

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

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This was a big year for SOS Children's Villages in South Africa. Marked by the celebration of 40 years in operation, we also found ourselves battling many challenges.





SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

Our vision

Every child belongs to a family and grows up with love, respect and security.

Our mission

We provide care through family-like villages, our Family Strengthening Programmes and our community Social Centres. We build families for children in need, we help them shape their own futures and we share in the development of their communities.

Our values

Courage, Commitment, Trust, Accountability.



Message from the Incoming National Director



The key focus for the Member Association (MA) South Africa in 2023 was to strengthen our Family Strengthening (FS) programme, where we can reach more children and transform their vulnerable living conditions. Some FS programmes moved to new locations, scaling our interventions to reach more communities. Our goal is to see more youth and families under our care become self-reliant and have the capacity to shape their own futures.

In our 2023 strategy had to following five ambitions.

- Improve programme quality and impact.
- Refocus of family strengthening programme in current locations.
- Enhancing and strengthen partnerships.
- Technology and innovation - more innovations.
- Increase advocacy and lobbying.

It should be mentioned that these ambitions were implemented under challenging and difficult financial conditions, where some were realized and some were deferred to 2024. The MA did not meet the income targets both in local and international funding, however, compared to 2022 there is significant improvement.

At programme level we exceeded our annual target for alternative care reach capacity of 730 children (these numbers are controlled externally by DSD and the capacity of our villages). Educational achievements reached the target of 85% across all villages. We had robust youth empowerment programmes, despite organisational liquidity issues all decisions, plans and operations had to prioritise the best interests of our programme participants (children, youth and families).

In 2022, South Africa had over 2.8 million orphaned children. This includes children without a living biological mother, or father or both parents, and in total is equivalent to 14% of all children in South Africa. Less than 1% of these children are in Child & Youth Care Centres, the majority are in communities. According to the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010) alternative care options should be at the best interest of the child. "The family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members" There is a global move, within and outside SOS Childrens Villages International, towards strengthening the capacity of families and communities in providing better care and protection of children, a move away from a village-based model which is believed to be secluding children from social and cultural settings.

According to UNICEF more than half of children in the country live below the poverty line. An opinion piece on the government website shared by Dr Nala, Director of Research at GCIS says that 'the strengthening of families and communities is the first line of response to child protection'. We established valuable long-term partnerships with like-minded organisations to advance the impact of our youth empowerment programmes. We had more young people in skills development programmes, entrepreneurship, and scholarship programmes, with innovation driven from village level, i.e., transforming vacant spaces to youth learning centres. Closer to the end of 2023 we launched Community Employability Services project in six programmes (Ennerdale, QwaQwa, Mamelodi, Mathanjana, PE and Nelspruit). We are also welcoming new initiatives within youth empowerment, i.e., Cross-Border Mentorship support. Furthermore, as part of preparing young people for life in the communities, as care leavers, villages have the Young People Build Project where young people mend and rebuild their family biological homes, as well as bond and expand their circles of support during independent living period.

This year we invested more effort in developing and strengthening the advocacy desk. There is a large and crucial role SOS CV needs to play as a voice of influence and advocate for children's rights within the sector. This year we expanded our networks to plug into existing advocacy efforts from a larger social sector network.

Our staff remains the valuable resource in realising our vision. This year we facilitated the formal training of all our 'Mothers' on Child and Youth Care Work as some 'Mothers' joined SOS using their maternal instincts to provide love, care and protection, without the formal qualification. Staff wellness was a priority for this year with innovative initiatives at programme levels.

Most of our villages have been digitised under the ICT4D (ICT for Development) programme with Rafiki and establishing digital villages. Digital Villages Programme aims at empowering SOS families through digital literacy training and access to ICT resources based on three main pillars: providing access to technology, building digital skills, training participants on cyber safeguarding.

The Fund Development Unit (FDU) has been operating with less human capacity, due to this the income secured totalled R46 million against a target of R52 million. This will be one of the key priorities in the next financial year.

We attribute these achievements and well-being of our children, youth and families to the unwavering commitment of our donors and Board of Governors who give selflessly their time and resources towards the SOS CV vision.

Your support transforms lives!

I look forward to the impact in the upcoming year.

Nqabakazi Gina
Incoming National Director



In 2024, we continue to be strongly guided by the SOS Children's Villages Care Promise



Following the Strategy 2030 road map

No child should grow up alone. This is the central message of SOS Children's Villages' international Strategy 2030, which serves as a road map to build and drive change for children across the world. The road map has seven strategic initiatives:

- Innovate alternative child care;
- Strengthen families;
- Empower young people;
- Advocate for children;
- Create a movement;
- Simplify SOS Children's Villages; and
- Invest for funding growth.

The current Strategy for SOS Children's Villages in South Africa includes a five-year commitment and strategic shift towards community-based programming, operations and advocacy which lines up with the Strategy 2030 initiatives.

The 2023 Strategy commitments were to:

- Improve programme quality and impact;
- Refocus the Family Strengthening Programme in current locations;
- Enhance and strengthen private and public partnerships;
- Tap into more benefits of technology and innovation; and
- Increase advocacy and lobbying.

SOS Children's Villages in South Africa made some significant achievements in line with these commitments in 2023, while dealing with some very real challenges.

Achievements included:

- Reaching and supporting more children through the Family Strengthening Programme;
- Providing robust youth empowerment programmes with strong corporate partnerships;
- Providing strong reporting and management of child safeguarding cases;
- Outstanding educational performances by children and youth in all locations; and
- Ongoing Child Safeguarding training for staff and children.

Challenges included:

- A low number of youth and families exiting care in a self-reliant state;
- Severe financial constraints nationally;
- Collapse of the national office building roof;
- Poor condition and deterioration of some properties;
- Urgent need to prioritise staff physical- and mental well-being;
- More children needing placement in the Alternative Care Programme; and
- Staffing issues due to the low salaries being offered.



