

Family Matters

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES UK SUPPORTER MAGAZINE
WINTER 2020/21



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**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

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A little boy in Syria enjoys playing in the fresh sea air on a day out at the beach. He is one of many children who have been separated from their parents during the war, often for many years at a time. We care for them at our SOS interim care centre while searching for their loved ones.

So far, we have looked after 648 children in Syria who have been separated from their parents and supported 486 of them through our Family Strengthening Project after reuniting them with their relatives.

After almost a decade of war, many families are struggling to make ends meet. By staying involved and helping them to care for their children both practically and emotionally, we're making sure families can stay together for the long term.

We've changed all children's names in this magazine to protect their identities.

Families matter, now more than ever

What a year! I hope this edition of Family Matters finds you and your loved ones safe, healthy and looking forward to the festive season.

The value of looking after our nearest and dearest has resonated with me more than ever recently. All over the world, families have been coping with the coronavirus outbreak, worrying about loved ones, missing relatives and friends, while working and learning in isolation.

Our global SOS family is no different. Thanks to you, many children are still enjoying safe and happy childhoods. Your generous response to our coronavirus and Beirut appeals also meant we could be there for children when they needed us most.

Lockdown has hit some of the children we support especially hard. It has been heart-breaking to see families, who were already struggling to give their children a good start in life, slip back into poverty and food insecurity. Jobs have disappeared along with the small businesses they've worked so hard to build up.

As the long-term effects begin to bite, these families need us more than ever – especially those from the poorest communities, with girls often facing the biggest challenges. Together, we can make sure they get back to school and normal life instead of being at risk of exploitation.

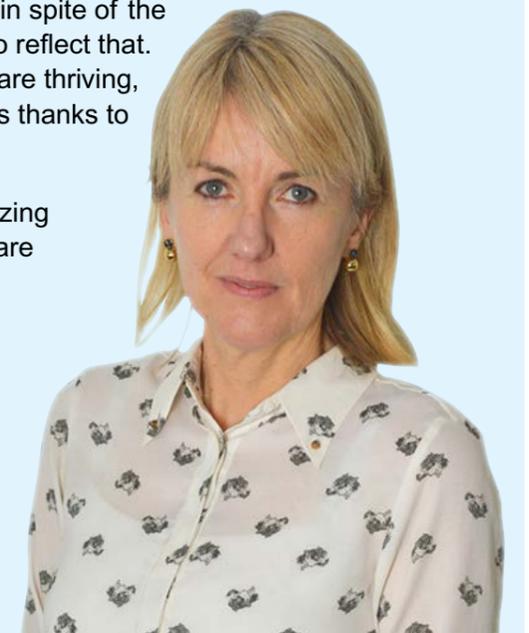
I am touched by how people are going above and beyond to help others. Like our wonderful nurse Halima Ahmed Dalelat, supporting new mums and babies at our clinic in Somalia (page 9). And hardworking SOS parents like Patience in Ghana (pages 10-11), cheerfully embracing the challenge of caring for sibling twins and triplets – and more! The inspirational children tirelessly keeping up with their studies together at home with support from SOS. And of course, our kind supporters. Without you, none of this would be possible.

So many good things have happened this year even in spite of the coronavirus, and I wanted this issue of *Family Matters* to reflect that. Life goes on and our work continues. So many children are thriving, growing and achieving their potential in our SOS families thanks to your support.

So, as 2020 draws to a close, let's celebrate all the amazing people coming together as one big extended family to care for each other and make a difference right now. *Here's to a brighter, better 2021 for us all.*

Alison Wallace

Alison Wallace, Chief Executive Officer,
SOS Children's Villages UK



Safe and loved in her **SOS family**

From the moment you meet her, it's easy to see why gorgeous little Rani is the centre of her family's world.

"Rani has brought us lots of happiness and joy," says her SOS mum, describing how her lively toddler loves walking around the village, dragging her by the hand and cheerfully greeting all her neighbours from a distance during lockdown.

Rani joined her SOS family when she was just a few weeks old. Her SOS mother named her Rani, which means 'queen' in Nepali. But after the whole village came together to celebrate her naming ceremony, everyone started calling her Nani - a Nepali word for 'little girl'.

Now aged three, Rani is the youngest in her SOS family. Her SOS brothers and sisters love playing with her and never leave her side.

Safe and loved at the heart of her big busy SOS family, Rani is growing up to be a healthy and happy toddler. She eats well, chats away with everyone she meets, and calls out to people walking by her house. She has even learned a few letters after her older SOS sisters started teaching her the alphabet.



