

The last school year at Colette De Brandt nursery school, Kurana Ubuntu (founded 2018), began on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

To begin with, it was not easy. The commotion and the cries from the babies' class spread like a contagion throughout the school. Very quickly, some of the third-year children, the so-called grownups, also suddenly felt the need to be with their Mothers!

However, we were proud of the opening of our two third-year classes of our nursery school. Beside the yellow class, they occupy the orange and brown rooms on the first floor - two new colours to learn. Red, green and blue classrooms are on the ground floor. We have furnished the third-year classes with new tables and chairs, all somewhat higher than those of the 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year classes!

Eighty-three new children, divided into two classes, have started the first-year. In second grade, eight new children joining has increased the number of pupils to eighty. Twelve new children joined third grade, bringing to seventy-eight the number in the two classes. So, at the beginning of the year, we had a total figure of 241 children.

In the school, we have four three-year-old children who have language development issues. However, there is no specialized school for these children in Ngozi, and they are too young to be boarders with the Brothers of Mercy in Gitega. Their parents prefer to entrust them to us, rather than leave them at home in the hands of a nanny without education. Despite the difficulty this presents for teachers, it is our charism to welcome them. Little Praise (called "Louange" in French), a child living with a mild form of Down's syndrome, is not able to go upstairs, where the second-year classrooms are located. We had to change her class and put her downstairs. Nothing else to do! She leaves the class at any time she wants! So she comes to the office, a place she regularly visits. Being unable to pronounce consonants, nothing she says is understood, but her expressions and hand gestures are worth watching. She is so sweet! Leaving the office briefly one day and knowing from experience that she had to be wary of the comings and goings of Praise, but since a teacher was nearby, Agnès had not bothered to lock the door. On her return, she found Praise sitting in her place, her glasses on her nose, carefully putting her "signature" on an official letter left on the desk. Fortunately, her initials were very light, since she never leans on her biro!

The office also serves as an "infirmary" at the moment. A big word, to designate the place which treats little skinned knees or, occasionally, one of the 3rd year boys suffering a nose bleed from a punch delivered by a classmate.

Little Pharaoh, a newcomer, seemed to have come from home with the habit of rolling on the ground, crying in anger to get what he wants. He systematically refused to enter class for the first three days, piercing the walls of the school with his cries and shouts. Gradually realizing that his tactics were not working, he found consolation in pushing a small table along the veranda, this time piercing the ears of teachers and children with the sound of wood on the tiles. Raising her voice, Agnès approached him, repeating, "Go to class!" Seeing her coming, he finally retreated and entered class. There, he categorically refused to sit down. It was only when the headmistress, Sister Arlette Ngenzebuhoro, intervened and said to him five times, "Sit down!", that he finally complied...

Another child refused to drink his tea and eat his roll at ten o'clock - poisoning is so frequent in Ngozi (a sad reality) that cautious parents forbid their children to eat or drink anything outside home. We had to call the father so that he could explain to his child that at school all children can safely drink and eat at break time. In fact, the delicious bread rolls come from our own Bread-making Oven Project (designed for the school's self-financing). Our sister, Jacqueline Ahishakiye, who initiated the project, first hired an experienced baker, before entrusting the responsibility to Mrs. Nadine Ndayisenga, who is well known to us for her honesty and loyalty. Jacqueline is studying Management at the branch of the University of Muyinga based in Ngozi. Our sister, Marie Goreth Ntakarutimana, is responsible for our chicken-breeding project, which also helps towards the self-financing of the school. We now have chickens and eggs for sale to hotels, like 'Hotel des Plateaux' which is in front of our home, and to the Bene Yosefu Brothers and the Carmelites, and other neighbours. We also have a pig project - another help toward making the school sustainable.

The snack at 10 am is followed by recess. Two double swings with two seats facing each other are invaded by a dozen children, all occasionally managing to find a place, some reduced to sitting on the metal plate connecting the two seats. Swings, a slide, and two ladders, all painted in the school colours, welcome the children who rush to try to get there first. The very small children often get into the sandbox, filled with shovels, buckets and plastic containers of all kinds. Ten old car tyres are the joy especially of the boys, who push their "truck" and take off for "Bujumbura or Gitega"... Hoops from old bike wheels are rolled with gusto by the first children who get a hand on them. The little ones, with the help of teachers, try to keep the colourful solid balls in play, a lesson learned after earlier balls were spoiled because of having been shot aimlessly and ending up on barbed wire in the neighbour's garden. Then, of course, there is always the temptation to hold on to the ball once possession is attained. The bigger girls enjoy skipping.

