

As news of the 9/11 attack rippled far beyond American borders, the effects were felt even in Rwanda. Humanitarian organizations including the International Red Cross swung into action to catch up with the situation, budget cuts and layoffs became inevitable.

Diane Bunzigiye still remembers the weight of that morning. Waking up to face the stark reality that she couldn't be going back to work—not because she had quit, but because the world itself had changed. It was September 11, 2001, a date etched in global memory, and for Diane, a single mother of three living in Rwanda, it marked the beginning of endless uncertainty.

Diane and her colleagues were stranded in the stark reality of widespread uncertainty and looming deleterious effects.

Nonetheless, the situation was a silver lining for Diane who instead of giving up, she conceived several projects.

While others rushed to find new employment, she thought of a different path in a maze of uncertainty. Diane was undeterred. “My friends told me, ‘Let’s go look for jobs,’ she recalls, “I said, ‘Nope. I’m going to employ myself. They laughed.”



Diane Bunzigiye, the Founder of Ecole Les Poussins

Days turned into months, but as someone who never gives up, an idea of starting a childcare centre –providing care and pre-primary education, especially to the children of working class mothers came to her mind. Soon, she'd gained on the basic requirements of starting childcare. After running out of options, at the height of financial problems, she started with one child with a single room as childcare centre.

“In fact, I developed the idea of a childcare centre in my childhood dreams,” she recalls.

Bunzigiye was inspired by H.E President Paul Kagame's appeals to women to start their own businesses instead of waiting for foreign aid “Why don't you work for yourself, instead, these NGOs will one day pack and return to their countries,” said Kagame.

In 2006, Bunzigiye established a childcare centre codenamed Les Poussins. She put in place the required facilities and did her best, with her reach to meet the basic conditions for a modern childcare. Besides ensuring a safe clean environment, Bunzigiye purchased toys, sleeping mattresses and ensured there was a budget for healthy meals of babies between 1-3 years.



THE BUMPY START

Bunzigiye recalls that finding clients was hard at the beginning. “I remember, my first client was a baby of my relative. I was not, however, discouraged by the situation. The school gradually picked up despite the scanty investment in advertisements,” she told Rwanda Dispatch recently.

The progress she made with the pioneer baby soon attracted other parents who praise the centre for its organization, professionalism and clean, learning and teaching environment.

The core objective of Les Poussins was to help working class mothers leave their babies in safer hands and conducive learning and teaching environments other than under the care of maids.

“Over the years, our clients love the way we do things in terms of services and childcare in general,” she observed.

Bunzigiye admits her baby care facility was financially struggling and weathered through hard times, which included failure to pay salaries. This prompted her to secure a bank loan and solved all outstanding challenges.

FROM BABY CARE TO THE FIRST CLASSROOMS

What started as a baby care soon became much more. Bunzigiye was caring for babies whose parents needed a safe, nurturing space while they worked but as the little ones grew, so did the expectations of their families. When the first group of children was ready to begin formal learning—nursery and kindergarten, the parents were hesitant to send them elsewhere, urging Bunzigiye to start a school.

It wasn't an easy decision. Turning a baby care center into a full school required resources she didn't have. Still, driven by the trust parents had placed in her and a

growing sense of purpose, she took a bold step—selling her car to raise funds, since she had no collateral to access a bank loan.



That sacrifice marked a turning point: what began as childcare was now evolving into a real school, built from the ground up with faith, resilience, and community support.

The original location of the school was in Kiyovu before it established another campus at Gikondo, housed by former APAPRE Secondary school.

Ecole Les Poussins is popularly known for going an extra mile in childcare, treating children like their own.

Today, the school is one of the best performing in Rwanda, at Nursery, Primary and Secondary education levels, located in Kigali's Gikondo area (serves as the main campus), another in Kiyovu and Kimironko). Les Poussins also has school in Muhanga (Southern Rwanda) and Rubavu (Western Rwanda).

At Kiyovu, near Kigali City downtown, Les Poussins runs a programme called 'Crib'—where they admit babies aged two for a year before proceeding to kindergarten. The teacher- pupil ratio is 1:5 (one teacher per five pupils).

SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The school curriculum is widely seen as friendly and flexible. The morning reception runs until 8:30. Parents pick up their children between 4:30- 6:00 p.m. The children are served with snacks per day along with milk and a healthy meal for lunch.

