

AMAKURU

AFJHAR NEWSLETTER
FALL 2024

ONE DREAM



ONE TEAM





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we move toward the end of the year, we are thrilled to present our Fall 2024 “Amakuru” newsletter and reflect on the incredible journey we’ve shared this year, our third year of operation. Your continued interest and support have been the driving force behind everything we’ve accomplished together, and it’s with immense gratitude that we celebrate these achievements with you.

This year we introduced new ways to share the journey with our friends at Journey House Actions (JHA) in Gashora, Rwanda. Our Rwandan Book Club has fostered meaningful conversations about the Rwandan genocide and its lingering impact in Rwanda today, bridging cultures and building understanding through shared stories. We introduced a Child Sponsorship Program, ensuring that even more children have access to the education and opportunities they need to thrive. And most recently, we introduced a Home Refurbishing Sponsorship Program, bringing comfort and dignity to families in need.

In August, JHA’s second Early Childhood Development center opened and currently serves 255 preschoolers. JHA also opened two dormitories that can house more than 70 previously homeless girls and boys, giving them hope and an opportunity to thrive. Both of these projects were made possible by our generous donors.

Looking ahead, we are excited to introduce new ways for you to engage with our mission. Whether it’s joining our virtual community events, participating in local outreach efforts, or becoming an advocate for our cause, we invite you to continue walking with us on this journey of hope and transformation. As we enter a season of reflection and renewal, I encourage you to stay connected and involved. Together, we are building a brighter future—one project, one life, one community at a time.

One Dream. One Team!

Greg Herrle

President, AFJHAR



ROGERS' MESSAGE

Thank you to all of our amazing AFJHAR friends for being part of our journey. As Executive Director of Journey House Actions (JHA), I am thrilled about all that has happened in 2024. Our impact is exemplified by a young man named Maurice. Prior to joining JHA as a security officer, he chose a life of crime in order to provide food for his young family. This year, Maurice came up to me and said “Rogers, there is not much I can say but one big thing I will never forget is my child can now have something to eat every day because of Journey House.”

This year we also took on Maurice’s wife, Jackeline, who now leads all the women on the JHA piggery farm. Maurice and Jackeline have two sons, Brandon and Junior. Brandon graduated from JHA’s Early Childhood Development (ECD) center and is now attending primary school. Junior is still enrolled in the ECD center and is a very good drummer. Their story is just one example of what we are all about. We could not achieve these transformations without all of our AFJHAR friends.

I am excited we opened our second ECD center in August. Our little ones are smiling every day because they have something to eat and can go to school on a full stomach. Our second solar powered clean water well with ten 10,000-liter storage tanks supports our new school, our farms, and serves 5,000 community members. We had a dream to build two new dormitories to provide a loving home to homeless children in our community. This year our dream came true as our girls and boys dormitories also opened in August.

Thank you very much for all your love and support.

One Dream. One Team!

Rogers Kimuli

Executive Director, JHA



JHA Opens Its Second Early Childhood Development Center

Gashora is brimming with excitement and hope as JHA proudly opened its second Early Childhood Development (ECD) center in August. This new facility, currently supporting 255 pre-kindergarten children, marks a significant step forward in JHA's mission to foster holistic development and educational opportunities for Rwanda's youngest generation.

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Ingui family from Scottsdale, Arizona who made this dream possible.

A BEACON OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The new center will provide a nurturing environment where children between the ages of 3 and 6 can access quality education, healthcare, nutrition, and psychosocial support. Early childhood is a critical stage of development, and JHA's ECD centers will ensure that these children receive the foundation they need to succeed in school and beyond.

For Gashora, the two ECD centers, currently serving 527 children, are beacons of hope. They not only offer early education for local children but also serve as a resource hub for parents and caregivers to learn best practices for child development.



JHA Opens Two New Dormitories for Vulnerable Youth

In an inspiring step toward addressing homelessness among youth in rural Gashora, JHA opened two new dormitories designed to provide safe, secure housing for homeless girls and boys. These dormitories will each accommodate thirty-six children, creating a stable and supportive environment for youth who previously faced uncertain futures.

These beautiful “Seeds of Love” homes were made possible by the generous support of the Friends of Doug Proebsting Fund and the Pagel Graphics Arts Scholarship Foundation in Wisconsin.



A Safe Haven for Gashora’s Vulnerable Children

The two dormitories—one for girls and one for boys—are a response to the growing number of children in Gashora and surrounding areas who lack stable housing and adequate care. Many of these children are either orphaned or come from impoverished families that struggle to meet their basic needs. Without a safe place to live, they are at risk of exploitation, malnutrition, and falling behind in education.

JHA’s new facilities offer these children more than just a roof over their heads; they offer hope and a pathway to a brighter future. With access to proper shelter, nutritious meals, educational support, and a caring community, these children can begin to heal

from their past traumas and build a stable foundation for the future. The dormitories will provide a home for more than 70 homeless youth.

