



Our Family, Together We Walk

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Where are they?

Former SOS Youth- Saleh Srour

“My family!” This was not the name of our newsletter, but Saleh’s Srour’s answer to our first question: “What are SOS Children’s Villages? We started talking about the beginning which he obviously does not recall. He was only a few months old when his mother passed away. His father could not take care of him, and he joined SOS Children’s Villages in 1973 becoming Mama Marie’s son.

“As far as I am concerned, she is my mother and the house my home, and the boys and the girls I grew up with my brothers and sisters. I did not use to know that this was not my biological family until I was around nine when I started comparing it to the families of the other children at school. Nothing changed. I got to know I had different circumstances, but did not feel that difference.”

Saleh smiles and remembers: “I was a difficult student and all my teachers protested about one thing or another. She never complained when she had to visit them and talk about what had to be done. I recall that at certain moments she had tears in her eyes begging them to keep me at school or not to give me too harsh a punishment. Her love and support were not affected by those difficulties. It was the opposite way around. She believed in me and was there for me. I owe her what I have become. I studied law at the St. Joseph University where I graduated with a BA and then I got a Master’s Degree from the Sagesse University.”

Mama Marie passed away 15 years ago, and Saleh still misses her a lot.

“Mama Marie had well defined rules at home, and trust me, they were there to be applied! We had to participate to the daily chores, and she even encouraged us to have summer and holiday jobs. I sometimes had two jobs at the same time when I was at university, and that did not affect my results. The opposite was true.”

We had to ask Saleh about now. He has a good relationship with his father and he thinks it’s due to the fact that SOS Children’s Villages made him visit his biological family as often as possible.



His brothers and sisters? “A Lebanese family spread all over the world”. They have stayed in contact with each other and share their happy and sad moments. The same goes for other former SOS youths. They hold regular meetings where they talk freely about their lives and problems. “It is very easy for me to open up to them. I feel they are my large family.”

“At a certain point, during the war, we were 14 children from different confessions, under the same roof. We never needed lectures to explain and promote coexistence. It was our way of life while others were fighting and hating each other. I was very lucky”

He is currently the assistant general manager and the legal consultant of a company that has to do with credits.

“I certainly do,” he replied adamantly when asked if he talks to his colleagues at work and new friends and acquaintances about SOS Children’s Villages. “It is the family that has offered me so much. It is where I learned how to accept myself and others; something that many of those who grew with their biological families are unable to do.”



Saleh and Mama Marie

Editorial

The speech of Mrs. Afifa Dirani Arsanios, president of The Lebanese Association of SOS Children’s Villages at the opening ceremony of the workshop “Towards Arab Standards for Children Deprived of Parental Care”:

The issue of alternative care and its quality has become an important one in the world, which prompted the drafting of international standards for the family alternative care where the SOS-KDI played an important role, based on Hermann Gmeiner’s pioneering idea which surmounted all geographical barriers, yet taking into consideration all cultural specificities and preserving them.

This partnership with the Arab League and the Arab CCD is an important step in our endeavors to give children deprived of parental care the necessary attention. It becomes even more important with the increase in the numbers of children who risk being deprived of the care of their parents because of social and economic conditions, which requires an amplification of the services and, consequently and more importantly, a development of the laws to guarantee the child’s best interests.

It is our aim, and in collaboration with all those who work in this domain in the region, to develop Arab standards that would certainly preserve our cultural particularity while guaranteeing the right of the child to an appropriate alternative family care that would secure all his/her rights as per the Child Protection Policy.

May we move forward in our cooperation and coordination in all the fields of human development in the Arab World.

The Family Strengthening Programme

SOS Children's Villages believe that every child has the right to grow up in a supportive and caring family environment and that his/her biological family is ideally the best place to take on this responsibility.

The programme aims at empowering families that risk child abandonment by leading them towards social integration and economic independence. We look forward to introducing a new achievement of this programme in each edition of our newsletter.

When you visit or call the National Coordination Office in Sin El Fil you will encounter and hear a friendly face and voice telling you about the association and the SOS Children's Villages, in addition to the role of the SOS social centres in empowering families and preventing child abandonment. Her name is Nariman, and has been a coworker for a year and a half now.

Her story, like all other stories, is unique and special. She used to live with her husband, bringing up her two sons, when she suddenly lost the family's supporter. A terrible shock. Karim was only four and Tarek a toddler. It was difficult for her to look after them and search for a job at the same time. At the beginning, and while the children were young, her parents, who had taken the small family in, were supporting her. Her children grew up, and a more permanent solution had to be found. Some friend indicated the SOS social centre to her. Her application was studied and then accepted. The first part of support, according to the criteria set by the programme, consisted of paying the children's school fees enabling them to have access to a proper education, as well as providing the small family with some basic needs. Housing was no problem as living with the grandparents was a lasting solution.



The second part of the programme stipulates assisting the potential care giver in finding a steady and secure source of income. They did not have to look very far and long: Nariman had worked as a secretary before getting married, and the National Coordination Office was recruiting a secretary to answer phone calls and receive its friends. She was hired for a three month period and did a good job. In a few months, she achieved her economic independence and is now able to bring up her children in a decent manner, adding a new success story to the golden book of the Family Strengthening Programme.

