

What inspires us in our work



Stories and Dreams
Harvesting Workshop 2017



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
HERMANN GMEINER ACADEMY

What inspires us in our work

Stories told by participants of the
Harvesting Workshop 2017



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
HERMANN GMEINER ACADEMY

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Harvesting time is when SOS Children's Villages co-workers from around the world come together to share stories about the best moments in their work. Harvesting workshops were developed to find out what functions really well in the day-to-day activities of SOS Children's Villages, what gives SOS co-workers strength and what we in the organisation can build on.

Preface

What is Harvesting about?

In Harvesting we, the Hermann Gmeiner Academy (HGA) education team, invite a group of approximately 20 long-standing co-workers to exchange their rich and varied working experiences through storytelling. Colleagues from different countries working in a variety of functions tell stories from their personal experience and extensive knowledge that deal with issues like child protection, emergency response, quality assurance and much more: all of special importance for our vision: *Every child belongs to a family and grows with love, respect and security.*

In Harvesting we focus on increasing what works well in achieving our mission. SOS Children's Villages is a living system and, as such, develops in the direction of its focus. Harvesting participants are therefore invited to concentrate on their strengths for the benefit of the children and young people in the SOS Children's Villages programmes who are definitely the essential core of this Knowledge Harvesting programme.

What are the fruits being harvested?

The fruits of this harvest are answers to questions such as: "What really energises you when you are at your best?" These answers touch the personal as well as the organisational level of participants' endeavours. Looking at the moments, patterns of behaviour or circumstances when our co-workers are in a "flow", when they are achieving the best results in supporting children at risk or in need, enables SOS Children's Villages to grow in that direction. Co-workers learn and benefit from each other's wealth of experience in being effective.

Harvesting proves that telling your own story and relating it to the stories of colleagues fosters a feeling of belonging, is an inspiration to take action, provides motivation and gives a feeling of being appreciated. Coming together in Harvesting offers participants the opportunity to share ideas and reflect on what the vision of SOS Children's Villages means for each co-worker's individual task. Listening and telling stories creates a powerful means of building a strong network of relationships throughout the federation.

Knowledge Harvesting

Why focus on what works well?

In Harvesting workshops we focus on what works well in the participants' daily work activities. Building on the "Appreciative Inquiry" approach, we are convinced that it is more effective to ask, "What do you want more of?" or "What do you want to see grow stronger, better, bigger?" than to look for weaknesses, mistakes or problems. In contrast to common ways of thinking, using the AI approach we look at everything that gives "life" and energy and thus supports and motivates co-workers.

"AI does not focus on changing people. Instead, it invites people to engage in building the kinds of organizations they want to live in. That's hard to resist."

Gervase Bushe

Research on positive psychology shows that the act of asking questions already influences the co-workers of an organisation in some way (Bushe, G.R. 2011). People generally show more confidence and readiness to journey to the future, when they know what to carry forward and what to build because it worked well in the past. In other words:

Energy goes where the attention flows

What does this mean? In Harvesting workshops we foster growth in a direction in which we at SOS Children's Villages are already proficient. We choose this approach, not because we think that no more changes are needed, but because we believe that what we focus on becomes our reality.

Looking at the great diversity of the Harvesting workshop participants, it is clear that there is not one reality but many. However, SOS Children's Villages co-workers are deeply connected by having the same vision: "Every child grows with love, respect and security." When asked, "What inspires you?" Harvesting workshop participants even expressed their own personal inspiration, describing it e.g. as: passion, protection, belief, fulfilment, urgency, leadership, flexibility, sacrifice, necessity, decision, positive change, adaptability to circumstances, targets, etc. This is what motivates the "Harvesters" 2017!

"Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational and community development that has been used successfully worldwide to cultivate hope, build capacity, unleash collective appreciation and imagination, and bring about positive change."

Bliss Browne

We aim to find answers to the following questions:

- What works well in the daily activities of SOS Children's Villages?
- What gives strength to SOS co-workers?
- What can we build on within SOS Children's Villages?

Before we present the individual stories told during the Harvesting workshop, we invite you to enjoy the "fruits" found in these stories. The fruits can be seen as the essence of what has been learned. They are derived from the stories told by the participants of the Harvesting workshop 2017.

These overarching aspects illustrate the collective wisdom of this specific group of SOS co-workers that is captured in their stories. The stories offer insights for the organisation and can be seen as an opportunity for SOS Children's Villages to learn from experienced co-workers.

What kind of stories appear here?

In the first phase of each Harvesting workshop¹ we invite participants to think back to a time in their working lives when they felt entirely focused on and energised for a specific task or project in their given function and to tell their story about this “flow moment”.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 49) describes the flow as an enlightening moment in which we felt at ease and energised even though we were exerting our maximum effort.

“Flow is the feeling of pleasure resulting from enjoyment over the attainment of set goals, the fulfilment of desired expectations, the feeling of being in harmony with the experiences of the moment and of achieving previously unexpected success.”

The following stories are about the time when a Harvesting participant was fully involved in and truly enjoyed the activity he or she had at hand. These are stories about the “flow moments” of experienced SOS co-workers.

Storytelling is an act of trust and it takes courage from each storyteller

¹ Read more about the Harvesting workshop process and background in the following documents: Curriculum for SOS Children's Villages Harvesting Workshops Handbook for Harvesting Workshops. User guide for Multipliers

to put themselves out and share their story. It is important for us to honour that act and to do our best to treat each story in a respectful way. Therefore some stories that have been told in Harvesting 2017 remain with the group.

In order to respect the privacy of people mentioned in stories, names have been changed to maintain confidentiality as indicated.

We aim to present the story in an authentic way. For most Harvesting storytellers English is not the mother tongue. To keep the original character of the story, editing was conducted in a minimal form.

Who are the story authors?

The authors of the stories represent the diversity of the Harvesting participants. Seventeen colleagues from sixteen countries and four continents gathered in the Harvesting workshop 2017. Participants come from different hierarchical levels and functions, from various backgrounds e.g. SOS mothers, a national director and representatives of regional international offices. This diversity is a key source of learning and enables the rich harvest shown in the collection of fruits. The stories told have now been compiled in this booklet.

The backgrounds where SOS co-workers live and work are so heterogeneous that it is often hard for us to imagine what the (work) lives of our colleagues might look like. In order to enable us to become immersed in these diverse worlds we start collecting stories from the participants long before we meet each other in person. We may have questions like the following:

- How have you become the person you are today?
- What drives you in your work?
- How do you describe the context/ country you work and live in?
- How do you regain energy?
- What does family mean to you?

Each participant shares the answers to these questions in a sharing tool which we call “Searching for the TREASURES in you!”. We asked participants to discover and describe the treasures in themselves and in their

- Work
- Family, social life
- Leisure
- Country, home

A summary of their treasures can be found at the end of each story in the author’s description.

What are the story topics?

Co-workers experienced flow moments related to the following topics

- Quality care in SOS Children’s Villages
- Organisational change
- Youth can!
- Children grow roots in their community
- Securing resources

What are your dreams for the future?

The second phase of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle, the dream phase, sets the scene for the individual to exercise his or her potential in “creative envisioning” for SOS Children’s Villages.

When asked: “What might be within my sphere of influence in SOS Children’s Villages?” Harvesting participants dream of

- Being able to care for more and more children
- Future forms of loving care
- A good environment for children
- Ideal participatory work in SOS CV
- Inspiring teamwork
- A good life after a long lifespan working for SOS Children’s Villages

The Harvest

Below is a summary of what participants of the 2017 Harvesting workshop describe as motivating, inspiring and life-giving in their working lives, taken from the stories they told.

Leading questions for the analysis were:

- What works well in the daily activities of SOS Children's Villages?
- What gives strength to SOS co-workers?
- What can we build on within SOS Children's Villages?

Quality care in a complex world

The feeling of belonging and connectedness builds the foundations for the development of a stable identity and happiness. Translated into SOS Children's Villages' contexts this means to be touched by the biography of a child in combination with searching for opportunities and organising action to improve opportunities for personal development. Feeling deeply moved by someone or captivated by something can be taken as prerequisites for engagement. This leads to situations where co-workers go beyond their given job description and demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to their tasks. A strongly anchored set of values and basic attitudes facilitates taking action beyond the supposed limits. It is easy to find examples which display these kind of situations in the excerpts below. Sharing these examples is important for learning within an organisation. Within SOS Children's Villages these examples can easily be linked to our commitments to care (The SOS Care Guarantee, Draft Policy, p. 8).



