

Orphans of Rwanda *update*

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Our Mission

Orphans of Rwanda, Inc. (ORI) is dedicated to helping orphans and other socially vulnerable young people in Rwanda pursue a university education and ultimately become leaders in driving economic development and social reconciliation.

We believe strongly in the principle that led us to accept our first class of 11 students several years ago—that every young person, no matter how poor or vulnerable, has the right to an education commensurate with his or her talent.



By the Numbers

Applicants for scholarships in 2008	1,500
Number of young people selected	68
Percentage selected:	5%
Average age of the incoming class	22
Percentage of students who are women	50%
Universities that students will attend	8
Fields of study	23

ORI Announces 2008 Class of Scholarship Recipients

Orphans of Rwanda is pleased to announce its 2008 class of university scholarship recipients. This summer, our team in Rwanda notified 68 talented young people they had been selected for four years of university tuition support. This brings the total number of students attending university through ORI to 121. The new cohort of scholarship winners will begin their studies at eight different Rwandan universities in early 2008.

We received more than 1,500 applications for the 68 awards—an acceptance rate of less than 5%. The selection process entailed a thorough review of the applicants' life histories, academic records, national university entrance exam scores, written essays and competence in English and French (the languages of university instruction). Finally, the selection committee, which included ORI's Country Director and representatives of five partner organizations, held personal interviews with 146 individuals at seven different locations around the country.



Spotlight on Gerardine Benimana

In her ORI application, Gerardine, 19, wrote that the 1994 genocide resulted "in a number of our citizens suffering from mental illness." In 2008, Gerardine—who completed high school in Kigali and graduated in the top third of her class—will begin studying psychology in pursuit of her dream: founding a center for psychosocial support where she will serve as a clinical psychologist. The selection committee highlighted her competency in both French and English, her "large capacity to overcome difficulties," and her "vision for the future."



Spotlight on Gemeni Credo Kananura

Despite losing both parents to the genocide, Credo, 25, completed high school in 2002 with excellent grades. After also losing his guardian, Credo moved with his surviving siblings from place to place and ended up in Uganda, working odd jobs to survive. A friend encouraged him to return to Kigali to continue his studies and there he learned about ORI. In his application, Credo wrote that "I really like computer science, because it can bring me a brighter future." The selection committee commended Credo for his excellent language skills and described him as "confident with a clear sense of direction."



The ORI Program

Most ORI students have spent much of their lives in orphanages and attending university is often their first experience of living independently. To help with the transition, ORI staff provide counseling in basic life skills, such as how to open and manage a bank account and how to manage their time. New students also participate in life skills workshops that range in topics from sexual and reproductive health, to trauma healing and confidence building.

All ORI students receive a monthly stipend for living expenses. These modest amounts, which go directly into bank accounts that ORI helps set up, enable students to focus on their studies by relieving the pressure to earn money during the school year.

To ensure that ORI students are prepared for academic success, ORI has developed a number of training and support programs. All new students participate in ORI's Language and Computer Training programs. Last year, for example, 39 of 52 students participated in an intensive nine-week language course and demonstrated an overall improvement of 32% in reading and writing skills, in both English and French. ORI has also organized a tutoring program that provides students with weekend instruction in subjects in which they are having difficulty.

Through an extensive system of counseling, training and development programs, ORI is committed to providing holistic support to students so they can thrive both academically and personally.

In addition to promoting academic success, ORI works to advance the post-university success of our students. To promote our graduates' readiness to enter the workforce, we recently launched a Career Development Program that develops students' understanding of potential career paths, introduces them to internships that will lead to full-time employment, and helps them hone their resume-writing and interview skills.

By providing critical services for ORI students during their university years, ORI strives to ensure they make a successful transition into their new lives—so they can excel academically and develop their potential for leadership.



New Student Orientation

On June 13, the 68 students that make up ORI's class of 2008 attended new student orientation, their first official function as ORI scholars. In a beautiful garden in Kigali, ORI staff, current students and representatives of our partner organizations welcomed the newcomers into the ORI family. The day featured passionate speeches, practical advice, and lots of meeting and greeting!

Spotlight: New Additions to the ORI Team



Michael Brotncher Executive Director

In May 2007, ORI's Board of Directors selected Michael Brotncher as the organization's new Executive Director. Before joining ORI, Michael was the Director of Development for the Fund for Public Schools, which secures private funding for the

New York City Department of Education's reform efforts and develops public-private partnerships. Michael has served on numerous nonprofit Boards and is on the Executive Committee for Root Capital, which provides affordable financial services to community-based businesses operating in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Michael holds an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley, and a BA from Wesleyan University.



