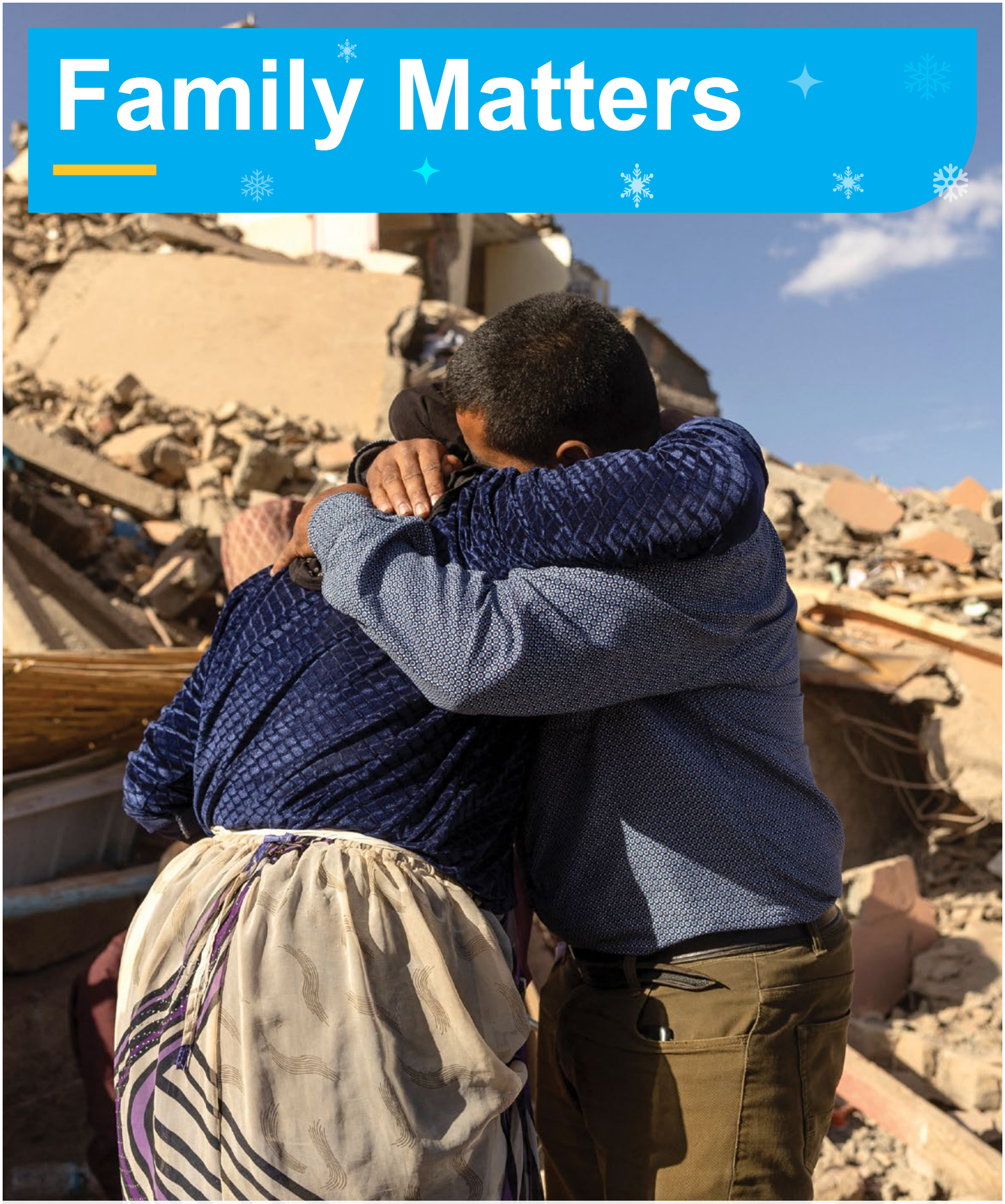
Family Matters



Five reasons children grow up alone

The trauma of war: Hannah's story

Standing strong amidst Morocco's earthquake

SOS Children's Villages UK Supporter Magazine
Winter 2023

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

In 2019, Kate, a mother from Mamelodi, South Africa, experienced her darkest hour. Diagnosed with a severe, life-limiting illness, she faced the daunting task of supporting her four children and her grandchild. Desperate but determined, she found hope with the support of SOS Children's Villages.

