



## The Last Saturday of the First month

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January 31<sup>st</sup> 2009, the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village has been buoyant with youthful voices for 45 days now, and the kids take part in their first day of collective community service (UMUGANDA) in their new hometown of Rubona.

The ASYV schedule on this Saturday is busy! The village will carefully undertake this first act of “Tikkun Olam” (mending the world) beyond its boundaries, but it will also play some friendly games of volleyball and football (soccer) with the Rubona teams, in addition to receiving some important guests, including the Honorable State Minister for Primary and Secondary Education, Mr. Mutsindashyaka.

From 7:00 am the kids are ready for the work outside of the village. The plan is for the girls to work alongside the local ladies, planting a beautiful garden at the town’s administrative office. The boys will work in the Eucalyptus forest near the village and clear it up of all hazards. At 7:30AM, the girls leave the village singing “Tuzarwubaka abana b’abanyarwanda turugire nka paradizo ku isi yose” (we will built this country, we the youth of Rwanda, and make it a paradise on Earth). The boys follow at 8:00AM, and the villagers are amazed to see how hard working and motivated the ASYV kids already are. Indeed, they work hard and with great enthusiasm, singing all along. I hear one villager say “these kids from the Muzungu are very serious; we thought that they were spoiled but they are hard workers”. At this point, many locals who had no plans to join Umuganda are changing their minds; they all seem to want a portion of the kids’ passion and resolve!

After Umuganda, there is a gathering of everyone who participated. The local authorities and the Vice-Mayor of Rwamagana District are present, and the discussion -which revolves around the values that all Rwandans should promote in order to reach the “Vision 2020”- is open to all. I am proud to see the ASYV kids participate very actively, asking and answering questions as they come. The neighbors are happily impressed too, they promise to have February’s UMUGANDA on the ASYV grounds. In the afternoon, 2 games are played (volleyball and football) with the Rubona Sector teams. It is invigorating to watch the village (kids, staff and volunteers) root for their teams! The Rubona teams have brought along 70 fans or so, they are singing and dancing but none of that earns them a victory -our teams are simply determined to win their first ASYV games! The match ends 2-1 in volleyball and 1-0 in football/soccer.

While the football match is happening, the State Minister for Primary and Secondary Education arrives with Mr. Pinny from Israel and Mme Aline Gahongayire in charge of Good Governance in the Eastern Province. They are surprised by the beauty of the village and the kids’ fortitude. It is unbelievable, they say, that this would be so after only 6 weeks of knowing each other! They also comment on how real the homes look and

The Agahozo Shalom Youth Village is a Special Project of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee



feel, visit the “Art and music Center” and stop by the “Learning Center” before heading to the farm. Minister Mutsindashyaka who strongly encourages them to keep up the good work, saying that indeed ASYV is bound to produce heroes in a few years, will later be told by an ASYV kid that in such a special place, “we promise to succeed, and no one will be disappointed”. I can’t help but think about the kids I recruited only few months ago, and what a transformation they have already undergone.

As Nir (Village director) introduces Lemor and Shallaf -from Apoel Tel-aviv FC- who came to train our soccer players (girls and boys), and thanks the Hon Minister for his unfailing support of ASYV, I am a little distracted by the thoughts and feelings about to burst out from my heart! The Hon. Minister closes by reminding the kids of how lucky they are to be in ASYV, that they must make sure to explore all opportunities provided to them, and that he expects to see them all becoming good leaders in the future of Rwanda, but my mind is racing back in time, unable to believe what I now see! Some were hopeless and unable to smile when I first met them -they are changing now, and starting to display a lot of leadership and talents, they are becoming creative and enjoying responsibilities, and they are cheerful! Many enjoy being in the learning center (for some, it’s the first time they see/touch a computer in their lives), others are busy in the Music and Arts Center, playing instruments and recording songs in the make shift music studio and the new songs are recorded everyday in the music studio, NIR is right in there, making AGASEKE (Rwandan basket). I lastly mention the farm where kids and staff like to work on Saturdays (except the Jews and 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventists who work on Wednesdays), but there is so much more that I am leaving out!

When the school started for instance (this is the last one), the kids were surprised to see the teachers and the principal of the school coming in the Dining hall to share the food with them. To this day they repeat “it was unbelievable, we never saw this in our life, and teachers were like enemies”! ASYV is making a difference by just being there and the kids “want” to succeed as a result. They value the respect we show them, and in turn they reciprocate profoundly! As for me and the rest of the educators, we could not have dreamed of a better way to contribute to a better world.

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