Christine Chiu Program Manager

Christine comes to ORI from Human Rights Watch (HRW), where she worked as a grant writer since 2005. At HRW, Christine wrote funding proposals for the Africa, Middle East, Children's Rights and Refugee Policy Divisions. Christine is a graduate of Stanford

University with a concentration in International Development. While at Stanford, Christine spent a semester in Geneva where she had the opportunity to engage with multiple UN agencies and other international organizations. Christine joined the Rwanda team in August.

ORI recently re-launched our website! The new site includes more information about our new class, including student profiles. Visit www.orphansofrwanda.org.

Note from the Founders

Many of you were with us in 2004 when we selected our first class of university students. Our acceptance rate then was 100%, as we admitted all 11 applicants to the program. For our second class, the acceptance rate was about 90% and last year it dropped to less than 40%.

When we planned the selection process earlier this year for our fourth class, we expected to receive 200 applications. Much to our astonishment, we received more than 1,500! And, these were not hastily completed submissions—these were five-page applications written in English or French (the third or fourth languages for many of these students). The applications came from talented students throughout Rwanda, whose personal essays conveyed a commitment to changing the country. As highlighted in this newsletter, we selected 68 students from this applicant pool—an acceptance rate of less than 5%.

This is truly a defining moment for ORI. Since ORI's inception, the two of us have wondered about the numbers of talented, motivated and vulnerable young Rwandans who want a university education. The number of applications this year confirms that we've only scratched the surface. On the one hand, selecting 68 of Rwanda's most skilled and vulnerable young adults—such as Gerardine and Credo, who are profiled here—is thrilling, because the students are incredibly impressive. On the other hand, it has been a profoundly sobering experience, because there are so many talented and deserving students we currently lack the resources to support.

Over the next few months, we will begin to re-think our growth plan in light of this tremendous response. We're lucky to have a new Executive Director on board to guide this process and fantastic new team members in Rwanda to put our plans into action. We're also fortunate to have generous and dedicated supporters like you who have made this rapid growth possible.

Our third class of university scholarship recipients matriculated at the beginning of 2007. This group includes future doctors, politicians, computer scientists, lawyers, teachers—even an aspiring pilot! With the class of 2008, ORI now provides university scholarships to 121 students. This is great progress, but we still believe strongly in the principle that led us to accept those 11 students into our first class a few years ago—that every young person, no matter how poor or vulnerable, has the right to an education commensurate with his or her talent. We still have a long way to go and hope you will join us as we try to make this aspiration a reality in Rwanda.

Best,

Dai Ellis & Oliver Rothschild

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What A Difference A Year Makes

A Report from Volunteer Program Manager Jordan Stewart

I was on vacation, sitting in an internet café in Bujumbura, when I learned we had received 1,500 applications for scholarships for the 2008 school year. The number remained an abstraction, until I returned to Kigali and applicants started coming out of the woodwork—my waiter at Chez Lando was an applicant, as was the girl sitting next to me on the bus and the young man who chased my car down the street pounding on the window. They all wanted to know whether they had been accepted.

The overwhelming response we received this year reflects the larger transformation ORI has undergone over the past 12 months. In June 2006, when I joined ORI, the “office” was a tiny table in a side room off the offices of the Millennium Village/Access Project. But our program has evolved even more dramatically than our quarters. Over time, we learned that our students needed support beyond the stipends and academic opportunities ORI provides. Many of them continue to face daunting personal challenges. Some of our students are the primary breadwinners in their families, providing for their younger brothers and sisters. They need to make tough decisions as they balance these responsibilities with their studies. ORI has paired them with mentors who can help them with their choices. Our staff has worked hard over the last year to create programs ranging from language training and tutoring to the psychosocial support these young people need.

We harbor the ambitious expectation that a group of very vulnerable young people can achieve what fewer than half a percent of all Rwandan adults have accomplished: earning a university degree. ORI’s holistic approach to student support is essential to making that expectation a reality. So, too, is the highly competitive selection process: our students know they were chosen from a huge pool of talented applicants on the basis of their academic success and personal drive. They also know that if they fail to take advantage of this opportunity, many others are waiting to take their place. All of our students are highly motivated. Indeed, for some, a university education offers an escape from untenable personal situations: advances from males on whom they depend economically, the threat of an unwanted marriage or forced involvement with crime.

One of the things I am most proud of is that we have transformed our student body. We are still serving the vulnerable population that Dai and Oliver first targeted, but we have added rigorous academic criteria. ORI’s student body includes double-parent orphans, young people who are heads of households, and single-parent orphans whose surviving parent is terminally ill. But these classes also comprise some of Rwanda’s best students. The 1,500 applications for the Class of 2008 demonstrate the tremendous need for ORI’s scholarships and for expansion of our work. The challenge going forward is to continue our growth and improve the support programs that will help our amazing students succeed and become leaders.