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# Youth Care



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES



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## That special season called youth

At SOS Children's Villages, we have already committed to walking with a child right through her/his growing up years. When that special and critical period called adolescence comes along in a child's life, we are ready to shift gears and walk with our young people into the complex, dynamic and intense phase called adolescence.

A young girl singing as her brother plays the guitar, at SOS Children's Village Bangpoo, Thailand

The second decade of life is a time of transformation. During adolescence (ages 10–19), girls and boys begin to interact with the world in new ways – taking chances, learning skills and experiencing unfamiliar emotions. They venture beyond their families to form powerful connections with peers. They search for ways to stand out and belong, to find their place in society and make a difference in their world. Today’s generation of young people is larger than ever before. But far too many are not getting what they need to realize their full range of rights. Poverty and deprivation, gender inequality and other forms of discrimination intersect with climate change, economic upheaval, conflict and displacement to threaten adolescents’ well-being. And through it all, adolescents are too often ignored by policymakers – or worse, viewed as problems or threats.<sup>1</sup>

We take a firm stand beside young people without parental care and those at risk of losing it. We believe that strong relationships with caring adults can be game changers in these young people’s lives. By offering high quality youth development services, we make sure they are not left behind and are supported to achieve self-fulfillment, start their own families and become self-reliant, productive, useful members of society.

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<sup>1</sup> “Adolescent Development and Participation: Investing in Adolescents Builds Strong Economies, Inclusive Communities and Vibrant Societies,” UNICEF, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/adolescence>.

## Who is a young person ?

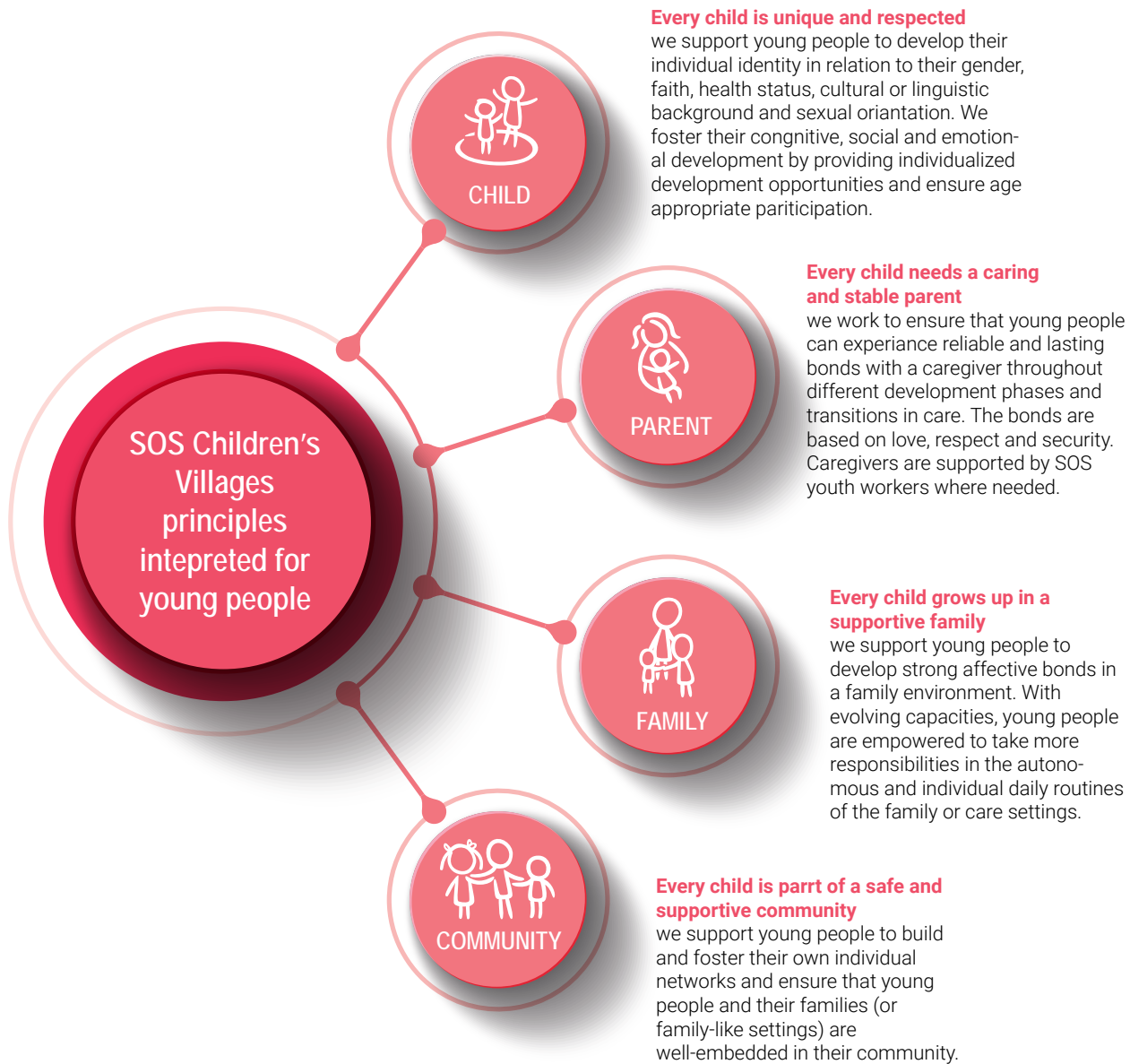
The term young people (10- 24 years) is used following the United Nations definition, to combine adolescents (10-19 years) and youth (15-24 years).