Beyond the dormitories, the children will also have opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities, life skills training, and counseling. These programs are key to JHA’s holistic approach to caring for vulnerable youth. By not only addressing their immediate needs but also equipping them with skills and knowledge, JHA ensures that the children are empowered to thrive over the long term.

“We believe that every child deserves a safe place to call home,” said Rogers Kimuli, JHA’s Executive Director. “These dormitories are a vital step in our mission to give homeless children in Gashora a second chance at life, an opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.”

Stories of Transformation

Derrick Rugema

Derrick Rugema spent the past three years living in the dormitories at Journey House Actions Rwanda. While there, he completed his high school studies, with his last year spent at an exclusive private high school in Kigali. His excellent grades and leadership abilities have landed him at a small liberal arts university in Chicago, where he is adjusting to a whole new world.

About a year ago, AFJHAR became aware that Derrick wanted to continue his education at a university in the US. Because I am on the Board of North Park University (NPU) here in Chicago, I mentioned this to the President and the admissions department of NPU. Last spring, we got the good news that NPU was offering Derrick a full-ride scholarship! Room and board and incidental expenses were not included, but members of the AFJHAR community quickly mobilized to fill in that gap.

After a very long wait, Derrick's student visa was finally granted on August 23, and he arrived in Chicago the day before classes started.



Derrick with Dawn & Ted Helwig

He came with no money, no towels or bedding, no toiletry items or computer, and only a few items of clothing. The admissions counselor from NPU was very helpful in getting Derrick settled in his dorm room, buying him towels and bedding, and even lending him some cash. We have since taken Derrick on a major shopping spree, so he now has some warmer clothing in preparation for a Chicago winter.

Derrick seems to have adjusted very well to college life and to life in a new country and city. He says that everyone has been very friendly, and he is enjoying his classes (physics, math, religion and writing) and professors. He has made a lot of friends, some of whom recently threw Derrick his first ever birthday party, complete with cake. Derrick has a very positive attitude and loves learning new things. In the US, he has been equally impressed by things we take for granted - like Super Target (all the selection!), dishwashers, cheeseburgers, and on-line deliveries - and by things that even impress us locals, like Chicago skyscrapers. We are confident that Derrick's attitude and skills will carry him far.

Dawn Helwig
AFJHAR Board Member

Priceless Memories

Bill Pollock

AFJHAR Board Member

This past February, I traveled about 10,000 miles from my home in Arizona to visit Journey House Actions (JHA) in Gashora. My friends George Dmowski and Brian Studebaker were my traveling companions. I was surprised that the JHA grounds are non-contiguous and spread across different parts of Gashora, a rural town of about 30,000 people. We had to walk several miles to see it all – the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers, the Guest House, the Gallery, the dormitories, their wells and storage tanks, the Dairy Farm, the Piggery and the Farm.

The JHA staff is a young and impressive group. They have good chemistry, work hard with a positive attitude, appreciate each other, and are committed to making their community a better place. They are open to new ideas and curious, and they ask a lot of good questions. They have a certain calmness and humility that I found refreshing.

I brought some recreation equipment to Gashora: board games, basketballs, volleyballs, frisbees and, on a whim, pickleball paddles and balls. In my mind,

these things were intended for the JHA staff, but Rogers had a different idea. He decided we were going to teach their 4–6 year-old ECD students how to throw a frisbee. I was skeptical, but one recess at the ECD turned into a frisbee workshop. The kids loved it, and after about 45 minutes of repetition, I and my fellow adult instructors were exhausted.

Another afternoon, Rogers asked me to explain the game of pickleball. We walked to the dirt volleyball court at a neighborhood park and set up a makeshift pickleball court. The ball bounced remarkably well on the hard-packed and relatively smooth dirt surface. The pickleball clinic morphed into a competitive game among the JHA staff members, with plenty of in-game banter (led by Rogers). The whole event went on for over 3 hours and, in the process, drew a crowd of curious onlookers.



In the last few months, I've had a series of Zoom calls with the JHA pickleball coaches, and JHA has developed a pickleball youth league. They are planning a local tournament with perhaps as many as 100 participants. The pickleball contagion strikes Rwanda!

Brian Studebaker

AFJHAR Board Member

My trip to Gashora, Rwanda in early 2024 was an eye-opening and inspiring experience. The purpose of my visit was to explore the commendable work being done by Journey House Actions (JHA). As soon as I set foot in Gashora, I was greeted by the warm smiles and welcoming hearts of the local children. Their curiosity and trust were palpable, reflecting the nurturing environment that JHA has fostered. The team at JHA, much like a large family, welcomed us into their home with open arms, providing us with a glimpse into everyday life in Gashora. It was a humbling experience to witness the grace and diligence with which everyone worked.

