first in all human interaction, whether it be with your family, friends or strangers from a different part of the world. The power of this joy far exceeds anything that can fit in a suitcase.

The world is so much about capitalism, communism or some other form of “ism.” My question is “How about when we smile at each other?” That is smilism. It is the other “ism” the world may not have thought much about. It is beyond boundaries, beyond borders. During their trip, our friends from AFJHAR met individuals working in the art gallery, played games with the children at school, worked on the farm & shared meals & conversations with the leaders of JHA. These moments are what make visits like theirs so meaningful to the people of Gashora.

For us, the biggest thing we would like to say is that the day our friends came to Rwanda, that is smilism. The biggest thing they shared with us was their smiles. I hope their visit is the first of many. Please come visit us. It means a lot. It brings us inspiration. It makes us wake up again & inspires us to transform our community. The cave can be very dark, but at the end, there is light. Our visitors shared their light with us.

Rogers Kimuli
JHA Executive Director

REFLECTIONS FROM RWANDA

From Lou Burnett & Gregory Herrle



To keep it short and sweet, my trip to Gashora was beautiful. Everything from the land to people alike. It's not perfect as nothing in life is. Loved to see the strength and grit of the folk. They have their needs, & it seemed to be a bit difficult to always get to them, but they made a way.

Rwanda - "The land of a thousand hills" is selling it short. Loved the simplicity, similarities & different dynamics, and being able to learn, teach and communicate. The cottage where we laid our head down at night was pleasant.

In the village it was extremely dark at night, I never noticed my street lamps at home until not having them. It's a very rural village, filled with children and teens being mentored to be young leaders. The elderly work as security at night. We shared warm milk which is a symbol of peace between individuals but is also very tasty. Sweetest onions I've ever eaten and fresh avocados were a true delight!

During our short time together, we laughed, played soccer, sweated, and shared stories and wisdom. They hosted us at a giant dinner with the leaders of the village. I'm going to coin it "the dinner of thousand stories."

Truly grateful to be treated with such kindness and a welcoming presence. We ate, worked, fed children together, danced & partied, prayed & stayed together and it truly felt like family.

I can't wait to return with more supplies & help out in any capacity.

LOU BURNETT

In Kinyarwanda, the word Ubumuntu refers to the act of being human, including showing kindness, patience, and love toward others. During our 10-day visit to Journey House Actions Rwanda, we constantly experienced Ubumuntu while walking down the street, observing teachers at work, and sharing meals with our generous hosts. We arrived in Gashora after roughly 24 hours of travel, greeted by a giant hug from Rogers and a 10 pm welcome dinner to meet much of the management team.

I should have known this 3-hour dinner would be indicative of many of the experiences to come over the week – a unique equilibrium of doing nothing while waiting for Rogers' direction and spending hours listening and learning about JHA and its leaders. We toured the numerous JHA facilities – the school where 300 kids learn and 600 kids are fed daily, the piggery where older children learn responsibility and economic development, the cow farm that produces over 200 liters of milk daily, and the agriculture farm where a 15-year old former homeless boy is in charge of food production from the nearly 6 acres of land.

The impact of JHA on the local community is undeniable. As young kids ran up to us to hold our hands, and village elders called out "Journey House!" as we walked by, it was hard to believe we were in a place that was hit so hard by the Rwandan genocide only 28 years ago.

Visits to the National and Gashora memorials were accompanied by much sorrow, reflection, and tears. Reconciliation and forgiveness is a long road, but as an African proverb quoted at the National Memorial says, "a tree can only be straightened when it is young." JHA's leaders – most of whom are younger than 30, some much younger – are passionate about providing a better life for the next generation. Most have direct stories of the genocide, and many have experienced the very same hardships they are now helping to alleviate.

Yet the kindness, patience, and love – the Ubumuntu – is felt in every conversation, every embrace, and every walk through Gashora.