We are willing to build strong and long-lasting relationships that go beyond “ordinary” care work

- “It was a magical moment when I held Jimmy in my arms. It was not only the holy water that sealed our promise, it was a long-term relationship that was built during years of waiting for this kind of situation, with a lot of meaning for us and for Jaime’s family. Of course he was present in this moment.”
Alberto Melgar, Page 37
- „Our workers found a sponsor who paid the debt for the utilities used. Heating and electricity in the house were restored and sanitary and hygienic conditions for the family were improved [...] However, the main help – now Maxim can hear and speak! I believe he will have a good future.” **Olena Kripak, Page 77**
- “Further special appreciation goes to the rest of my children for allowing me to be their mum, loving me despite our differing opinions on some issues, and for growing up to be successful young men and women in society, full of respect and constantly keeping tabs on me and the current generation of children. You are my family and always will be. I will continue loving and cherishing each of you dearly.”
Nancy Gicheru, Page 33
- “The small actors and performers are ready in their places. They are hopping impatiently, waving to their mothers and aunties to be sure they will see them as they appear on stage or shout the names of people they haven’t seen for a long time. Teachers are standing calmly next to them and pretending to be extra cool and relaxed and that everything is fine, like any other day. They give the children the final instructions about what to do and how to look their best.”
Ivana Zekić, Page 48

- “Smiles on the faces of our audience and a few happy tears mean that we made it – we touched their hearts. What our audience does not know is how much hard work we put into the preparations, how big are the life obstacles and limitations, fears and insecurities that we have overcome and how great is our success. Again, this was the best Christmas celebration ever. We did it together.” [Ivana Zekić, Page 49](#)



We are dedicated to helping generations of children to have a better life

- “Working with the family brought positive results. Oksana began to give more free time to the children, spent a family holiday, became more balanced and learned to restrain negative emotions. She went through a series of individual psychological counselling sessions, and the course on improving parenting potential and the women’s club helped her to develop herself. Previously she worked as a cleaner, but now she is an administrator in a beauty salon.” [Olana Kripak, Page 77](#)
- “One day I heard a knock on the door and went to check who was knocking. I was so surprised to find that it was one of our famous sports journalists. However, he seemed very angry and told me that he was looking for Katongo’s uncle. I became worried that my youth might have committed a crime. I told him that I was the uncle and asked him if I could be of help to him.” [Lyford Zulu, Page 44](#)
- „I presented the whole issue and the process I had gone through to the management team and the international project director. They asked me to draft the letter and try my best. Some of the management members said, “This is impossible, it is the CBE’s policy issue and that of the country. They will not grant your request”. However, I was determined to fight the case to the end.” [Mitikie Tilahun, Page 82](#)

- “Our co-workers support the children and help them to shake off their worries to make more space for creativity and play.” [Ivana Zekić, Page 47](#)



We can rely on co-workers being aware of the rights of the child, also outside of work in the SOS CV programmes

- “The case seemed critical. [...] The village committee decided to investigate the case. So I, along with a counsellor, travelled to the village where the children were living the next day [...] While we were inquiring about the children, a girl of about 12 drew our attention, as she seemed to be deeply concerned about our inquiry. Then we asked the crowd who she was and found out that she was the eldest sister of the same three children. After that we turned to the villagers and said, ‘Why didn’t you apply for this girl?’ In response, one of the villagers said, ‘She has already gone through her first menstruation cycle. So she might elope with somebody at any time.’ This answer was beyond our imagination.” [Hamal Padam, Page 39](#)
- „As the elder child Marina spent a lot of time taking care of her younger brother, she was not able to communicate with her peers and had no free time for children’s matters. We made sure she got involved in art therapy classes, where the girl was able to express her views and feelings, solve existing conflicts and problems, develop her thoughts and feelings of harmony, and develop creative abilities which helped her to establish social contacts.” [Olana Kripak, Page 76](#)
- “In this infinite point of time, we celebrate life and all we have achieved. I wish this moment could last forever.” [Ivana Zekić, Page 49](#)

1 Commercial Bank of Ethiopia



Finding an individual approach to supporting development is always core in SOS CV

- “Choosing the right career path during schooling is crucial,” says Liza. “I’m really thankful to my guardians at SOS Children’s Villages Bangladesh: they helped me to choose the right one. They secured my education which will secure my future.” [Enamul Haque, Page 53](#)
- “Each of my other children is also unique in their special way and they have gone on to pursue diverse interests.” [Nancy Gicheru, Page 32](#)
- „We started working with the family right away. Due to the low level of parental potential and the absence of suitable living conditions for her children, Oksana was invited to participate in the course Strong Parents – Strong Children. There the mother was able to learn how to create trusting relationships with her children, how to communicate properly and effectively and how to create an emotional connection with them by looking at the world through the children’s eyes and how to achieve closer relationships with each other in the family.” [Olena Kripak, Page 76](#)
- “In working with her younger son, a lot of time was spent on solving the issues of Maxim’s speech disorders. The boy did not speak appropriately for his age and uttered only unintelligible sounds – his „own“ language – which was impossible to understand. The project speech therapist suspected that the child did not hear at all and sent him to the audiologist, where it was found that the boy had a 2 (3) degree of deafness. The boy needed special care. He needed a hearing aid, for which the family had no money.” [Olena Kripak, Page 76](#)
- “After about six months of consistent therapy, our Faith started marking major milestones, quite an impressive feat. It was a miracle that a two-year-old who had never uttered a single word or taken a step could now crawl and stand up on her own.” [Nancy Gicheru, Page 32](#)

- “Carmen became very independent so that she can do most of her house chores all by herself, including making up her own bed and washing her socks after coming home from school. At the age of 13 she was taken off all her medication and she has now had no seizures for three years.”

[Nosisi Gloria Skontya, Page 28](#)



We believe in the integrity of children and support their development by respecting their decisions

- “So we tried to find out the reason for Sunidhi being unhappy which kept her from going to school. We had discussions with the teachers, students, the SOS mother and Sunidhi.” [Hamal Padam, Page 41](#)
- “From the day a child is welcomed into an SOS family or programme, they are supported to develop their potential and become self-supporting and participating members of society. Decisions on care, accommodation, education and career path are always taken together with the young person and are based on their development needs and best interests.” [Enamul Haque, Page 51](#)



We are willing to engage in critical reflection that enables improvement of quality care

- “[...] all agreed that it was truly complicated to look at so many aspects but this gave a true picture of their complex working situation. To be asked in detail showed them that the association really wanted to know how it was to live and work in a CVF and they felt really appreciated by this. In the part of the questionnaire about resources and stressors they also felt that, through this way of looking at both sides of the coin, they could really express properly how they often felt about their work.” [Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 58](#)

Youth can!

The care environment which SOS Children's Villages provides is a key component for the development and integration of young people who participate in its programmes. Under the prevailing circumstances this is best done through mutual understanding, agreement and close teamwork with the family system of origin. All the personal and organisational efforts guide, support and empower young people on their way to becoming self-determining members of a given community. SOS Children's Villages is accountable to its stakeholders for the quality of care it offers young people to make the best out of opportunity. We trust and are fully convinced that 'youth can!'



We strive to find the right way to support young people individually in building a sustainable future

- "Smiles on the faces of our audience and a few happy tears mean that we made it – we touched their hearts. What our audience does not know is how much hard work we put into the preparations, how big are the life obstacles and limitations, fears and insecurities that we have overcome and how great is our success. Again, this was the best Christmas celebration ever. We did it together." [Ivana Zekić, Page 49](#)
- „I decided to be very frank and reminded him that he was not very gifted academically. I gave him examples of people who were very successful in life despite their humble education. He just smiled at me and said, 'Uncle I am going to surprise you by passing my high school final exams and getting my college certificate'. I assured him that I would be the last person to be surprised if he completed his education and went to university [...] I said to him, 'If going to college is what you want and you are determined to work harder, then you have my full support'." [Lyford Zulu, Page 43](#)



We encourage children to explore their full potential through education and guide them on their path towards an independent life

- "I told Katongo that as much as I sympathised with him, there was nothing he could do to bring his parents back. I encouraged him instead to develop a positive attitude and look at the house, brothers and sisters, the mothers, father, uncles and aunties and, above all, the education as a great advantage over his friend's situation. I tried to make him understand that he was less vulnerable than his friend." [Lyford Zulu, Page 44](#)

- „On some occasions the children would hug me tightly after my break and ask me not to leave for such a long time ever again (two weeks). This would make me laugh, but I also think it was important to teach them that it is okay to be independent, if anything were to happen to me – but of course this never went down well with any of them.”
Nancy Gicheru, Page 33
- “I watch all our little performers and feel proud and happy. I am delighted to see four-year-olds singing and older children dancing. Guided by the safe hand of their teachers, they bravely walk onto the stage. Under the stage lights some forget the words. So what? The show continues with cheers and applause.”
Ivana Zekić, Page 48
- “The students used to live at the Vocational Training Centre for two years - a good time to build strong relationships. That happened with Jaime and me. We used to meet and talk about his realizations as a student and his near future. When he finished studying he decided to move to the eastern part of the country, the tropical part. He went there to work in an agricultural enterprise.”
Alberto Melgar, Page 35
- “Her progress ultimately made us believe that it is possible to motivate children for their better future. But we need to motivate them positively without putting any pressure on them and give them space to make decisions on their own.”
Hamal Padam, Page 41
- „I was able to encourage him to repeat and give it another try. He repeated and sat the exams again. Unfortunately, he still failed to get the required marks to go to college. However, the marks were better than the previous ones. I then encouraged him to apply for a trade test at our vocational training centre. He agreed to be enrolled and managed to graduate. He subsequently used his trade test certificate to enter college and graduated after two years with a craft certificate in power electricals. He is currently working as a freelance electrician and is happily married.”
Lyford Zulu, Page 45



We believe in the abilities of young people and find creative ways to support the development of important life skills and independence

- “It is all about the opportunity and chance. Please let us give them the opportunity and chance to succeed in life. (You) can! I hope this story can rouse us to realise that the young people can! You (co-workers, care-givers, family, sponsors) can give them the opportunity and chance to succeed in life!”
Alexandre Pires Rocha, Page 73
- “It didn’t take long for me to get praise from my colleagues and the officials at SOS Kenya for the progress that Faith had made. My beautiful daughter had changed the narrative to the surprise of everyone, especially the medics who had wanted her relegated to a disabled children’s facility. Faith, now a 27-year-old mother of one, has grown to be an outgoing cheerful young lady.”
Nancy Gicheru, Page 32
- “I am talking about a sixteen-year-old girl now. I have realised that taking care of children is very important. To bring up and support a child is a journey of its own. I am aware that the reason that the child was placed in my care was to save a soul, irrespective of intellectual or external appearance.”
Nosisi Gloria Skontya, Page 29

The power of great teamwork

Trusting relationships within the team serve as a strong energising force especially in challenging and complex situations. Willingness to make decisions in ambiguous situations increases if co-workers are confident about the (often implicit) agreement to act as a strong team. Stories emerge of these experiences of relying on each other and how trust creates confidence. Collaboration and teamwork are seen as a strong enabling force.