According to UNICEF, more than half of South Africa's children live below the poverty line. In order to meet the Strategy 2030 objectives, it has become clear that SOS Children's Villages in South Africa needs to advocate strongly for more funding of community care programmes, specifically funding by the provincial Departments of Social Development (DSD) as per the Children's Act.

Chapter 8 of the Children's Act states that the provincial MEC "must" fund early intervention programmes to serve families where children are identified as vulnerable to or at risk of harm or removal into alternative care, and develop the capacity of parents and caregivers to safeguard their children's well-being and best interests.

In an opinion piece on the government website, Dr Ntombifuthi Nala, Director of Research at Government Communication and Information System, stated that "the strengthening of families and communities is the first line of response to child protection".



"the strengthening of families and communities is the first line of response to child protection"

If SOS Children's Villages in South Africa is going to support more children and scale up our care programmes in South Africa, then more resources need to be deployed to our prevention and early intervention programmes like the Family Strengthening Programme. Budgets for such programmes come from the national DSD, but SOS Children's Villages cannot influence policy reform and national budgets on its own. It's vital that we form alliances with similar

organisations and drive a national call for action with clear demands.

A number of other lessons were also learned in 2023. It's clear that we need to create working models from our work that can be shared with the sector and can influence national policies. Partnerships with research engines such as universities and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) could also advance our work.

We've also seen that funding targets should be based on the current capacity of the team, not the ideal capacity, as that leads to unmet targets.

The internal audit and regional investigations in 2023 produced a number of recommendations which will be implemented to strengthen systems and accountability within the national office going forward.

Looking to the future, we have solid action plans to ensure the sustainability of our work. These include:

- Implementing an impact-measurement system for all our programmes;
- Optimising operations by placing suitable candidates in crucial roles, improving performance, and ensuring job descriptions align with organisational strategy; and
- Transforming into a learning organisation where lessons and insights from our work inform future planning, proposal development and model development.



Programme overview 2023

By Sipelile Kaseke, National Programmes Director, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa

Early in 2023 the Department of Social Development (DSD) announced the national Institutional Realignment Project which aims at increasing the government's capacity to lead in all aspects of child protection. Although the project will see a reduction in the allocation of resources to the non-profit sector, it will increase the government's responsibility and accountability

for the well-being of children and families across the country.

As SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, we welcome this initiative and are looking at different ways we can support government programmes. "The care reform needs to be at the top of our agenda, with the hope of increasing care options for children and strengthening programme regulations by adopting strict gatekeeping policies," says Victor Mbinga, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa's Programme Director – Mamelodi.

In this reporting period, all the SOS Children's Villages in South Africa locations renewed their service level agreements, achieved clean audits with DSD and the Department of Health, and received full funding allocations for 2023 and 2024. This attests to the quality of work being done by the programme locations.

"The safety of children is at the core of our work," reiterated Kgomoiso Loate, National Child Safeguarding Officer. "We are working to strengthen our transitional safeguarding approaches through an increased focus on enhancing child protection systems at community and location level."

In 2023, the [youth unemployment rate](#) in South Africa remained nearly unchanged at around 50.47%. This figure represents the share of the economically active population aged 15 to 24 who are currently without work and who are actively seeking employment. This high unemployment figure has a variety of devastating effects on communities.



"Working with young people from low-resourced areas, one is constantly awakened to the linkages that exist between unemployment, mental health, sexual reproductive health and violence against children," said Peter Kotlolo, National Project Coordinator/Acting Sekhukhune Programme Director.

During 2023, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, in partnership with Standard Chartered, implemented the Futuremakers project. Government, civil society and the private sector were also involved in the delivery of the project. This initiative focused on developing youth employability skills, increasing access to job opportunities and mentorship, building entrepreneurship skills, and addressing issues of mental health and sexual health. The project baseline and end line data showed improved resilience outcomes among the young people who participated.

Another achievement during 2023 was being accepted as a member of the South African Parenting Programme Implementers Network (SAPPIN), co-chaired by UNICEF, Save the Children and Clowns Without Borders. This creates opportunities for joint advocacy and networking.

The current funding crisis has a huge impact on the most vulnerable people in our country – our children – and we are calling for children's well-being to be prioritised across the nation. This can be achieved through better parenting programmes that aim at strengthening families, and better allocation of resources for child protection and well-being.

Looking forward, the 2024 programme will focus on improving growth and quality in our Family Strengthening Programmes. With more financial support from donors, we will be able to make a bigger impact in this area.



Ellen Malumane – The table is the centre of the home

Started as house mother in November 2023

Being a mother is a long-term commitment, and Ellen Malumane was certainly up to the task. The children who were raised in Ellen's home at SOS Children's Village Mbombela (Nelspruit) over the 21 years were blessed by a woman who specifically made time to talk to each one, because she knew the children had all been through a great deal before they got to her home, and all reacted differently to their traumas.

Ellen was the first house mother at SOS Children's Village Mbombela and is proud to have been there at the start. She had already spent four years working at a temporary place of safety when she saw the advert calling for house mothers for SOS Children's Villages in South Africa. She was eager to join the organisation so she could make a difference and help children, giving them what they didn't get from their biological parents.

When Ellen first started there were four children in the house, but that later grew to nine, although many more passed through over the years, generally only leaving after they completed their tertiary education or had learned a trade like plumbing or bricklaying at the inclusive school. Ellen says sometimes her job was very challenging, and at one stage she had to go around with one child tied on her back while she carried another little one in her arms.

As with any home, food was a big focal point and Ellen's children especially enjoyed the weekly Sunday braai. She also made a point of teaching all the

children to cook and bake and was very proud when one of her boys went to one of the other homes in the village to teach the girls there to make vetkoeks.

Ellen placed great importance on family time around the table – to eat, share from the heart and especially to laugh. She recalled one dinner conversation where the children were discussing what they would call their spouses when they grew up, and there was much laughter when one child declared they would call their beloved "Baby". Other gatherings around the table were to establish house rules and to get the children's input on how to deal with anyone who broke the rules – democracy in action right from the start!