GREGORY HERRLE

AFJHAR BOARD MEMBER



GIFTS & SUPPLIES

We took eight 50-pound suitcases of gifts & supplies with us on our visit to Gashora. Thank you to those who donated items or money. Some of the items included:

- Baseballs, gloves & bats
- Basketball jerseys
- Soccer shoes, jerseys, shin pads & shorts
- First aid kits, wound care supplies, pediatric OTC medicines for the Children's Center
- 100 pairs of donated prescription eyeglasses & readers (thank you St. John Vianney School)
- School & art supplies for the Children's Center
- Dyes, threads & related items for basket weavers & sewers
- Four large rolls of PUL fabric to make sanitary pads
- Medical exam gloves
- Solar lamps

We also bought 100 pairs of new tennis shoes & new clothing for the children while in Rwanda. The JHA children had the opportunity to pick out their own shoes, which was quite a treat! The children wash & clean their tennis shoes every day. Lastly, we gave thank you necklaces to the women who took care of us during our visit & Green Bay Packer T-shirts to the JHA leadership team.



Down On The Farm

Thanks in significant part to AFJHAR'S 2021 Food Basket Appeal, JHA owns & operates a Dairy Farm with over 20 cows, 7 calves & one busy bull. The cows produce 150 to 250 liters of fresh milk daily for the children, staff, farm workers & elders in the community. In addition to providing nutritious milk, the Dairy Farm creates numerous jobs, leadership opportunities for local youth & health insurance for its workers. It is transforming the community. We even had the opportunity to milk some cows during our visit.



Earlier this year, AFJHAR provided JHA with a \$100,000 grant to purchase 6 acres of farmland along beautiful Lake Mirayi. This land supports the JHA "Seeds of Love" Farm that grows onions, green peppers, tomatoes & many other vegetables with the goal of creating a more self-sufficient community. During our visit we harvested green peppers & planted some other crops. This land will also be the future home of JHA's vision for another pre-K school, a primary school, girls & boys dormitories, a guesthouse & an art, basket weaving & sewing gallery for JHA's workforce development program. JHA also teaches effective farming techniques to the villagers.



Abdoul, who is now 15 years old, is responsible for all the planting at the Seeds of Love Farm. JHA took him in at 12 years old after he had spent several years living on the streets after being abandoned by his parents. He was so grateful for being fed that he set a goal to feed 500 families in the community. Abdoul already achieved his goal thanks to the Seeds of Love Farm. He, like many of the other youth at JHA, is an amazing young leader who has benefited from the guidance of JHA. It was a great pleasure to spend time with him during our visit.

