

January, 2008

Dear Friends,

Another year has gone by and it is time, once again, to present an update of our activities, thank you for your continuing support and, on behalf of all of us associated with SOS Children's Villages of Pakistan, extend to you warm greetings for the New Year.

The past year has not been a happy one as we lurched from crisis to crisis and finally witnessed the most reprehensible act of all – the assassination of a popular leader. We grieve for all those whose hopes and dreams are shattered in an instant, and pray for a return to normality in the country. Words are insufficient to condemn the spiral of violence in which we seem to be trapped. We are not a violent nation and we have so much to be proud of. It is for each one of us to play our part in putting the country back on an even keel by being positive, constructive and tolerant of each other, while condemning all that has gone askew in our society.

Even as we regret the state of affairs in the country, we are happy to inform you that our work continues to steadily progress. For this we are ever so grateful to all of you, who make it possible for us, to reach out to more and more deserving children. Thank you for your concern and thank you for your confidence in us. Confidence in our ability to provide the children with a secure haven, a cheerful environment and the opportunity to develop to their full potential. We look forward to your continued support, as it is only through this that we are able to implement our plans.

This year we make a special appeal to all of you to please consider contributing towards the establishment of more projects. Construction costs are now so high that the financing of new Villages has become increasingly difficult. A project is under construction in Quetta and, by the time you receive this newsletter, contracts will have been awarded for the construction of SOS Villages in Islamabad and Jamshoro - and those in the earthquake affected regions are yet to come. Even though the costs are daunting, we believe that our responsibility is to do the necessary planning and ensure judicious use of funds, the rest is not in our hands. We are proud of the generosity of our nation and its concern for the needy. It is rightly said that a society is judged by what it does for its weakest members and, unfortunately, we have so many in our midst. Please consider this 'sadqa-i-jaria' from which countless orphans will benefit over the years, and also convey this appeal to others who may not be aware of the urgent need. We also require more sponsors for the earthquake orphans and for new admissions to the Villages. The monthly sponsorship is Rs.2500 per child. Anyone who is interested should contact the nearest Village or the National Office.

As our work expands this report becomes longer and longer, so I plan to mention only a few highlights from each centre, and am suggesting to all the Villages, that they send separate reports to their local donors. Indeed, some are already doing this, and many events are similar in all the projects.

LAHORE

The SOS Children's Village, Youth Home and Community School serve as models for the other projects. Since the National Training Centre is also situated here, there is a hum of activity all year round. The annual National Conference, Directors Training and Mothers Training programmes are some of the events which are organized, all adding to the hustle and bustle of the regular Village activities. There is a steady stream of visitors, from both Pakistan and abroad, and they are warmly welcomed as all our work is made possible through such support. The construction of a new Youth Home has still not begun, despite the land being allocated to us by the Government of the Punjab in 2005. There have been some hurdles created by the previous lessee but, hopefully, these will soon be removed. This delay is most unfortunate, as a generous donor from Sharjah has offered to construct the project, and it could have been ready by now.

DHODIAL

We lost two of our dedicated committee members during the course of the year, Begum Mahmooda Salim Khan, who had been Chairperson of SOS Children's Villages of N.W.F.P, since its establishment in 1982, and Begum Akhtar Malik, who was a member of the committee and a much loved 'Nani' of all the children. We mourn their loss and appreciate the tremendous contribution they made to the development of the organization. Begum Zari Sarfaraz Khan, a renowned social worker, who was previously Vice-Chairperson, now heads the Committee.

The damage caused to the Village and School by the earthquake was, fortunately, not serious and has been repaired. The new Vocational Training Centre is functional and will also be admitting girls from the neighbourhood.

The children from this project continue to excel in academics. One girl obtained first position in the MBA examination from Hazara University, one is studying medicine at the Abbottabad Medical College, and another one, architecture at the National College of Arts, Lahore. Three boys are admitted to the Cadet College, Batrasi.

Due to its beautiful setting and pleasant climate, this Village is a popular holiday destination in the summer. Groups of children from the Lahore, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Sargodha and Multan projects enjoyed the warm hospitality which is always extended to visitors.

KARACHI

In Karachi, too, we lost one of our dedicated committee members, Mrs. Zarine Gulgee, who had been associated with SOS for the past twenty years. It is always difficult to come to terms with a bereavement, but the circumstances of her death make it even more so. We offer sincere condolences to the families of our departed members, and pray that they find some solace in the fact that they will live forever in the minds of all those whose lives they touched.

A very commendable initiative has been the introducing of older girls and boys to community service. They have been encouraged to spend time with the special children in Dar-ul-Sakoon and patients in the Children's Hospital, and help brighten up their lives.

As everywhere else, great focus is laid on the children's education. The SOS Hermann Gmeiner School has been upgraded to College level and classes introduced for F.Sc. pre-medicine, pre-engineering and commerce. There was a great need for this and students can now go directly into professional colleges.