Being a house mother comes with all the usual parenting challenges. Ellen recalled times when she had to advocate for "her" children with school officials and even with their peers, asking other children to be kind and have patience with children who were sick or had skin conditions, and explaining that the children hadn't asked for their afflictions.

Now that she has retired from SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, Ellen is able to spend time with her own grandchildren and has more time for bible study and to preach, but she says she still misses her children from SOS Children's Villages, she comes to visit a couple of times. She has a close bond with most of the children who passed through her home and many of them regularly call or visit. Ellen is still a local board member and is happy she's still able to impact the community where she played such a big part.



Rene du Plessis – One big happy family

Started as house mother in 2001

Rene du Plessis has worked for SOS Children's Village Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) for 23 years – two years in an "aunty" position providing support to the house mothers, and the balance as a house mother herself – and firmly believes in providing a stable home with a set daily routine. She says this gives the children the security of knowing what to expect, and their involvement in basic chores provides a sense of belonging and ownership.

Having come from traumatic situations, it sometimes takes the children quite a long time to "find you", says Rene, and the stability of routine helps her and the children understand what to expect of one another and how to work together.

Even the "hectic" school mornings are well ordered, with Rene getting up extra early to make sure there's porridge on the table when the children wake up. If she can, she likes to cook the dinner in the mornings too so that she's available to help with homework in the afternoons. And then comes one of the most important parts of the day: Playtime!

Like any family with so many children, the house is almost always busy and loud. "At the table, everyone wants to tell their stories at the same time, and those who don't have real stories make one up so they also have something to say," she shared. Known as a great baker, Rene involves all the children in helping her to bake cakes and make puddings, and also to garden.

She says interacting with the children while they do these activities gives her an opportunity to hear all their stories.

Some of the children who have lived in Rene's home have been there for up to 18 years.

Rene admits that it takes a long time for her to get over the sadness when she has become particularly close to children and then they leave after a couple of years. It's natural to develop a special bond with children when you hold their hands through teeth extractions and sickness, and when they absorb the abundant affection that's poured out which they did not receive from their biological mothers.

However, like any good mother, Rene puts the children's needs ahead of her own comfort and is happy for them when they can be reunited with their biological families. Fortunately she's still able to keep tabs on them from afar and keeps photos of them in her lounge to remember the part she played in their lives.

Clearly Rene's love for others is contagious, because one of her long-term house daughters who lived there for 13 years has special needs and can't live alone, so she now lives with Rene's biological daughter – another special way of maintaining the bonds formed at SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, all made possible thanks to generous donors.



Ntombomzi Skiti – A life dedicated to the children of her heart

Started as house mother in 2002

Ntombomzi Skiti truly jumped into the deep end when she first stepped into the role as house mother in SOS Children's Villages Gqeberha at the age of 35. She took over from an elderly house mother who was retiring, and was initially faced with the challenge of caring for a number of teenagers, which can be a huge task for anyone. As difficult as it was, she says she stood firm, reminding the teenagers: "I am shaping you so you can stand on your own when you go back to the world!"

Almost all of Ntombomzi's house children have attended a special school due to having special needs, some as a result of the circumstances they were born into and some as a result of mental- or physical disabilities. At the moment she has eight children in her home.

She shares that in the early years she sometimes went to the village supervisor crying about how hard the work was and saying that she didn't know if she was really making a difference. Wisely, she was counselled that "at a later stage you will reap the rewards of what you plant". Those words have proved true, and the rewards of her hard work in diligently caring for the children have been ample over the years.

Ntombomzi shared a story of two sisters who moved into her house when they were five and seven. One of the girls was particularly curious and always stood close to watch Ntombomzi preparing the meals. One day when the house mother returned from a long and tiring grocery shopping expedition, she was gearing up to prepare the supper when one of the girls, aged nine by then, told Ntombomzi she had already made the supper! What a delight for any mother!

After that the girl regularly helped with meal preparations. Ntombomzi later advocated for her to be accepted for hospitality training and the young woman now works at a Radisson Blu hotel. Her sister is working as a chef in Johannesburg. Both girls regularly check on their "mother", and the bond is so close that Ntombomzi proudly shared she walked one of the girls down the aisle when she got married.

Stability is key for children to flourish, and Ntombomzi has helped to provide this safety net for her children time and again for over two decades. She told of one boy who came into her care when he was five – tiny and very sick. The doctors later discovered he had a heart problem too. Ntombomzi spent days on end visiting the hospital. "It was only the grace of the Lord that he made it!" she said. The boy had a long and difficult journey, and at one stage left the village and even ended up on the street due to some bad choices, but in recent years Ntombomzi found him again and their strong bond helped get the young man back onto a good path.

Living in the village also brings the joy of having an extended family. Ntombomzi explained that the house mothers like to treat their children every so often by getting together in the multipurpose building and all bringing something to share. During the holidays when some of the mothers and children go away, the mothers on site all bring their meals to the hall too so that everyone can eat together.

It truly does take a village to raise a child, and – thanks to the support of donors – these house mothers are making an enormous difference in children's lives.



Maria Phillips – Togetherness builds strength

Started as house mother in 2014

Like most mothers, Maria Phillips, a house mother at SOS Children's Village Gqeberha, says she can't ever switch off, even when she's technically on leave. She believes in always going the extra mile for the children and understands that children who have lived through trauma need different things from her than what her biological children needed. "I knew I was going to work with other people's children who came from bad environments and hadn't had the love and attention they needed, so I have to do it on their level," she said.

Working together is a core value in Maria's home, and she believes strongly in routine and planning ahead, like setting out the children's clothes each night for the next day because "without planning everything is upside down". Maria and her children do everything together – play together, study together, watch TV together, laugh together and cry together. They even went with her to vote in May 2024! As a result of their togetherness, she says the children in her home all know the routine and older children will often help with the younger children.

"Every moment is a special moment and a learning process for me," Maria said, noting that she had learned a great deal from one of her children who has autism spectrum disorder. She particularly realised how much damage can be done if children with special needs are put in a corner with very little expected of them. This boy has flourished under

Maria's care. "I knew nothing about autism, and I have learned so much from that child. When I see progress in him my tears start running!" she shared.