With this help, Kate accessed vital resources, from food, fuel and clothing to emotional support. When she first asked for help, her youngest child was severely malnourished. Today, she is thriving, healthy and happy. Kate, now actively engages in support groups and training, and is able to do more on her own, including taking care of her children. Kate's remarkable journey is testament to her strength and determination, as well as the powerful impact of community and compassion.

© Amerti Lemma

We've changed the names of all children and some featured adults in this magazine to protect their identities.

Front Cover: Family members react near the rubble of collapsed buildings in the village of Imi N'Tala near Amizmiz, Morocco. © Fadel Senna/ AFP

Dear friends and supporters,

When I read this latest edition of Family Matters, I'm filled with a profound sense of gratitude. Every story paints a vivid picture of the positive impact you are helping to make for children around the world.

Our shared ambition is straightforward – that no child should grow up alone. With your unwavering commitment, we can continue to work with our dedicated colleagues around the world, as well as with the many remarkable families, children, young people and communities we support, to make this dream a reality. Throughout this issue, we look at the challenges and obstacles that many children and young people face, and explore how we work together to prevent children who are vulnerable from being alone.

As we celebrate the successes, we must also acknowledge the tragedies. We are devastated by the many lives lost as a result of the conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip. The horrific violence has claimed the lives of children and families from our programmes on both sides. We will continue to protect children regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion, and support our colleagues at both SOS Children's Villages Israel and SOS Children's Villages Palestine who are working together to provide aid to the innocent victims of war. Read more on page 7.

The recent earthquake in Morocco also serves to remind us of the speed at which life can change. It's heartening to see how SOS Children's Villages in Morocco swiftly provided relief to thousands of families and children. Read about their emergency efforts on page 9.

A story that particularly resonates with me is that of Hannah from Ethiopia, who you can read about on page 6. During the Tigray war, she witnessed things that no person, let alone a seven-year-old child, should be forced to see. To read about her transition from the trauma of conflict to finding safety and solace, gives me hope for other children growing up in war zones. Such examples make me feel grateful that our colleagues in over 130 countries are perfectly placed to support children and young people when tragedy strikes.

Each story and update in this issue of Family Matters is made possible by supporters like you. Your ongoing commitment helps us to keep pushing forward, ensuring every child is not only safe, but knows they are loved. Thank you!

Warm regards,

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

Children playing with co-workers of SOS Children's Villages Ukraine, Kyiv Region © Ksenia Borisova

Five reasons children grow up alone

...and how supporters like you help protect them.

Around the world, children face the heartbreaking reality of growing up alone. Every day, the support you provide, helps to give children the love, care and warmth they deserve. There are many reasons why children are at risk of growing up without the support and love of those around them. We work to ensure that they never have to feel alone again.

Natural disasters

From earthquakes, floods and hurricanes to the ongoing impacts of climate change, when natural disasters strike, families are torn apart. During an emergency, we protect unaccompanied minors and work quickly to reunite them with their parents in a place of safety. Where this isn't possible, due to the tragic loss of one or both parents, we look for relatives, community networks or foster care options and support them to care for the children. Only if no other option is available, we provide a safe and loving home for them to grow and thrive.

Our teams are already on the ground in over 130 countries, allowing us to act swiftly with immediate aid, medical help, shelter, financial assistance and child-friendly spaces where children can play, learn and feel safe. We aim to be there for the long-term, helping communities to rebuild, providing education, and ensuring access to mental health services to help the children deal with the trauma they have experienced.

