

Spès Nihangaza

Spès Nihangaza was honoured by the World's Children's Prize because for over 25 years she has been fighting to help Burundi's orphaned and most vulnerable children.

One in five children, around 700,000, in the world's third poorest country, Burundi, are orphans. Four in ten children were never registered at birth, which makes it difficult for them to access health care, go to school or inherit property.

When Spès and her sister Caritas were growing up, they were taught to help the sick and the weak. When, in 1992, they began looking after children who had lost their parents to AIDS, they set up the organization FVS, which is now called FVS Amade. The mass murder during the long civil war that started in 1993 led to many children being orphaned. Spès and FVS have worked to find these children new homes.

FVS runs a boarding school, a centre for street children and clinics, helps children go to school and access health care, and runs a social insurance fund for poor families. FVS has created a system of 1,700 solidarity groups, in which villagers get together and pay in money, which is then used for loans for starting up small businesses, for health care and school uniforms and school materials for children. Poor families are given support, and orphaned children are fostered and offered support to attend school. Spès has also created a system of Child Protection Groups that help children whose rights have been violated by providing legal and psychiatric support. Spès is sometimes called "Mother of 50,000 children" because she and FVS Amade help give so many children a better life.



When Spès Nihangaza and her big sister Caritas were growing up, they were taught to help others. When helping sick patients at a hospital in Burundi's capital Bujumbura, they soon realised that the patients' children also needed help. So they set up FVS, which now works to protect children's rights across the country.

It all started when two of Spès' uncles became ill at the end of 1989. Spès had recently qualified as a pharmacist and was working at a pharmacy. Her big sister Caritas worked as a nurse.

The two sisters and their seven other siblings were used to taking care of others. The door was always open at their parents' home for anyone who needed help. Spès' grandfather often talked about how her great grandfather looked after orphaned children after his village was struck by a deadly epidemic.

Spès' parents' house was also home to several of Spès'

cousins, who had moved in after their parents died in a car accident. Spès' mum and dad said that the children should be willing to share both their food and their rooms with relatives or neighbours who needed help.

So it felt completely natural for the whole family to step in and help the two uncles when they became ill. The siblings and cousins drew up a schedule to make sure the uncles had visits every day. They brought food and helped with washing, shaving and cutting their hair. They brought clean clothes and sat and chatted with them. No-one

knew what was wrong with the uncles.

One day, when Spès arrived at the hospital, she saw that the other patients were watching her.

"Dear uncle, why is everyone looking at me like that?" she asked.

"Well, every time you come here they're just waiting for you to go so they can have some of the food you bring. Hardly anyone else here gets visitors."

Lots of children

When she got home, Spès told the rest of her family what she'd found out. They decided to take a little extra



TEXT: ERIK HALKJAER, PHOTOS: JESPER KLEMEDSSON

food with them, but no matter how much food they took it was never enough.

Her big sister Caritas started visiting the women's ward at the hospital. She noticed that several women had their children with them, as there was no-one else to look after them.

In order to help as many patients as possible, Spès,

Caritas and their siblings and cousins asked their friends, neighbours and colleagues if they could help out. Soon there was a much bigger group of people than just the family giving their time voluntarily at the hospital.

Spès' little sister, who was studying to be a doctor, got in contact with the doctors at the hospital. One day the doctors explained that their sick uncles and many other patients had AIDS.

Help our children

And so the day came when a woman died, leaving her little girl behind her.

"What do we do now?" asked Caritas.

"We'll have to call everyone to a meeting," said Spès.

Children who have been orphaned as a result of AIDS, mass murder during the civil war or other causes have always had a friend in Spès.

They advertised in the newspapers, on the radio and in various churches for someone to look after the girl. She lived with Caritas' family for six months. Then the girl's aunt called and she was able to move there. More and more patients wanted Spès, Caritas and the others to help take care of their children when they died. A couple of patients also wanted to pay them for all the help they received.

"We need to set up an organization," said Spès to Caritas.

At the end of 1992, Spès and Caritas founded FVS (Famille pour vaincre le Sida, Family to Fight AIDS). They used the money they were given to buy food and pay for schooling for the patients' children.

More help

When Burundi's government started offering poor people cheap health care, FVS

Spès and her big sister Caritas (standing to the left of Spès) grew up in a home where they always made an effort to help the sick, the poor and the weak, and they have continued to do this throughout their lives. Here they are visiting a solidarity group, whose members take care of orphaned children and help to ensure they attend school through a system devised by Spès.

became involved in helping hand out healthcare cards. Their contact with the government led to Spès being invited to meetings with other organizations.