A very pragmatic person, after nearly a decade at SOS Children's Village Gqeberha and years before that as house mother for another similar organisation, Maria knows that if you decide to do this kind of work it must come from your heart, because it's not an easy job. "You have to ask, 'Why am I here?' even before you apply for the job," she emphasised.

Maria says some of the hardest times come when children leave the home, but she does her best to prepare them for the real world outside SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, warning that "Life outside is not easy. Here at SOS Children's Villages in South Africa you get everything – you know there will be porridge on the table in the morning and your washing will be done. You must always stand up for yourself in the real world."

Her life lessons clearly sink in, because she says many of the children come back to her saying, "Aunty, I still remember what you taught us!" Like any children, they also always know they can call their "mother" when they're going through a rough patch after they've left the home, and she will do what she can to help.

Support from donors enables us to provide these family-like homes for children needing alternative care.



Themba Faku – Gardening of a different kind

Started as house mother in 2009

It's clear that Thembeku Faku has enormous pride in all of the children in her care, but especially those who have special needs or who have suffered more than some of the others. As is often true as a mother, it's the children who give you the hardest time that creep the deepest into your heart.

Thembeku's upbringing in a close, supportive family where her mother was a Sunday School teacher and where their house was always full of other children, prepared her well for her role as a house mother at SOS Children's Village Gqeberha.

Thembeku says she has never needed anyone to pat her on the back and say, "Well done, Thembeku," because of the joy she feels when she sees "her" children blossom. She knows she is just there to help.

One of the most beautiful "flowers" in her garden inside the home is a five-year-old boy she describes as "a handsome, brilliant boy – a genius" who arrived at the home as a 15-month-old but with the developmental age of an eight-month-old and didn't even know how to eat. He was sickly, and on many nights Thembeku

thought the child was about to pass away, but her loving care and the support of SOS Children's Villages in South Africa's staff turned his life around. By the age of three he knew all 88 children and the staff on the premises by name. Thembeku says she screamed in excitement the day she took him to school for his Grade R interview and he was accepted on the spot.

She gets emotional talking about all the ups and downs and the terribly traumatic situations some of the children have been through. "But you can't break in front of the children. You are their pillar and you must be strong," she said. "I respect the children. Some of the things that happened to them ... I was so lucky they didn't happen to me."

Thembeku's other great love is gardening and, just like her mother before her, she says she never buys vegetables because the garden outside her window is full of broccoli, spinach, cauliflower, tomatoes, green peppers and other plants. One of the boys currently in her home has special needs and has struggled for years in a mainstream school, but things took a turn for the better when Thembeku saw his love for gardening and persuaded the school to allow him to work in their school garden and thus tap into his strength.

Although she's due to retire in 2025, Thembeku says she will never be far from SOS Children's Village Gqeberha because she knows she will do more damage to her current children if she just disappears from their lives. She plans to become a "holiday parent", taking some of the children who have no other family to her own home for weekends and holidays, and remaining a big part of their lives, even if not on a daily basis.





Mbombela changes shape

In 2023 SOS Children's Villages in South Africa had to start changing the approach of our support in Mbombela (Nelspruit) because the village properties there were in a bad state of disrepair. Eight houses were severely damaged and five moderately damaged, and we had no financial means to repair them or rebuild the village, nor to relocate to other premises we were offered.

Unfortunately, the facility was built on a very unstable rocky area and, over time, the rocks below ground moved, the buildings' foundations moved, and ultimately the buildings themselves shifted. By 2011 the buildings were showing signs of distress. Numerous technical assessments and expert reports helped identify the problems and provided recommendations to address these issues. Interventions over the years included underpinning the buildings and reinforcing the foundations and structure, but the infrastructure's condition continued to deteriorate.

Almost all our residential buildings in Mbombela now have severe structural defects and the houses no longer comply with the necessary norms and standards. They also failed the most recent Department of Health compliance certification assessment. These

buildings are thus considered high risk and pose a danger to occupants, and had to be evacuated.

Naturally, the children in our care are our top priority, so SOS Children's Villages in South Africa management met with the Department of Social Development (DSD) officials in Mbombela to update them on the infrastructure challenges, the risks that the occupants were exposed to, and to seek DSD's collaboration and support in solving the challenges.

When we first decided to evacuate the village, 65 children were housed on the property, but this number has dropped as alternative arrangements have been made for some of the children.

The office buildings are still structurally sound, so as an interim measure some office space was converted into bedrooms and some of the children were moved there. This affected the functioning of the offices, though, and personnel alternated days in the office due to the reduction in space.

The announcement of the evacuation and subsequent uncertainty of the timing and process moving forward was



naturally stressful for the personnel and the children. A decision was subsequently taken to delay the final closure of the village until December 2024, to provide stability for the children until after they finish their year-end exams.

The DSD is working with us to explore other care options for the children and young people who are in our care, including relocation to another facility within the same province, reunification with their families, joining the Family Strengthening Programme, and foster care. There is still some uncertainty about how the closure of the village will affect the Mbombela personnel.

Although we will no longer offer an alternative care facility in Mbombela, the children and youth will still be supported by SOS Children's Villages in South Africa through our other off-site programmes. The Family Strengthening Programme in Mbombela will continue to operate as normal, and we will work in co-operation with local authorities, partners and stakeholders, and other service providers to continue to protect and care for as many children as possible.

Persevering through the challenges



Noma* and her three siblings were brought to SOS Children's Village Mthatha in 2000 when she was five years old, because her mother was too ill to care for the children. Noma moved into House Six under the care of Ms Dlamini* who is now retired, and although the little girl was not happy in her new home for the first few days, her house mother comforted her and soon she made friends and settled.

School was a different story altogether! From the first day when she started Grade R Noma was so happy to attend school that she cried when it was time to go home. She got involved in so many activities at the kindergarten that she became Miss SOS Kindergarten. She then moved up to the Hermann Gmeiner Primary School which she attended from Grade 1 to Grade 9.