Extreme poverty

With extreme weather events leading to a loss of livelihoods and income, the rising cost of living and soaring inequality, many families around the world are living in extreme poverty.

In such cases, it can become impossible for parents to give their children enough food, clothing and other necessities. This can result in families breaking down or children having no choice but to go out to work.

We work with communities and families to help them better provide for their children. By helping parents access training opportunities and government grants, or when necessary, by providing direct forms of support such as school uniforms, food and medical care, we stay by their side until families can sustain themselves. This helps children stay in school and supports families to stay together.

Neglect, abuse or abandonment

When home becomes a battlefield, children are the silent casualties. Violence, neglect, abuse and family dysfunction makes children feel alone and scared. While most children have families who love them, the unfortunate reality is that millions of children around the world are abused or neglected each year. In some places, children born out of wedlock, are also at risk of being given up by their families.

SOS Children's Villages' social workers, therapists and childcare experts are there to help. Where possible we support the family, providing coaching or financial assistance to address the root causes of neglect. When it isn't safe for a child to stay with their family, or when no parent can be found, we look for close relatives, community members or long-term foster care, so the child can grow up with stability and love.

Pakistan Floods, © SOS Children's Villages Pakistan

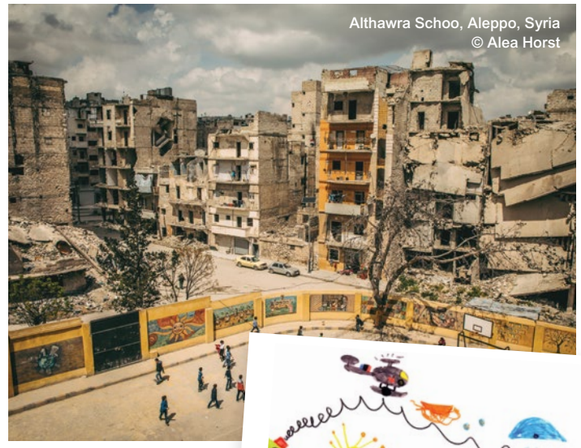
Death or illness of a parent

Sadly, the death of a parent affects around 140 million children, with at least 15 million of those having lost both parents. In these cases, children are more likely to grow up alone. In addition, long-term illness can result in parents struggling to work or care for their children.

We provide assistance to single parents and families in the event of death or illness, helping keep families together. Through coaching, the development of skills, emotional encouragement, or direct financial support, we work with families going through the most difficult of times. Where a child has lost both parents, we support relatives or other next-of-kin to love and care for the child. Where no family can be found, or is able to care for the child, we bring children into our own family-like homes, where the children can find the security, love and bonds they need to thrive.

War

In regions torn apart by violent conflict, children are frequently separated from their families amidst the chaos. The trauma of war is coupled with the terror of being alone, and children often see unimaginable horrors. In these war-torn areas, we strive to make sure that children have somewhere safe to turn, and to know they are loved and cherished.



Althawra Schoo, Aleppo, Syria © Alea Horst

We provide therapy to help address the trauma they have experienced, and ensure they are able to live safely with loving caregivers.

This gives them the stability they so desperately need amidst the upheaval. When you read Hannah's moving story on the next page, you'll see how much difference your continued support makes for children like her.

A boy hugs his mother, Kenya © Jakob Fuhr

The trauma of war: Hannah's story

Amid the heart-wrenching civil war in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, children like seven-year-old Hannah are surrounded by fear and loss, displaced from their homes and alone. Her wish is simple – to live a peaceful life where she can play safely and not worry about her future.

"When Hannah joined my family in December 2021, she could not speak at all. She looked visibly shaken and her eyes seemed to be asking for mercy," Kassech, the SOS mother who cares for Hannah at SOS Children's Village Bahir Dar explains.

