



FRANÇOISE – RUHANGO, RWANDA

Françoise is a caregiver at an Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centre in Ruhango, and she is assisted by Alphonsine, Grace and Leontie. They are all from their local community and have been working at this ECCD centre for over a year. In December last year they started enrolling the new children at the centre, in time for their first day on 9 January. Parents in the community have sent one hundred children to this ECCD centre, divided equally into two 'classes' of 3-4 year olds and 5-6 year olds.

For young children, the first day of the ECCD year is always very exciting and nerve-racking. Françoise smiles remembering how, just two weeks ago on their first day, half of the children were crying and scared. Françoise and her fellow caregivers carried out lots of activities with song and dance to encourage children to feel at ease, "and now they have stopped crying, they are so excited to arrive each morning".

Beyond the normal nerves of starting somewhere new, this year there was something to be even more excited about on the first day of the ECCD year: a brand new building with two large and brightly painted classrooms, a kitchen, toilets and a fenced off play area. "It's easier to interact with the children now" says Alphonsine "they're more responsible because they feel so excited about the colours, and the round tables really encourage better socialisation and groupwork".



Grace, Alphonsine and Françoise are thrilled with the new ECCD building and grounds – it is safer and more conducive to developing a child-friendly learning environment than their temporary building from last year. "The children will learn so much and they will have fun; they feel proud to be attending", says Grace. "Parents are also happy" says Alphonsine, "and we hope this will continue for many years".

Caregivers' enthusiasm and energy is vastly supported by improved facilities at the ECCD centres. The one hundred young children aged 3-6 will benefit from spending time in a safer and more child-friendly environment. Extensive international research shows that investing in pre-primary aged children is key: starting young means they will learn the building blocks that will help them transition successfully into primary school, perform at a higher level throughout school, and probably go on to have better jobs as adults.