

# Family Matters

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES UK SUPPORTER MAGAZINE  
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**SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES**

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The girls are smiling because they are finally going to school. The Estradas are one of many undocumented Guatemalan families living in Mexico, just 15 minutes away from the Guatemalan border.

They live in an informal settlement called 'El Refugio' or 'the shelter,' made up of families who fled the 30-year civil war in Guatemala. Often called the forgotten community, there is no access to sanitation, local schools, social services, and healthcare.

Working closely with Carlos and Marcela Estrada, the girls' parents, SOS, has successfully obtained birth certificates for their children, so they can enrol at school and access other support.

SOS Mexico has supported families in El Refugio and the wider Chiapas region for more than 16 years. By obtaining much needed identification documents, families can access vital social services, apply for jobs, send their children to school, and work towards improving their lives in the long-term.



Front cover image: A stateless Guatemalan family in Mexico faces hardship.

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

## Being part of a **global community** is everything

What a strange year it's been as coronavirus continues to grip the world - but amidst the pain was an immense sense of unity and support across the UK and the world. People came out in force to help the most vulnerable in their communities, working together and helping each other. Indeed, that is what Christmas is all about.

We're uniquely positioned to support those in need in 136 countries and territories around the world. We have local specialists in every field, making us a global community of local experts, allowing us to support each other and share our learnings with one another.

Indeed, our work would be impossible without the local teams we rely on to reach the people most in need. They understand the community because they are a part of it and they are the most proficient at getting things done because they have long-established relationships with their community, local and national government bodies and suppliers.

In this issue, you will hear from staff across the world, working in the most challenging conditions. An SOS education specialist in Burkina Faso explains why, amidst the conflict, play is so important for children. You'll see the urgency of the Madagascan crisis in the voices of our staff there and feel the hope from our project manager in Ethiopia, teaching young people to fight climate change. We also celebrate the heroic efforts of Swati, who provided food and healthcare to a remote Himalayan community during lockdown, and Judith in Kenya who has dedicated her life to connecting vulnerable families to SOS's family strengthening programme.

I am awed by our local SOS teams across the world, who are so committed to helping their communities out of poverty, and are the experts who steer us in the right direction, and you, our supporters, without whom none of this would be possible.

So as 2021 draws to a close, let's celebrate our amazing global community coming together as one big family to help each other and the children and families that we work with.

Thank you for your support this year, and I wish you and your families a wonderful festive season and a happy new year.

*Alison Wallace*

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



## Taking the **future** into their own hands

*"If the climate is good, we are fine too. If the climate is bad, the plants die and we will starve," says 16-year-old Tadelech.*

### Young people teaching their elders to adapt to climate change

In Eteya, a remote rural town in Ethiopia, Tadelech and other young people are planting trees and learning about sustainable farming so they can teach their parents and the wider community.

Fifteen students plant and water their saplings in the school yard, ready to pass on their knowledge to their parents, many of whom have had to rely on government support for the last 13 years because of constant drought.

Ethiopia is severely impacted by climate change and deforestation. As little as 16% of the land is currently forested according to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). Severe soil erosion, dwindling water resources and a lack of rain are making living conditions extremely difficult. For many families who rely on subsistence farming, the climate crisis is threatening their very existence.

Since almost all the school children in Eteya come from farming families, local school principal, Kedir Abdo Ketebo, initiated the climate protection project with SOS Ethiopia to educate young people about climate change and teach them new sustainable agricultural techniques.



Deforestation and monocultures – the growing of single crops – are part of the problem, explains Kedir, but he does not want to blame the families and sees education as a positive way forward.

But the project doesn't stop there. It is being extended to 3,000 children and their parents in the area and creating employment opportunities in 'green' jobs.

*"Our aim is to create an awareness that everyone is responsible for the environment and future generations," says SOS project manager, Tadesse Abebe. "Environmental and climate protections are closely linked to food security in Ethiopia. So, if we manage to contain the effects of climate change and exploitative agriculture, we will also fight hunger and rural exodus."*

The Ethiopian government has pledged to plant 20 billion trees over the next five years.