The depth of Hannah's trauma is palpable. "Sometimes she wakes up breathing heavily and fast, frightened that she is going to die. Loud noises and people she has never met – mostly men – also completely terrify Hannah. She needs encouragement and assurance of her safety every day to process the trauma," Kassech continues.

Teresa Ngigi, a mental health advisor at SOS Children's Villages, tells us about Hannah's reaction. "Going into shock is the only way the brain can protect this child because the trauma is too much. Her little body is unable to process all that she experienced, so she just freezes. If there was no one to make Hannah feel a sense of safety in the chaos, then the impact would be much worse."

Hannah's past is filled with tragedy. Originally from Mekelle, the capital city of the Tigray region, she was thrust into the horrors of war on in November 2020 when conflict erupted between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The traumas she has endured are unimaginable and include witnessing her father's brutal death.

The bleak aftermath of the war sees countless children like Hannah, displaced, traumatised, and in dire need of support. Teresa warns of the long-term consequences if these children are left without appropriate care: "When children are not supported to heal, they develop their own internal working model of the world around them." She adds, explaining that the world these children construct based on trauma can lead them down a path of self-destruction and distrust.

Yet, there is a beacon of hope. With the help of SOS Children's Villages, children traumatised by war can find healing and stability once again. They are supported by people who prioritise building trust and ensuring safety.

"As a caregiver, my responsibility is to ensure that my unconditional presence makes a child feel safe," emphasises Kassech.

Through simple activities, patience, and affection, Hannah is gradually reintegrating into a more normalised life. She enjoys playing football, hide and seek, and is preparing to return to school.

"I see a smile and a spark in Hannah's eyes when she is playing," observes Kassech. "The safer she feels, the more she will overcome her fears and find new energy to learn and flourish. Although she still does not say much, she sleeps better these days without nightmares, and she is slowly getting into the right frame of mind for school and everyday living."