Noma did exceptionally well at school and got three or four awards at prize giving every year. Her teachers loved her and her house mother always encouraged her to study hard.

Noma then went to a local high school from Grade 10, and that was not easy for her. It was the first

time she was studying outside the SOS Children's Village and she was afraid, but her elder sister assured her she would always look after her sibling, and the teenager set her mind to work hard.

She continued to perform well up to Grade 12, and also enjoyed playing netball both at the village and at school. Noma also entered the Miss Khanyisa High School pageant and was the second runner up.

Sadly, Noma's biological mother passed away during her matric year, and it was a difficult time for the young woman and her siblings. Noma wrote her final school exams that year and still managed to pass and received her National Senior Certificate.

The following year she worked at McDonalds for the whole year and then applied to study an Advanced Diploma in Public Management at Walter Sisulu University. She completed her course in 2023 and graduated in May 2024. She is now looking for employment and hopes to be able to study further in the future.

* Names have been changed for child safeguarding purposes.



Transformative power of opportunity

Kgatso*, a 19-year-old girl from Vlakfontein, has had a remarkable journey of growth and opportunity over the last seven years. Raised by a single parent facing health and employment challenges, Kgatso's life took a turn in 2017 when her family was taken in by the SOS Children's Villages Social Centre Sekhukhune. Recognising the risk her children faced without proper care, Kgatso's mother made a courageous decision for their well-being, and asked for help.

Under the care of SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, with the support of SANTA Thwalanani, a partner community-based organisation, Kgatso and her siblings received the essential services they needed. While engaging in youth programmes organised by SOS Children's Villages in South Africa and SANTA, Kgatso found herself immersed in opportunities that would shape her future.

A pivotal moment came when DHL advertised an internship in supply chain management. The programme director shared the opportunity with the youth in Sekhukhune, leading Kgatso and 16 others to be shortlisted for interviews. Kgatso and two other young people from Sekhukhune secured the positions that were advertised.

Kgatso excelled during her one-year internship in supply chain management at Kellogg's, where she showcased her skills in customer service and outbound control.

Now, as she awaits her certificate for training in supply chain management, Kgatso's story is a testament to the transformative power of opportunity and hard work. The determined rural girl from Vlakfontein is an inspiration to all who dare to dream and strive for a better future in the face of extreme challenges.

** Names have been changed for child safeguarding purposes.*



Master of his future



Sbu's* journey from graduating with a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Chemistry and Microbiology to pursuing his Masters in Nano Sciences is nothing short of monumental. Despite facing setbacks in his job search, he didn't give up on his dreams. Instead, he took matters into his own hands and reached out to the Hermann Gmeiner Global Scholarship Fund, which approved his application for funding to further his studies.

Sbu's determination and resilience enabled him to continue his education and also serve as a great example for other young people. Not only has Sbu actively engaged in the Supervised Independent Living programme in Gqeberha, but he has also represented his country as the Youth Leader for SOS Children's Villages in South Africa in the International Youth Coalition that was held in Indonesia.

Sbu's journey truly is a shining example of what can be achieved with hard work and perseverance. This young man has set ambitious goals for himself for 2024. He plans to complete his Master's degree from Nelson Mandela University, obtain his driver's licence, and secure employment that will allow him to make a positive impact on his family's life.

Sbu is incredibly grateful for the support and guidance he has received from SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, particularly the Youth Department. Their assistance has been instrumental in ensuring the success of his journey, and he is immensely grateful. With his determination and the support of those around him, there is no doubt that Sbu will continue to achieve great things in the future.

We couldn't be prouder of this young man and all that he has accomplished; the sky truly is the limit for Sbu.

**Names have been changed for child safeguarding purposes.*

Safeguarding is a priority

Everything we do is guided by our commitment to provide a safe, secure and empowering environment for all. Our concept of safeguarding extends not only to the children and young people in our programmes but to everyone who engages with us – including our staff, community members and partners.

For more than 40 years, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa has been providing family-like care to over 700 children in our villages, and over 4 500 children benefited from services to prevent family separation through our Family Strengthening Programme.

In 2023, the following policy documents were approved by the Senate and are being implemented: an incident management regulation, which establishes streamlined incident management procedures; and a revised Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy. Nationally we are guided by the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and at a global level by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Across all our programmes, we focussed on raising awareness about safeguarding, strengthening prevention measures and adequate response to incidents. We conducted audits to identify safeguarding gaps and implemented plans to address.

We have several reporting channels available to our children, young people, staff and associates, with provisions for anonymous reporting. These channels include:

- Child and Youth Safeguarding teams at programmes;
- Reporting boxes at every location;



- National office Child Safeguarding Team;
- A dedicated safeguarding email address; and
- Our website.

During Child Protection Week 2023, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa took significant steps to prioritise the education of both children and adults as a means to better protect children and young people. Our initiatives included:

- **Raising Public Awareness:** Through interviews on several radio stations, we effectively raised awareness about the critical importance of child protection.
- **Empowering Youth:** We provided targeted training for children and youth on anti-bullying tactics and

cyber safety, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves in both physical and digital environments.

- **Staff and Associate Training:** Our dedicated training sessions for staff and associates focused on the prevention and awareness of child abuse, ensuring that all members of our organization are equipped to identify and respond to potential threats.
- **Community Engagement:** We held child protection awareness drives at local schools, educating learners and educators on the importance of vigilance and proactive measures in safeguarding children.

- **Advocacy through Action:** A child protection awareness march was organized from our Rustenburg location, serving as a public demonstration of our commitment to protecting the rights and well-being of children.

These efforts underscore our unwavering commitment to education as a cornerstone of child protection, ensuring that all members of our community are informed, prepared, and active in protecting the most vulnerable.