Exciting things are in store for Rani in the New Year. When she turns three and a half, she'll join the local village school. And then, a whole new world will open up for her.

"Rani has brought us lots of happiness and joy."



'Coronavirus changed **everything**'

Thirteen-year-old Tia can't wait to get back to school. She loves studying, and we've helped pay for her school fees through our Family Strengthening Programme. Her story shows why coronavirus means she now needs our support more than ever.

"Coronavirus has changed everything and increased the hardship in our lives. I live in Chimoio, a city in Mozambique, with my mother, three sisters and two brothers. I'd like my mum to stay home to be safe, but we depend on her income from selling vegetables to survive.

"She deals with many people at the market, which exposes her to the virus. She wears a mask, but she doesn't like it. I am worried that if she catches the virus and dies, we'll be left all alone.

"I heard on the radio that people should stay a metre and a half apart. This means the women at the market have to trade in turns on alternating days. So now my mum struggles to feed all of us because she isn't earning enough.

"Without enough food at home, there is no happiness. There's nothing to eat for breakfast, we can't afford to buy rice, fish and sugar anymore.

"While she works, I watch my siblings, clean the house and sweep the compound.

"I don't have access to online learning or a TV. My mum had planned to save money to put electricity in our two-room house. I was happy about getting better lighting, especially for my homework. Without money, the wires are just hanging on the walls.

"The government has said schools can reopen slowly and that's good, because I've been at home for too long and missed too many lessons."

SOS Children's Villages Mozambique is providing hundreds of children and families like Tia's with the health information they need and practical support to keep themselves as **safe as possible from coronavirus.**

Happily ever after with Grandma

Samith and his two little brothers had a tough start in life. But their story had a happy ending after we helped reunite them with their grandmother in Sri Lanka.

When you meet bright and sparkling 10-year-old Samith playing joyfully in a grove in his village, it is hard to imagine the trauma he went through. His Grandma Pushpa looks sombre as she recalls how his parents neglected and abandoned him and his two little brothers: "The boys used to look very sad and disoriented," she says.

But then her expression changes to one of pride and joy: "Now that they're with me they're happy, bright, and full of energy." And it is plain to see that she is doing a fabulous job raising Samith, his nine-year-old brother Dumith and five-year-old Harsha.

Together, their little family has come a very long way.

Abandoned and beaten

The brothers were little more than babies when their parents' marriage fell apart and their mother left them at a hospital.

The boys' dad felt unable to look after them, so they were sent to a local childcare institution. There, the situation went from bad to worse. "They used to beat me," says Samith, briefly revisiting painful memories of suffering violence at the hands of older boys.

Luckily, after a year in the institution, the boys came into contact with SOS Children's Villages who found their Grandma Pushpa.

They reunited her with her three grandsons and they joined our Family Strengthening Programme.

'The brightest child I have ever seen'

Now safely settled in a village near Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, Samith and Dumith attend the local school while Harsha goes to kindergarten.

"Samith is the brightest child I have ever seen," says Grandma Pushpa, smiling with grandmotherly delight. All her three boys love learning. Even while schools were closed due to coronavirus, they kept up with their lessons and made the most of their time at home together, enjoying getting on with their schoolwork.

Their local SOS Community Office made sure they had the right tuition papers, textbooks and exercises to carry on studying.

"I am grateful for the educational benefits my grandchildren get through the Family Strengthening Programme."

A friendly and supportive local community also makes a big difference. With the help of SOS Children's Villages, many more families in Pushpa's neighbourhood receive the support they need to ensure their children can continue to learn from home during lockdown.

It seems nothing can hold Samith and his little brothers back. Armed with Grandma's love, a good education and a strong support network around them, the next chapter of their story promises to be the best one yet.

Samith, his brothers and friends



Samith, Pushpa, Harsha, and Dumith

In 2019, SOS Children's Villages helped more than 395,000 people, or 80,200 families, through 680 family strengthening programmes worldwide

Drawing strength from disaster

Thanks to your generous donations, we were able to act immediately when disasters struck this year. In August, we responded quickly to the devastating explosion which destroyed lives and livelihoods in Beirut. Then in September, a refugee camp burned to the ground in Greece leaving already traumatised families in a desperate situation. Here's an update on how we're making a difference, together.

Devastating fire in Lesbos

When around 12,000 people were forced to flee a devastating fire in Moria refugee camp on 9 September 2020, a third were children. Of them, 400 are especially at risk, having arrived in Europe alone or with special needs.