The impact of JHA's early education center and food basket program is evident in the vibrant, thriving community. The program is not just feeding bodies, but also nourishing minds, providing children with

the tools they need to break the cycle of poverty and build a brighter future. The sight of children, once marginalized but now brimming with potential, was truly heartening.

What excited me most was the discussion around JHA's future plans. The organization is in the process of expanding its reach, with new education centers, dormitories, and agriculture programs in the pipeline. These initiatives promise to elevate the community to new heights, offering even more opportunities for growth and development.

My trip to Gashora provided me with a first-hand look into the transformative power of education and community support. It was inspiring to see the tangible changes brought about by JHA's efforts and to discuss how I could further contribute to their noble mission. The resilience and warmth of the Gashora community left a lasting impression on me, reinforcing my belief in the power of collective effort towards a common goal.



Priceless Memories (cont.)

George Dmowski

AFJHAR Donor

This past February I had the good fortune of being able to travel to Rwanda and visit firsthand JHA's facilities and projects in Gashora. The warmth of the Rwandan people cannot be overstated. On our first day, towards supper time, our visiting group walked along a dirt road to assist in the daily feeding of about 400 to 500 children.

As we walked to the dinner line, hundreds of children emerged to walk with us, hug us, and hold our hands. As I looked down at one point, I saw at least half a dozen small hands clutching mine. At that moment, when I looked at the small hands attached to smiling faces, I realized this was why I came, this is what AFJHAR's funding is providing, this is why I support it.

An Evening With Immaculée

On October 14th, AFJHAR was thrilled to welcome New York Times bestselling author and Rwandan genocide survivor, Immaculée Ilibagiza, to speak to a sold-out crowd in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The goal of the event was to raise awareness of the conditions and the good work being done in Gashora by the JHA team.

The evening was sponsored by the ECAB Group at Baird, Ann & Bob McCormick, Julie & Mark Steinhafel, The Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Catholic Financial Life, and Mary & Tom Nolte and by our in-kind donors The Westin Hotel - Milwaukee and A.L. Schutzman Co.

Greg Herrle, AFJHAR President, gave a history and overview of AFJHAR's purpose and how it supports Gashora and the JHA's programs. A welcome video by JHA Executive Director, Rogers Kimuli, was shown along with an introductory video about Immaculée to acquaint those unfamiliar with her story.

Immaculée spoke to the group for about an hour about her personal experiences and how she discovered that prayer and faith led to the only true path of love and forgiveness, thus bringing healing and the ability to move forward. The crowd was held spellbound as she spoke of the horrors committed in the name of an intended ethnic cleansing during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. She described the unimaginable conditions she endured while hiding with seven other women in a cramped bathroom for 91 days.



The event ended with a book sale and signing by Immaculée. We also sold Rwandan baskets and art made by the women artisans of Gashora. Attendees were deeply moved by Immaculée's message. We were most grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness about AFJHAR and the support of our work in Gashora.

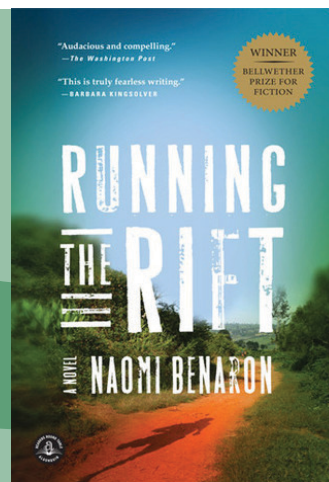
Ways to Engage

We've introduced new ways for our supporters to join us on our mission of empowerment and community building, fostering a deeper sense of involvement and making tangible differences in Gashora.

Rwandan Book Club: A Journey Through Stories

Our Rwandan Book Club allows supporters to learn more about the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its impact on Rwanda today. This initiative goes beyond reading; it's about understanding the challenges, triumphs, and resilience of the people we serve. By joining the club, supporters engage in thought-provoking discussions, reflect on Rwanda's journey, and gain insights into how AFJHAR is making a difference on the ground. Each quarter, participants explore stories that inspire empathy, connection, and action.

Register for book club sessions at <https://afjhar.org/registration/>.



Child Sponsorship Program: Empowering Futures

We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to succeed, and our Child Sponsorship Program offers a direct way to support this vision. Through this initiative, sponsors provide financial support to a specific child, providing improved access to education, healthcare, and essential resources. Sponsors receive updates on the child's progress, personal letters, and opportunities to correspond, creating a heartfelt connection that transcends borders. Supporters become a part of a life-changing journey, helping children unlock their potential.

Learn more about sponsoring a child at <https://afjhar.org/sponsor-a-child/>.