SOS Ethiopia will plant 17,000 trees



## New Youth Training and Employability Centre opens in The Gambia

Did you know that in February 2020, with the generous support from UK donors, SOS opened a Youth Training and Employability Centre in The Gambia? Built in the poorest part of the country, The Upper River Region, the five-year project aims to support 1,000 young people to find sustainable employment.

In March 2020, just as students enrolled and started attending classes, the global pandemic led to a national lockdown. Our colleagues in The Gambia continued to maintain contact with students, especially those at risk of dropping out. Six months later, the restrictions were lifted, and the courses resumed, providing opportunities for young people to earn a living, start their own businesses and support their families.

Despite the challenges the pandemic presented, in July 2021 we completed a full academic year of training with 136 students successfully sitting their final examinations. They are currently on internships with local organisations to develop practical work experience in their selected area of training.

Recognising that access to training is especially difficult for women and people with disabilities, 70% of the students they registered were women, and five students had disabilities. Mariam, who lives with multiple disabilities, enrolled on the sewing course. Using a modified sewing machine, she is able to participate in all the practical learning tasks and is one of the most committed students on the course.

Vocational courses such as sewing, catering, social work, and PC and mobile repairs, provide young people with the skills to pursue long-term careers. But that's not all, the centre also provides basic maths and English lessons as well as training in financial literacy, how to present oneself at an interview, write a CV, and work effectively in a team.

We aim to enable long-term changes and ensure the training centre remains a valuable asset for the local community at the end of the project. To do this we have set up a Project Steering Committee with prominent members of the local community, our SOS colleagues are working closely with them to strengthen their capacity and knowledge on how to run a training centre. At the end of the project the Centre will be handed over to them to ensure training remains accessible to the most vulnerable young people in the region.

Our colleagues in The Gambia have been able to foster the resilience of young people and ensure solutions for sustainable livelihoods not only bridge skills gaps, but are reimagined in a way that present the possibilities of the future.



"I will always continue to thrive in whichever situation I find myself in," says Mariam. "I would like to build a better future by developing my sewing and business skills."

## Playing away from the violence

The world's fastest-growing humanitarian crisis is currently unfolding in Burkina Faso.

More than one million people have been forced to flee their homes due to extremist violence in just over two years. Attacks on civilians and state security forces by militant groups have intensified. Right now, Burkina Faso is one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in Africa. According to the UN, more than one in 20 people have been forced to flee their homes.

Amidst the chaos, SOS is providing children with safe spaces to learn, dance, play and be themselves, away from the violence. We have set up temporary learning centres in Kaya, a city located in the northern part of the country most affected by the attacks.

"Play is a central component of our teaching methods. As we support many children and young people who have been traumatised and lost all hope, it is very important for them to have a way to process their fear and try to reconnect with a sense of normality, a sense of what childhood should be," says Julia Nessao, an SOS educator in Kaya.

For many displaced children, the SOS centres mean they can resume their education and for others, it's an opportunity to go to school for the first time. But that's not all, the centres also provide families with protection, nutrition, health services and some form of respite from the ongoing violence.

Burkina Faso has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in the world and hundreds of thousands of children are growing up without parental care. Because we have been supporting families and children here since the 1990s, we have been able to respond rapidly to the unfolding crisis in the north of the country and will continue to assist families to rebuild their lives.



# Haitian earthquake shatters families once more

Just eleven years after an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale shook Haiti, another one of a similar magnitude – 7.2 on the Richter scale – struck on the morning of Saturday 14th August 2021, causing mass devastation. Since the earthquake, hospitals have been overwhelmed and there has been a shortage of medicine.

“If I could, I would take my children away from here,” says Kerline. She and her husband had a small business selling meat to support their family, but when the earthquake hit, it destroyed their house along with everything in it. Kerline found shelter in a hangar for her family, but the rainy season has made conditions worse.