With your help we immediately stepped in to look after them in nearby Kara Tepe camp, where our team has worked since 2015. Specialist staff at our child-friendly centre encourage children to process their feelings about traumatic experiences.



Playing and making friends also helps bring some much-needed stability to young lives hit by chaos and uncertainty.

We now plan to expand our educational and sports activities, including Greek and English lessons.



We'll also continue to support families affected by the Moria camp fire through the winter, by providing them with food, clean drinking water, blankets, baby formula and nappies, raincoats and basic hygiene kits to help prevent diseases such as coronavirus.

How you've made all the difference

Responding to emergencies is at the heart of our work, but the cost is high. Thank you to everyone who donated to our coronavirus and Beirut appeals, through our Emergency Relief fund.

Your donations mean we can move fast to help families like Rula's whenever disaster strikes.

To find out more about our Emergency Relief work visit: www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/our-work

Rebuilding after the Beirut blast

Up to 300,000 people lost their homes when a massive explosion devastated the Lebanese capital Beirut on 4 August 2020.

Many were also injured, lost their loved ones and also their livelihoods.

"We ran outside with nothing but our blood-stained clothes on," says Rula, a mother of three. "I was wounded, my daughter's hand was broken and my son is still in pain. But I am thankful that we survived." We helped Rula find temporary housing while her family's house is being repaired.

Lebanon's exhausted population was already battling with the coronavirus on top of an ongoing economic crisis, widespread poverty and political instability.

"Everyone in Lebanon has been affected in some way," says Carla Choueifaty, our local Family Strengthening Coordinator.

We're working hard to help families like Rula's by providing them with food, clean water and soap. We're also providing children who are on their own with a safe and loving home in our Children's Villages while we work to reunite them with their relatives.



Keeping children and families healthy and safe

Our fantastic frontline staff are keeping children and their families healthy and safe, despite the challenges posed by coronavirus. One of them, Halima Ahmed Dalelat, has spent five years working as a nurse at our mother and child clinic near Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. She told us her story.

"A mum who had given birth at home without any help recently came to me. She was bleeding and her small baby was shivering from a lack of warm clothes. The mum was hungry too, having arrived in the camp just a few days earlier after fleeing famine at home.



"I always get emotional when I receive such desperate cases. But I am strong for the families I work with. After treating her I referred her to our maternal and child health nutrition programme, where she'll receive food donations."

"I often get called out to help pregnant mothers in life-threatening situations who can't reach our clinic. I always follow up in person until I know both mother and baby are stable.

"To help expectant mums give birth safely at home, I distribute delivery kits. They contain a plastic bag, a towel, oil for the baby, disinfectant for the mother, two pairs of gloves, a clamp for the umbilical cord and a sterile blade to cut it.

"I also counsel women who are in violent relationships. A husband might beat his wife for visiting the health centre without his approval, and she'll come to me with bruises on her face. I refer tough situations to a local organisation helping women get legal advice and counselling.

"Because I'm a mother, I see my daughter's face in the 15 or so children I care for every day. There is no better reward than seeing sick children gain strength and healthy mothers taking care of them. I aim to work until every child and mother is healthy."

Necessity: the mother of invention

When the price of a packet of face masks recently skyrocketed, our SOS hospital staff in Mogadishu soon found a practical solution.

To protect their patients and each other they folded local white cloth and sewed elastic at both ends quickly making extra facemasks. They also shared their mask-making method with local communities and refugee camps, making sure people living in crowded conditions can protect themselves and their families, too.



Six siblings reunited in a brand new family

When their mum died and their father didn't feel able to provide for them, twin boys Fadu and Seidu were forced to leave their siblings behind and do back-breaking work. Thankfully, their new SOS mother, Patience, changed everything.

Expecting a new child can be daunting, even for the most experienced parent. So just imagine the pressure Patience felt when she learned she'd be receiving five siblings at once, including triplets and twins, possibly with a sixth brother to follow just months later.

"The number was overwhelming, and I panicked!" laughs Patience, now looking cheerful and relaxed in her SOS family house in Tema, Ghana. "The experience I've gained from 10 years working as an SOS mother seemed to pale before this task."

But patience is clearly in her nature as well as in her name, and she took the new challenge in her stride. Today, three contented two-year-olds (two boys and a girl) are stacking coloured wooden bricks on the floor while their older brothers are busy at school.

This happy family scene is a far cry from the tragic circumstances that eventually led these six children to Patience's door.