Youth is the most dynamic season of change in our lives, and is characterized by prominent growth in the physical, cognitive and psychosocial aspects of life.

Transition and change are key words in this phase, when a young person moves towards personal autonomy and an independent life.

We understand this stage as a continuous process, as an experience unique to each young person’s background, circumstances, aspirations and abilities.

The start and end of this journey with its twists and turns and ups and downs are all unique to each young person we live and work with. This is why we are committed to supporting each and every young person in our programmes in stepping towards an independent life, and accompanying them in their journey of self- discovery.



Source: *Youth Development User Guide*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

# 2

## Our guiding framework

The youth care programmes of SOS Children's Villages have their foundations in two key internal frameworks that shape and drive all our programmes across the world – the SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030 and the SOS Care Promise, both of which are guided by international instruments such as the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our youth care programmes are further guided by the Youth Development User Guide and the Youth Participation User Guide.

**READ MORE:** Refer book 1 of this Information Pack for details on the international and internal policy frameworks that guide our programmes.



A care leaver of SOS Children's Villages Cambodia

# SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030

Our Strategy 2030 is clear in its commitment to youth, as one of the Strategic Initiatives is dedicated to empowering young people.<sup>2</sup>

## Strategic Initiative 3

We are going to empower young people by strengthening their care and improving their employability.

Towards this, we will:

- Strengthen young people's participation and prepare them for independent living, with an emphasis on employability and community integration.
- Train care professionals to strengthen independence of care leavers<sup>3</sup> and support young people in receiving quality education.



<sup>2</sup> *No Child Should Grow Up Alone: SOS Children's Villages Strategy 2030* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> A care leaver is an individual who has grown up in alternative care and left upon reaching the age of majority as per the national law, which is often 18 years. In SOS Children's Villages, the age of leaving care depends on the readiness of the young person to transition into independent living or reunify with the family of origin.



- Accompanying young people on their journey to independence through coaching and mentoring, together with networks and partners. Support them in building professional, entrepreneurial and soft skills to develop their careers.

## SOS Care Promise

The SOS Care Promise defines our commitment to quality care for every single child and young person in our programmes. While all its nine care commitments take into consideration the needs and rights of young people in all our programmes, care commitment eight has particular relevance to youth care.<sup>4</sup>

### Care Commitment 8

We promote education, participation and steps to independent life.