Celebrating Mthatha mothers

Characteristics of a mother

Motivator

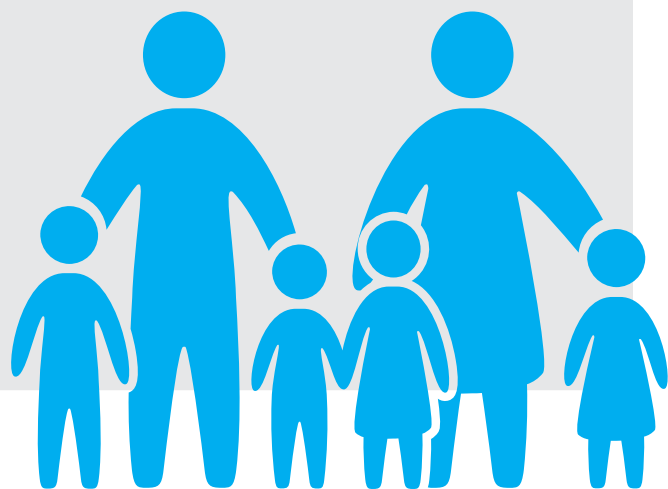
Outstanding operator

Teacher

Honourable helper

Energetic

Resourceful



A mother is the heart of a home, and this is especially true at SOS Children's Villages in South Africa where they are central to our model of providing families – not just residential care – for children in alternative care. The house mothers answer a calling to love children not born from their bodies as though they were, and this deserves a special celebration.

The first Mother's Day celebration was held in the USA in 1907, and was initiated by a woman named Anna Jarvis. Her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, had died in 1905 and Anna wanted some way to honour the sacrifices made by mothers for their children. The tradition later spread to other countries, including South Africa.

At SOS Children's Villages in South Africa we celebrate Mother's Day for a number of reasons:

- To express respect, honour and love towards mothers;
- To acknowledge the contribution of mothers in society;
- To honour sacrifices made by mothers for their children;
- To honour motherhood;
- To honour maternal bonds; and
- To unite in action for peace in our societies, the peace normally upheld by mothers.

The 2023 Mthatha Mother's Day celebration was organised by Nobuntu Hlomendlini and was held at one of the local entertainment centres in Mthatha. It was a real team effort which produced a thoroughly enjoyable event. The Master of Ceremonies was Luleka Adam, a child and youth

care worker, and, as always, the event was opened with a prayer by one of our mothers, Busiswa Ntando.

SOS Children's Villages in South Africa Social Worker Nomonde Fodo, took care of the welcome, and then another one of our mothers, Buyiswa Mafahla, spoke about the purpose of the event. Kutala Makhosini, also one of our mothers, shared the history behind the celebration, and the ICT intern, Afika Situnda, volunteered to be the photographer for the day.

It was a wonderfully interactive, entertaining day, with each speaker singing, dancing, telling jokes or playing games with the audience before she spoke, resulting in much laughter and great camaraderie.

The event was beautifully rounded off with the cutting of the cake and a round of thanks to everyone whose support made this day possible.



Strengthening the family unit

Today, one in 10 children and young people are separated from their families, abandoned, neglected or forced to live in an abusive environment, growing up without the support they need to prepare them for a successful, self-reliant future. This is where SOS Children's Villages steps in to help families who are in acute danger of breaking up.

Assistance provided through the Family Strengthening Programme includes a wide range of tailored support, advice and education services aimed at helping families to grow resilient, to overcome their challenges and keep them together. At the end of 2023 there were 4 761 participants from 1 500 families on the Family Strengthening Programme.

One of our focus areas is improving parenting skills among the communities we work with. This is achieved by hosting monthly parenting workshops and caregiver support groups, and by encouraging the use of the RAFIKI online parenting app. We believe these interventions have improved caregivers' ability to parent well, resulting in reduced violence against children and an awareness of the need for child protection. These initiatives were implemented in partnership with the departments of health, justice, and social development, the South African Police Services and other organisations.

The Family Strengthening Programme has two arms – "Direct Family Empowerment" and "Community Empowerment for Family Empowerment". Children who are part of the Direct Family Empowerment programme are provided with nutritious meals, school uniforms, education- and health services, and we help those who need assistance getting birth certificates. In 2023, we provided food vouchers to 297 households through our partnership with KFC, while



other households were trained on food production. Beneficiaries also have access to psychosocial support on a monthly basis, which fosters a sense of community and helps provide emotional support.

Under the Community Empowerment for Family Empowerment banner, two of our programme locations (Mathanjana and Gqeberha) are the implementing partners of the government's Risiha community-based programme which also aims to strengthen families and communities. This part of our programme also sees us working with the Entokozweni Resource Centre Miag to link suitably skilled beneficiaries in Mamelodi with appropriate opportunities.

Seven of our programme locations have also partnered with community-based organisations to provide daily cooked meals for 2 126 vulnerable children.



During 2023 a number of young people on the Family Strengthening Programme also accessed training, entrepreneurship development, job preparation and business start-up capital, and 73 participated in the annual GoTeach employability programme. The Standard Chartered Future maker project, in collaboration with Raj Skills Training, equipped those participants with essential business skills.

Our programmes are tailor-made according to the needs on the ground, and we ensure that children on all the SOS Children's Villages in South Africa's programmes are granted similar or equal opportunities to succeed.

Our financial donors enable us to support the caregivers and families who have no one else to turn to.

One such caregiver is Zama (not her real name). In the heart of the bustling township of Mamelodi, amidst the

challenges of poverty and adversity, Zama found herself burdened with the responsibility of raising her siblings alongside her own children. Struggling to make ends meet, she faced numerous hurdles to ensuring the well-being and education of her family. However, with the guidance and assistance of the Family Strengthening Programme, she received the necessary resources and support to navigate these challenges.

Through the unwavering assistance and psychosocial programmes provided by SOS Children's Villages in South Africa, Zama and her family found solace and guidance, enabling them to overcome the obstacles that once seemed insurmountable, and their journey from hardship to triumph began to unfold. Zama and her family now stand as a beacon of resilience in their community.