Hannah playing with her new sisters, Ethiopia. © Bahir Dar

Gaza Strip. © Mohamed Zaanoun - Middle East Images via AFP

Children in the crossfire

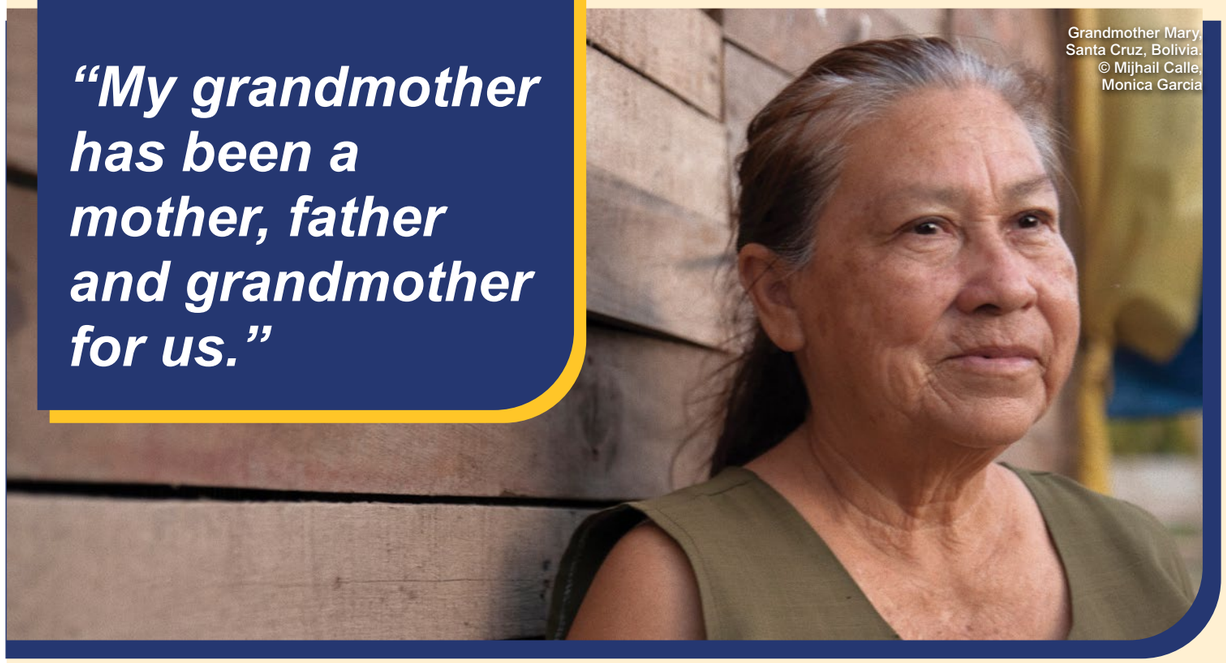
Gaza Strip, © Hosny Salah

We are horrified by recent events and the brutal violence in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel. We mourn all the lives lost and are deeply saddened to report that children, young people, and parents who we worked with from both sides have tragically been killed during the recent outbreak of fighting.

They were caught in the middle of an ongoing conflict that has torn apart the lives and dreams of millions. Each life lost is a stark reminder of the terrible human cost of war, and the urgent need for lasting peace. The children, young people and families caught up in the violence simply want to live in peace. Our colleagues at SOS Children's Villages Israel and SOS Children's Villages Palestine are working together tirelessly to provide aid and support to the innocent victims of war, whilst grieving the loss of the children and young people they cared for. They continue to collaborate and support one another in their shared drive to protect and nurture the youngest victims of this conflict.

Gaza Strip © Hosny Salah

While our teams on the ground focus on emergency response, including trauma counselling, and the safety of those in their care, SOS Children's Villages, internationally and in the UK, called upon all parties in the conflict to take immediate steps to protect children and respect international human rights and International Humanitarian Law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children should not have to live in the shadows of missiles, nor should they lose their lives because of disputes they have no part in. The SOS Children's Villages community worldwide is committed to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, ensuring the utmost care and respect for the well-being and dignity of those affected.



Grandmother Mary, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. © Mijhail Calle, Monica Garcia

"My grandmother has been a mother, father and grandmother for us."

A few years ago, the future of the Rojas siblings, from Santa Cruz in Boliva, hung in the balance. Abandoned twice – first by their father and then by their mother – it seemed unlikely that they would be able to grow up together.

"[Their mother] was there for a while and then she disappeared," recalls their grandmother, Mary, looking back on the time that she began to care for the children.

Mary, aged 67, stepped in and embraced the role of caregiver for all six of her grandchildren. Despite the challenges of age and circumstance, her love for the children was unwavering.

"I decided that my grandchildren would stay together no matter what."

Six years ago, SOS Children's Villages joined hands with Mary to offer support. "Those wooden houses at the bottom of the hill were where we lived," Mary reminisces, gesturing down the street. With help from SOS Children's Villages, she could afford a new home, to support the children's education, and address her own health needs.

Daniela and Maribel, the youngest Rojas siblings, are immensely grateful for their grandmother, and value her support. Now 18, Daniela is pursuing a design course, dreaming of a career as a designer. Speaking of her grandmother, she says, "I thank God because he sent her to me. She's been our mother, father, and grandmother. I feel happy that she has raised us," she says.

Today, as Mary looks to the future, she has hope. "I feel very happy because I have achieved a goal with my grandchildren. Supporting them, pushing them to study."