Children and staff in the SOS Children's Villages are thankfully all safe. Many are too young to recall the earthquake in 2010, like 16-year-old Jessy who arrived at the Village in Les Cayes in February 2010.

She has only vague memories of the earthquake eleven years ago because she was only five at the time. Now she is older and cannot shake off the fear of another aftershock.

*"I haven't recovered yet. I always have the feeling that the earth is moving under my feet,"*

We are supporting Jessy and others like her with ongoing counselling and activities to help them recover from their trauma.

We have been working with children and families in Haiti since 1978 providing a loving home for those without parental care, strengthening families and providing schooling and vocational training for young people.



## In 2010

We rebuilt seven schools and constructed two new ones, distributed more than ten million meals, reunited 241 children with their families, gave homes to children who had lost their families in our SOS Villages, and built ten new community centres to support children.

“The outpouring of support from donors in 2010 allowed us to respond to the immediate needs of people, but also make lasting changes to improve the lives of children and families,” says Celigny Darius, National Director of SOS Children's Villages, Haiti. But families in Haiti are in crisis again. As such, we have launched our emergency relief plans, working with local organisations to provide vulnerable families with food, medical aid, and basic supplies, as well as ongoing therapy and counselling.

We are working hard to reunite children with their families where possible and provide foster families in loving homes in our SOS Villages for those who have lost their parents. We are particularly concerned about the protection of vulnerable children who are at risk of exploitation and are working very hard with communities to establish Child Protection mechanisms, creating safe spaces for children. Haitians find themselves once again having to rebuild their nation, but this time they also have coronavirus to contend with. We are distributing hygiene kits, water filters and cleaning kits. We have also repaired the water tank in Les Cayes, which experienced extensive damage as well as fixing electrical, mobile and IT services, so that Haitians can have access to basic services.

With the support of our generous donors in 2010, we were able to work with Haitians to emerge from the horrors of the earthquake. Thanks to the generous support of donors in the UK and around the world, we will do it again.

## Fighting for **survival**

**Rain has barely fallen in Madagascar for four years and famine is engulfing the island. In the south, 1.3 million people are suffering from food insecurity, and 730,000 of them are children.**

They are experiencing the worst drought in 40 years, and this is in addition to the pandemic. Food prices are rocketing and children, hungry and weak, have simply stopped going to school. Families are resorting to eating the seeds they had planned to plant in the spring to survive.

*"The situation is overwhelming," says Jean Francois Lepetit, National Director at SOS Madagascar. "There is no water to wash in and people are having to drink dirty water."*

*"Sometimes I just want to cry," adds Jean Pierre Tombozandry, Regional Director at SOS Madagascar. "It's one thing to see these terrible images on TV, it's completely different to see them in real life."*

In the six most affected communities, in the regions of Androy and Atsimo-Andrefana, we have provided rice, cereal and beans for 1,600 families, supplementary foods for more than 2,000 children and pregnant women, healthcare and counselling. Thank you to all of our supporters, who have made this possible.

Our aim, since starting our work in Madagascar in 2011, in response to a previous drought, has always been to help communities support themselves, not to provide hand-outs. For the last ten years, we have provided basic health services, education, and local community jobs, in construction and maintenance, so that people could feed their families. But this latest drought has forced us to offer emergency relief.



## Families stick **together**

Often in times of crisis, it is those that are closest who can help the most. In Bolivia, 34-year-old Rocio, a widow and mother of two daughters, kept her promise to her older sister that she would take care of her three children, Zaida (10), Marco (8) and Yoselin (5), when she died in 2019.

Rocio lovingly welcomed them and took care of all five children in her home in the city of El Alto. However, the onset of coronavirus and the national lockdown restrictions stretched the family to the limit. Rocio was unable to go to the market to sell her handmade baby clothes and she struggled to support the family.