We are good at finding ways to cope with the challenges which arise and act as a strong team

- “Now the question arises as to why I chose to share this experience (if it is not a story)? I chose this because such experiences help you to realise your strength in times of crisis, you discover the undiscovered part of your personality, you come together much more closely as a team and get a better understanding of each other’s potential.”
Yogesh Thakur, Page 67
- “I started the arduous journey of visiting different doctors with Faith and was given various diet and therapy recommendations. Initially, though this was traumatising for me, I gained courage from the help of older SOS mothers and from my dear mother who, through constant telephone conversations, would encourage me.” **Nancy Gicheru, Page 31**



We can rely on experienced co-workers who can build on their expertise in finding appropriate responses in challenging situations

- “There was a risk of failure but HR as a team took this challenge and decided to continue. The driving force behind this decision was not to see this situation as a challenge but an opportunity to learn and achieve something extra.”
[Yogesh Thakur, Page 66](#)
- “It is worth mentioning that I managed to overcome these difficulties with the support of co-workers who encouraged me not to get frustrated and not to be demotivated.”
[Ekaterine Demuria, Page 61](#)



Co-workers get great motivation and positive feelings from the strong and supportive relationships they experience in their workplace

- “I am glad and thankful to my SOS Ukraine co-workers. My team motivates me a lot. It is a ‘dream team’: I work with the right people and together we are the best child protection organisation in Ukraine.” [Olena Kripak, Page 77](#)
- “A gamified system of points for every lead generated and every donor converted was created and the entire process was run like a fun game played to win by scoring top points. This element of fun was vital in driving results without building any competitive pressure.”
[Yasmin Riaz, Page 90](#)
- “What keeps my spirit flowing is the support of my fellow colleagues, teachers at the school and my church members.”
[Nosisi Gloria Skontya, Page 29](#)

Dialogue and openness enable sound decision making

Leadership goes beyond the obvious requirements of managing people and reaching strategic goals. All co-workers, regardless of their position, face situations in which they reveal their leadership skills. The stories show how co-workers take decisions and how they follow them through wholeheartedly. The ability to listen with an open heart and will builds the foundation for sustainable relationships. Dialogue is a powerful tool to allow different perceptions and this holistic information can serve as a valuable resource for strategic thinking e.g. through applied research.



SOS CV is a learning organisation that builds its strategies on research,

thus enabling a better understanding of challenges

- “Do SOS mothers and fathers see their work and the circumstances as stresses and strains, or as a rewarding challenge which gives meaning to their lives? We could find questionnaires for each side of the coin, but they still seemed unsuitable. [...] With this idea in mind it was only a short step to developing a questionnaire and this was done in a kind of flow [...] The clue was that they did not need to decide either/or but they could say that both of them – or none – is more or less true. For the most important aspects they should also write down the reasons for their assessment.”
[Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 57](#)



We engage in dialogue and listen with an open heart and will

- “In order to fill the gaps and ensure successful implementation of the financial work, I realised that I needed closer cooperation and open communication with the other structural units and fields. I started asking questions and listening to my colleagues at each level.”
[Ekaterine Demuria, Page 62](#)
- “When we asked them afterwards how they felt about the questionnaire, they all agreed that it was truly complicated to look at so many aspects but this gave a true picture of their complex working situation. To be asked in detail showed them that the association really wanted to know how it was to live and work in a CVF and they felt really appreciated by this. In the part of the questionnaire about resources and stressors they also felt that, through this way of looking at both sides of the coin, they could really express properly how they often felt about their work.” [Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 58](#)



We are willing to take on responsibilities and make decisions wholeheartedly

- “Therefore, let us choose the right track and never ever give up, as long as it is for a good cause.” [Mitikie Tilahun, Page 83](#)
- “Thus we were convinced of the need for a third SOS Children’s village in Botswana. In view of the increasing number of orphans in the country, SOS Children’s Villages Botswana resolved to construct the third village in the country.” [Motshwari Kitso, Page 85](#)
- “Furthermore, it has shown that when people are determined they can overcome all situations. In conclusion one could say ‘where there is a will, there is always a way’.”
[Motshwari Kitso, Page 87](#)



We are good at building strategic partnerships that lead to synergies in collaboration

- “So while I lost a slot of sleep mulling over these problems, it strengthened my resolve to find a solution and to pilot a low-cost scalable model to acquire committed donors. The agency model in the insurance sector (where I worked before joining SOS India) leverages the natural market of the insurance agents. Basing the idea on this fundamental thought, I came up with a plan to run a month long “internship” for 15-20 year-olds during their summer vacations to acquire committed donors. Since high school students and undergraduates seek recommendations and service certificates for volunteering with non-profits for their university admissions, most of them are very willing to volunteer.”
[Yasmin Riaz, Page 89](#)
- „Finally we received information that the CBE/IBD had decided to waive the commission charges on all conversion transactions from USD to LCY and the bank offered us a prime rate privilege for exchanging USD to LCY. This resulted in savings of over USD 120,000 annually for SOS Children’s Villages Ethiopia.”
[Mitikie Tilahun, Page 83](#)



We encourage strategic ways of thinking and take action to implement the strategy within our area of responsibility

- “Although the pilot has been successful the actual success will depend on scaling this up and implementing it across many locations and at greater frequencies for maximum impact. In an environment with not many options to innovate channels of fundraising, the intern pilot proved to meet all the demands of all the stakeholders and helped in winning over all the different stakeholders.”
[Yasmin Riaz, Page 91](#)
- “Step by step I became familiar not only with my area of work but I also got an overall picture of SOS Children’s Villages. The knowledge I gained gave me an opportunity to see all the strong and weak points of my field.”
[Ekaterine Demuria, Page 62](#)
- “According to them the tool worked well for expressing their perspectives and allowing them be heard. Some respondents even said it helped them to better understand their own situation.”
[Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 58](#)
- “In the further development process the results of this instrument and the whole questionnaire were recognised as a valid and empirically tested basis for decision. This examination has an impact and shows how working and living in CVF is perceived. It provides a good basis on important topics to be developed further. The results also provided the opportunity to enhance communication between CVMF, quality development staff and the management board.”
[Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 59](#)



Co-workers show commitment to the organisation and take immediate action for children in need

- “I am a happy person, because I have the opportunity to support people. In addition, thank God SOS came into my life. Since then helping others has become my main priority. When I manage to improve someone’s life, I feel happier. Nevertheless, I get the most pleasure from empowering families and preventing social orphanhood.”

Olena Kripak, Page 77



Leaders drive innovation through nurturing a culture where people are open to new approaches

- “This project helped in breaking the mindset of my team about committed giving.” **Yasmin Riaz, Page 91**
- „After a few seconds (of reflection) to consider the potential (in)ability, strengthening and opportunity for the young people, I accepted the challenge: I answered ‘Yes, we can!’”