"I liked the way you talked about your way of working," said a woman from Switzerland.

Spès said thank you, but then the woman started talking about something called projects.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand what you mean when you talk about projects," said Spès.

"Don't you conduct your





work as projects? Then how do you apply for funding to do your work?” wondered the woman. “If I ask you what you plan to do with the money you get, what would your answer be?”

“Give food to the patients’ children so they can go to school,” said Spès.

The woman taught Spès how to write a project application and promised to organize funding.

There was no way to stop HIV and AIDS, but in 2001, WHO (the World Health Organization) decided that everyone in Burundi who was HIV positive would be entitled to free antiviral drugs that prevent the HIV virus from developing into AIDS. FVS was one of the organizations that would be handing out the medicine. Spès and Caritas opened the first FVS clinic, where people who were HIV positive would be offered health care, medicine and mental support.

More orphans

The organization that Spès and Caritas founded in 1992 was now doing much more than just caring for sick people. From the end of 1993, Burundi was affected by a long civil war. Many children lost their parents. FVS looked for new

homes for them, just as they did for the children of patients who had died.

The children’s foster parents needed money to buy food and clothes and to pay for schooling for these children. That’s when Spès had the idea for FVS solidarity groups (Nawe N’uze).



“If a child gets an education, they can get a job and lift themselves out of poverty, and then more children can get to go to school,” says Spès.

The members of the solidarity groups buy shares or membership. The money from the groups helps to buy school uniforms and school materials for the children, the adults can take out loans for small business projects, and there’s also money for health care if any of the group’s members or the children fall ill.

The most important thing for Spès is that the adults earn money, so they can invest more money in their solidarity group and help more children.

“When children get to go to school, they learn things, which reduces the risk of them becoming ill or getting HIV.

Mother to 50,000 children

This is what Spès is sometimes called because she and FVS Amade help so many children to achieve a better life.





They get an education, and they can go to university and get a job so they can help their family. If a member of the solidarity group or a child manages to get themselves out of poverty, then more children can go to school. Nawe N'uze is sowing seeds for the future," says Spès.

The beginnings of a good idea

One day, Spès met an older woman whose daughter had

been assaulted and had a child she didn't want. The daughter gave the child to her mother and disappeared. When Spès met the woman, the young child was very ill. The woman explained that the doctor had said the girl needed antibiotics. She needed two boxes of tablets, but the woman could only afford to buy one box. She could buy the next box once she'd sold a few vegetables, which would be harvested in a couple of months.

Spès' idea for how the poor can best help themselves and the large numbers of orphaned children has now expanded to 1,700 solidarity groups. Here she meets with one of the groups. The villagers in the solidarity group are collectively building a better life for themselves and their children, but they also act as foster parents to orphans and provide help for the poorest children and families in the village.

Spès went home, gathered FVS' management team together and presented her idea. They decided to create healthcare insurance for the people they helped. Then the woman wouldn't need to wait until harvest time to buy the medicine for her grandchild, who needed help now.

"When I see someone who needs help, I don't hesitate. I've always been this way. When I see a street child we've helped go to school with their school books under their arm, it makes me happy," says Spès. 🌍



How Spès and FVS Amade work for children

- They help set up solidarity groups and use them to find foster parents for orphaned children, who are also given help with school, school uniforms and school things. The solidarity groups also support children from poor families.
- They offer foster parents microloans to help boost their finances and provide for their foster child.
- They organize Child Protection Groups, train their leaders and offer legal and psychiatric help to children who have had their rights violated.
- They help children obtain birth certificates.
- They help children attend school, and they run a boarding school.



Support from a princess

In Burundi, all children aged between 7 and 13 must go to school. School is free, but many are unable to afford a school uniform, books and other school things. Pupils have to pass a test to go on to study after sixth grade. If you don't pass, you either have to quit school or pay to go to a private school. Few can afford to do that. Before 2005, you had to pay for years one to six as well. Several organizations, including FVS, managed to convince the government to introduce free schooling.

FVS has built its own school in Spès' home town of Bururi for 268 pupils at secondary and upper secondary level. Forty of the pupils have been given a scholarship by FVS to attend the school. Spès wants the school to offer gifted pupils who have previously been helped by FVS the chance to study further, even if they haven't passed the entrance test for secondary school. FVS' school has been built using money donated by Princess Caroline of Monaco, who is president of the organization AMADE Mondiale. In 2013, FVS merged with Amade Burundi. That's why FVS is now called FVS Amade. Spès is on the board of AMADE Mondiale.