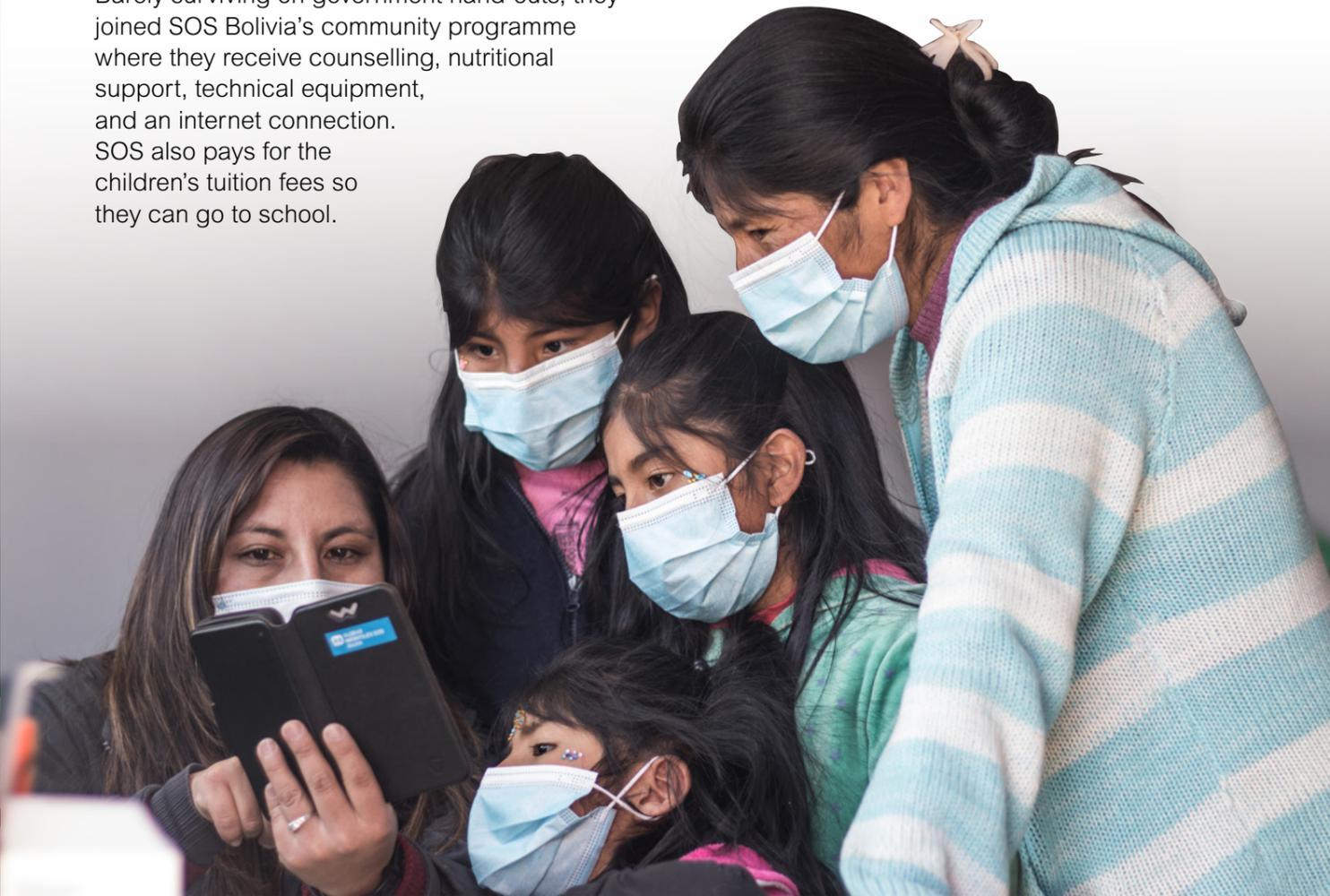
*"Although we couldn't go out, I still went out at night to sell because the children have to eat," says Rocio.*

Having already lost their mother, the children were terrified of losing Rocio too, as coronavirus spread. They could not continue with their studies online either as the family did not have access to the technology.

