



Enhancing and developing safeguarding at SOS Children's Villages International

As a result of information from two independent, external reports, the governance body of SOS Children's Villages International which is the umbrella organisation for the independent national chapters of SOS Children's Villages, has announced that it is establishing an independent special commission into serious allegations of safeguarding, governance and other failures.

Though the details of the investigation remain confidential, we at SOS Children's Villages UK know that we are not under investigation ourselves. We have no reason to believe that any staff or volunteers past or present of SOS Children's Villages UK are involved or that children or young people currently in programmes funded by SOS Children's Villages UK are affected. However, until we have more information we cannot say whether there are historic incidences of failures that affected children or young people in programmes we funded at the time.

We would like to assure you that SOS Children's Villages International leadership have taken this very seriously and, in that light, are setting up the special commission with the mandate to consider and recommend any further action as well as to initiate investigations into unresolved allegations. Furthermore, on June 24 it was announced that Dr Dereje Wordofa and Ms Beáta Juvancz will take over as the new SOS Federation President and Vice President, respectively. The change in leadership comes as the organisation moves forward to implement a wide-ranging Safeguarding Action Plan in a commitment to fulfil its promise to keep children safe. Dr Wordofa's early priorities will be to lead changes in the broader governance and culture of SOS Children's Villages to strengthen programme quality and safeguarding in every corner of the organization.

The Safeguarding Action Plan has prioritised action to address the most urgent points in the reports. This includes providing support to victims, and ensuring organisational learning and programmatic improvements. The action plan also covers the setting up of the special commission, and aims to strengthen existing safeguarding work such as supporting children and others who have experienced abuse, establishing a safeguarding ombudsperson to represent the rights of children and others who have experienced abuse, improvements to incident management processes, and improvements to HR policies and practices that put safeguarding responsibilities at the forefront of recruitment and performance management.

Importantly, as well as making recommendations for improvement, the reports noted that a lot of progress had been made since SOS Children's Villages International introduced its safeguarding policy in 2008. SOS Children's Villages UK welcomes these developments and strongly supports increased investment in the safety and protection of those with whom we work, to consolidate the progress that has been made in recent years. While it is fair to say that the vast majority of children and young people in our programmes experience the best possible care, this response and renewed focus on safety and protection is the only way forward if we are to achieve an environment of zero tolerance for safeguarding violations,

uphold the rights of those with whom we work and meet our goal of ensuring every child grows up feeling safe, loved and supported.

SOS Children's Villages UK reviewed its approach to safeguarding in 2018 and, among other things, introduced requirements for background checks for staff and volunteers and visitors to our programmes. We are committed to transparency about the safeguarding risks that exist in our work. We report safeguarding incidents in our programmes to the Charity Commission and publish that information in our Annual Report. SOS Children's Villages International publishes an annual safeguarding report, a link to which is on our website, and we submit a copy to the Charity Commission, too.