Evelyne bakes for her family

When Evelyne missed lessons and didn't do her homework, she had to retake a year of school. She quit school after third grade. She took a job in the fields and sold fruit and vegetables, or helped her three younger sisters. When Evelyne was 18, a friend told her that FVS Amade ran courses for young people who hadn't finished school. Evelyne went to FVS Amade's offices and was able to choose between courses in baking, car repair and sewing. She decided to be a baker. She can use the money she earns to help her mum and pay for her sisters' schooling.

When Ninette's dad died, her stepbrothers took all the farmland. They also tried to take the cows that her dad had left to Ninette, her sister and their mum. So her mum went to the village's Child Protection Group, who fought to make sure that Ninette and her sister also got their inheritance from their dad.



Ninette's stepmother and her sons wanted to take the cows and leave Ninette with no inheritance, but FVS Amade helped her to get them back.

Ninette gets her cows back

Ninette and her mum were about to go to bed when they heard movement outside the house. They took the torch and went out. Ninette's three stepbrothers were standing there. They had three cows and were about to take them away with them.

"What are you doing? Don't take our cows!" shouted Ninette's mum.

"They're our cows. Our dad bought them and they belong to us," shouted the brothers.

One of the brothers grabbed the torch Ninette was holding and stamped on it so it broke.

Then they disappeared into the darkness with the cows.

A couple of days later, Ninette's mum went into the village. She told Marc from FVS Amade's Child Protection Group in the village what had happened.

"You need to tell the village leaders about this," he said.

Ninette's mum went with Marc to the office of the village leaders and told her story again. After a few days, Ninette's mum and big sister went into town to tell a judge as well. Marc had called one of FVS Amade's lawyers, who had promised to help.

Only boys inherit

When Ninette was nine years old, she discovered that her mum was very careful not to walk on the field next to theirs. Ninette asked why.

"It's not our land. It belongs to your stepbrothers, and they've said we're not allowed to grow food there," explained her mum.

In Burundi, women and girls cannot inherit when a man dies. Only boys can inherit. So when Ninette's dad met another woman, her mum just got a small piece of land for a house. Her dad's new wife had three boys and she





thought that all the land and all the animals should belong to her sons when the dad died.

When Ninette was six years old, her dad died. Her stepbrothers didn't let her or her mum have any of her dad's fields. They also wanted to have the cows that her dad had bought and that Ninette's mum had kept.

An end to the row

Ninette's mum spoke to Marc about the problems. He thought that Ninette and her sister should be entitled to some of the inheritance. Although the law says otherwise, the tradition in Burundi is for all children to receive something when their father dies.

Marc spoke to FVS Amade's lawyer, who contacted the village leaders. Together they managed to convince Ninette's stepbrothers to share some of the land. Ninette remembers how Marc, the lawyer and the head of the village spent the whole day going round the fields measuring. Ninette's mum and stepbrothers stood by and watched. In the end, Ninette and her sister got part of their dad's old field.

It was worse with the cows, which are very valuable in Burundi. When FVS Amade's lawyer tried to get the stepbrothers to give the cows back, they said no. But one day when Ninette came home from

Ninette and her mum have had to fight to ensure Ninette inherits land and cattle from her father because only sons are entitled to inherit in Burundi.

Marc from the village's Child Protection Group contacted FVS Amade's lawyer, who got Ninette's stepbrothers to share the land left by her father and got a court to rule that she should also get to keep the cows.



school, the cows were standing there again, grazing.

"We won in court!" said her mum.

Ninette's stepbrothers were cross, but when Ninette met one of them on the path outside the house, he said hello. That had never happened before. Ninette realised that the court ruling had put an end to all the rows. 🌐



Ninette, 12

Wants to be: A cattle farmer.

Often: Draws figures in the sand and decorates them with stones.

Sometimes: Plays marbles.

Favourite sport: Running.

Favourite subject: French.

Dreams of: Going to university.

FVS Amade's Child Protection Groups

FVS Amade has set up Child Protection Groups in the suburbs and villages where they work, to ensure that orphaned children come to no harm and are not exploited. A couple of adults in each location are trained in children's rights and basic law. They often work with the solidarity groups in the same village or suburb. They raise the alarm when they find out that a child's rights are being violated. FVS Amade has its own lawyers, who can help out. FVS Amade is helping the government and Unicef to set up Child Protection Groups in all villages, towns and suburbs across the country.