<sup>4</sup> *SOS Care Promise: How SOS Children's Villages Ensures the Best Care for Children and Young People.* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2018).

We commit to support every child and young person in our programme in taking steps towards an independent life. This means securing access to quality education and supporting them to develop appropriate skills and work ethic to succeed in life.



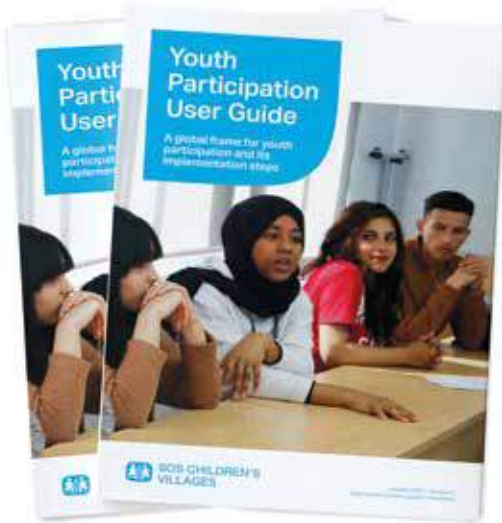
## Youth Development User Guide

This guide serves as a global tool for continuously improving the quality of youth care and development at SOS Children's Villages. Its intention is to support SOS member associations in bringing the SOS Care Promise to life. They are encouraged to tailor its implementation to their local realities and develop their own national youth concepts in line with this global user guide, in partnership with young people.<sup>5</sup>



## Youth Participation User Guide

Young people are experts of their own lives. Their participation in decision-making is a lifelong process, which needs to be built and promoted across all life stages, beginning in childhood. Youth participation builds upon the participatory experiences of childhood in which, from the early age, children can play a significant role as agents of change with the capability to engage in decision-making processes, in accordance with their evolving capacities and gradually increasing autonomy. This guide serves as a global frame for youth participation and its implementation steps at SOS Children's Villages.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> *Youth Development User Guide: Ensuring Quality Youth Care and Development in Partnership with Young People* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> *Youth Participation User Guide: A Global Framework for Youth Participation and Its Implementation Steps* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2021).

# 3


## A spirit of partnership with young people

We take on this journey of accompanying our youth in the spirit of partnership, and affirm their right to be a part of decision-making about their own lives and futures. This is not only promoted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but also strongly highlighted in the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

This spirit of partnership, belonging and collaboration is also the SOS Children's

Villages culture in the region of Asia and in all its member associations.

Partnerships require sharing of power, patience, respect, transparency and honesty to succeed. In all our interventions with young people, we aspire to live these values. We have made a paradigm shift in our thinking at SOS Children's Villages. We have moved, from working *for* young people to working *with* them.



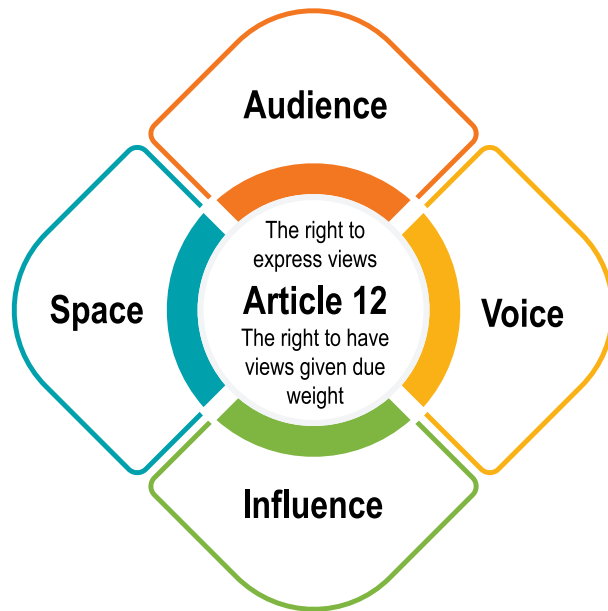
Members of the Generation Never Give-up (GNG) Network of care leavers in Sri Lanka, the very first care leavers' association formed in Asia, in 2017, supported by SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka

We foster this spirit of partnership with authorities and other agencies who our young people need to relate to as well. We build on existing youth care and development structures and jointly strive for quality youth development interventions towards a smooth and successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

Our programmes exclusively tailored for youth and care leavers illustrate our commitment to participation. Youth Power, YouthCan! and the International Youth Coalition are three of them.

**READ MORE:** Refer book 7 on Advocacy for illustrations of youth participation in advocating for their own rights.

## THE LUNDY MODEL OF PARTICIPATION



Source: *Youth Development User Guide*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

## Youth Power

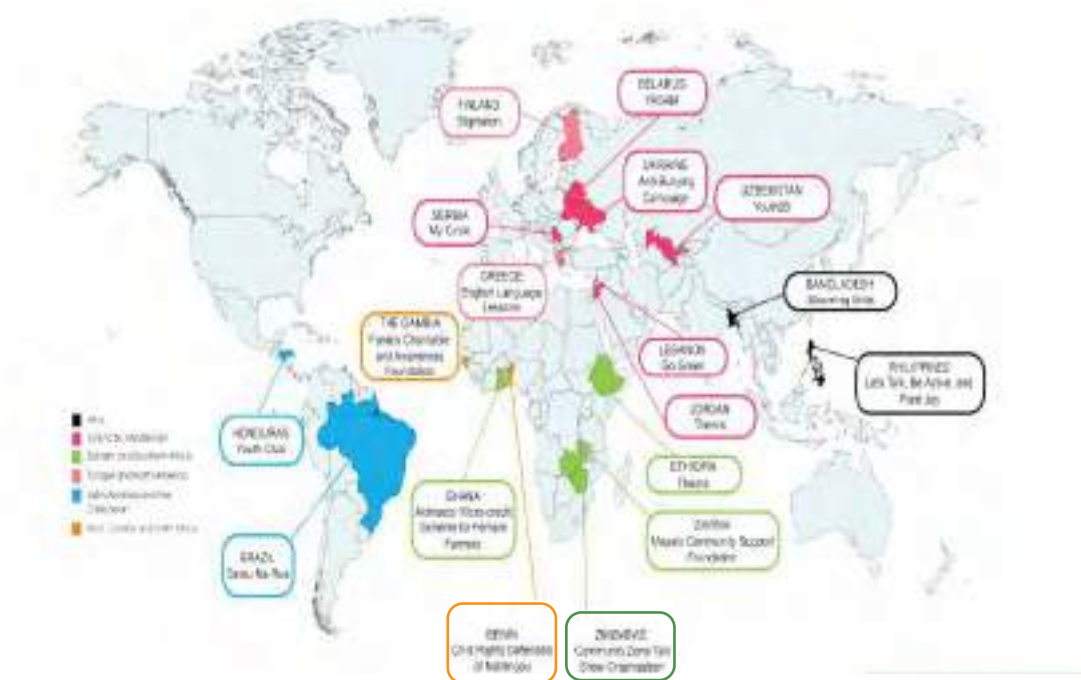
Youth Power is an initiative that seeks out and harnesses powerful creative energies among young change makers across the region who have special skills in entrepreneurship, leadership and pioneering. It is a platform that facilitates opportunities for youth to showcase and share projects and initiatives they have created, which can have a positive impact on the world and on their own societies. This platform creates powerful synergies among equally talented and highly motivated young peers across the region. Participants come from across the globe and represent every region, creating coalitions, and giving expression to powerful ideas that can create change in some of the most significant issues affecting youth and their world.