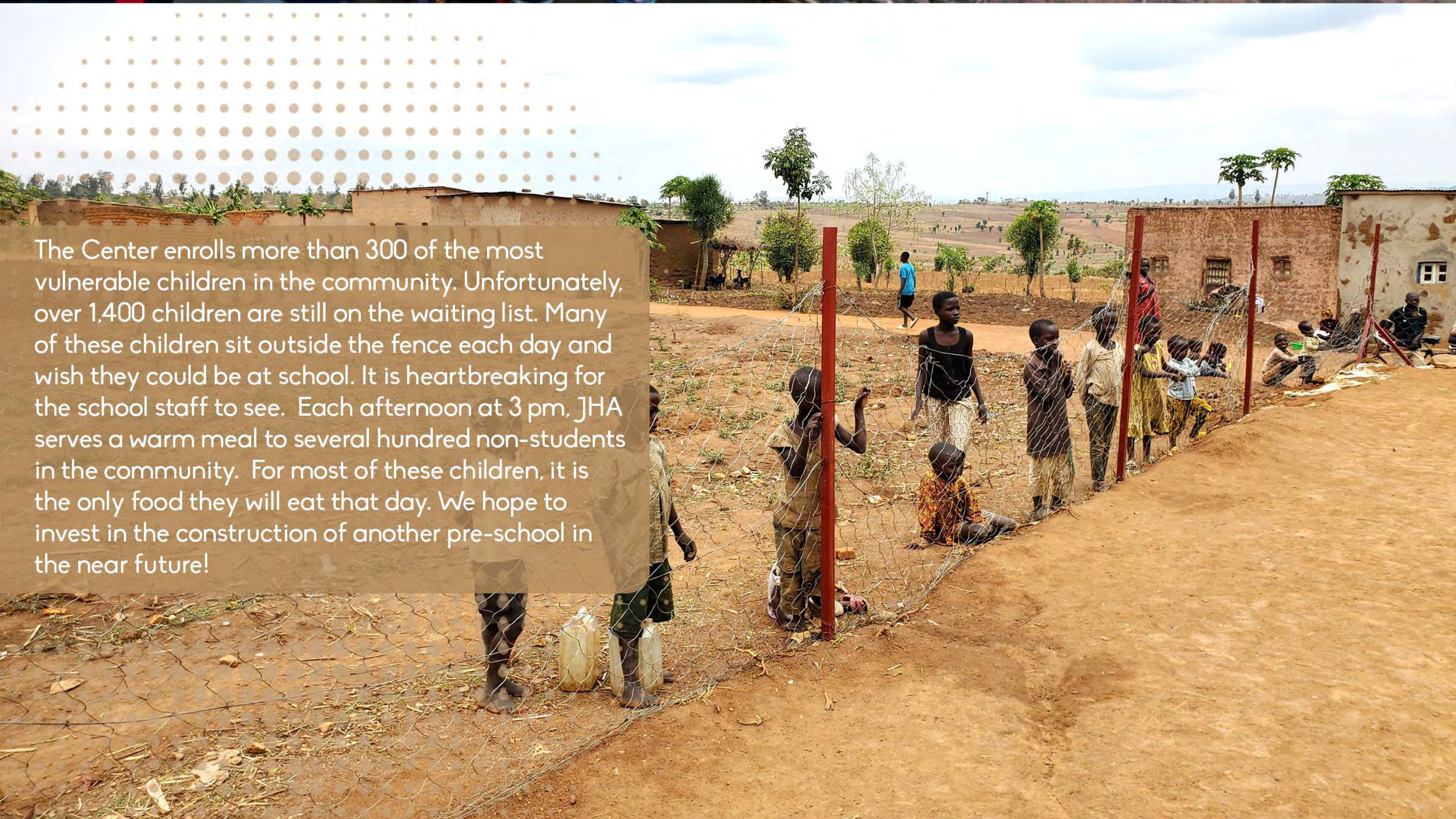


SCHOOL NEWS!

In 2021, thanks to the financial support of many generous donors, the Norman & Marlyn Herrle Children's Center was constructed. This pre-K school has three grade levels for children ages 3, 4 and 5, respectively. During our visit we were blessed to honor the most recent graduating class of children & their families at an amazing graduation ceremony.

[WATCH HERE!](#)

The school operates 5 days per week all year long & offers recreational programs on the weekends. We had the great pleasure to meet the dedicated & selfless JHA caregivers (teachers) who do an amazing job with the children. It was an honor to serve lunch to the children at the school. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, during the past year AFJHAR contributed at least \$30,000 each quarter in support of JHA's Food Basket Program to feed the students two meals each school day. Food security in the region has been affected by local droughts & the war in Ukraine. The malnutrition rate has been reduced by over 80% in our students.



The Center enrolls more than 300 of the most vulnerable children in the community. Unfortunately, over 1,400 children are still on the waiting list. Many of these children sit outside the fence each day and wish they could be at school. It is heartbreaking for the school staff to see. Each afternoon at 3 pm, JHA serves a warm meal to several hundred non-students in the community. For most of these children, it is the only food they will eat that day. We hope to invest in the construction of another pre-school in the near future!



We also attended a ceremony dedicating the Norman & Marlyn Herrle Children's Center. We would like to thank everyone who supported the construction of this one of kind school, which has become a model for early childhood education in Rwanda.

