**Vulnerable Families Need Support to Avert Orphan Crisis**

**Child Protection Week – 31 May to 7 June 2013**

A View on the General State of Child Welfare in South Africa

History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children

**- Nelson Mandela**

During Child Protection Week from 31 May to 7 June 2015, SOS Children’s Villages will be drawing attention to the plight of 11.4 million South African children who are living in extreme conditions of poverty, abuse and neglect, with the hope of entrenching a culture of action and accountability for children’s rights and protection. For over 30 years, SOS Children’s Villages (SOS CV) has been providing loving homes for abandoned and orphaned children in South Africa and implementing family strengthening programmes within impoverished communities to ensure children don’t fall from their family safety net in the first place.

“Added to this we have the burden of HIV Aids – the culmination of which is tearing apart family structures and leaving our most vulnerable children exposed and devastated. The alarming rates of women abuse is also a very worrying factor, since violence against mothers will have direct and serious consequences for the children living in such a dysfunctional family environment,” explains Mosa Moremi, a Children’s Rights Advocate at SOS Children’s Villages South Africa.

SOS CV work to protect the rights of orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children, providing a loving home with a family that cares for their needs. Unfortunately the demand for this care in South Africa massively surpasses the supply, and the organisation realised that urgent intervention was needed to strengthen family units within the community in order to care for their children. Through this realisation, the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) was born, which offers Prevention and Early Intervention service.

“Our FS programme is focused on strengthening and rebuilding families within communities with the end objective of self-sufficiency. We implement and support various programmes including heath care management, Childhood Development Centers, community awareness campaigns, income generating projects and workshops to educate and inform community members about how to improve their circumstances. The community forums bring various Community Based Organisations (CBOs) as well as the local government services together in order for the community to raise concerns about service delivery, safety and other issues they might face. Removing a child from parental or family care should be a last resort when it is clear that the child may be in danger of having their rights violated, and where there is no hope of remediation at that time. Our aim is to keep family units together within their communities where this is possible,” says Moremi.

The reality is that widespread poverty and inequality have left many communities and families in crisis. High levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, low morale, total lack of even the most basic services and rampant corruption are leaving our poor communities more vulnerable than ever, and in turn, our children are suffering beyond comprehension. At a very basic level the FSP, together with its partners, ensures that these families have access to the basics such as food, shelter, clothing, education and access to healthcare and government grants through the various programmes run in the communities.

“Child protection does however go much further than providing for the basic needs of the child. We endeavour to educate the community about the dangers lurking in communities for children. In these communities abuse is rife and many children live through this horror every day, often perpetrated by by others in child-to-child bullying or violence. We inform the community of the steps that can be taken when there is abuse of any nature whether physical, sexual or substance abuse in their household or a neighbouring household,” explains Moremi. Our awareness campaigns help communities to understand children’s rights and what to do when faced with violation of these rights. They help people to identify potential child abuse cases, where to report abusive behaviour and how to protect their children from becoming victims of abuse.

Children are encouraged to participate in the forums so that they know what they can do as well. These workshops are held for communities at large as well as focused groups such as caregivers and neighbours, FSP staff, CBOs and FSP volunteers.

The protection of children and their rights is a complicated matter which can only work properly when partners co-operate on all levels. For this reason SOS CV through its Advocacy department participates in public campaigns and discussions of issues that are pertinent for the safe existence of especially vulnerable children.

 Looking at the child protection crisis, NGO budgets are simply nowhere near what are needed. Funding is an enormous challenge. Non-profit organisations (NPOs) caring for children are under great pressure. Urgent action is needed to ensure that the many experienced and high-impact organisations can survive and continue to provide services where they are desperately needed in vulnerable communities.

“The problem is far, far too big for the state to tackle on its own. We need much greater political and business resolve to pull our efforts together and make a real impact in an impending crisis in so far as our vulnerable children are concerned,” says Moremi.

“When we look at issues around poverty and the massive disparities that exist in our society, it would be easier to throw our hands up in the face of the overwhelming odds we face and to feel helpless. But it feels so much better to rather pitch in and say that although we cannot help everyone and everywhere all at once, we can start with one child and one organisation at a time. Every step towards improving one person’s life is a step in the right direction and it’s all about caring for each other as human beings on a personal level. There is an opportunity for each and every South African to get involved and make a difference through financial support and by giving their time, skills and mentorship to a child who needs you. Not just during child protection week, but every day,” concludes Moremi.

To support SOS Children’s Villages SMS the word SOS to 42975 to make a R30 donation or go to [www.sosvillages.org.za](http://www.sosvillages.org.za)....

**Interview Opportunities**

If you are interested in an interview with SOS Children’s Villages, contact Anne Da Silva on (011) 894 2767 or Anne@tscommunications.co.za to make the necessary arrangements.

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**About SOS Children’s Villages**

In South Africa, the SOS Children’s Villages concept was established and registered in 1982, with the first village built in 1983 in Ennerdale. This was followed by seven more in Mamelodi, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, Pietermartizburg, Mthatha, Nelspruit and Rustenburg. In addition to the village concept, the growing orphan crisis in Southern Africa, largely attributed to the HIV & AIDS pandemic, saw the establishment of the SOS Family Strengthening Programme. SOS CV realised that there was a need to expand beyond its children's village operations to prevent children from becoming orphaned and abandoned, and falling out of the family environment. SOS CV responded by developing community-based family strengthening programmes, which provide support to families caring for orphans and vulnerable children, with the aim of keeping these children in their families and communities of origin.

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