

Using art to promote family based care for children

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Mashirika on stage in Ngoma District - (Courtesy photos)

A nationwide drive to raise awareness about the plight of homeless children in the country has concluded successfully. Dubbed *Tubarerere Mu Muryango* (Let's raise children in families), the three month campaign used theater to reach out to parents, caregivers and local authorities to promote a safe family environment for children.

Mashirika Performing Arts and Media Company spearheaded the drive. According to Hope Azeda, the artistic director of Mashirika, the campaign places a special focus on children living in orphanages for their safe reintegration in family based care. The campaign kicked off with a special launch ceremony at the Gorillas Golf Hotel in Nyarutarama in May, last year.

At the event, guests were briefed on the importance of a family environment for the proper upbringing of children.

This was done through artwork and poetry in an entertaining yet educative manner. Apart from open air stage shows, the campaign also includes national community dialogue via live radio talk shows, social media engagement, and district level community forums.

In his speech, the UNICEF country representative to Rwanda, Oliver Petrovic, explained that the programme provides a unique framework for all development partners involved in child care reform in Rwanda and, allows for all activities to be harmonised and integrated across the country under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and the National Commission for Children (NCC).



Mashirika on stage.

The campaign has already seen the Mashirika theater team stage road shows in Kamonyi and Huye in the Southern Province, Rwamagana and Ngoma in the Eastern Province, while in the City of Kigali; the campaign went to Gasabo and Nyarugenge Districts. On May 31, the production headed to Rubavu and Rusizi Districts in the Western Province.

The last leg of the campaign covered Gicumbi and Rulindo Districts in the Northern Province on June 2nd and 3rd respectively.

In all the shows, the main theme propagated is the safe reintegration of children in orphanages/institutions into family based care in the country. Key among the issues that were highlighted through theater were; Child abandonment, the joy of parenting, and parental responsibility.

The campaign was conducted by the Mashirika Performing Arts and Media Company in partnership with UNICEF, the National Commission for Children (NCC), and the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF).

During the 7th Children Summit on January 4, 2012, the government of Rwanda made a strong commitment to transform orphanages and other children's institutions and to reintegrate children into family based care. The then newly established National Commission for Children (NCC) was tasked to oversee the successful reintegration of children, the creation of a national alternative care framework and the transition towards a robust child protection system.



Actor Kennedy Mazimpaka (right) breaks into dance at one of the roadshows in Ngoma.

In March, 2012, Cabinet endorsed a landmark Strategy for National Child Care Reform (and launching the operationalization of the strategy took place in March 2013). It details how Rwandan children living in institutions should regain their right to live in a loving, safe and supportive family environment. This strategy is aligned with the Constitution of the Republic of

Rwanda and the Integrated Child Rights Policy, as well as with international conventions and guidelines.

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