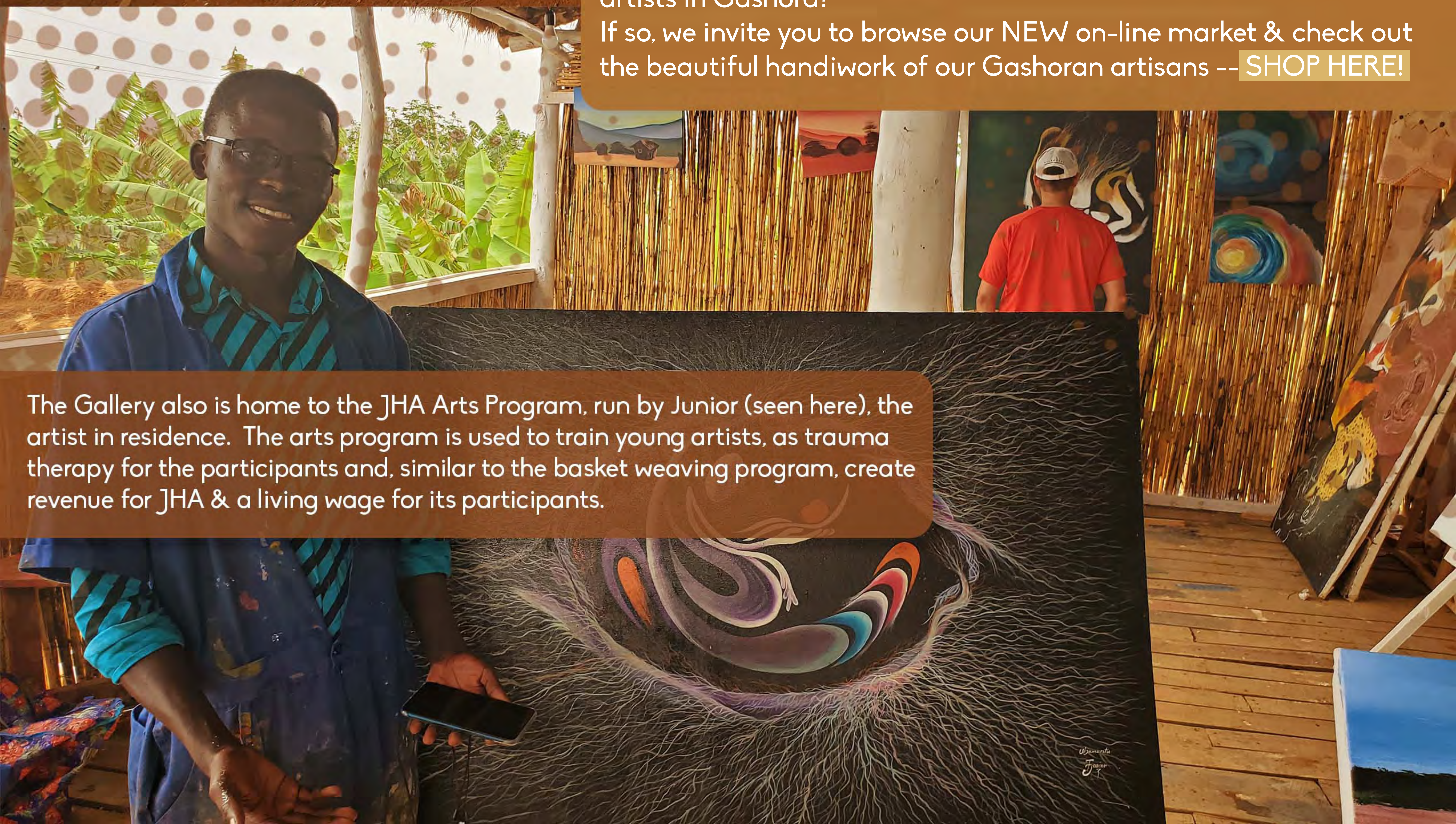
Art Goes Virtual

JHA's workforce development programs are designed to create meaningful jobs for the community and provide a "living wage" to the participants. The Basket Weaving & Arts Program are two examples. Each morning during our visit we awoke to the chatter of the women basket weavers, many with their young babies, as they arrived at JHA's Ikirebe Gallery to create their beautiful baskets.



Are you looking for unique holiday gifts or accessories for your home? Would you like to provide a living wage to our basket weavers & artists in Gashora?

If so, we invite you to browse our NEW on-line market & check out the beautiful handiwork of our Gashoran artisans -- [SHOP HERE!](#)




The Gallery also is home to the JHA Arts Program, run by Junior (seen here), the artist in residence. The arts program is used to train young artists, as trauma therapy for the participants and, similar to the basket weaving program, create revenue for JHA & a living wage for its participants.