The construction of the Youth facility is progressing well and will be ready in a few months. An agreement has been signed with Infaq Foundation for the establishment of an SOS Technical Institute. This will be constructed by them, according to our requirements, and handed over to us for operation. Besides this, the establishment of an SOS Village in Jamshoro has the Committee fully occupied and construction should start up soon.

RAWALPINDI

This is the largest SOS Complex in the country as it includes a Technical Training Centre and an Automobile Workshop, which are making it possible for hundreds of youth to acquire the requisite skills for entering the job market. The SOS Hermann Gmeiner School has been functioning since 1995, but was still without a Boys High School. This has now been constructed and the boys will not have to go to outside schools, after the new school session starts in April. The computer and science laboratories are being equipped through a grant from HSBC.

The Village and Youth Home are very generously sharing their accommodation with earthquake affected children, who have made good friends with the others.

Since Islamabad and Rawalpindi receive a steady stream of dignitaries from abroad, SOS is often included in their itinerary. The representatives of Action for Change, the British Airways charity, also visited in the spring and presented a minibus to the children. They, along with members of the UK Support Group, planted saplings, which the children will take care of. The visitors are invariably impressed by the talented and confident children.

FAISALABAD

The SOS Village in Faisalabad is steadily being developed, thanks to generous support being received. Following the construction of a spacious auditorium and renovation of the administrative block, the donor, Mr. Joroen Van Dooren, CEO of Messrs. Dobotex also donated the cost of construction of three residential units for boys. Young boys who are still attending school have been shifted there while the older boys remain in the Youth Home.

Plans are being finalized for the completion of the school and this should be taken up as early as possible. Presently the Primary School building is being used to accommodate 163 students from Nursery to Class 10 and, as admissions increase, there will be acute pressure on the existing facilities. As it is, the boys are enrolled in outside schools, after Class 5. The annual SOS Inter-Village Cricket Tournament was hosted by Faisalabad, for the second time, and their team also won for the second time. This is a great opportunity for our SOS youth, from all over the country, to meet each other and forge friendships.

SARGODHA

For a long time the Sargodha Village suffered from insufficient monitoring, as committee members were otherwise involved. We have now introduced some new members, and formed a Village Committee, which is overseeing the activities in the Village, Youth Home and School. We are fortunate to have as Chairman of this Committee, Professor Mukhtar Ahmad Malik, who is giving generously of his time and expertise to bring the facilities up to the required standard. Public support is slowly increasing and medical doctors, in particular, are offering their services and other assistance.

This project faced serious maintenance problems due to excessive salinity in the water, which exacerbates the inevitable deterioration. With assistance from 'Friends of SOS' and other concerned supporters, a major programme of repair and painting of the premises has been undertaken. The pathways in the Village are in bad condition and need to be replaced with tuff tiles. This is an expensive proposition but will make a big improvement in the appearance of the project. We look forward to some donors taking up this requirement.

MULTAN

Going through the annual report of the SOS Children's Village, Multan one is impressed by the interesting outside trips which have been organized for the children, and the many visitors who have participated in their activities. The committee and staff are certainly sparing no effort to fill their lives with stimulating and exciting experiences. This is as it should be, because it is the right of every child to have the benefit of not only a good education, but also good recreational facilities.

A Community School has been functioning in a building loaned by the management of Colony Textile Mills, while the regular school building is under construction. This is now nearing completion and will be an attractive addition to the institutions of Multan. We are most grateful to the major donors of this project, Mr. Imtiaz Shaikh based in Dubai, and Mr. Akbar Butt who resides in London. It is most interesting that the latter found out about SOS, just by chance, and came to see for himself what we are doing.

SIALKOT

This is the newest Village in the country and, perhaps, one of the most attractive. It is located on the site of an old rest house, which had some beautiful old trees, and efforts were made to save as many as possible. The committee in-charge is so very enthusiastic, despite the distance and bad roads, and the project is off to a flying start. This is just as well, as many earthquake orphans have been accommodated here, and more are on the way.

A remarkable achievement of this Village is that their football team, all under 14, competed with under 19 teams and won the first league match, played in November and then the final, played in December. Well done young boys, keep it up! These matches were organized by ILO/IPEC who provided all the football gear and also professional coaches.

The group which visited from the UK in the spring, made a special effort to visit Sialkot where the SOS Children's Villages of Pakistan UK Supporters Group had donated Rs.5 million, for the construction of the administration block and community centre. They were very pleased with what they saw, and the welcome they received from the children.

QUETTA

Sincere congratulations to Mrs. Roshan Bharucha, Chairperson of SOS Children's Villages of Balochistan, on her appointment as Minister of Social Welfare in the caretaker government. Thanks to her, and the other dedicated members of the committee, matters are progressing well and, before long, we will have our own premises in Quetta.

In the meantime a second house has been rented to accommodate the new admissions. Twenty-six children are happily settled in the two homes and busy with their studies at the Army Public School.

