



**SOS**  
**KINDERDORF**  
INTERNATIONAL

## **What SOS Children's Villages stands for - *A loving home for every child***

Hermann Gmeiner set up the first SOS Children's Village in Imst, Austria, in 1949. Today, SOS Children's Villages is a private, non-governmental child welfare organisation that is active in 133 countries. The main focus areas of our social work are family-based care for orphaned, abandoned and neglected children and comprehensive community-based social programmes for disadvantaged families.

World War II left thousands of children orphaned, uprooted and traumatised. Hermann Gmeiner was convinced that, in contrast to conservative, institutional care in children's homes, a family-like environment could provide these children with a good basis for their future. He questioned the traditional methods of caring for orphans and introduced a family based approach that was uncommon at that time.

### **Concept: Children need a family**

Gmeiner's concept was based on four main aspects: every child needs the care of a parent who establishes a close relationship with each child. The children grow up in a family with girls and boys of different ages as their siblings.

The family is part of a community that functions as a support system. Biological siblings are not separated if possible and if this is in the children's best interests. The model of the "classic" SOS Children's Village has been and will continue to be modified and adapted to local conditions and requirements. There are now, for example, SOS Children's Villages that have been integrated into housing estates, short and medium-term care places and assisted living facilities for young people.

### **Sustainable strengthening of families**

Even though the number of orphans is decreasing in many countries, the number of children who, for various reasons, cannot live with their biological parents is increasing. This concerns an estimated 150 million children worldwide. SOS Children's Villages continuously works on developing child care methods and preventive support for families to be able to respond to the continually-changing requirements.

In this development process, community-based programmes aimed at preventing the marginalisation of children in society play a key role. With its family strengthening programmes, SOS Children's Villages aims to help families to support themselves in the long term, leading an independent life and raising children in a healthy and protected environment. This is the only way we can assure that children are not abandoned and can grow up with their family of origin.

## **Comprehensive support**

In many countries we have for years provided comprehensive support services regarding nutrition, health, education and child care, which aim to support women and families in particular. Within this support process, solidarity and self-help among women, families and communities are very important issues. Community projects, such as child care that the beneficiaries themselves have organised, serve as a clear relief and protect families.

## **Implementation and enforcement of children's rights**

SOS Children's Villages works according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and advocates the implementation and protection of these rights at international, national and regional level. We are particularly committed to the rights and protection of children without parental care. SOS Children's Villages has a consulting function in the UN Economic and Social Council and is, among others, a member of the Child Rights Action Group that supports the EU Child Rights Strategy.

*SOS Children's Villages is an independent, non-governmental, social development organisation that provides family-based care for children in 133 countries and territories and that advocates the concerns, rights and needs of children. Approximately 63,000 children and young people live in 518 SOS Children's Villages and 392 SOS Youth Facilities around the world. More than 140,000 children and young people attend SOS Hermann Gmeiner Schools, SOS Kindergartens and SOS Vocational Training Centres. Moreover, SOS Children's Villages provides families with material, psychological and social support. Approximately 430,000 people benefit from these family support services; some 455,000 people make use of the SOS Medical Centres. In times of crisis and disaster, SOS Children's Villages helps through emergency relief programmes.*