Alexandre Pires Rocha, Page 72



Leaders who trust in their co-workers’ potential and support development give strength to their co-workers

- „The energy was so infectious and I was relieved to see my team members also feeling upbeat and investing their energy in the project.” **Yasmin Riaz, Page 90**
- “Several activities were done in order to ensure the team’s cohesion and engagement as follows:
 - team building activities
 - experience in sharing between locations
 - development of different procedures and guidelines
 - organising professional training”**Ekaterine Demuria, Page 62**
- “I took into consideration their needs and requirements in order to deliver better financial support and simplify the various procedures. This improved communication and had a positive effect on our overall performance.” **Ekaterine Demuria, Page 62**
- “Overall what I learned from my experience working for SOS Georgia is that mutual support, enthusiasm, patience, respect, proactive vision, team work and commitment are the basis of success.” **Ekaterine Demuria, Page 63**



Leaders live and promote the values of SOS Children's Villages (trust, courage, commitment and accountability) through their own actions and by being role models

- "I decided to come up with a way of linking up with this youth so that he should not see me as an authority but as a peer and role model."
[Lyford Zulu, Page 43](#)
- "Even today I cannot forget the happiness of the group working together. Boys and girls in groups cooking, painting, digging, using soldering-irons, planting and so on... The moral/lesson of this story is to show that it is always possible and that everything depends on us!"
[Alexandre Pires Rocha, Page 73](#)
- "After about two weeks, I checked back with the CBE. They said they had not yet discussed the issue due to lack of time. However, I never gave up. I visited them every week and checked if there was news for SOS. I think it was about five months later that I received a phone call from the International Banking Department." [Mitikie Tilahun, Page 82](#)



Co-workers are able to manage themselves and keep work and personal life in balance to build resilience against stress factors

- "At that time there was no proper onboarding programme for finance positions as there is today. It is worth mentioning that I managed to overcome these difficulties with the support of co-workers who encouraged me not to get frustrated and not to be demotivated."
[Ekaterine Demuria, Page 61](#)
- "[SOS parents] have to balance both sides and, as long as they can feel resources coming from their work, they can cope with the stresses and strains. According to them the tool worked well for expressing their perspectives and allowing them be heard. Some respondents even said it helped them to better understand their own situation."
[Wolfgang Sierwald, Page 58](#)

Dialogue keeps the federation strong

SOS Children's Villages is organised as a federation¹. This creates a complex system in which we have to leverage solidarity and autonomy on a daily basis. Open and continuous dialogue creates a common understanding and makes sure everybody is on the same page. Without dialogue, differing expectations or interpretations can lead to misunderstandings or even to conflict. Defined principles of collaboration have to be integrated into the living system by maintaining a willingness to find a common language and understanding of each other's perspectives.

Focussing these discussions on the joint vision – the binding element within SOS Children's Villages – keeps the federation strong.



Members in the federation can build on a strong brand

- “I urged them to support SOS Children's Villages and, in doing so, I reminded them that they would in fact be supporting their own children – Ethiopian children.” [Mitikie Tilahun, Page 82](#)
- “In my capacity as the national director I always had and have to ensure good working relationships between the Member Association and SOS Children's Villages International. This story shows the importance of mutual understanding and trust in working relationships. It also shows the importance of strong affiliation.” [Motshwari Kitso, Page 86](#)
- “Moreover it shows that SOS CVI as custodian of the brand must ensure that all member associations are familiar with its governing rules and regulations to ensure a common understanding of it. Last but not least it was possible to see how important it is to consider local situations when decisions are taken within the federation and vice versa.” [Motshwari Kitso, Page 87](#)



Involving local stakeholders creates strong partnerships

- “The impact of the involvement and bonding of local stakeholders was clear to see.” [Motshwari Kitso, Page 86](#)

¹ SOS Children's Villages helps 550,000 children to grow up in a loving family. Active in 134 countries it is organised as a federation. This means it “is an organisation [...] within which smaller divisions have some degree of internal autonomy” (Oxford Dictionary online). In SOS CVI's statutes these smaller divisions are named “ordinary members”. In the day-to-day work they are called “Member Associations (MAs)”. MAs are legal entities with a legal capacity and have been founded with the sole aim of establishing, operating, managing, financing or supporting SOS Children's Villages and other SOS programmes etc. (SOS CVI Statutes)

What gives life to SOS Children's Villages?

The following mindmap was developed as a collection of the insights and learnings that emerged in a first step of dissecting the stories after phase one in the Harvesting workshop. It is a summary of what participants of the Harvesting work-

shop 2017 describe as motivating, inspiring and life-giving in their working lives. These life-giving factors or forces emerged in the stories told during the workshop and guided our collection of fruits described in the previous chapter.



Stories

about flow moments

Quality care in SOS Children's Villages

Being capable of developing strong feelings of belonging and giving someone a strong feeling of connectedness is essential for developing an integrated social identity. This identity leads to contentedness and happiness in life. Translated into SOS

Children's Villages' vocabulary, it is about building and sustaining relationship(s) at the various levels of a child's living environment. Our vision at SOS Children's Villages is that "Every child belongs to a family and grows with love, respect and security".



(SOS Children's Villages International, Who we are). Our efforts are focussed on creating the conditions to make this development of unconditional strong relationship(s) possible.

Beyond this SOS Children's Villages programmes provide and ensure safety in all matters. Feeling safe and unconditionally respected and accepted is essential for all educational endeavours. These are prerequisites for the successful interdependent life scripts of young adults who have participated and lived in an SOS programme.

The following selection of stories contain the above-mentioned aspects in

one form or another and describe what SOS Children's Villages stands for and how it provides the best care for children and young people who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing parental care. This includes children whose parents are currently incapable of caring adequately for them for whatever reason. You will read and learn more about the importance of solidarity, personal relationship building, the uniqueness of each and every child, access to education, the ability to express oneself – ideally in the mother tongue – and language fluency.





Nosisi Gloria Skontya

SOS Children's Village Mother, Child and Youth Care worker, Cape Town, South Africa



Aim high

to save the life of children without judging

I started working at SOS Children's Village Cape Town in 2005 as an SOS Aunt¹.

At first it was not easy at all as I had to rotate round almost all the houses in the village, working with different SOS mothers and different children. After two years I was appointed as an SOS mother, running a house with eight children on my own. The first barrier was the language as the majority of children in the house spoke Afrikaans although they also understood and spoke English very well.

1 SOS aunt: co-worker group trained to care for children from different families. An SOS aunt is single with no dependent children and lives in the SOS Children's Village.

2 Name changed to protect the privacy of the child

"You will receive one more child"

One day I received a call from the social worker, saying that very soon I would be receiving a new child, after six months of getting to know the children I had in my house. For us, news like this feels like conceiving a new-born: not knowing the gender, and all the challenges that come with having a new-born. The social worker then called me into her office and explained that an eight-year-old girl called Carmen Monk² would be joining our family. She described Carmen as a special needs child suffering from epilepsy and with her left-hand side disabled. I then had to prepare myself and the children in the house for a pre-visit from Carmen the next week. At that moment this was not good news at all for me as I already had one boy in the house with the same condition except for the disability. Anyway, I had to accept having Carmen placed in my house.

“Nosisi has a passion for children, particularly those in need. She believes that experiencing emotional, social and physical safety is the foundation for child development. She constantly works on her pedagogical skills and reflects on her understanding of “care”. In her free time she enjoys taking a walk around the village and ending her busy days by



Preparing my children for the arrival

Back at the house I sat down with the rest of the children and prepared them for the new member of the family who would join us the following week. On the day of Carmen's visit I prepared a nice big family lunch and we all waited in anticipation for her to arrive. At around 2.30 p.m. the social worker called the house to say that Carmen had arrived and she was about to bring her over. As I opened the door for them, a beautiful little girl with the friendliest smile was standing in front of me. She was dressed very neatly and her hair was nicely platted in two long plats hanging down to her shoulders. Right there and then we all fell in love with Carmen straight away.

The following week Carmen was officially placed in my care and her SOS siblings welcomed her with open arms. They were all willing to assist her when she was unable to do something, like plating her hair, helping her make up her bed or any little assistance she might need to manage something. Two days after her arrival she started having seizures. According to a letter from the hospital, she needed to be rushed straight to hospital when her seizures started. So we rushed her to Red Cross Children's

Hospital which is 20 minutes' drive from the village. When we arrived at the hospital we took her to casualty but the nurses immediately escorted her to emergencies where she was attended by a pathologist as her condition was critical. All the necessary procedures were done including a brain scan. The following day she was discharged.

Great progress impressed doctors

I then had to take her to regular doctors' appointments and collect her medication every month, up to today. There was a great improvement in Carmen's health within four months. The doctors were very impressed to see such great progress and reduced her doctors' appointments to every two months.

Carmen became very independent so that she can do most of her house chores all by herself, including making up her own bed and washing her socks after coming home from school. At the age of 13 she was taken off all her medication and she has now had no seizures for three years.

reading a book. Nosisi grew up in a family of unity, respect and empathy. She is aware that it is the spirit of belonging and generosity amongst the family that led her to become the person she is today. Nosisi was born in a small town in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa, in a climate with four seasons. She grew up not knowing that vegetables are

Carmen's helpfulness is impressive

At school she is doing very well, she is at a special needs school in the senior phase now. Her teachers are all so proud and impressed by her friendly behaviour and her helpfulness, not just at school but also in the village as the other SOS mothers love this young girl so much.

I am talking about a sixteen-year-old girl now. I have realised that taking care of children is very important. To bring up and support a child is a journey of its own. I am aware that the reason that the child was placed in my care was to save a soul, irrespective of intellectual or external appearance.

What keeps my spirit flowing is the support of my fellow colleagues, teachers at the school and my church members.

Carmen used to attend physiotherapy once a month at the hospital and also went horse riding at school as part of her physio. Her strength and confidence makes me very proud of her as she will even volunteer to pray at functions that take place here in the village.