Grandmother Mary and her two grandaughters, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. © Mijhail Calle, Monica Garcia

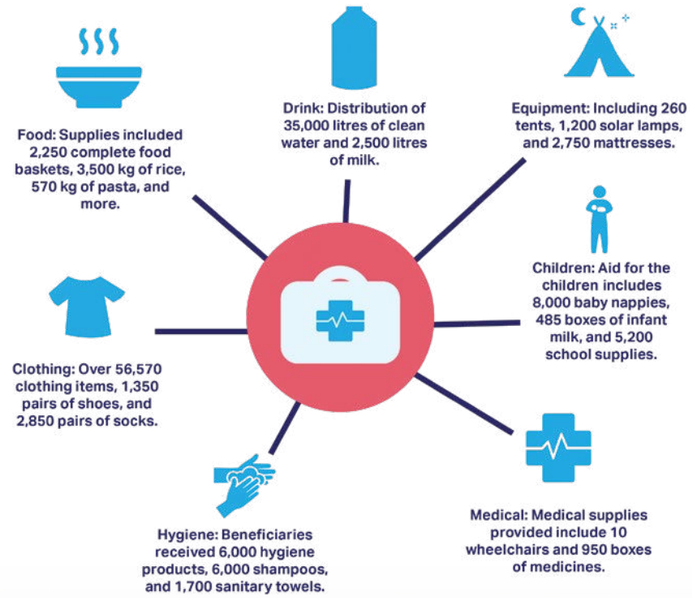
Standing strong amidst Morocco's earthquake disaster

In the early hours of Saturday 9th September, a horrifying earthquake shook the regions near Marrakech, Morocco. Amidst the debris, SOS Children's Villages acted swiftly to protect children. The epicentre of the quake lay close to Aït Ourir, 30km east of Marrakech centre. As the world held its breath for news, SOS Children's Villages in Morocco reported with immense relief that none of the children in their care, or their staff, had been injured.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, they provided material, logistical, psychological, and medical support to people in 39 douars (small rural villages).

Community support and emergency relief were top priorities, along with psychological support for the children in our care. In the two weeks following the earthquake, SOS Children's Villages directly supported **3,543 families** and **1,616 children** aged between four and twelve years old.

SOS Children's Villages Humanitarian Response



"I am very proud of our teams, and we are very grateful to all the generous donors, volunteers and partners, and to everyone who has contributed directly or indirectly to this exceptional show of solidarity."

Samya El Mousti, National Director of SOS Children's Villages in Morocco

A mother walking with child after the earthquake in Morocco, © Mosa'ab Elshamy

Relief workers bringing in aid after the earthquake in Morocco. © SOS Children's Villages Morocco staff

For more information on how SOS Children's Villages reacts in emergencies visit: soschildrensvillages.org.uk/emergency-giving

Pranita, Guwahati, India
© Lydia Mantler

A single mother's journey to financial independence

In the heart of rural Kaibartapara in Assam, India, traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained. Despite this, Pranita dared to challenge them. Widowed at 32, and left to care for her young daughters, Gargi and Bhagyashree, Pranita had to grapple with her grief, as well as the expectations of a society where women are often bound to household roles.

Pranita's determination to succeed and set an example for her daughters shines through her words: "When my daughters see other children spend time with their dad, they miss their father. But I remind myself and them that I am both their mother and father. I am proud of being able to provide for them in ways that many in our village cannot."

The hurdles were numerous, especially as young widows in Kaibartapara often face social exclusion. Although she knew it would be difficult, Pranita was steadfast in her resolve.

"I was not taught financial independence as a girl, but I will make sure my daughters know how to be strong in the world, no matter how their circumstances turn out to be. I will support them, and I will teach my daughters how to be self-reliant. My daughters can choose whatever they want to be when they grow up."

Pranita and her daughters looking through a picture book, Guwahati, India
© Lydia Mantler

With support from SOS Children's Villages, Pranita began her journey with goat-rearing. A loan from her local self-help group, an initiative started by SOS Children's Villages, helped her expand into pig farming, diversifying her income. Her aspirations didn't stop there. After saving diligently, Pranita finally achieved her dream of becoming a beautician. She revealed that this had always been her dream, but she had felt it unachievable due to the lack of resources.