Our youth speaking out while participating at a YouthCan! event in Thailand

## WHERE ARE OUR YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS FROM?



Source: Youth Power 2.0: Getting to Know the Participants. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

### YouthCan! Power partnerships for youth empowerment



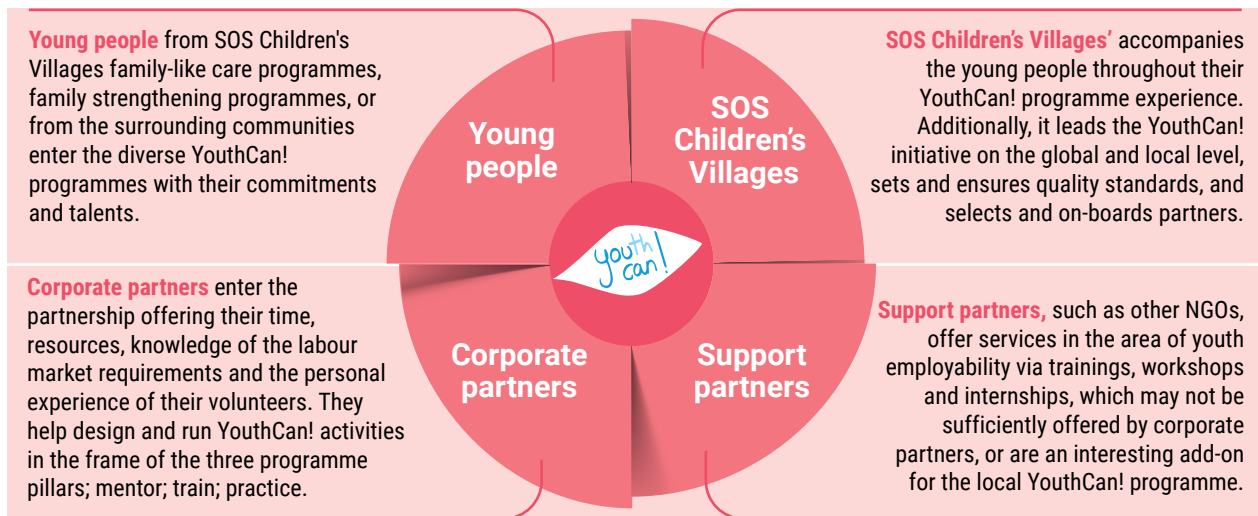
Participation and partnership are hallmarks of our youth initiatives. The power of partnership and collaboration is best exemplified in our global youth initiative YouthCan!

YouthCan!, though a global initiative, spans six countries in the Asian region. The sixth and latest country to launch YouthCan! is Bangladesh, which launched its programme in October 2020. YouthCan! draws well established corporate giants and well-known local businesses into partnership with SOS Children's Villages to work with our youth, in order to equip them for careers in the corporate world.