Villagers invest in

Floriane's mum has always been ill and her dad works a lot. Floriane and her siblings have had to help so much at home that they've barely had time to go to school. But one day Floriane got her big chance. The village solidarity group helped her get a place at FVS Amade's boarding school for poor children.

Floriane always finds coming home difficult. The life she has at school is so different to the way things are at home. She loves seeing her dad and siblings, but she feels sad when her mum isn't home. She's been ill for as long as Floriane can remember.

When Floriane still lived at home and went to the village school, her mum was sometimes at home in the morning, but then she'd be gone for several days. Then she'd suddenly be at home again. When Floriane would ask where she'd been, she'd just say she'd been to visit friends.



Floriane, 15

Wants to be: A business owner or banker.

Dreams of: A better life than I've had.

Likes: Praying to God.

Doesn't like: Arguing.

In her free time she likes: Singing and hanging out with friends.

Looks up to: Spés!



Her mum was kind and laughed a lot, but she didn't work and wasn't very good at taking care of the children. Spés and FVS Amade helped arrange for her to be admitted to a psychiatric clinic, which is where she is now. Floriane hopes her mum will be well enough to come home again some time.

Helped by the villagers
Floriane's dad is old. He

doesn't have much land of his own and he works for others in their fields. The house they live in is made of brown mud. They used to have an old house, but it collapsed.

Floriane's dad was given money by the village's solidarity group to build a new house. Floriane's parents aren't part of the group, but they were given help anyway because Floriane's mum is sick and her dad is poor.

The village's solidarity group surprised Floriane by arranging for her to attend FVS Amade's boarding school for poor children.

Her dad sold a calf to buy tin for the roof of their new house. They've also built a little barn for the family's cow and a new calf to sleep in at night. Next to the house, Floriane and her siblings have been growing sweet potatoes.

As a thank-you for all the help, Floriane usually assists



Floriane's mum is ill and her dad is poor. That's why the solidarity group has helped the family.



Floriane's big sister has always had to help out at home and hasn't had time for school. Her big brother goes to another boarding school, but he also has to help at home.





Floriane

When Floriane is at home she helps out in the family's little field and fetches water.



TEXT: ERIK HALKJÆR PHOTOS: JESPER KLEMEDSSON

at the solidarity group meetings. She loves maths and finance, and she makes notes in the group's cashbook.

Big news

One day when Floriane was working in the field, her big brother came with some important news.

“The solidarity group has decided that you will have the chance to go to a boarding school for children from poor homes,” he said.

Floriane had been going to the school in the village from first to sixth grade. It took an hour to get there. Often she left home without eating any breakfast because there was no food at home. She didn't get any food at school either. The days were long without food, but Floriane enjoyed learning things. Maths was her favourite subject.

The village's solidarity group realised that Floriane was particularly gifted when it came to figures, so they asked FVS Amade whether there was a place for her at the

organization's school in Matana, which is a couple of hours away by car.

The solidarity group had already helped Floriane's dad pay for some of Floriane's big brother's schooling, but Floriane would be able to go to the FVS school for free.

School with a computer room

When term started, Floriane packed her things in a bag. FVS Amade picked her up on the Saturday before school started.

The school was big. There was a basketball court, a chapel and a dining room. There were nuns who looked after the pupils. They showed Floriane and the other girls the dormitories with lots of beds.

Everything was different to the village and the village school at home. The nuns explained that everyone was given breakfast in the mornings, then there was lunch in the middle of the day, and in the evening there was dinner. The school also had a computer room.

The next day, all the other

pupils arrived. There were lots of them. Floriane was nervous, but also excited about getting to know girls from other parts of the country.

Extra-mum Spés

When school started on Monday, Floriane realised that it was really happening. She also realised that she was actually quite clever, and she was particularly good at maths and French. But she missed her family and thought about her mum a lot.

“You can always come to me if you need help. I can be like your extra-mum,” said Spés.

Floriane now has lots of new friends at school and is really enjoying it. The nuns take good care of her and her school friends. There's plenty of time to study in peace and quiet. There's always food, but sometimes she feels sad and misses home.

When she's feeling really bad, Floriane often thinks about how lucky she is to be here, but how much her family



Back at school!





05.30
Good morning!

and friends at home in the village struggle. That's why it's so hard to go home in the holidays.

Homework at dawn

Floriane's dad doesn't always have money. Sometimes he's sick and can't work. Then Floriane's brother has to work instead. When he does, he misses school, and he may have to quit. Of Floriane's six siblings, she's the only one who has completed more than nine years in school.