No more work, back in school

Life changed dramatically for the siblings when their mum died. Their dad, a casual labourer, couldn't afford to keep them. After placing his baby triplets in an institution, he entrusted an aunt with caring for Fadu and Seidu in Accra, Ghana's capital.

But instead of sending the two little boys to school every morning, the aunt woke them at the crack of dawn and ordered them to work at a construction site.



Along with trafficking, child labour is a deep-rooted cultural problem in Ghana. Another relative sent their tiny younger brother, Ekuwa, to work on a farm in faraway Côte d'Ivoire.

Fadu and Seidu's little bodies ached from carrying heavy stones. With no time to play, laugh or learn, the brothers were always sad, missing their parents and siblings terribly. "We wanted to go back to our father so he could take us to school," says Fadu.

"I knew my father's number so one day when my aunt wasn't looking, I took her phone and called him." Fadu didn't know exactly where he and Saidu were staying, but he managed to describe his surroundings well enough for their father to come to their rescue.

Knowing the love of a mother

The boys didn't know what to expect after all this trauma and upheaval in their short lives. But a door to a whole new life opened once their dad sought help from SOS Children's Villages.

One bright November day in 2018, Fadu and Seidu were brought to one of our 15 family houses in SOS Children's Village Tema, and into the loving care of their new SOS mother, Patience.

As a professional caregiver her job is to give them the security and stability all children need. "I protect these children like I would my own, so they can grow up knowing the love of a mother," says Patience. "I know that it has been difficult for them, so I always comfort and encourage them."



The sky is the limit

The best thing of all was being reunited with their three baby siblings. The boys hadn't just lost out on precious school time – they had missed out on forming close bonds with their sister and brothers.

And they all received a special extra surprise – a new SOS big sister! From the start, 12-year-old Emily was on hand to help as they all moved in. "I was happy to have them join my family, but I was surprised that there were so many," she giggles shyly.

"I sing with the triplets, we play ball and I play teacher by writing the alphabet on the board and asking them to repeat after me," says Emily. "I love them."

Finally, in March 2019, they received the fantastic news that little Ekuwa, now aged seven, had been rescued from the farm in Côte d'Ivoire and would join Patience's family, too.

Back in school, the boys are thriving. Fadu wants to be a pilot and Seidu wants to be an engineer and invent robots that will do whatever he wants. Now these children are safely back together again, **the sky is the limit.**

"The number was overwhelming, and I panicked!"



Community support

This year we supported families affected by drought in Zimbabwe, including helping Grandma Lucia feed her grandchildren, along with many other people in rural communities there.

“We use this water for cooking, washing and feeding our few chickens and cows,” explains Grandma Lucia.

Like so many other small-scale farmers in southern Africa she carries the constant burden of keeping her family afloat. “The rains haven’t been coming so we have to do with what little is available,” she says, wearily. As harvest after harvest fails and the wells dry up, feeding the children is a daily struggle. Left with no choice but to drink dirty water from unprotected pits, they are all getting ill.

“Sickness has become a part of our lives as we drink water from any source,” Lucia says, her expression showing the pain of always having to worry about her family’s future.

“Due to the food shortages, children are dropping out of school,” says Ayele Sebaro, our Regional Emergency Response Advisor. Hunger also puts children at risk of being exploited.

Providing food and clean water is therefore a simple, yet powerful way to protect children here. And recently, life has looked a little brighter for Grandma Lucia and other families in Bulawayo, Chitungwiza and Shamva districts as we have been able to provide support for food, clean water and help with better sanitation and hygiene during this difficult period.

This means elderly people like Lucia, who are caring for children whose parents have migrated to find work, can keep going and keep their grandchildren safe.

Thank you to a generous supporter from the UK whose gift to us in their Will helped make this possible.

We are so grateful to everyone who chooses to leave a gift in their Will to SOS Children’s Villages UK. If you would like to find out more, please call us on 01223 365589 or email hello@sosuk.org



FACTS ABOUT FOOD SHORTAGES IN ZIMBABWE

- Millions of small-scale farmers depend on rain to feed themselves and support their families.
- Irregular rainfall, persistent drought, frequent cyclones and flooding ruin many harvests.
- Up to 5.5 million people lacked affordable, nutritious food in 2020.
- Food shortages cause malnutrition that often stunts children’s development.
- Children who drop out of school because of hunger are at high risk of exploitation.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Christmas appeal!

This year, we asked you to support children who are alone and need immediate help this Christmas, before a longer-term family setting can be found for them.

We were delighted by the generosity of our supporters, which meant we could reach children who were facing the prospect of spending this Christmas alone, and give them the love, support and sense of normality they really need at what is supposed to be the happiest time of the year.