# YouthCan! mission

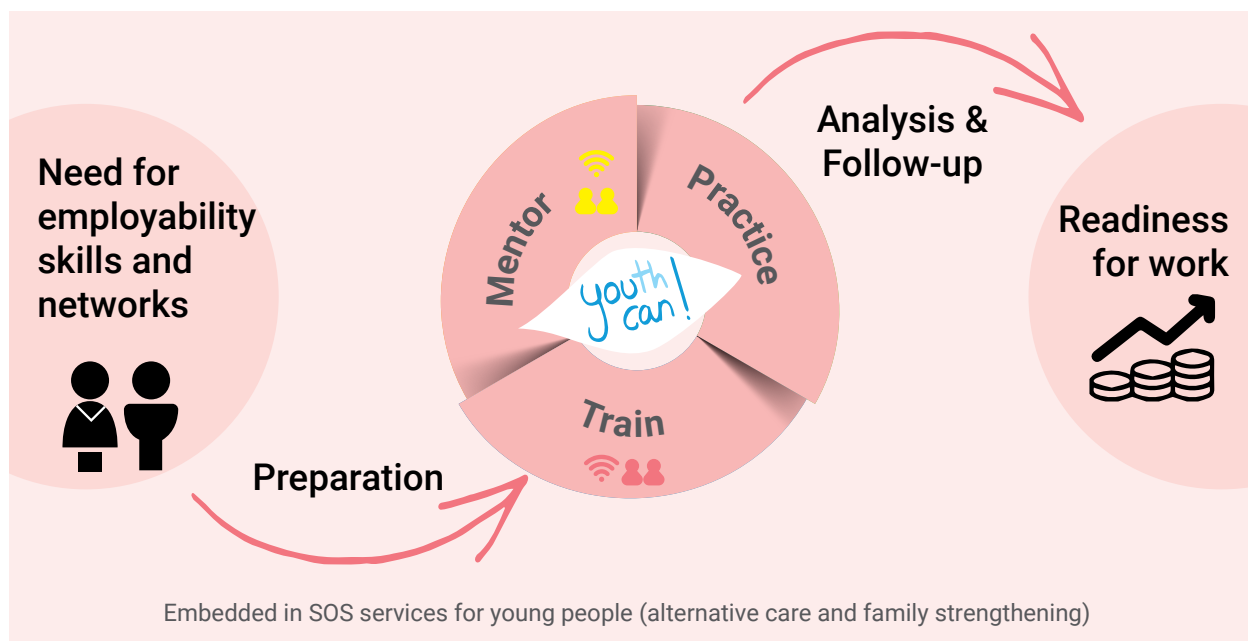
Through YouthCan!, SOS Children's Villages and partners jointly create uplifting and inspiring opportunities for young people that strengthen their employability and enable them to gain relevant practical experiences, skills and knowledge. YouthCan! inspires, consults and supports SOS member associations and their partners (e.g. corporates, entrepreneurs, small businesses, NGOs or alliances) to replicate and further develop already existing employability partnerships and models on the national and local levels.

## YOUTHCAN! PARTNERSHIP ACROSS DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS



Source: YouthCan!: A Global Partnership for Youth Employability. Support Tool. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

## THE THREE PROGRAMME PILLARS OF YOUTHCAN!



Source: *YouthCan!: A Global Partnership for Youth Employability. Support Tool.* SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

In order to realize change in young people's lives, a multidimensional approach is key. That is why YouthCan! combines the three programme pillars, *Mentor – Train – Practice*, into one holistic programme. Young participants can choose between different activities from the three pillars and participate in several simultaneously or in an order that responds to their individual needs. YouthCan! also offers a blended approach, meaning that training or mentorship activities can be implemented face-to-face or online, by using the YouthLinks platform.

Perhaps the single most significant challenge for any young person is the transition she/he must make from being taken care of by others to taking responsibility for one's own self. As we have seen, being able to successfully secure a livelihood, earn and becoming financially self-reliant is not possible unless a young person has the support and encouragement of family. YouthCan! is the expression of our desire at SOS Children's Villages to enable our youth to reach the highest level of employability their capacity and talent call for.





Vaxai (not her real name), a care leaver of SOS Children's Villages Laos, is currently following a vocational training course in hotel management. After classes she works part-time as a waitress at a restaurant and does sewing during weekends, for an extra income.

## Emerging challenges

Pre-COVID 19, approx. **68 million young people aged 15-24 were unemployed** and looking for a job while **429 million youth were in employment** worldwide.

Since COVID-19 amplified youth workforce vulnerabilities all around the world, we have witnessed deterioration even for those **429 million employed young people (out of which 77% are in informal employment)**.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020).

The transition into the labour market remains a real challenge for young people across the globe. The increasing complexity of labour market entry, the foreseen post COVID-19 economic crisis and the decrease of stable employment add to the urgency of the situation.<sup>8</sup> This is the essence of the challenge our youth are faced with and our response is to double down on YouthCan!