Floriane's youngest big sister has reached ninth grade, but she's had to retake several grades because she had to help at home.



14.00 Floriane, who is good at maths and wants to run her own business or be a banker, has lessons in financial management and bookkeeping, and here she's studying computing.

Every time Floriane comes home she tries to help out as much as she can. She remembers how it was when she lived at home and came home from school. There were always things to do: she had to bring home the cows from the field, someone had to fetch water, dad needed help in the fields and she or her sister had to make dinner.



11.00 On Sundays there's a church service. Here Floriane is singing in the classroom with the other pupils who are also Protestants. Pupils who are Muslims and Anglicans have gathered in other classrooms. The Catholic pupils have their service in the school chapel. In her free time, Floriane usually sings pop songs and raps with friends from her dormitory.

Ten of Floriane's school friends



"I come from a poor family in Bujumbura. Here at school I get some peace and quiet to read and I eat good food and sleep comfortably. When I'm older, I want to be a doctor and help my family."
Gerard, 13



"When I was little, my dad disappeared. There are good teachers here and we get plenty of food. I'm going to be an ambassador and live abroad with my family when I'm older."
Prosper, 14



"My dad died and my mum and siblings have HIV. I'm the only one who isn't infected. We had no light at home to do homework, and very little to eat. Here I get to learn about things I probably never would have learned about at the school at home. When I'm older, I'm going to be a journalist."
Yves, 13



"My parents are dead and I grew up with my grandma. There were always loads of jobs to do at home. Now I've come along much further at school than my old classmates. In the future I'm going to be president!"
Filisten, 14



"Mum and dad don't have much money, but I've been given the chance to study here. At home it was too dark to do my homework and there was hardly any food. When I finish school, I'm going to be a doctor."
Alain, 12



16.00
After the end of the school day, Floriane plays basketball and hangs out with her friends.

Her sister couldn't answer. She was ashamed. But now Floriane helps her with the baby when she's home. She and her sister share a bed and have the little girl between them under the mosquito net.

Floriane sometimes feels angry with her mum. If only she hadn't been ill, then Floriane's big sister could have finished school and wouldn't have had to work at home so much.

Floriane wants to graduate and be like Spés: start a company or maybe a bank. She likes looking after the cows and the calf at home, so one of her ideas is to run a big farm with livestock. 🌐

19.00 Floriane isn't used to always having breakfast, lunch and dinner (shown here), served every day.



There was hardly any time to do homework. The best thing to do was to get up early and do homework just as the sun was coming up. There are no lights in the house, so you can't read when it's dark.

Wants to be like Spés

One day when Floriane came home, her big sister told her she was pregnant.

"How will you cope? You know you have to go to school. Now you'll have to take care of the baby instead. What will you do then?" asked Floriane.

20.00
Good night!



"The good thing about being here is that I can study and play as much basketball as I like. I'm going to study at university to be a doctor."
Jovith, 12



"My dad died. My mum doesn't have a job, but she tries to do a bit of farming. It's easy to study here and they take good care of us. I want to be a lawyer, like my dad."
Bella, 14



"My mum died when I was a little baby and my dad got very ill. I've been living with my aunt, but she doesn't have that much money. It's easy to study here and you can go as far as you want to in life afterwards."
Lauraine, 12



"When I was ten, my mum died and my dad couldn't cope with looking after me. I lived on the street, but a man found me and took care of me. He helped me get into the school here. It's good, because now I don't have to work at home."
Nella, 12



"There are lots of us at home. Our dad died and mum only has a small field to grow food. Not all of us can go to school, so I'm glad to be here. I've made lots of new friends and it's much easier to learn things here. When I'm older I want to be a doctor and help others."
Ghyslaine, 13



The girl with the drum

When Arlette feels sad and misses her family, she usually plays the drum. She's been playing since she was little, and now that she goes to FVS Amade's boarding school far from home, she plays often.

"Every Saturday I go down to the chapel and play. It helps when I feel lonely.

Things weren't that easy at home. My dad disappeared five years ago and there are four of us children. That's why mum joined the solidarity group, which helped me get into this school.

In the holidays, I'm reminded how tough it is at home, but I also think about how I've been given such a big opportunity here at the school. I can get grants and continue my studies at university. Then I can get a job and help my family.

When we were in eighth grade, we got to go on a class trip to Uganda. All the children there spoke English, but I'm really good at it. We were there for three weeks, we learned to cook and did business projects, like making soap or jam and selling it. I called my mum when we got home. I said that the trip had been really useful for me and that what I'd learned will help me in the future. 'Mum, everything's going to be fine, don't worry,' I said."