Pranita's story is not simply one of financial empowerment. After joining one of the 1,248 self-help groups that SOS Children's Villages has set up in India for women just like her, she was able to make long-term plans for her family. Through the support of the self-help group, Pranita found strength in community — these groups not only provide financial training but vital social connections.

Pranita overcame her shyness and became an entrepreneur, whilst also getting help to navigate many of the challenges she faced as a single parent, helping to keep her family together.

Today, Pranita's concrete home stands as a symbol of her determination, inspiring other women in her community. "Many people come to me and ask me how much I earn and if they can earn too by raising a pig farm. They also have questions about the logistics of how to access markets or medicines for the farm." We are proud to support visionary women like Pranita to chart a new future for themselves and their children.

Pranita and her daughters reading, Guwahati, India © Lydia Mantler

Pranita and her daughter holding their kids, Guwahati, India © Lydia Mantler

We are so grateful for all the support we receive from our donors and partners.

We are always looking to improve how we communicate with you, giving you more of the information and stories you would like to see. Please let us have any feedback on this or previous editions of Family Matters to help us improve future issues.

You can contact us on 01223 365589 or email: hello@sosuk.org

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

Supporting families affected by loss

Gideon preparing food, Accra, Ghana
© Celeste Heikamp

Meet Gideon, a 17-year-old from Ghana whose life has been far from easy since the death of his father.

''After my father died, life was very difficult for us. He passed away years ago. My mother had a lot of trouble taking care of us by herself. The idea that we had no place to sleep, and no food was a nightmare for her, and unfortunately reality.'' When Gideon thinks back to his high school days, he remembers one thing well: ''I had only a few dirty and torn uniforms that I wore all week. My classmates laughed at me and that made me immensely embarrassed. When I think about that, I still get sad.''

However, through the support of SOS Children's Villages in Ghana, Gideon's family is now self-sufficient once again. With access to resources and training, his mother was able to find her feet and start her own bakery.

Gideon and his mother displaying their food, Accra, Ghana
© Celeste Heikamp

A family portrait of Gideon, his mother and siblings, Accra, Ghana
© Celeste Heikamp

He has since graduated from high school and he and his family are doing much better. ''Thanks to SOS Children's Villages' programme all our problems have been solved. My mother took several courses, so now she can take good care of us again. We have a place to sleep and eat. Gone are the days when we went to bed with an empty stomach. In the future, I would like to become a soldier so that I can help and assist the people in my community so that they too can have a better life.''

"It was during the difficult moments in my life that I realized the value of family, how important it is to always have the people who love you by your side. Without SOS Children's Villages, I would have lost this happiness."

This Christmas, many children have *one wish* – not to grow up alone.

At this time of year, many children around the world are eagerly sending their Christmas wish lists to Santa, ready to hang up their stockings in excited anticipation of the presents to come. This innocence, joy and hope for the future are what all children deserve.

Sadly, there are millions of children who not only won't get any presents, but whose main wish is for a life free from fear and loneliness, where they can play, and where they know they are loved unconditionally.

No child should fear growing up alone.

***THANK YOU* to everyone who has supported our campaign to make their wish come true!**

Scan to read their stories

#OneWish

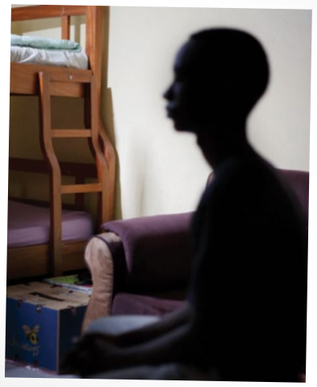
"To stay with my family"

#OneWish

"To have food to eat"

#OneWish

"To be with my sister"



#OneWish

"To be free from violence"

#OneWish

"Not to be alone"

Shop your wishlist to make *their* wish come true

This year, give a gift that makes a positive difference.