Building youth employability

Highlights for 2023:

- 1 004** young people had career assessments
- 1 255** young people attended mental health awareness events
- 301** young people attended an entrepreneurship workshop on business management
- 25** young people each received R5 000 for their business start-ups
- 325** young people attended job readiness programmes
- 65** young people earned forklift drivers' licences
- 25** young people earned drivers' licences
- 25** young people attended short courses on security and computer training
- 250** young people registered on YouthLinks!
- 348** young people received digital literacy training
- 299** young people attended social activities and mentorship programmes with some of our partners
- 1** young person represented YouthCan! at a youth meeting in Germany

With a [youth unemployment rate](#) in South Africa of just over 50% it's easy to see the importance of our youth upskilling programmes that aim to make a real difference in the lives of young people, including making them more employable.

Through the *YouthCan!* and *YouthLinks* programmes, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa partners with corporate companies to provide vocational training opportunities and also links young people to mentors who can support them on their journey.

Our Futuremakers project, supported by Standard Chartered, is having a great impact. Two young people who showcased the impact in 2023 are Mthandazo and Tiny.

Mthandazo overcame many challenges to complete his National Senior Certificate, and then successfully completed a learnership in automotive maintenance and tyre fitting. With the support of the Futuremakers project, Mthandazo obtained a code C driver's licence, earned a certificate in armed response and completed security officer training grades A-E. Later he underwent firearms training and received his certificate in early 2023. Mthandazo secured a position as a security officer at one of the major banks with the Fidelity Security Company, and a few weeks later he received an offer from Bidvest, where he started working in November 2023.

Despite facing setbacks and unexpected turns, Mthandazo remained focused on his goals and utilised the support available to him through the Futuremakers project. Mthandazo's journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of empowerment programmes and the potential for individuals to create positive change in their lives and the lives of those around them.



Tiny Komane showed remarkable determination and resilience on her journey with SOS Children's Villages in South Africa. In addition to joining the Family Strengthening Programme and enrolling in the Futuremakers project, Tiny also took advantage of other opportunities available to her. She participated in digital literacy training which equipped her with essential digital skills for today's technological world, and she attended mental health awareness sessions which provided her with much-needed support and counselling to cope with the emotional strain of caring for her siblings.

Prior to her involvement in the Futuremakers project, Tiny had limited knowledge about running a business. Through the entrepreneurship training she received, Tiny gained a range of valuable skills that have been instrumental in her success. With the seed capital of R5 000 provided by the Futuremakers project, Tiny invested in materials for her hairdressing business. Through careful financial management, she was able to

save money, enabling her to purchase a piece of land and build a house for herself and her siblings, providing them with a secure and stable home environment.

Tiny's hard work and dedication have enabled her to become fully self-sufficient.

One of SOS Children's Villages' mandates is to increase youth participation in various programmes, so all 11 SOS Children's Villages in South Africa locations have active youth forums. We have also integrated youth social, sport and cultural events at various programme locations. We had planned to host a national youth forum in November 2023 but had to abandon this plan due to a lack of funding.

Support from our current partners has helped us make great strides in empowering our youth, but more financial support is needed to enable us to make more of an impact and to implement our plans for 2024 and beyond.



Statement of financial position

Figures in R	2023	2022
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	22,656,456	22,851,946
Intangible assets	3,321	5,978
Investment at fair value	136,097	125,022
Total non-current assets	22,795,874	22,982,946
CURRENT ASSETS		
Trade and other receivables	18,290,177	14,653,258
Cash and cash equivalents	16,865,988	21,623,124
Total current assets	35,156,165	36,276,382
Total assets	57,952,039	59,259,328
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Reserves	8,976,892	8,558,600
Accumulated funds	26,001,960	32,036,220
Total equity	34,978,852	40,594,820
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Deferred income	350,900	441,144
Retirement benefit obligations	436,145	575,015
Total non-current liabilities	787,045	1,016,159
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Provisions	2,600,580	2,463,283
Trade and other payables	10,078,705	5,456,198
Retirement benefit obligation	74,411	91,058
Funds held on behalf of children	4,293,355	4,827,612
Deferred income	5,139,091	4,810,198
Total current liabilities	22,186,142	17,648,349
Total liabilities	22,973,187	18,664,508
Total equity and liabilities	57,952,039	59,259,328

Statement of comprehensive income



Figures in R	2023	2022
Revenue	96,451,043	105,466,510
Other income	3,046,279	3,076,850
Other expenses	(105,330,830)	(106,982,883)
Other gains and (losses) Credit	450	(145,054)
Loss allowance movement	(164,459)	(1,599,918)
Deficits from operating activities	(5,997,517)	(184,495)
Finance income	481,650	425,486
Finance costs	(100,101)	(68,829)
(Deficit) / surplus for the year	(5,615,968)	172,162

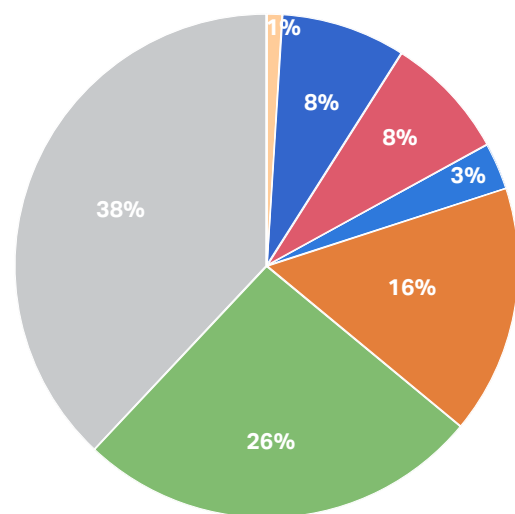


Fundraising – cheers and challenges

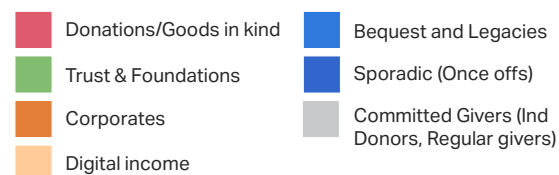
By Valerie Naiker, Head of Fundraising, SOS Children's Villages in South Africa

Following on from the previous challenging year, 2023 threw a number of curveballs our way and these had a telling effect on local fundraising efforts. Fundraising in South Africa can be difficult at the best of times, but given the current unprecedented events, for many NGOs it has become harder and we see daily announcements from charities about their permanent closure due to these funding challenges. Many of these are child-focused charities, which means many more children are without the support they desperately need.