Three baskets offer help

The three baskets are filled with money when the solidarity group in Floriane's home village hold their meetings. The money is then placed in three boxes, each with their own lock, in the wooden chest. Money from the locked boxes has helped Floriane's family and enabled her to go to FVS Amade's school ...



In the middle of the lawn are three woven baskets and a wooden chest. 21 men and women dressed in smart clothes sit in a half circle around them. They are all members of the solidarity group in Floriane's home village. Floriane used to join in with the group's meetings sometimes because she's good at counting.

Floriane sits next to the cashier. Firstly they call out the names of everyone who has taken out a loan from the group's funds; they have to pay interest on their loans by putting money in one of the baskets. The group applauds every time. Sometimes a member can't put money in, so that person has to pay double next time.



One basket is filled with the villagers' interest payments on their loans from the solidarity group.



Floriane notes down all payments in the solidarity group's cashbook.



Those who want to can also put money in another basket which is for deposits. All the members of the solidarity group pay an annual membership fee, also called a deposit or share. When someone puts money in the other basket, that person is buying a larger share of the whole group's total contribution. This means the whole group gains more money, or capital.

The money from the three baskets is placed in the three boxes in the safe: one for interest payments and deposits, one for the fund for healthcare and other help for the villagers, and one for school uniforms and materials for the children.



When she's home from school, Floriane usually goes to the solidarity group meetings. The solidarity group in her village has also decided to help poor families that are not members of the group.

Three keys

Those who can put a little money into a third basket, contributing to fund to pay for children's school uniforms and school materials.

Floriane notes everything down: who pays their interest and how much they've paid, who has bought a bigger share and for how much and who has put money into the fund for school material, and how much.

All the money is then placed in different boxes in the wooden chest, which is on the ground next to the baskets. Three keys are needed to open the three boxes in the chest.

The money paid in interest and deposits goes into the first box. A small portion of the deposits goes into the second box for a fund for healthcare or other help the members might need. The third box contains the money for school uniforms and school materials.

While Floriane notes everything down in the group's cashbook, others

note down the details in each member's own cashbook. The members can use these to keep track of their investments during the year.

A member can apply for a loan for small business projects at any time during the year. At the end of the year, everyone who has paid their interest gets their investments back with a small profit.

Helping the village

The money for school materials is used every year at the start of school. The solidarity

group buys school uniforms, pens and notebooks for all the children in the village.

The solidarity group in Floriane's village has decided to help more people than just its members. Floriane's family is poor, so they have been given help to build a house. The group also helped Floriane get a place at FVS Amade's school.

"I'm so grateful for your help. I don't know how to thank you. You are like my parents and I hope you can help others like me in the

future," says Floriane when the meeting is over.

"We're happy for your sake and that you have the chance to go on and do further studies. You're always welcome here. You know that," says the group's chairwoman Christine.

Floriane has decided that when she's finished university and started her own company or got a job at a bank, she's going to help the people in her village. Because they've helped her. 🌍



"I don't know how to thank you. You are like my parents and I hope you can help others like me in the future," says Floriane to the village's solidarity group.



TEXT: ERIK HALKJÆR PHOTOS: JESPER KLEMDSSON





It's nice to have a roof over our heads, at grandma's. There's a mattress and a quilt. Evariste doesn't get wet when it rains. He used to live at a rubbish dump; it smelt horrible and was really dirty. He got soaked through whenever it rained.

From the street to grandma's

Their mum and dad beat Evariste and his younger brothers Selmani and Eric, so they ran away from home and lived on the street. Help from FVS Amade has enabled Evariste and Selmani to return home and they now live with their grandma. They go to school and play football whenever they want. But their little brother Eric is still living on the street ...



“We’d slept on the rubbish dump at the market in town. We got up early to look for wood to sell to people who make coal, but my little brother Selmani didn’t want to. He disappeared into town instead. I went to the market on my own and looked. Our little brother Eric wasn’t with me either. He had slept somewhere else.

“When I got back to the dump, Selmani wasn’t there. I heard that the police had been there looking for street children.

Reading and writing is hard. Evariste is a bit better at it than Selmani. Grandma Rachel tells them off because their notebooks are so crumpled and dirty.

“That night I prayed to God for Selmani to come back. We always sleep together, even if we do different things during the day. He was gone for four days. I searched everywhere and asked after him, but no-one had seen him. At night, I prayed that nothing bad had happened to him. I met Eric, but he didn’t want to help look for him.”