Ups and downs continue

Just a week before I went to the Harvesting Workshop that took place on 17 June 2017, her seizures started again after three years without any epileptic challenges. I rushed her to hospital again where she was immediately admitted. I slept over with her at the hospital and very early the next morning she was referred to an adult hospital as her age is no longer appropriate for the children's hospital. She is now being put back on medication and her health is making steady progress again.

something you can buy. Surrounded by beautiful mountains and rivers, her place of birth is somewhere where your neighbour's child is also your child as is expressed in the words "It takes a village to raise a child". Her country has experienced a tragic history but today all South Africans strive together for a better future and to uphold democratic values.





Nancy Gacheri Gicheru

SOS Mother, SOS Children's Village Buru
Buru, Nairobi, Kenya.



My journey to SOS in 1992

Giving the best to the child

My name is Nancy Gacheri Gicheru, from SOS Children's Villages Nairobi. My calling and journey as an SOS mother started in January 1992, having worked as a nursery (kindergarten) teacher in one of the community grammar schools in my rural home in Kenya. After my training, I was assigned as a caregiver – mother of house 7, SOS Children's Village Nairobi.

I started with five children: three of them were orphans and the other two my biological children. The youngest of the three orphans, Muthini, was only two years of age and could neither walk nor talk due to malnutrition, to the extent that some medics had recommended that she be taken to a disabled children's facility. However, having raised two children by myself, I was not convinced. It was also around this time that SOS mothers were required by the then village director to

have an official title linked to a child's name, so I duly chose to be referred to as "Mama Faith". Mama is a Swahili word meaning mother whereas Faith is the name I gave to Muthini, who in my view would only recuperate to the level of a normally functioning 2-year old in size and health through God's faith.

I started the arduous journey of visiting different doctors with Faith and was given various diet and therapy recommendations. Initially, though this was traumatising for me, I gained courage from the help of older SOS mothers and from my dear mother who, through constant telephone conversations, would encourage me.

During this time my two biological daughters, Ruth and Mercy, also played a key role in making it easier for me to take care of the little, fragile Faith by encouraging and playing with

“ Nancy has been an SOS mother since 1992. Her passion for caregiving, especially to orphaned children, led her to join SOS Children's Villages. She has raised 25 children: 10 boys and 15 girls. She derives satisfaction from working on community development projects with her SOS colleagues and seeing how life for young people improves. >

her siblings, Janet and Hermann. This relieved them of the stress of worrying about their sister's survival and consequently, the stress for me as the caregiver of the four traumatised children.

While pursuing ongoing therapy with Faith, I was blessed with seven more children, for a full house of twelve. The transition was smooth because I had got used to seeing other mothers handling more than my five children. In addition, this was done progressively, making sure I had time to interact with the children as more came on board. However, I spent most of my initial period as an SOS mother at the physiotherapist's with Faith. As time went on I also realised that Ruth, now the oldest of twelve, had by default stepped up into the role of the first born and led the other children in adjusting to our routine chores and activities. On the other hand, Mercy became overwhelmed somewhere along the way and had started asking questions as to why I was taking on more children, as expected of a last born. As a result, I would sit her down and explain that my other kids also needed a caregiver; and that they had lost key people in their lives and so who better to give them support than me? Knowing her love of playing only too well, I would encourage her to look on the brighter side now that she had

more friends to play with and not just her commandeering sister. This would always lighten up her mood and to date this still makes me giggle.

After about six months of consistent therapy, our Faith started marking major milestones, quite an impressive feat. It was a miracle that a two-year-old who had never uttered a single word or taken a step could now crawl and stand up on her own.

For that, and every time I remember this, I give God the Glory. Over time, she progressed and her first word was "maa----am".

It didn't take long for me to get praise from my colleagues and the officials at SOS Kenya for the progress that Faith had made. My beautiful daughter had changed the narrative to the surprise of everyone, especially the medics who had wanted her relegated to a disabled children's facility. Faith, now a 27-year-old mother of one, has grown to be an outgoing cheerful young lady.

Ironically, she is also passionate about children. She successfully graduated with a Diploma in Childhood Education and is currently an SOS Children's Villages kindergarten teacher/educator, a profession she dearly loves.

Each of my other children is also unique in their special way and they

Nancy was born into a large loving family and feels the same sentiment towards her SOS family. She keeps up strong relationships with family members. In her leisure time, she likes to travel and visit family. She is also a cultural dance enthusiast and leads a lot of cultural marriage celebrations with her singing and dancing.

have gone on to pursue diverse interests.

While it was hard initially for every child to adjust to the idea of living with another mother, family, children and even the general SOS community, with time they coped well. As they say, children adapt easily. I am a strong believer in this as they adjusted pretty easily and grew up well. I am proud of each one of them, being aware of the fact that they are all different and faced different challenges in life: this is the essence of life. As for challenges that I faced during my time in SOS, these varied from getting lost in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, as I used public transport to take Faith to therapy amongst other things. I was fresh and new to the city when I came to SOS and, like any other mother, I was required to familiarise myself with places so as to be able to source food as well as other services required by my children. Leaving all my children with a mother assistant during the official leave days was also hard for me as I worried about how they would fair under someone else's care, especially the children who longed for constant attention.

On some occasions the children would hug me tightly after my break and ask me not to leave for such a long time ever again (two weeks). This would

make me laugh, but I also think it was important to teach them that it is okay to be independent, if anything were to happen to me – but of course this never went down well with any of them.

Faith indeed brought me this far and blessed me with a special family. I appreciate Ruth and Mercy for allowing me to take care of Faith as the youngest in the family and “making them overly independent at such a young age” (in their words).

Further special appreciation goes to the rest of my children for allowing me to be their mum, loving me despite our differing opinions on some issues, and for growing up to be successful young men and women in society, full of respect and constantly keeping tabs on me and the current generation of children. You are my family and always will be. I will continue loving and cherishing each of you dearly.

“It is indeed possible with faith” –
Mama Faith ©

Nancy was born in a rural town in the south-western part of Kenya. She now lives in Nairobi, the lively capital of Kenya. Kenya is known as a popular tourist destination. There is a great diversity of flora and fauna and impressive landscapes like the Rift Valley, natural lakes and rivers, and a variety of animal species.





Alberto Melgar Rada

Program Director Cochabamba, Cochabamba One
Programme in the Tiquipaya Office, La Paz, Bolivia



Family across generations

long-term relationship

This Story begins when I was principal at the Agricultural Vocational Training Centre we had in Cochabamba. It was in 1995 when I met Jaime Torrez¹ who was there as a student. He came from the SOS Children's Village La Paz and was filled with a lot of energy and willingness to face the world.

The students used to live at the Vocational Training Centre for two years – a good time to build strong relationships. That happened with Jaime and me. We used to meet and talk about what he had achieved as a student and his future.

He asked me if he could call me "Dad"

When he finished studying he decided to move to the eastern part of the country, the tropical part. He went there to work in an agricultural enterprise. He used to call me twice a year telling me about his adventures and some-

times his problems: "I was working as a tractor driver, I don't want to work with the chainsaw anymore. I met a girl, ..." and so on and so on. One time he called me to tell me that he had been in jail for a few days: he was involved with someone who stole cattle. Another time he called me to ask if he could call me "Dad". I said "yes" and told him that if he felt like it he was welcome to do so.

We continued to have this phone communication for a couple of years. My wife Luisa and my two sons knew about this relationship and I used to tell them about Jaime's life.

At that time it was not so easy to get in touch by phone. We did not have mobile phones. For a long time we had no contact. It was up to him to call me, because he moved a lot.

¹ Name changed to protect privacy

“His core motivation is to improve the living conditions for the people in his country. The future of children and community development are the essence of his life. He was an active youth leader and his engagement resulted in political exile. He had to move to Sweden, where he studied agriculture. After seven years he was able to return and began



Here is someone who wants to talk to you

In Bolivia the rainy season was very heavy in December 2014 and the tropical region was severely flooded. We at SOS Children's Villages decided to send a team there to organise an emergency programme. They built a camp in Trinidad. In the middle of January 2015 I got another call. It was our deputy national director who was visiting the emergency programme in Trinidad. Here told me: "There is someone here who wants to talk to you." I recognised the voice immediately. It was Jaime. He had moved to Trinidad after many years working for ranchers. He had lost my phone number and when he saw the SOS people working in the emergency programme he went there telling them that he grew up in the SOS Children's Village La Paz and studied at the SOS Vocational Centre. He told them that he had a friend in Cochabamba and mentioned me. We talked for a while, exchanged phone numbers and were happy to be in touch again.

Two weeks later Jaime called me again and he was crying. He asked me if I had heard about the new flood in Trinidad and how two people had been dragged away by the flood. One of them was his second son.

Becoming the child's godfather

Some weeks later Jaime called again. He was calm. He had some news and a proposal for me. First he told me happily that his wife Martha was expecting a new baby due in July! Second they wanted me to be the godfather for the coming baby. Of course I accepted immediately even though I knew that this kind of situation should be discussed at home. Luisa my wife was always kept informed about Javier and I was sure that she would agree to my accepting this invitation. So I ended the conversation with him, expressing my gratitude and agreeing to speak again soon about organising the baptism.