Home Refurbishing Program: Building Homes, Restoring Hope

AFJHAR's Home Refurbishing Program improves the living conditions of vulnerable Gashoran families. Supporters contribute to the renovation and refurbishment of homes, providing families with safe, clean, and more dignified living spaces. From basic repairs to more extensive renovations, this program is a tangible and specific way to see your contributions at work, whether through financial support or volunteering time and skills.

If interested, please visit

<https://afjhar.org/home-refurbishment-sponsorship/>.

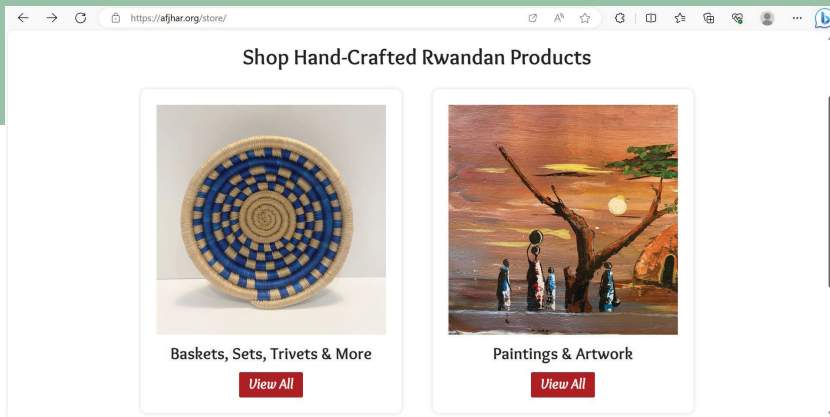


Why We're Excited

We know that our supporters are more than donors—they are partners in our mission. We hope these new opportunities provide you opportunities for deeper connections and shared experiences with the children and families of Gashora. Together, we can continue building a brighter future for Rwanda, one story, one child, and one home at a time.

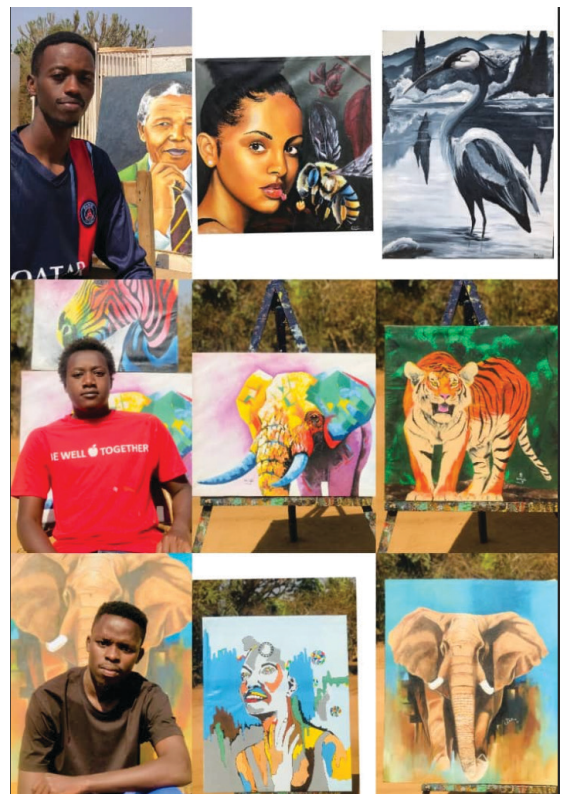
HOLIDAY SHOPPING

The holiday season will soon be upon us, so now is a great time to buy unique gifts for family and friends or beautiful accessories for your home or office.



We invite you to browse AFJHAR's on-line shop and check out the beautiful handiwork of our Gashora artisans. [SHOP HERE](#)

Journey House Actions' (JHA's) workforce development programs create meaningful jobs for the community. The JHA basket weaving and arts programs provide a "living wage" to the participants. Our talented weavers are specialists in weaving baskets of the highest quality and their stunning bowls, trivets and containers stand out because of the care they take into crafting each one. Each creation is an original work of art. 100% of the proceeds go back to the women & children in the village to support educational and nutritional programs & other programs offered by JHA.



Fourth Annual Food Basket Appeal

“Nutrition is the Foundation to Learning”



Access to nutritious food is critical for the cognitive development and wellbeing of our children. Without food, children can't learn and develop. In December, AFJHAR will be holding our Fourth Annual Food Basket Appeal in support of the work of Journey House Actions (JHA) to feed the poorest children and families in rural Gashora, Rwanda. We plan to send out appeal letters in early December.

“Investing in early childhood nutrition is a surefire strategy. The returns are incredibly high.” Anne M. Mulcahy

Thanks to our generous donors, AFJHAR raised \$160,000 during last year's Food Basket Appeal. In 2024, JHA added its second early childhood center serving 255 students and two dormitories that house 70 previously homeless children. These additions increased the need for additional critical food support. Therefore, our goal this year is to raise at least \$180,000 to fund JHA's 2025 Food Basket needs.

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