SEEDS OF LOVE HOMES

During our visit to Gashora we visited two rental homes that JHA uses to house 32 homeless boys & 16 homeless girls from the Gashora area. Many of these young children were abandoned by their parents & left to fend for themselves while living on the streets sleeping in boxes. Often they (the boys raising their hands in this photo) went 2 or 3 days without eating & were exposed to many forms of abuse. Rogers Kimuli & JHA provide a safe haven to these vulnerable young children and enroll them in JHA's Norman & Marlyn Herrle Children's Center or in the local primary school depending on their ages & level of development.

To see a video of the Seeds of Love Home, click [HERE!](#)



Although the children typically sleep 2 or 3 to a bed, they all expressed how grateful they are to sleep in a bed, have food to eat daily & feel loved & safe, often for the first time. The JHA Seeds of Love Homes create a real sense of "home" & "family" for these young children. The children are also provided with clothing & given responsibilities for maintaining their homes & appearances. It was a great honor to spend time with them, hear their incredible stories of sadness & perseverance, yet now see their amazing smiles. As Rogers Kimuli often says "some light now shines on the darkness in their lives." JHA's vision is to build & own their own Seeds of Love Dormitories that will house up to 32 boys & 32 girls, respectively. AFJHAR hopes to financially support this effort next year.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AFJHAR Information Sessions

We would like to invite you to attend one of our upcoming one-hour information sessions on Zoom. The purpose of these sessions is to provide an update on the latest activities and outcomes of Journey House Actions (JHA) & share how AFJHAR is supporting and helping fund their efforts to transform lives and help the most vulnerable women and children achieve their infinite possibilities in life.

If you are interested & available to join Rogers Kimuli (Executive Director of JHA), Greg Herrle (AFJHAR President) & Gregory Herrle (AFJHAR Board Member) on one of the following Zoom sessions, please

[REGISTER HERE](#)

AFJHAR INFORMATION SESSION DATES

- Thursday November 17 at 10 am Central Time (8 am Pacific, 11 am Eastern)
- Tuesday November 29 at 2 pm Central Time (Noon Pacific, 3 pm Eastern)
- Thursday December 1 at 4 pm Central Time (2 pm Pacific, 5 pm Eastern)
- Wednesday December 7 at Noon Central Time (10 am Pacific, 1 pm Eastern)

"Day of Thanksgiving" Celebration with JHA

Please Join us in celebrating a "Day of Thanksgiving" & gratitude on a one-hour Zoom call at 10 am Central Time on Thursday November 24 with our friends & children at Journey House Actions in Gashora, Rwanda. If you are interested and available to join in the festivities, please register using the link below. Thank you!

- Thursday November 24 at 10 am Central Time (8 am Pacific, 11 am Eastern)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Second Annual "Seeds of Love" Food Basket Appeal

Following Thanksgiving, we will hold our Second Annual "Seeds of Love" Food Basket Appeal in support of the food, nutrition & agricultural programs at Journey House Actions (JHA). Our goal is to raise \$90,000 to support the purchase of rice, maize flour & beans that help feed 305 students twice a day at the Norman & Marlyn Herrle Children's Center in Gashora & several hundred non-students each afternoon. For many of these children, it will be the only food they receive that day. Due to the war in Ukraine, food insecurity is a significant issue for the children & families in Gashora.

The Food Basket Appeal will also support the operations of JHA's "Seeds of Love" Farm - currently housing 22 dairy cows, 7 calves & 1 bull. The farm has 6 acres of vegetables, including cabbages, green peppers, onions, tomatoes and red & green amaranths. Feeding hunger transforms community and enhancing community makes our world better.

We look forward to sharing more information about this appeal with you shortly.



WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER!

We would like to welcome Julie Steinhafel to our AFJHAR Board of Directors.

Julie is a community volunteer who resides in Elm Grove, WI with Mark, her husband of 39 years. They have five children (all boys) and three grandchildren.

In addition to her active involvement in local non-profit organizations, Julie loves to travel, read and take art & French classes. She is a fluent French speaker.

Welcome to the team!

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If you would like to provide financial support to our work [DONATE HERE](#).
For more information about AFJHAR, please visit our website at www.afjhar.org