A call from Trinidad from somebody else

For about two months I didn't get any news from Jaime. My attempt to reach him failed, because there was only an answering machine, but suddenly I got a call from a co-worker who was still in Trinidad, working for the emergency programme. He knew about the relationship between Jaime and me. He told me straight away that Jaime had been killed. I couldn't say a word. I hung up the phone. I called Luisa to tell her what had happened. I really needed to talk to her to discharge all the sadness I was feeling.

working for SOS in 1998, starting an agricultural technical centre for young people. Beto is the proud father of two sons who both live in Europe. He recently lost his beloved wife who was a central link in his social network stretching far beyond the biological family. In his free time Alberto loves travelling and going on picnics.

We realised that we should somehow get in touch with Martha. However, I had never asked Jaime for her number. Anyway, I managed to contact her through Jaime's SOS mother who Martha had called before. Martha had told her that Jaime had passed away. When I called Martha she knew me. Javier had mentioned our relationship. She said that she had already wanted to contact me but didn't know how to reach me. I closed our conversation wishing her a good birth and saying that we would try to go to Trinidad in August, one month after the expected birth of the baby.

The plan to go to Trinidad

We were unable to organise our activities to travel in August. I called Martha to tell her that and to congratulate her on her new-born son. We agreed that October would be the new month to meet.

Martha called us at the beginning of October, asking if we would come to see them. She told us that the new-born baby was sick and she was afraid that the baby might even die. She asked me if I would have anything against her decision to invite somebody else to become the godfather in case we could not come quickly. She did not want the baby to pass away without

being baptised. She said that she and Jaime had another three-year-old son who had not been baptised and that she would wait for us with him to fulfil Jaime's wish.

Fortunately the baby did not die. We decided to travel to them by the end of December to baptise Jimmy, the three-year-old son. It is almost 1000 kilometres from Cochabamba to Trinidad. My wife Luisa and I really enjoyed the trip, and it was amazing to drive in the Bolivian tropical region. We arrived there on December 30th. The meeting with Martha and her four sons was very emotional. We agreed that it was important to organise Jimmy's baptism as soon as possible. The Catholic Church used to have strong decrees, e.g. normally a godfather should have a minimum of a week's preparation for the ceremony, and this was the case with the first church we asked. So we moved to another one where they understood our situation. On 3rd January 2016 we were able to accomplish Jaime's wish.

It was a magical moment when I held Jimmy in my arms. It was not only the holy water that sealed our promise, it was a long-term relationship that was built during years of waiting for this kind of situation, with a lot of meaning for us and for Jaime's family. Of course he was present in this moment.

Beto lives in Bolivia, a country consisting of 36 nationalities. 48% of the 10 million inhabitants live below the poverty level. Almost 1 million children are at risk of losing their family. Bolivia is a country under development and he feels part of this. He believes in a deep cultural identity and the willingness of the people to fight for their rights.





Padam Bahadur Hamal

Project Director at SOS Children's Village
Dhangadhi in Nepal since 1992.



It is possible!

The journey of a girl towards her new life

A story about how to motivate a child for education.

This is the story of a girl from Doti District. One day in early 2015 some people came to SOS Children's Village Dhangadhi from a remote village named Doti. They had brought an application along with the necessary documents to admit three children who had lost their parents. The case seemed to be critical. We decided to investigate it, so we went to the village where the children lived.

I realised from the documents and the information provided by the people that the children had lost their parents and were living alone.

The case seemed critical, as the children had already lost their parental care. I immediately called a village committee meeting and presented the case for discussion and a decision. The village committee decided to investigate the case. So I, along with a counsellor, travelled to the village

where the children were living the next day.

We felt the need to investigate

After 5 hours' continuous driving on a hilly road with innumerable bends and one and a half hours' walking we reached the village. When we reached the house where the children were living, people started gathering round us, looking at us in amazement as we were dressed differently from the villagers. However, we tried to ease the atmosphere and started our job.

While we were inquiring about the children, a girl of about 12 drew our attention, as she seemed to be deeply concerned about our inquiry. Then we asked the crowd who she was and found out that she was the eldest sister of the same three children. After that we turned to the villagers and said, "Why didn't you apply for this girl?" In response, one of the villagers said, "She has already gone through her first menstruation cycle. So she

“

His passion is to work for the betterment of children, who inspire him with their open expression of happiness. He consciously focuses on listening to their stories, as this helps him to identify the immediate needs of the children. For him family means together-



might elope with somebody at any time.” This answer was beyond our imagination.

The risk of early marriage or trafficking

We were worried about the girl because this area is known to be somewhere with early marriage and girl trafficking. So she might be abused and fall victim to traffickers or she might be forced to get married. We decided to explain about the legal provision against child marriage as well as informing them about our SOS Children’s Village Programme policy, which doesn’t allow us to separate brothers and sisters. Our explanation about the legal provision and SOS policy surprised the villagers. After a short discussion, they agreed to prepare the documents for admitting her to our SOS Children’s Village. Then we turned to the girl and asked her name and she said “My name is Sunidhi¹.” “Are you ready to go with your brothers?” She immediately replied, “no”. Her “no” answer made us more surprised and compelled us to ask a question, so I asked her “why”. According to Sunidhi, living in an SOS Children’s Village meant “reading and writing” which she didn’t like. We were puzzled by her remark and asked her,

“Who said so?” She pointed to the villagers who had told her this. We then tried to convince her and said, “It depends on your wish to read or not. If you don’t want to go to school, we won’t force you. But think seriously about how your little brothers will feel without you. You need to take care of your brothers in the SOS Children’s Village, just like here.” Hearing this, she thought for a while. Then she smiled and said, “If this is true, I’m ready to go to the SOS village”. At last we asked the villagers to prepare the necessary documents for the girl too, so that all four children would be admitted to the village together, and returned to our place.

Accepting her decision

After one week, the children were admitted to SOS Children’s Village Dhangadhi. The three children were admitted to the school without Sunidhi. The girl stayed at home. Now it was our duty to motivate her to see the value of education. Sunidhi was told different stories about the role of education in life and the success of educated people and the opportunities they had. This went on for 10 to 15 days and we felt that it was putting a kind of pressure on the girl so we stopped the stories.

¹ Name changed to protect the privacy of the child

ness and trust. He is grateful to his parents who helped him build a strong foundation for his own life. He is trying to transmit the same family values and culture of helping each other to his daughters. In his leisure time he loves listening to Nepali traditional songs and watching cricket games. Music connects heart to mind and sport entertains him. Padam was

About 25 days later, Sunidhi approached us and said, “Baba (Father), I want to go to school”. I shared it with my team. On hearing this my team and I were amazed as well as delighted. The following day she was enrolled in the school in grade three, as she didn’t even know any alphabet or numbers. She looked happy and was a regular attender at school. We were also happy with her changed behaviour. But it did not take long until she changed her mind. After only a week Sunidhi was unhappy and was not willing to go to school anymore. This really discouraged us and we felt a little bit challenged as well.

So we tried to find out the reason for Sunidhi being unhappy which kept her from going to school. We had discussions with the teachers, students, the SOS mother and Sunidhi.

Finally, Sunidhi told us why she was not willing to go to school anymore. According to her, she was the eldest and tallest in her class and teased by her classmates who called her TEACHER.

Understanding the situation helped

We felt relieved after listening to the cause and tried to normalise the situation. We talked to the teachers and the children of grade three. We

tried to convince them that only their support would motivate Sunidhi to return to school. We told them that if they did not support her they might feel ashamed one day in the future. We finally succeeded and can say that their support played an important role in the life of Sunidhi.

She continued her education and, after a few months, her grade sheet was in my hand, but was not very encouraging. However, her hard work, help from a home tutor and the support of her teachers and friends brought remarkable changes to her progress from grade four. It was the first time that she received her progress report with some positive remarks from her teachers and with pass marks in all subjects. She has now become able to read books and write anything she likes. She attends school regularly and has promised to get outstanding marks in grade five so as to upgrade to grade seven without attending grade six.

Her progress ultimately made us believe that it is possible to motivate children for their better future. But we need to motivate them positively without putting any pressure on them and give them space to make decisions on their own.

born in Chhadung, Dailekh, Nepal, a remote part of the country. The village was out of reach of basic human requirements. Later, when he moved to the city, he was amazed to see vehicles, roads, electricity for the first time. He still loves his birth place and wants to contribute to the education of the children who live there.





Lyford Zulu

Village Director at SOS Children's Village
Livingstone, Zambia.





Walking on the positive side of life.

A story about quality care in Zambia.

During my early days in SOS Children's Villages Zambia, the village social worker briefed me about one child in the family house who had no interest in school, his academic performance was very poor, he was fond of bullying other children, didn't like doing his house chores and was giving his mother a hard time. The counselling which he was being given was not yielding any positive results. I visited his mother so that I could get more information but there was nothing new.

I decided to come up with a way of linking up with this youth so that he should not see me as an authority but as a peer and role model.

One day while I was visiting family houses, I saw Katongo¹ playing chess with his friend. I immediately decided to grab the opportunity by walking over to them and asking if I could join them. I

¹ Name changed to protect privacy

told them that I was feeling very bored at the office and that I was looking for a way to pass the time. They welcomed me and, after playing a few games, they discovered that I was very good at the game. This made Katongo very happy and he asked if I could play chess with him more often. This was a very big breakthrough for me and marked the beginning of our journey.

You orphan ...!