Barely surviving on government hand-outs, they joined SOS Bolivia's community programme where they receive counselling, nutritional support, technical equipment, and an internet connection. SOS also pays for the children's tuition fees so they can go to school.

*"I like to go to the pool, to the river to have fun, go for a walk in the park with my family and buy ice cream," explains Zaida.*

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. SOS Bolivia has been running its family strengthening programmes since 1983, to alleviate hardship in the community and ensure that children have access to education, healthcare and a happy future.



## News in brief

### Helping women become breadwinners in rural Mexico

Bread isn't the only thing eight women from a remote community in Chiapas are breaking together. These women are smashing conservative gender stereotypes by setting up their own businesses and supporting their families.

In San Antonio Copalar, only six out of 100 people have decent living conditions, such as access to basic services and food security, and women are expected to stay at home and look after the household.

With the help of SOS Children's Villages, these inspirational women have been provided with supplies, ingredients, and guidance to become the family breadwinners.

"The objective is for women to empower themselves," says SOS Children's Community Advisor, Graciela Aguilar.

Six months ago, they barely knew each other. Now they work long hours, chatting and laughing, kneading dough, and breaking barriers.



"I feel proud because I have learnt how to make bread. Now I want to learn more and grow," says Evila.

### Determined to help against the odds in India

Bhumiadhar village is a small, sleepy Himalayan hamlet, an hour away from any major city. As the second wave of coronavirus hit, Bhumiadhar went into lockdown. The 300 families living there became cut off from healthcare, emergency services, COVID testing and vaccinations, and they didn't have enough food to survive.

SOS family strengthening co-worker, Swati, who lives 15 kilometres away was determined to help. She visited the community and found out exactly what they needed, and in collaboration with another partner organisation, arranged dry rations such as pulses, rice, wheat, oil, tea, sugar, and milk for the most vulnerable families.

She liaised with a doctor on their behalf and arranged ambulance services, even convincing other local organisations to distribute hygiene kits to the community.

"I have worked all my life with these people. We don't abandon family, especially in difficult times," says Swati.



### The most valuable link in Kenya

Judith Kathiru has dedicated her life to keeping families together in her community on the outskirts of Nairobi.

She is a community volunteer and a link between poor families in the KCC, a low-income neighbourhood, and SOS Children's Villages' family strengthening programme. She has been working with SOS since 2003 to identify vulnerable families in need of support. Everyone in the community knows and trusts her.

Children in KCC are hungry and many don't go to school. Often the women carry the burden of supporting the family, but with meagre incomes from casual work, they cannot meet their children's basic needs.



"Parents I connect with SOS Children's Villages receive help with start-ups, education and psychosocial support to ensure their children are well cared for within their own families," says Judith.

It is thanks to Judith and other volunteers like her around the world, that we are able to support so many families and help them to stay together.

### Thank you to everyone who supported our Christmas appeal!

We were delighted by the generosity of our supporters, which meant we could give children the love, support and sense of normality they need, especially at this time of year. To find out more about our Christmas appeal visit: [www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/Christmas](http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/Christmas)

We hope you have a wonderful Christmas and wish you every happiness in 2022.



### It's not too late for our Christmas e-cards

You can still spread some cheer to your friends and family with our range of festive e-cards and help so many children across the world this Christmas.

Go to [www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/cards](http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/cards) to get yours now.



## Dishes from around the world

Christmas to many of us means a time of sharing food with loved ones, and SOS Parents around the world take to the kitchen to make something special. In Kenya, this means only one thing – it's time for chapatis!

After all, food is not just about eating - a meal can be filled with memories, culture, and tradition. It brings communities together and evokes love.

You probably have your own favourite Christmas dish, but why not give this Kenyan chapati recipe a go?

Send us photos of your chapatis to [hello@sosuk.org](mailto:hello@sosuk.org) – we'd love to see how it turns out for you!