Miscellaneous

Volunteering

The Lebanese Association of SOS Children's Villages is in the process of forming a multi-age group of volunteers. This operation aims at giving interested persons, young girls and boys in particular, to become effective participants in the activities of the association. If you are interested in joining in, you can call Ms. Leila Saad at 961 1 499808, or send her an email to leilas@sos.org.lb, or simply visit the National Coordination office in Jisr El Bacha, Monseigneur Chibli Street.

Master cards

The Lebanese Association of SOS Children's Villages has **SOS/Fransabank Master Cards** currently available.

You can use it for your daily purchases and to donate to SOS Children's Villages. Join in!



**"Hayda Nehna"
"This is Us"**

Is the annual magazine written and edited by 12-14 year olds provided family-based child care within the four SOS Children's Villages. The first issue, which appeared last summer, had the child protection policy as a theme. In their articles, the children describe children's rights from their perspective, putting forward their problems and the way they perceive the solutions to those problems. It is equally a different way of preparing them for the quite important and delicate period of transition to the youth houses.

Activities

The SOS social centre of Ksarnaba organized an educational entertainment day for the children of the families participating to The Family Strengthening Programme. The purpose of the workshop was to get the children acquainted with their rights allowing them at the same time to develop communication and interaction skills.

Holding High Children's Rights



Vivicita- Run for Peace



On the first of June 2008, SOS Children's Villages staff and children ran for SOS as part of the Vivicita Mini Marathon. In addition to promoting

the cause of children deprived of parental care and those who risk losing the care of their parents, SOS Children's Villages has once more shown that it is part of its community and an active partner in all the causes it defends.

An Active and Leading Role in the Arab World

1. As a result of a partnership established between the SOS-Kinderdorf Regional Office for the Middle East, the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD) and the Arab League of States, a regional workshop "Towards Arab Guidelines for the Provision and Appropriate Use of Alternative care" took place in Cairo between 8 and 10 April 2008. It was attended by almost 150 persons representing governmental and non-governmental organizations from 17 countries from the Arab World. Mrs. Afifa Dirani Arsanios, president of the board of SOS Lebanon and member of the SOS-KDI senate participated to the opening ceremony. Moreover, Mrs. Zeina Allouche, National Director, participated to the workshop with a presentation entitled "From Prevention Towards Guaranteeing Quality Alternative Care in the Light of the Child's Best Interests".

2. Mrs. Zeina Allouche participated to the Second Orphans Conference, organized by the Royal Association in Bahrein between the fourteenth and sixteenth of April 2008, with a presentation entitled: "The Right of the Child to Protection Within the Alternative Care Context".

3. In the context of a partnership and cooperation agreement between SOS-KDI and the Emirates Foundation in Abu Dhabi and the Dar Zayed for Comprehensive care, the Lebanese Association of SOS Children's Villages is providing the experience and technical assistance required by Dar Zayed to adopt the SOS model of alternative care in its constant and assiduous efforts for evolution.

The Editor's Corner

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to be here with you in this fourth edition where we would like to share with you the speech made by Mama Jamal Abi Younes from the SOS Children's Village of Sferai, on the occasion of the "Alternative Care Giver Day" held in UNESCO on April 21, 2008 under the auspices of The Minister of Education:

On behalf of all the SOS mothers I would like to thank all those who have organized this event which pays tribute to the care giver in his role in supporting children deprived of parental care.

I consider that the mere fact of becoming an SOS mother is a commendation by itself. I have been a mother for 25 years. I brought up, and still am, more than 30 children most of whom have started their own independent lives.

To be a mother is a gift from God. To be a mother and a care giver is what our association makes happen through the guidance and continuous training provided by psychologists, sociologists and health specialists, all in coordination with the association's pedagogical team, developing her capacities and acknowledging her role. In addition to this moral backing, an SOS mother is financially supported until the end of her life which by itself is an appreciation of the role she plays as a professional care giver. The Lebanese Association of SOS Children's Villages pays attention to the SOS mother's well being who in turn conveys this well being to the children to live in harmony and peace at the SOS Children's Villages. We stand by the child today to remain in his memory in the future.

Finally, I would like to say that I have always thanked my children for allowing me to become a mother, and I thank them today for allowing me to deserve this honor.

Thank you all.

Mama Jamal

Mother's Day



A time for gifts

The new multi purpose room at the top of the National Coordination Office(NCO) Building was beautifully ornamented with flowers and birds to celebrate Mother's Day. All the SOS mothers and aunts were invited by the coworkers of the NCO who decorated the hall themselves in collaboration with Ms. Aida Abi Khalil, youth leader of the Abra youth house for girls. Present were Mrs. Afifa Dirani Arsanios, president of the board of directors, in addition to board members Mrs. Mona Khoury and Mr. Nagi Gebran, in addition to the four village directors. Mr. Anthony Usher, CEO of the Standard Chartered Bank, sponsor of the event, commended the role of SOS Children's Villages and the important responsibility of the SOS mother. Everybody shared the delicacies of the buffet, and the feted received symbolic gifts prepared by the SOS social centre atelier.



Birds and Posies



The SOS family with Mr. Usher

Major Donors (above 2,000\$)- January-May 2008

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