Our income secured in 2023 did not reach the level we would have liked, but it showed that although many people have been financially impacted, donors still continue to give what they can when they truly believe in a cause.



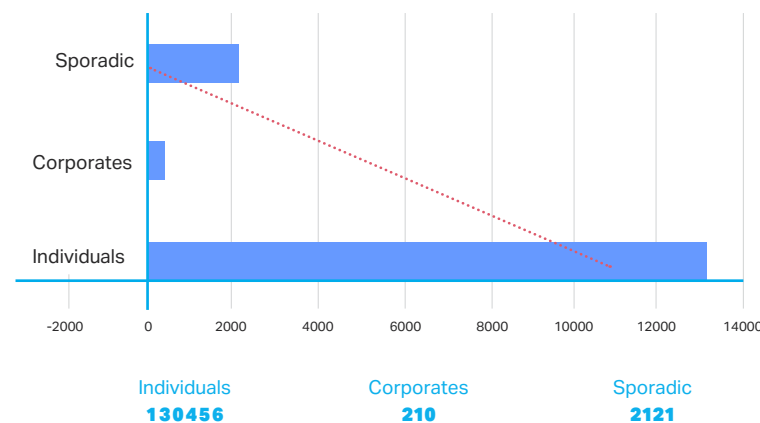
Local Income



To raise as much as we possibly could in the current circumstances, the Fund Development Unit had to match strategy to situation, secure quick wins, achieve alignment, build and strengthen our internal capacity and resources, and create alliances with international counterparts in securing international funding.

The following summary provides a snapshot of our fundraising activities and outcomes for the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023, and includes some key insights.

During the 2023 financial year, income secured totalled R46.5 million, against a target of R52 million. The target was not achieved due to multiple reasons which include capacity challenges, changes in agencies, and disruptions to our operations due to the national office structural crisis.



Private sector

The private sector continues to play a leading role in our ongoing sustainability, and we value our wonderful partnerships with the corporate donors who support us.

Committed givers

Sustainability and growth was the focus for 2023, as we want to ensure that there is incremental growth and retention of those who commit to donating monthly. Most of our committed givers are reached via our face-to-face sign ups at shopping malls.

Bequests and legacies

We received a much-needed sum of R1.55 million through bequests and legacies, and are enormously grateful to those people.

Mandela Day 2023: It's in your hands

Nelson Mandela International Day 2023 saw SOS Children's Villages in South Africa receive an outpouring of support like never before. It was clear that corporates and their employees were itching to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty.

Sustainability

The way forward for SOS Children's Villages in South Africa is very clear: Our priority continues to be achieving self-sufficiency and growth in order to improve the lives of more vulnerable children and to contribute to the 2030 goal of leading the world's largest movement. We will continue strengthening and scaling up our three-year face-to-face campaign which has proved to be a highly effective donor-acquisition channel, and we would like to continue with this momentum.



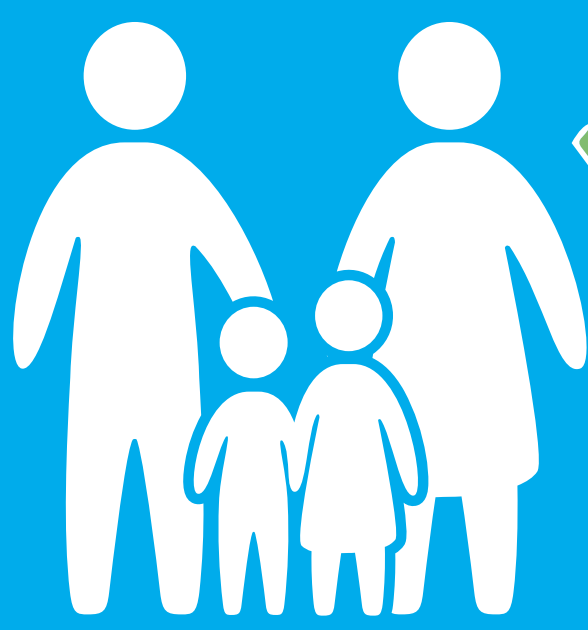
Highlights from corporate donors

- KFC continued their feeding scheme support, resulting in 1.9 million meals being served to 3 800 beneficiaries in 2023.
- DHL continues to offer wholehearted support through their GoTeach programmes.
- Our international donor, TCC Global in partnership with SOS Children's Villages in the UK, has committed to renovating 10 family homes per village over a three year period:
 - 2022: Pietermaritzburg
 - 2023: Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha
 - 2024: Cape Town
- Pinsent Masons sponsored forklift driver training for 43 young people, and mental health and psychosocial support for 201 young people. They also co-funded a seven-seater vehicle for our re-integration and family reunification visits.

Locations

<div>1</div> <div>Cape Town</div> <div>80[*]</div> <div>83[*]</div>	<div>5</div> <div>Pietermaritzburg</div> <div>81</div> <div>392</div>	<div>9</div> <div>Mathanjan</div> <div>0</div> <div>757</div>
<div>2</div> <div>Mamelodi</div> <div>97</div> <div>403</div>	<div>6</div> <div>Nelspruit</div> <div>67</div> <div>354</div>	<div>10</div> <div>Rustenburg</div> <div>89</div> <div>585</div>
<div>3</div> <div>Port Elizabeth</div> <div>96</div> <div>324</div>	<div>7</div> <div>Ennerdale</div> <div>113</div> <div>455</div>	<div>11</div> <div>Sekhukhune</div> <div>0</div> <div>431</div>
<div>4</div> <div>QwaQwa</div> <div>31</div> <div>614</div>	<div>8</div> <div>Mthatha</div> <div>79</div> <div>363</div>	

*Alternative Care
*Family Strengthening





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