I subsequently discovered that Katongo was a highly gifted football player and I started following him to the football pitch. Then one day while playing football with the children from the surrounding community, Katongo injured one of them and he told Katongo, "wanchena wemwana wanshiwa iwe." Meaning, "you orphan, you have hurt me." This drove Katongo mad and he started fighting with the boy. I was forced to run onto the pitch to separate them. I took Katongo to my office and gave him

“Lyford has always been committed to improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged people and his work has been the realisation of this passion. He finds it fulfilling to know that his actions have a positive influence on people's lives. Lyford is married with two sons. He makes sure he spends quality time with them because he knows what it means for children to grow up without their parents. Lyford is a soccer fan and loves going to the stadium to



water to drink. After he calmed down, I asked him what made him react like that. He responded by asking me if it was his fault for losing his parents. I assured him that I did not think it was his fault and that his friend was insensitive and weak-minded to think that his situation was better than Katongo's.

Despite having both parents, his friend was living in a crowded house with no electricity and no flushable toilet and his parents could not afford to provide decent meals or clothing or send their children to school.

I told Katongo that as much as I sympathised with him, there was nothing he could do to bring his parents back. I encouraged him instead to develop a positive attitude and look at the house, brothers and sisters, the mothers, father, uncles and aunties and, above all, the education as a great advantage over his friend's situation. I tried to make him understand that he was less vulnerable than his friend.

The golden opportunity

One day I heard a knock on the door and went to check who was knocking. I was so surprised to find that it was one of our famous sports journalists. However, he seemed very angry and told me that he was looking for Katongo's uncle. I became worried that my youth might have committed a crime. I

told him that I was the uncle and asked him if I could be of help to him.

He explained how he had watched Katongo during a football tournament and became impressed with his talent. He was however, very disappointed by the boy's lack of interest in becoming connected to one of the big local football clubs. He gave me some names of players in the national team whose talents he had identified from the grass roots. I saw this as a golden opportunity for the young boy in our care and assured the journalist that if he could come back the following day, I would convince Katongo to take up the offer.

Uncle I am going to surprise you

In the evening, I sat down with Katongo and tried to make him understand that this was a golden opportunity for him and that he should not hesitate to grab it. He just answered that he did not want to play football but wanted to focus on his education and go to college.

I decided to be very frank and reminded him that he was not very gifted academically. I gave him examples of people who were very successful in life despite their humble education. He just smiled at me and said, "Uncle I am going to surprise you by passing my high school final exams and getting my college certificate". I assured him that I would be the last person to be surprised if he completed his education

watch local football teams at the weekend. He also has a passion for books. Lyford lives in the capital city Lusaka, a city that constantly grows due to rural exodus. This has led to increased numbers of street children. Zambia is a vast country filled with wildlife, rivers

and went to university. I told him that I knew of many people in this world who had become very successful despite the whole world not having imagined that they could succeed. I said to him, “If going to college is what you want and you are determined to work harder, then you have my full support”.

One day I noticed that the light was on in the living room because I used to live in the same house with the young people. I went to check and found Katongo reading his book. This was not the first time I had noticed him studying after midnight. He always spent longer hours reading than the rest of the young boys in the house but his performance was always the poorest. So I asked him to relax and go to bed. After 30 minutes, I noticed that the light was still on. I went back and asked him to switch off the light. He just said, “If it is the electricity you are worried about, you should take it from my allowance.” I said, “Switch off the light, go to bed and we will talk tomorrow.” When I saw that he was reluctant to obey my instruction, I just switched off the light and he went to bed.

The following day in the morning I tried to greet him but he just ignored me. Then I noticed that he was taking his frustration out on the other young boys. After we finished our supper, I asked him to come to my room. When he came, I asked him if he was upset with me. He told me that he was not happy

with the way I had treated him the previous night. He said that he couldn't understand why I could not allow him to study despite his assurance that he would pay for the electricity. I said to him, “I did not see you studying but saw you panicking.” Then I decided to share some techniques with him to help improve his memory.

Was it a wrong decision I made?

Unfortunately, when the time came to write his final examination, he was unable to get the necessary grades to enable him to be admitted to college. This affected him very badly. He told me that he felt as though he had made a terrible decision by choosing education over football. I assured him that I was convinced that he had made a very good choice to follow his dream.

I was able to encourage him to repeat and give it another try. He repeated and sat the exams again. Unfortunately, he still failed to get the required marks to go to college. However, the marks were better than the previous ones. I then encouraged him to apply for a trade test at our vocational training centre. He agreed to be enrolled and managed to graduate. He subsequently used his trade test certificate to enter college and graduated after two years with a craft certificate in power electricals. He is currently working as a freelance electrician and is happily married.

and lakes. It consists for the most part of a high plateau, with an average height between 1060 and 1360 meters above sea level. It is the home of the Victoria Falls which is one of the seven natural wonders of the world.





Ivana Zekić

Educational psychology Child Development
Team Leader in SOS Children's Village Lekenik
in Croatia since 2010.



Celebration of life

organising a Christmas celebration in my village

How team work and children's participation give the greatest meaning to work

I will tell you a simple story about a very special day in my working life. In my story there are no heroes, no special drama, no turning points... maybe just a small twist at the end.

My story started a few years ago when I was invited to a Christmas party at the SOS Children's Village Lekenik as a guest. The show was presented with children performing and, sitting there, I felt an energy that made me wonder what it would be like to work in a special place like that. A year later I was working in SOS Children's Villages. For years, participating in the preparation of Christmas parties has always made me the most excited, happy and proud. Let me tell you why.

In my village, we start our preparations many days before Christmas and each child and grown-up has their own role. Our director gathers us all together and gives us all the notes, plans and schedules, just like a real theatre director. The children are the stars and we, the co-workers, are the production team of the show. The children rehearse hard and their teachers put all their effort into making their performances perfect. Our SOS mothers help their children, they comfort and encourage them. And together with their little performers, they learn their lines by heart.

Our co-workers support the children and help them to shake off their worries to make more space for creativity and play.

A few days before, the village handy-men set the stage and ladies from the accounting department prepare some sandwiches for the guests. The village

“Her job is an important part of her life and she sees it as an opportunity to make an impact and make a change in the lives of children. Ivana sees family as a safe place to grow and learn. In the family you learn the meaning of long-lasting and loving relationships >

director is serious about the work but proud making sure everything goes to plan. The whole village is busy preparing.

And when the day comes... our social centre is warm and welcoming, decorated with Christmas lights and glittering ornaments. We all dress up nicely and put on our biggest smiles.

The guests start arriving and the whole village gathers in the social centre. You can feel the excitement and expectation that something special is about to happen. We, all the co-workers, take turns at the entrance, smiling and taking over groups of guests with the warmest greetings and leading them to their seats. The crowd in the hall starts to grow, so we slide around each other and other people. Children enter the glittering auditorium with open eyes and mouths. On this day, their mothers and aunties are particularly beautiful and the children also show off their dresses and festive clothes. SOS mothers and aunties make room for them at their sides and try to calm them down a little bit.

The small actors and performers are ready in their places. They are hopping impatiently, waving to their mothers and aunties to be sure they will see them as they appear on stage

or shout the names of people they haven't seen for a long time. Teachers are standing calmly next to them and pretending to be extra cool and relaxed and that everything is fine, like any other day. They give the children the final instructions about what to do and how to look their best.

And when the noise of greetings, kisses, and cheerfulness becomes almost deafening, the lights slowly start to go out, announcing the beginning of a special moment.

The audience is now crowded but silent. The children still gaze around and try to guess what will happen next. The director calmly sits on his chair next to the most important guests. His orchestra begins to perform.

We, the co-workers, move slowly in silence through the hall, helping the children to come out onto the stage. We exchange views, nod and wink to each other. Everything goes smoothly.

I watch all our little performers and feel proud and happy. I am delighted to see four-year-olds singing and older children dancing. Guided by the safe hand of their teachers, they bravely walk onto the stage. Under the stage lights some forget the words. So

in life. Two years ago she and her husband became adoptive parents to a fifteen-year-old. If you listen well, teenagers can teach you a lot about life. In her leisure time she likes to rest. She enjoys reading and going for coffee with friends. She enjoys camping at the seaside, walking barefoot and relaxing under the trees. Ivana lives in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.

what? The show continues with cheers and applause.

This year, our drama group again took the audience's breath away. In the next moment, the wonderfully awkward playing of the violin brings more smiles to the faces of the adults and loud disapproval from the youngest members of the audience.

At the end the audience is moved by the whole show and applauds for a long time. Among all the lights and glitter, a careful observer can even spot a few tears in their eyes. SOS mothers hug and kiss their children joyfully.

In this infinite point of time, we celebrate life and all we have achieved. I wish this moment could last forever.