Our Sister, Janvière Niyongere, arrived as Bursar at school in January. Being slim and low-sized, the girls took her as one of themselves and asked her from the beginning to join their games, which she did willingly, teaching many new games in the process!

There are now thirteen teachers - two per class and one substitute. All are needed if individual attention is to be given to some forty children in each class. They are six men and seven women, three of whom have become mothers since they came to Kurana Ubuntu. A young single lady and three religious sisters are also on the staff - two of the Sisters are Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Marie Goreth Ntakarutimana, Burundian, and Immaculate Atwebembere, Ugandan, and one comes from the Family of the Disciples of Christ. Four educational helpers also assist - they accompany the children to the latrines, wash their clothes when necessary, and prepare tea, or porridge of wheat flour, corn, rice, enriched mainly with soybeans (once a week).

The majority of children are Catholic. A few are Pentecostal or belong to one of the other numerous churches in Ngozi. Two Muslim girls take off their veils of their own accord when they enter school, and put them back on as soon as their Dad arrives to pick them up. It's delightful to see the smiles that light up the children's faces as soon as they see their parent arrive at noon. For security reasons, we have adopted a badge system for the person who comes to collect the child. If the person is late, after half an hour the secretary calls to tell the parents: "Your child is still at school... »

Among the parents are bankers, magistrates, doctors ... who rub shoulders with drivers, shopkeepers, and others, including one mother who is a farmer and arrives in her loincloth straight from the fields. Her little Carmel is always smiling and happy.

Height of the children come from homes where single mothers care for them and they have a "godfather" or a "godmother" in the Northern Hemisphere: Carmel, Angel, Gaby, Morgana, Douce Perla, Keita, Naomie, Jerusalem's Light.

The construction of the primary school, on another plot, has begun. This will meet the demand of parents and will ensure a follow-up to the education of children attending Kurana Ubuntu.

The ending of the school year on June 26<sup>th</sup> 2021 was marked with great festivities. All the parents came with their children to the Procure, near the residence of the bishop, where we were able to avail of a sufficiently large hall. Sisters Marie Goreth and Janvière had built a stage at one side of hall. The curtains opened on a traditional Kirundi dance performed by the third-year girls. They had learned it very well from our sister Faustina Niyonzima, who dances with delightful grace, charm and a natural smile - a style well captured by the children. The boys performed a modern dance. It was amazing how, to the delight of their parents, they reproduced what they had seen on television. Sister Janvière had designed the costumes and composed a sketch which students presented, a fitting tribute to the education they had received at school.

These performances alternated with poems from the 1st and 2nd grades and a mime game where the parents were invited to participate. They made us all laugh out loud! The celebration ended with a recitation from the 3rd years entitled "End of Cycle", where the children expressed their pride in being the first class to graduate, having completed the full cycle of the three years of kindergarten. To say "Thank you" to their Headmistress, they offered her the photo of their class with their teachers. Sister Arlette then cut the cake to the delight of the children who each received a piece. The class teachers then gave the parents the assessment sheets of their students.

As they bless you, the children, who represent the Burundi of tomorrow, send a broad smile to each of you, along with their shouts of joy and their pride at being in the school. One or other girl asked Agnès to lean towards her so she could bless her on the forehead! No doubt she learned this from her mother.

Arlette and Agnès.

Here are some photos



The regional team of Africa visiting the construction of the primary school.



Gaby



Jerusalem's Light



La 3e maternelle avec sr Marie Goreth et Mr Gérard.



Carmel avec son père apprenti maçon.



Ange Samuella devant une balançoire double (à 2 sièges).



Sr. Immaculate et la 1e maternelle.



The building of thé six classes of thé kindergarden, with the colours learned by the children: red, green, yellow, blue...



Sr. Arlette Ngenzebuhoro



Sr. Janviere



Sr. Jacqueline



Photo des 2 classes de 3e maternelle.