Help for the boys

“One day when I was going past the prison, I heard someone calling my name:

‘Eva, Eva!’

It was Selmani. He was sitting in a car with some adults. I was so happy to see him.

‘We’re from an organization called FVS Amade. We helped your brother get out of prison and we’re going to take him to



Evariste, 10

- Wants to be:** A priest.
- Would rather:** Go to school.
- Doesn't want to:** Live on the street again.
- Likes:** Playing football.
- Misses:** The house where he lived with his mum and dad.
- Favourite toy:** A teddy.

“Sometimes young people from the government militia captured us. They were on drugs and they beat us and wanted to steal our things. They could also lock us up for a few days.

“When I first started living on the street, mum and dad were really angry when I came home again. I'd gone off with some other kids and stayed with them. Dad shoved me in a sack and beat and kicked me.

“Mum forced us to do loads of work at home. When we didn't do it, she hit us. She tied me up once, but Selmani cut me free with a knife.

our centre for street children,’ explained one of the adults. ‘Would you like to come too?’

I wanted to, and we got to stay with FVS for ten days. They gave us food, shoes and new clothes. One day they said that we would be able to go home to grandma's and live with her. We were pleased. I've always felt happy with her. We have to help out with some things at home, but we can play football and go to school.”

Hard life on the street

“Living on the street was tough. I've been in prison four times. We used to steal watches and phones. We used the money to buy a little food and glue, which we sniffed. The police caught us because they didn't want street children on the streets. They used to let me stay in prison for three or four days before letting me out.

“That's why we ran away from home and never went back. Eric ran away when he was just two years old. “It's better now we're living with grandma. She doesn't hit us.” 🌐

Everyone after the ball

Evariste, his little brother Selmani and their friends play football whenever they can. The ball is made out of rolled up bits of material. There aren't any rules. Everyone goes after the ball and shoots and passes as much as they can. If the ball goes outside the edge you have to try and catch it quickly, or it'll get lost forever down in the ravine.





Evariste and Selmani search for their little brother Eric.

Searching for their little brother

Evariste wishes his youngest brother Eric could come and live with him at grandma's. Eric usually hangs around the market. They found him once, but he disappeared again.

Sometimes after school, Evariste and Selmani travel into the centre of the capital Bujumbura to look for their little brother Eric. They get help from FVS Amade.

Evariste and Selmani know roughly where Eric usually sleeps and spends his time

during the day. They also know which other street children know him.

They don't have any photos, but Selmani looks a lot like Eric, so several people at the market understand who they're looking for. Many say they know where they've seen Eric.



Evariste's school uniform is a light brown shirt and a pair of shorts. They're much too big, but they will last for several years. He also got a pair of shoes and a rucksack from FVS Amade.

When Evariste and Selmani were found, they got to live at FVS Amade's reception centre for street children for a month and a half before moving in with their grandma. Now four other children live there.

We've left the streets



"I'm grateful that they've been so welcoming here after I'd been in prison. Now I can go back to school after two years on the street."
Francine, 12



"I've been living on the street for two months, but now I want to go back to school again and be like other children."
Aimable, 12





Evariste and Selmani had never been to school before. They are in the same class, year 1, even though Selmani is two years younger than Evariste. They go to school in the mornings, and in the afternoons, the older children go to school.

“He was here earlier on. Check at the Asian market,” says one woman.

A girl Evariste knows says she hasn’t seen Eric for several days. Two boys recognise Evariste and Selmani. They ask what they’re doing there in their school uniforms.

“We live with grandma and we’ve started school. It’s good,” says Evariste.

Found and lost

Sometimes they walk round the market for several hours.

Sometimes they go home after just a short time. FVS Amade doesn’t want Evariste and Selmani to feel tempted to go back to their old friends.

Although sometimes some of the street children they meet come into contact with FVS Amade later. They realise they can get help, maybe even start school.

One day, Evariste and Selmani find out that someone from FVS Amade has found Eric. She recognised him because he looked like

Selmani. Eric went with her to FVS Amade, but he only stayed for five days. He met Evariste and Selmani, but then he disappeared.

“He’s very dependent on drugs. If we find him again, we’ll need to help him get off the drugs,” says a social worker at FVS Amade. 🌐

Grandma Rachel lives high up on a hillside outside the capital Bujumbura. The brothers’ school is right at the bottom of the hill. It doesn’t take long to get down, but when it rains it’s muddy and slippery.



