

How We Show Up

The HSA Way™

A conversation about listening, local leadership, dignity, and serving in ways that strengthen people.



How we show up matters.

Because people remember more than what we did;
they remember how we entered the room.

HSA did not arrive at this way of serving all at once. Some of it came from experience. Some from mistakes. Much came from listening to people in Rwanda and realizing that good intentions are not enough on their own.

Over time, a few convictions have become part of how we think about service, partnership, leadership, and community. We call this The HSA Way™.

THE BEGINNING

We learned to slow down.

When you care about people, movement can feel like faithfulness. You see a need and want to respond. You see potential and want to build. You see an open door and want to walk through it before it closes.

We understand that energy. HSA was born from a yes.

But some of our most important lessons have come from discovering that not every yes should be rushed.

Maybe you know this feeling.

You enter a new community with a heart full of ideas. The ideas may even be good. But the people who live there have a history with those ideas, the relationships around them, and the realities that will determine whether they last.

So we learned to pause. To ask another question. To hear more than the first answer.

Listening is not what we do before the real work begins.

Listening is part of the work.

That sounds simple. In practice, it changes almost everything.

LISTEN FIRST

What if the first voice is not ours?

Cross-cultural work can make visitors feel unusually important. We traveled the distance. We may bring funding, education, professional experience, or connections. People may welcome us warmly and ask for our thoughts.

None of that means we understand the community better than the people who call it home.

Local leaders know which family has quietly been helping another family. They know which young person is ready for more responsibility. They know when a solution will create conflict, when a conversation needs more time, and when something that looks small from the outside carries deep meaning inside the community.

A different kind of expertise.

A visitor may understand fundraising, technology, education, or organizational systems. A local leader may understand the people, trust, timing, history, and context. Healthy partnership does not ask which expertise matters more. It asks how they can work together.

Listen first.

Not because you have nothing to offer, but because what you offer becomes wiser when it is informed by people who are already there.

HONOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The goal is not to become the most important person in the room.

We have become increasingly convinced that lasting change is strongest when local people help shape it, lead it, and carry it forward.

That can require something difficult from people who are used to solving problems: making room.

Making room for someone else to make the decision. To try. To learn. To lead a meeting differently than you would. To receive the credit. Even to make a mistake that becomes part of their growth.

This can feel slower.

It is often faster to do something yourself. It can be more efficient to take over. But efficiency and development are not always the same thing. If the work succeeds only when the outsider is present, we have to ask what kind of success we built.

Leadership with love makes room for other people to grow.

Sometimes the best evidence that your leadership mattered is that someone else can now carry what once depended on you.

PROTECT DIGNITY

People are never the project.

Needs are real. Poverty is real. Health challenges are real. Education can be interrupted. Families can face pressures that deserve a compassionate response.

But no person should be reduced to the hardest thing happening in their life.

That conviction shapes how we talk, give, photograph, tell stories, and make decisions.

Think about the language we use.

There is a difference between saying, “We helped a poor family,” and saying, “We walked alongside a family navigating a difficult season.” One sentence makes the visitor the main actor—the other leaves room for the family to remain fully human.

Dignity asks us to see the whole person.

Need may be part of the story. It is never the whole story.

When we see people fully, we begin noticing their ideas, humor, faith, work, relationships, skills, hopes, and ability to contribute. Service changes when we stop seeing someone only through what they lack.

SERVE TOWARD STRENGTH

We do not want to be needed forever.

This may be one of the clearest ways HSA has changed over time.

In the beginning, being needed can feel like proof that the work matters. People call. Programs depend on you. You solve problems. You become central.

But dependence is a poor measure of impact.

We're more interested in what happens when people become stronger.

What strength can look like.

A young leader handles something that once required your involvement. A team solves a problem before it reaches you. A community idea moves forward with local ownership. Someone who once needed encouragement is now encouraging someone else.

Our help is healthiest when it strengthens what can continue without us.

That does not mean leaving people alone. It means walking alongside with a different goal: not to become indispensable, but to help people grow in confidence, capacity, ownership, and leadership.

THE HSA WAY™

Four things we keep coming back to.

We do not hold these as a formula. Relationships are too human for that. We hold them as reminders - especially when the work moves quickly, or the answer feels obvious.

LISTEN FIRST

Enter as a learner. Ask before assuming. Pay attention to what is already happening.

HONOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Give weight to the people closest to the community. Make room for others to lead.

PROTECT DIGNITY

See the whole person. Let compassion and respect travel together.

SERVE TOWARD STRENGTH

Help in ways that build confidence, capacity, opportunity, and ownership.

And underneath all four is something even simpler: relationship.

People first. Relationship before response. Leadership with love.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO CARRY

How are we showing up?

These questions aren't for other people. We use them on ourselves too.

- Am I listening long enough to understand before I respond?
- Whose knowledge should carry the most weight in this moment?
- Am I making room for someone else to lead?
- Does the way I am telling this story preserve the person's dignity?
- Will my help build strength, or quietly make me more necessary?
- Am I moving because the door is open - or because the timing is right?
- If I step away, what will remain?

We show up as someone on assignment, not as someone with all the answers.

That truth keeps our role clear and our hands open.

The HSA Way™ is still being lived, tested, and deepened. We expect to keep learning because relationship keeps teaching us.

What is one thing you want to carry forward from this Field Note?

If your church, school, nonprofit, mission team, or organization is thinking about how to serve, lead, or partner across cultures, HSA would be glad to continue the conversation.

Hope Springs Africa

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