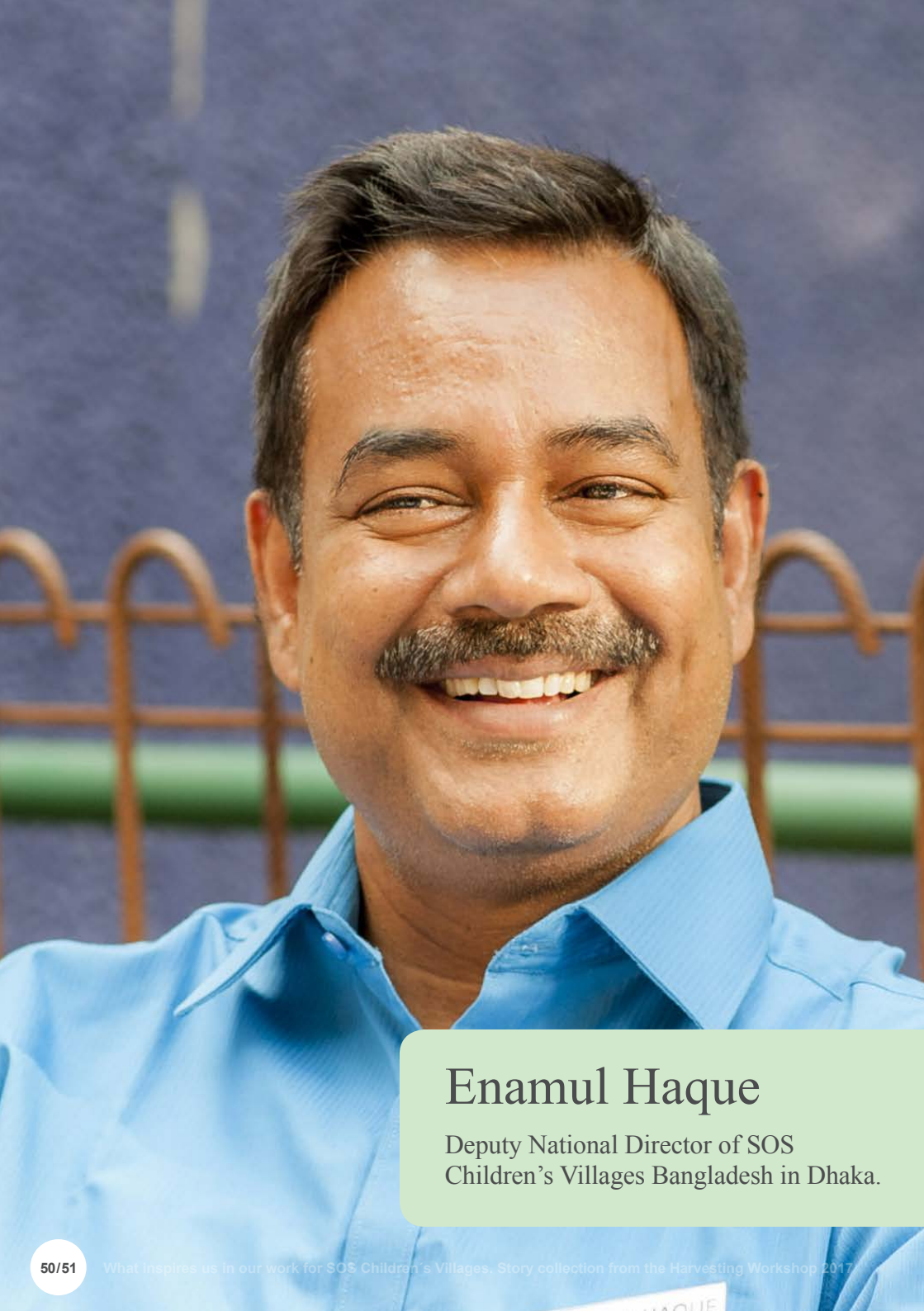
Later on we congratulate each other and laugh, sit and talk for a long time after the guests have gone.

Smiles on the faces of our audience and a few happy tears mean that we made it – we touched their hearts. What our audience does not know is how much hard work we put into the preparations, how big are the life obstacles and limitations, fears and insecurities that we have overcome and how great is our success.

Again, this was the best Christmas celebration ever. We did it together.

Zagreb is a nine-hundred-year old city with a million inhabitants. The Republic of Croatia is a country on the north western edge of the Balkan Peninsula in southern Europe. The country's population is 4.28 million. Croatia joined the European Union in 2013 as its 28th member state.





Enamul Haque

Deputy National Director of SOS
Children's Villages Bangladesh in Dhaka.



Quality youth integration.

Opportunity comes only once in our lives!

As an SOS co-worker, guiding and assisting young people is the main aim. Being an SOS adult and holding a position in the National Office, SOS young people have immense expectations of me. It is not always possible to make everyone happy by fulfilling his or her desires. The young people who have grown up in SOS Children's Village should be able to live on their own.

From the day a child is welcomed into an SOS family or programme, they are supported to develop their potential and become self-supporting and participating members of society. Decisions on care, accommodation, education and career path are always taken together with the young person and are based on their development needs and best interests.

The path towards an independent life

In order to improve youth care and employability, we take decisions in the best interests of the young person. We

provide personalised youth services that enable the young person to succeed in life and we take specific steps to prepare them to enter the job market.

When young people over 18 years of age try to start semi-independent living, we make sure they are visited once every month by a youth care co-worker, village director or mother to play a counselling and advisory role. We also thoroughly plan and implement the process of leaving care and aftercare. We have specific plans for this which we follow in all our youth care programmes. Even after independence, young people can come back home to find support.

Education guideline

We have a specific Education Guideline for the children and young people in SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh. The major aims and objectives of the guideline are as follows:

“ He has held this role since 2005. In his leadership position he believes it very important to treat co-workers as valued individuals. As a medical graduate he started his career in the humanitarian sector and received the 7th Hermann Gmeiner Award in 2002. His main motivation is to enable young people to succeed in life by strengthening youth care and employability. In his limited leisure time, Enamul likes reading books, listening to songs or >

- To encourage children to explore their full potential through education.
- To clarify and create a common understanding amongst children and co-workers for achieving the educational goals of every individual boy and girl in line with their wishes and capabilities.
- To develop an attitude in children and young people and prepare them to make a reasoned decision on general or technical education.

As per the guideline, we maintain two types of educational plans. The first one is the Child Development Plan for children up to grade eight, which is updated every year. The second one is the eight-year Educational Development Plan for young people which is prepared when a young person has passed the junior school certificate examination (grade eight). This plan is prepared on the basis of the young person's academic results and interests.

The guideline presents details of the scope of educational support available to the children and young people in SOS care and eligibility for admission to different educational institutions.

Youth employability programmes

Our youth employability programmes build on three pillars:

Coach: We ensure career orientation and coaching for the young people.

Train: We try to strengthen their vocational, employability, and entrepreneurial skills.

Practice: We ensure their access to work experience and training in partnership with the private sector.

Choosing the right career path during education

Our education system in Bangladesh is highly competitive in nature with limited job opportunities. Each individual has different goals, talents, interests and values. In other words, there are certain careers which not every individual should pursue and others where they could excel and be satisfied. We create opportunities for young people with career assessments, career counselling and thorough self-evaluation so that they can determine what they would enjoy and where they could shine. However, developing the right career path during schooling is not an easy task.

Supporting the right decision

I received a phone call from the village director of SOS Children's Village Dhaka, Bangladesh around March 2012 to talk about Liza¹, a talented, ambitious young person. She completed her secondary school certificate examination in the science group with a good result.

¹ Name changed to protect privacy

travelling with his family. His country is Bangladesh – a land of amazing natural beauty! It is one of the world's most densely populated countries and shares land borders with India and Myanmar (Burma). Dhaka is its capital and largest city. Bangladeshis include people of

However, at higher secondary level she changed educational track and applied to a college in the business studies group, which was very difficult for her SOS mother, the village director and all the teachers to accept as she had the talent to pursue a future in medical science or engineering.

We showed her different paths

After passing the higher secondary certificate examination, Liza expressed her desire to obtain admission to a professional certification course in chartered accountancy. Failing to convince her in favour of higher education in a public university, the village director asked me to join a meeting with Liza. We sat in my office and had a detailed discussion with her. I gave the example of my childhood days in SOS Children's Village and tried to link this to the situation she was now faced with. The first meeting passed with no result. After one week we met again with the young person and tried to get her to understand that life doesn't provide many chances, unlike in a film, and that opportunity comes only once in our lives. We showed her different paths to succeed in life. Even then, she was confused and felt in a dilemma. We suggested she take time and reflect upon it. After a few days, we sat down with her for the third time, seeing her firm determination for her personal goal. Pointing out her abilities, for ex-

ample her good communication skills, ability to make a good impression, her skills in sports and music, we showed her choices in higher education at public universities which could ensure better future prospects and would keep the door open for her to realise her potential in co-curricular activities.

In the end Liza appeared for the admission test to public universities and got the opportunity to study for a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English at the University of Rajshahi. She has now completed the Honours degree with a decent result and has since finished her Masters in the same subject. During her university life she won several medals for her outstanding performance in games, sports and cultural activities. Liza is now trying to get a scholarship abroad to study for an MBA.

“Choosing the right career path during schooling is crucial,” says Liza. “I'm really thankful to my guardians at SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh: they helped me to choose the right one. They secured my education which will secure my future.”

different ethnic groups and religions. The low-lying country is vulnerable to flooding and cyclones and is at risk of being badly affected by any rise in sea levels. Poverty is serious and widespread.