### Ingredients:

- 350g plain flour
- 250ml lukewarm water
- 2 tbsp. oil
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. sugar
- Oil for frying – enough for 8-10 chapatis

### Directions:

1. Mix the flour, salt, and sugar in a bowl.
2. Add half of the lukewarm water (125ml) and mix to a thick dough.
3. Add more flour and water, and knead until the dough is no longer sticky.
4. Add 2 tbsp. oil and let the dough rest for 30 - 40 mins.
5. Divide the dough into 8-10 pieces. Roll them up into balls and leave on a floured plate or surface.
6. Roll out each ball with a rolling pin, then fold it up lengthways like a Swiss roll. Then curl the rolled dough up into a swirl like a cinnamon bun.
7. Heat a pan with oil in the bottom.
8. Immediately before putting each chapati in the pan, take the coil of dough and flatten it by pressing on it with your hands. Then place the flattened dough in the pan and turn it after a few minutes.
9. Fry until it has the desired brown colour.
10. Cut the chapati into triangles and eat as an accompaniment to a meal, or simply enjoy them hot from the pan! Don't burn your mouth though!



## Spotlight on: Humble Warrior

At SOS Children's Villages we view sustainability as one of our top priorities, and ensure it is central to everything that we do. This ethos is one of the reasons we're such a good match for Humble Warrior. The goal of Humble Warrior is simple, create soft fizzy drinks which are good for you and the planet, and the dedicated three-person team achieve this in several ways. The ingredients they source come from only ethical growers, which are then packaged in 100% recyclable materials, while the actual drinks are low in sugar and full of vitamins and nutrients. Humble Warrior have supported us since November 2019, when they were impressed by the reports of the positive impact we made in the Nuwara Eliya region, Sri Lanka; here's a few words from them on why they chose us.



*"Giving back to the community has been a priority of ours since we started the business. We support the growers and other workers in our supply chain, but we were looking to go further and make a direct contribution for every drink sold. After hearing about the positive impact SOS Children's Villages was having in Sri Lanka it seemed like a natural choice to support them, after all Rosh, one of our founders, hails from there! We donate 2% of every drink sale straight back to SOS Children's Villages so we can directly support the fantastic work being done in the Nuwara Eliya region. It's been brilliant to be supporting SOS Children's Villages, a charity that matches our ideals and does invaluable work to support people in a country we love."*



If you are interested in supporting us through your small business, please get in touch with us: [hello@sosuk.org](mailto:hello@sosuk.org)

## 7 women, 7 causes

In March 2021, SOS Children's Villages' long-time partner DeMellier launched "7 women, 7 causes," a capsule collection of seven tote bags designed to raise awareness and funds for charity. The founder of DeMellier, Mireia Llusia-Lindh, designed the LIFE tote bag to support SOS Children's Villages: "Supporting SOS Children's Villages for me is about providing every child with the chance to grow up in a safe and loving environment, and giving them the chance to lead a more balanced life, which is why I chose the word LIFE to name my tote, also hinting at our permanent initiative A Bag, A Life. The brown tonal shades of the leather and canvas evoke a notion of grounding to me, which is what SOS Children's Villages offer the children: a sense of grounding and belonging." 100% of the profits from the sale of the LIFE tote were donated to fund lifesaving medical treatments for children in our programmes.



We are so grateful to DeMellier for their incredible support and for truly going above and beyond this year to help children at SOS Children's Villages. "It is partnerships like these with companies that share our values which allow us to really push for lasting change for some of the world's most vulnerable children," said Alison Wallace, CEO of SOS Children's Villages UK.



We are so grateful for the support we receive from our donors and partners. If you would like to leave a gift that would last a lifetime, please do get in touch to request a legacies pack, please call us on 01223 365589 or email: [fiona.munro@sosuk.org](mailto:fiona.munro@sosuk.org)

We hope you enjoyed this edition of Family Matters. We would love to hear what you think. Please feel free to email us at [hello@sosuk.org](mailto:hello@sosuk.org) with your feedback.



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