“I’d rather not see my mum again. She just wants me to beg and give the money to her. If I could, I’d go to school and live at school too.”
Selenia, 12



“We get food here, without having to beg or work. It’s nice. I’ve lived on the street for a year and a half, but now I want to go back to school so I can be a doctor.”
Levien, 11



Celestin looks after his animals when he gets home from school. Here he is doing his homework, next to his goat and his mum's calf.



Celestin's cockerel.

Celestin's animals create a better future

Celestin's dad didn't want to know him, and he was bullied at school. But no-one teases him anymore. Instead he is respected for his faith in the future and his ability to earn money from his animals.

One day when he was eight years old, Celestin asked his mum what the pills were that he took every day.

"You have a virus in your body called HIV. If you don't take your pills, you could get AIDS and die," explained his mum Marie, and added that she also had the virus. And Celestin's dad had it too.

Celestin's dad accused Celestin's mum of infecting him. It was probably the other

way round, but his dad forced Celestin and his mum to move out. Celestin and his mum had to keep moving to different villages for a couple of years. Celestin's dad's relatives didn't want them to live with them, but, as his son, Celestin is entitled to inherit some of his dad's land.

Just like everyone else

At the hospital, Celestin and his mum met a person from FVS Amade, who said that



Celestin looks after his schoolbooks and wraps them carefully in protective paper.

they could get help. FVS Amade's lawyers helped Celestin get a house from his dad's relatives. The house is next door to his grandma Rachel. FVS Amade also made sure that Celestin got to go to school.

"I didn't tell anyone that I was HIV positive, but one of dad's relatives worked at the school and told everyone that I had the virus," says Celestin.

Suddenly no-one wanted to play with him and he had to sit on his own in the classroom.

Following an argument, Celestin and another boy were called to the headteacher's office. The teachers said that Celestin had to quit school. His relative was the worst of all. But FVS Amade explained to the headteacher that Celestin was taking medication and that HIV isn't spread just by playing with other children. So the headteacher said he could remain in school.

"No-one's teased me since that day. They also explained to all the children at school





what HIV is and that I'm just like all the other children," says Celestin.

One hen becomes five

Not all Celestin's relatives were mean. One day, an aunt gave him a hen. When the hen laid ten eggs, Celestin only sold five of them. The five eggs he saved became five chicks. He bought feed for the five chicks using the money from the five eggs he sold. They would in turn grow up and produce new eggs.

At school, Celestin likes maths. His hens gave him the idea of investing the money he earned to buy more animals.

Then one of the hens got sick and died. It infected the others, and they died too.

But Celestin didn't give up. He had saved money and bought new hens and a cockerel. He used the money he earned to buy feed for his hens and to help his mum.

Moles in exchange for sheep

Many of the farmers in the village have problems with moles eating their crops. Anyone who can catch moles can earn

lots of money and Celestin has made his own traps.

"I caught 25 moles in a day. I got up early in the morning and put the traps out. Then I went to school, and when I got home there were moles in several of the traps."

Celestin used the money he earned from catching moles to buy a sheep. He raised the sheep, sold it and then bought a goat with the money. Then he bought another goat and a new sheep.

The goats and the sheep produce manure for fertiliser, which Celestin sells at the market. Sometimes farmers come to his home to buy fertiliser.

More and more animals

Celestin wants to use the money to buy more animals



Vital medicine

The antiretroviral drug that Celestin takes every day means he can live a long life without getting AIDS.

and feed for them. He also helps his mum and pays for his own clothes and school things.

Celestin's mum is a member of the village's solidarity group. She's been given a loan so she can grow fruit and vegetables, which she sells at the market. She has also been able to buy a cow and a calf.

"I feed all the animals before I go to school. When I get home, I look after them again. Then I do my homework before it gets dark."

Celestin likes fixing bikes and he often helps a bicycle repair man. One day he hopes to have his own local bicycle workshop and maybe even buy his own motorbike. 🌐

FVS Amade helps people who are HIV positive

Pregnant women can pass the HIV virus on to their baby when it's born. HIV can also be passed on when a person with the virus has unprotected sex with another person. Blood from a person carrying the HIV virus can also infect another person. There is no cure for HIV yet, but antiviral drugs can stop the virus from developing into AIDS, which is fatal. You can live your entire life with HIV, as long as you take the antiviral drugs. Around 84,000 people in Burundi are HIV positive. Two thirds of them take antiviral drugs. The number of people living with HIV in Burundi has dropped hugely over the past few years. FVS Amade runs two clinics offering treatment to people with HIV.



Celestin in front of the house that FVS Amade's lawyer helped him get from his dad's relatives.