Due to insufficient funds for the construction of the entire SOS Children's Village, it was decided to first construct the Youth Home. Not only is the cost much less, but it will also be completed in less time. Since this decision was taken, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Pakistan Petroleum Limited made generous donations which will enable us to carry on with some portion of the main Village. Hopefully, more donations will come in so that work can continue.

KASUR

The SOS Rural Support Programme has been an outstanding success from the very beginning, and has steadily gone from strength to strength. The dedication and hard work of the team has paid off and the project is acclaimed as a model in the field of integrated rural development. Many agencies, including the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, the Asian Development Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency have provided funding for a wide range of interventions. Remarkable achievements have been made, not only in the usual fields of education, health, sanitation and water supply but also, many less conventional areas. Some of these are a Leadership Programme for schoolchildren, raising awareness and providing technical support for establishing Citizen's Community Boards, participation of men and women in local government and the establishment of Gender Support Centres. It is most gratifying to witness the sea change brought about by this programme, in the lives of a population of over 11 million people, living in 45 villages.

EMERGENCY PROGRAMME

We presently have over two hundred children, orphaned by the earthquake, in our care. They are housed in a temporary facility in Rawalpindi, a rented building in Dhodial and SOS facilities in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Sialkot. We would like to express sincere thanks to the Human Development Foundation (USA) for their continuing sponsorship of one hundred children, to Children of Hope (Canada) for financing their education and Action for Change (British Airways) for the consignments of computers, books, stationery, tools, shoes, clothes etc. not forgetting the donation of a minibus and financing of a family unit in the Islamabad Village. Another unit has been committed by the SOS Children's Villages of Pakistan UK Supporters Group who, along with SOS UK and BA representatives, made a special trip to Pakistan in March, to visit the children and witness for themselves the havoc caused by the earthquake. They visited Muzaffarabad in hazardous weather conditions and got an insight into the difficulties faced by the people. So many people help ease their trauma and a lead role has been played by Telenor, which also hosted an enjoyable iftari party at the Emergency Shelter, Rawalpindi. They, too, have committed funds for a home in the Mansehra Village.

As I informed you in my newsletter last year, we plan to relocate the damaged SOS Village in Muzaffarabad to another location and construct new Villages in Rawalakot and Mansehra District. We had requested allocation of land by the respective provincial governments so that we can implement our plans. I am pleased to inform you that we have been allotted 90 kanals of land in a beautiful location in Rawalakot, land is being acquired in Muzaffarabad, and a suitable site has also been identified near Mansehra. I am most excited about the Rawalakot site because here we will, God willing, establish a large complex comprising of an SOS Children's Village, an SOS Youth Home, a community school, a skill training centre and a holiday camp for children from other projects. We are nothing if not ambitious! I would like to express sincere gratitude to Mr. Shamsul Mulk, Caretaker Chief Minister N.W.F.P and Mr.

Javed Majid, Chief Secretary AJK for their assistance in this matter. It is the collective concern of so many people that keeps us moving forward and I sincerely hope that the day is not too far when the children can be settled in permanent homes.

FUTURE PLANS

I almost hesitate to put these on paper because the magnitude of the work we have opted for is quite intimidating. As you know, the establishment of every SOS Children's Village is followed by an SOS Youth Home for adolescent boys, a community school and, in some locations, a technical training centre. Three Villages are under construction, in Quetta, Jamshoro and Islamabad, and projects in Rawalakot, Muzaffarabad and Mansehra should follow shortly, so we are actually looking at eighteen individual projects. Beyond that we have Peshawar and Sukkur identified as future locations, so the need for funds is never ending. However, I am of the firm belief that if it is necessary, it is possible. I also have immense faith in a greater power which makes work, such as ours, possible. I am often reminded of the first 'big' donor who gave us Rs.30,000, over thirty years ago. I was a little overwhelmed and, thanking him, asked him to tell others about SOS, as we could do so much if we had the funds. He looked at me quizzically and said '*Begum Sahiba, aap paisay ki kabhi fikr na karain, paisa bahut hai, aap apni niyat theek rakhain*'. To this day his words remain with me as a beacon light and, to tell you the truth, I have never, ever, really worried about where money will come from.


You may well ask how we can take on so much. It is possible for us to finance, construct and maintain projects, in so many different locations, only through the support of our dedicated Managing Committees. These consist of committed and competent volunteers, who give selflessly of their time and expertise, to ensure high standards of care for the children. My sincere thanks to all of them, and to our Support Groups outside Pakistan, who raise funds and find sponsors for the children. We truly appreciate the assistance we receive from all of you.

In ending I must, once again, express heartfelt thanks to all our donors who make our work possible. Without you we could do nothing and, together, we are playing an important role in providing for the most vulnerable amongst us - the orphans. As we celebrate our achievements of over three decades, we dedicate ourselves to the future. To giving the children hope and dignity. To ensuring that they, too, have the right to be loved, to be cared for and to feel safe. To rebuilding their world.

I thank you for your concern and look forward to your support as we journey on.

May God bless you all.

Yours sincerely,


Mrs. Souriya Anwar
President