Here are some photos showing how children in different parts of the world will be celebrating Christmas with their SOS families. To find out more about our Christmas Appeal visit: www.sosuk.org

We hope you have a wonderful Christmas and wish you every happiness in 2021.



Putting the finishing touches to the tree in Peru



In Syria, children gather ready for Christmas



Children in Kosovo getting the tree ready



A child in Belarus designed this lovely Christmas card



Biscuits being baked by an SOS family ready to leave out for Santa

Creativity and dance **aid recovery** from trauma

Children in Ouham province, Central African Republic, are among thousands whose lives have been changed forever by the brutal civil war that began here in 2013.

Zigzagging on bumpy dirt roads through the beautiful savannah, it's hard to imagine that every village here has a history of harrowing stories. Too many children have lost their parents.



"We have a lot of ex-child soldiers and many girls are abuse survivors," says Jean Yves Maganda-Belalengbi, who supervises five SOS child-friendly spaces in Ouham. "They dance together, play games, tell fairy tales, act in theatre plays. We help them discover their dreams, and talents. And their rights."

Playing and dancing is at the heart of our psychosocial support for younger children. Alongside other organisations we're also reuniting children with their families whenever possible, and making sure they grow up feeling safe, loved and supported.

Solar-powered ambitions in Ethiopia

To help children keep up with their studies when schools closed during the coronavirus pandemic, we distributed 400 solar-powered radios.

"I was among the top ten students in my class," says 13-year-old Tigist. "But my mother couldn't afford to buy a TV or radio for school broadcasts so I thought all this effort would be lost."

"I was very excited when SOS gave me a solar-powered radio so I could listen to school broadcasts," Tigist continues. "I felt as if my future had returned to me. We don't have a table in our house so during lessons, I put the radio next to me on the bench with the exercise book on my lap and write as much as I can to capture what the teacher says."

Speaking out for **lasting change**

As well as supporting children day-to-day during the coronavirus pandemic, we've been speaking out alongside other international organisations such as Save the Children. Together, we're urging world leaders to prioritise children without caregivers in their plans to confront the virus.

Our advocacy work is vital because it enables us to tackle the root causes that put children at risk. And that means we can create lasting change in children's lives, as well as providing them with immediate practical support. By putting the children and young people's voices, thoughts and opinions at the heart of our work, we can influence decision-makers and push for changes that will help all children reach their full potential.

Watch out for more stories about our advocacy work in future issues of *Family Matters*

Raising funds with a virtual quiz

Employees in DK Publishing's International Publishing and Licensing Department recently organised a virtual quiz to raise money for our Beirut Appeal. Their strong relationships with Lebanese customers meant they knew first-hand people's day-to-day struggles after the catastrophic blast in September.

"The Lebanese cause is very close to us," one of the organisers told us. "We decided to support your charity for the outstanding work you do in Lebanon."

The quiz was also a much-needed chance to catch up with colleagues while everyone works from home. "We're missing our easy chats over a coffee in the kitchen, or bumping into each other in the corridor," they said. "Doing a quiz definitely helped to bring back some of the good spirits."

An amazing 43 people participated in six teams, with special guest appearances from relatives and housemates. Questions ranged from travel and music to literature (of course!) and a bespoke round on Lebanon. The result was an incredible £740 which will go directly towards supporting children and families in Beirut.

Interested in hosting a similar event? We'd love to help! Get in touch if you need advice or support: hello@sosuk.org

Home truths about **online education**

Adi Soumena, 17, is an advocate for children's rights from SOS Children's Village Lembang in Indonesia. He recently spoke out about the challenges of online education during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The coronavirus has hit us students especially hard," Adi said. "In theory, distance learning sounds good but practically it has been a nightmare. Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture recently said that if he had to write down all the complaints from parents, students, and teachers it would be quite a thick book."

Adi said it is mostly poorer and disabled students who are missing out. Many lack proper internet access, affordable data and devices. Parents, caregivers and teachers also often struggle with the technology.

"Responsible and inclusive education can only be achieved when parents, teachers and children collaborate to create a good learning system," Adi concluded. "After all, children are the assets of the nation and the future is in our hands."



There's still time to get our beautiful **e-cards!**

Still got cards to send, or did you forget to include someone on your Christmas list?

No need to worry - simply choose from our range of different designs, including the lovely one featured here, and send to your nearest and dearest in plenty of time for Christmas.

Go to www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/cards to get yours now.



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Email: hello@sosuk.org

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