THE OFFICIAL SCHOOL CALENDAR IS ANNOUNCED THROUGH THE MEDIA.

The Primary school programme begins at the age of six while Secondary at 12 a structure aligned with the French curriculum.



Children at the 3rd and 4th grades receive preparation for the Brevet diploma (DNB). Students at Secondary level enroll for long distance courses (CNED).

The curriculum includes Science Courses, Arts and Languages, students receive 17

hours of core lessons per week and 12 hours of specialized lessons besides 1.5 hours orientation lessons per week, in the final year of high school, the lessons reduce to 1.5 hours per week.

The vision of Ecole Les Poussins is focused on empowering each student with the knowledge and skills alongside promoting Rwandan values and culture.

Shekinah Mwiza Balinda, the Administrator at Les Poussins explains that, they focus on empowerment of the children and preserving Rwandan culture. She disclosed that they offer an international curriculum at an affordable price.

Ecole Les Poussins partners with France's Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance (CNED), a national center for distance education that offers various educational programs, including high school diplomas and other qualifications. Balinda says their graduates always pursue further studies in the USA and Europe.

For students who need extra support, Les Poussins provides room for catch-up classes on Wednesday afternoons, ensuring no one lags behind. The school also recognizes that individualized attention and support is crucial for helping all students succeed.

Beyond the core curriculum, Les Poussins schools offer a robust extracurricular program that includes activities such as acting, digital tool use, sports, and traditional cultural drama. These diverse offerings allow students to explore their interests and talents outside the classroom.

Les Poussins boasts a programme that involves parents in their children's individual academic progress. They have a special day where parents, teachers, and students discuss the child's performance.

The parents take part in various initiatives, Balinda notes, fostering a strong sense of community.

Each year, Les Poussins hosts a heartwarming event called "Pajama Day," during which students dress in pajamas and bring their personal attires to donate. The event carries a deeper purpose: to instill empathy, generosity, and social responsibility in students from an early age by encouraging them to support less privileged members of the community.

The school holds an annual event called “Carnaval Day,” where children come dressed in déguisement— costumes that represent the professions they aspire to pursue in the future, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers, pilots, flight attendants, and more.



“Les Poussins places a strong emphasis on the importance of capacity building, and we offer capacity-building programmes for teachers in partnership with foreign educational institutions.

This is a gesture of recognition of the centrality of empowering teachers in the efforts to provide high quality education,” remarked Balinda.

Angelic Niyonshuti, a parent with two school going children and two who completed Les Poussins, says that Diane Bunzigiye’s determination and passion for educating children is a reason why she takes her children to the school. Diane, a single mother, started with one baby, but through God’s grace and hard work, she has progressed to this level.

“The teachers are highly trained and qualified, as evidenced by the children’s homework and results. The pupils are open-minded and speak very good French, English and Kinyarwanda which is why we all take our children there,” observes Niyonshuti.

As a parent, I’m intrigued by how my children handle their homework, as they even conduct research on using internet for further education. I urge other parents to take their children to Les Poussins, because in a few months, the children learn good

languages and teachers love the children, as well as teaching them a variety of engaging activities.

What is intriguing, Niyonshuti adds, is that Les Poussins offers motivation for parents with many children who are struggling with scholarships or tuition fees.

The school also runs a support program for orphans and disadvantaged children. In the unfortunate event that a parent passes away or faces a serious crisis, the school steps in to ensure the affected child continues their education without interruption.

Additionally, children of the school's staff receive free education—a gesture that reflects the school's deep commitment to community care and solidarity.

Even during difficult times, Les Poussins managed to weather through the difficult situation. During COVID-19, Diane Bunzigiye reveals that Bank of Kigali (BK) stepped in to assist the school in meeting teachers' salaries and providing internet access so that children could learn from home.



From a single room in Bunzigiye home to a network of thriving schools across the country, Les Poussins is a true testament that innovation, perseverance, and that opportunity, indeed, begins at home.

At the heart of Bunzigiye's journey is a deep commitment to empowering both children and women—nurturing the youngest minds while creating spaces where women can grow and lead. She believes her mission is not only personal, but part of a larger national vision.

With humility, she attributes her achievements to God's guidance and the visionary leadership of His Excellency President Paul Kagame, whose policies have opened doors for women to thrive and for children to be given the foundation they deserve.