Our ‘Christmas Gift Guide’ showcases small UK-based businesses who each give back to SOS Children’s Villages all year round. By supporting businesses that support us, your Christmas shopping will make a difference for children around the world, helping to protect them from growing up alone. **Scan the QR code to shop each product.**

For the star in your life

1. You’re a Star Organic and Fairtrade Dark Chocolate Raspberry Stars
From Babies with Love - frombabieswithlove.org
Price: £7.90

From Babies with Love likes celebrating people who spread kindness: little acts that have an impact every day. These heavenly stars are made with velvety smooth 73% organic dark chocolate and adorned with pieces of raspberry. This luxury box of ethically made chocolates comes with a matching ‘You’re a Star’ greetings card. Visit the website (above) to view their selection of beautiful, practical, organic baby clothes. *SOS Children’s Villages is one of two charities which benefits from 100% of profits of From Babies with Love’s products.*

For the little ones

2. Honeybee Easy Fit Sweatshirt
Shëlk Wear - shelkwear.com
Price: £14

This Easy Fit Sweatshirt is made from repurposed 100% cotton jersey fabric and is an oversized style with an extra-wide hem to make it fit for longer. It is inspired by the honeybee hive pattern to ignite the curiosity and wonder of inquisitive children. Year round, Shëlk Wear donate 2% of the retail price of each of their products to SOS Children’s Villages. *During November and December, they will donate 5% of the retail price of the Honeybee Easy Fit Sweatshirt, and two other products, sold on their website.*

Eco-Friendly gifting

3. The All-In-One Gift Card for Sustainable and Ethical Brands
EcoSwap - ecoswap.uk/sos
Price: from £10

EcoSwap is not your standard gift card; they’re a little different! With an EcoSwap gift card, you can shop from the UK’s favourite eco-friendly brands, making it the perfect Christmas gift for a sustainably minded person in your life. With dozens of leading eco-friendly brands to choose from, ranging from eco fashion and innovative technology to climate friendly outdoor and adventure gear – they’ve got you covered! *For every gift card purchased, EcoSwap will donate 5% of the card’s value to SOS Children’s Villages.*

For the bold

4. Sunflower Sunshine Leggings
Llama Leisure - llamaleisure.com
Price: £22 - £28

There is no better way to brighten your wardrobe in the middle of winter than with beautiful sunflowers! The stunning sunflowers in Llama Leisure’s super soft leggings and shorts will bring a bright pop of colour to lighten your day. *10% of sales from the Sunflower Sunshine collection is donated to SOS Children’s Villages.*

For someone special

5. Golden ‘Dreamer’ Pendant Engraved Necklace
Lines & Current - linesandcurrent.com
Price: from £45

Christmas is the perfect time to treat that special person in your life with a timeless piece of jewellery.

Made in collaboration with fellow mum and artist Aileen from Plume Calligraphy, the Dreamer necklace is romantic and moving: an engraved 18k gold-plated coin with custom-designed lettering and a gold-plated beaded chain. The coins are available as mini coins or a necklace. *10% of profits from all Lines & Current products are donated to SOS Children’s Villages.*

Make a statement

6. The London Clutch in Gold Metallic
DeMellier - demellierlondon.com
Price: £275

The London Clutch works as the perfect transformational day to evening bag. Featuring a retractable fine gold chain shoulder strap, this style is both beautiful and versatile. A V-shaped front flap is adorned with a gold arrow shaped lock, keeping all dinner party belongings safe and secure inside the cotton canvas lined interior.

For every bag purchased, DeMellier donates to SOS Children’s Villages UK to fund lifesaving vaccines and medical treatments for children in Africa

If you own, or work for a small business, consider supporting us today!

Your help can be a lifeline for children who risk being alone.

'Girl decorating Christmas tree, Peru' © Graham Hilliard

We are so grateful for all the support we receive from our donors and partners.

Gifts left in Wills can be a wonderful way to make a difference for a child's future. If you would like to consider leaving a gift in your Will, please call us on 01223 365589 or email: hello@sosuk.org

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