## A multi-dimensional approach

YouthCan! provides a digital platform called YouthLinks, to connect young people and their respective mentors or trainers online. The platform enables cross-border support to young people by: connecting them with mentors from the same or different countries; hosting online courses adapted to local needs by facilitators; enabling communication and networking within virtual communities.

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<sup>8</sup> *YouthCan!: A Global Partnership for Youth Employability. Support Tool* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, 2020).



Our youth in Thailand receive online training through YouthLinks digital platform that enables mentors to stay in contact with young people online, breaking geographical as well as social distancing barriers



## Safe and strong relationships

We prepare both young people and their volunteer mentors to have a strong, supportive and safe relationship. Close support to both mentees and mentors ensures maximum impact. They are encouraged to keep in touch, in person or virtually, regularly through platforms like YouthLinks.

As in all SOS Children's Villages initiatives, safeguarding of young people is a priority. All adults who are in direct contact with young people are required to follow a Code of Conduct training. There is a strong focus on safeguarding in mentorship relationships. When it comes to virtual training, YouthLinks uses a private and secure platform, allowing us to grant access only to people who are part of the programme.

## Individual solutions

Tailor-made support measures for each young participant are based on the individual needs. Each young person has her/his own regular individual planning processes which are conducted in close cooperation with SOS care professionals. YouthCan! activities forms one very important aspect of each young person's individual plans. This learning process is an ongoing, dynamic one replete with e-learning and knowledge exchange opportunities both online and offline, between current and former YouthCan! participants.

## Locally owned, contextualized opportunities

We believe our youth need to be prepared for current realities and local labour markets. Programmes are always contextualized to fit the national technology infrastructure and educational systems. Choices also strongly influenced by the interests, capacities and needs of our young people.



An industrial visit organized for our youth in SOS Children's Villages India through the YouthCan! employability skills training programme

## YouthCan! partners and partnerships

We encourage member associations to find supporting partners in the corporate world as well as in non-governmental organizations covering a variety of different industries, opportunities and skills that will host internships, train and mentor our youth. We currently work with six key global partners: Deutsche Post DHL (DPDHL) Group, AkzoNobel, Allianz, Johnson & Johnson, thyssenkrupp Elevator and Siegwerk.



In Asia, SOS Children's Villages Indonesia was the first member association to launch YouthCan! in 2017 followed by SOS India, SOS Sri Lanka and SOS Thailand in 2018, SOS Viet Nam in 2019 and SOS Bangladesh in 2020.

Since their launch, the member associations have been partnering with global partners namely DPDHL, AkzoNobel, Siegwerk, Allianz and thyssenKrupp Elevators. Member associations have also developed various local partnerships to enhance the employability skills of young people at the location level. Support partners such as Youth Career Initiatives (YCI) and Mentors without Borders (MWB) are helping young people enhance skills in hospitality sector and computer programming respectively.

## Results framework of YouthCan!

With YouthCan! we influence two distinct environments: that of the young people from our programmes and communities where we work, and the corporate environment where our partners who participate in the project also benefit. For this reason, we developed two results frameworks: for young people and for volunteers. The complete frameworks include a list of indicators that help us to measure if the results are achieved. Our member associations are encouraged to develop their own national frameworks.

The key impacts we aim towards:

- Young people without or at risk of losing parental care become self-reliant (with stable income, employment and support networks).
- YouthCan! corporate partners are recognized as socially responsible and reputable businesses.

# International Youth Coalition

The International Youth Coalition (IYC) is a platform for young programme participants from ten countries around the globe (the participant countries change every two years). It aims at strengthening youth participation by giving them a forum to express their ideas and innovations, participate in decision-making, and gain skills in organizing global and regional youth consultations.

In June of 2019, 14 young people from eight countries were trained during the annual IYC meeting in Pinkafeld, Austria. Four young people representing Asia were selected from SOS Indonesia and SOS Sri Lanka to participate in the IYC meeting. This time, the theme was Technology for Better Education and Relationships.

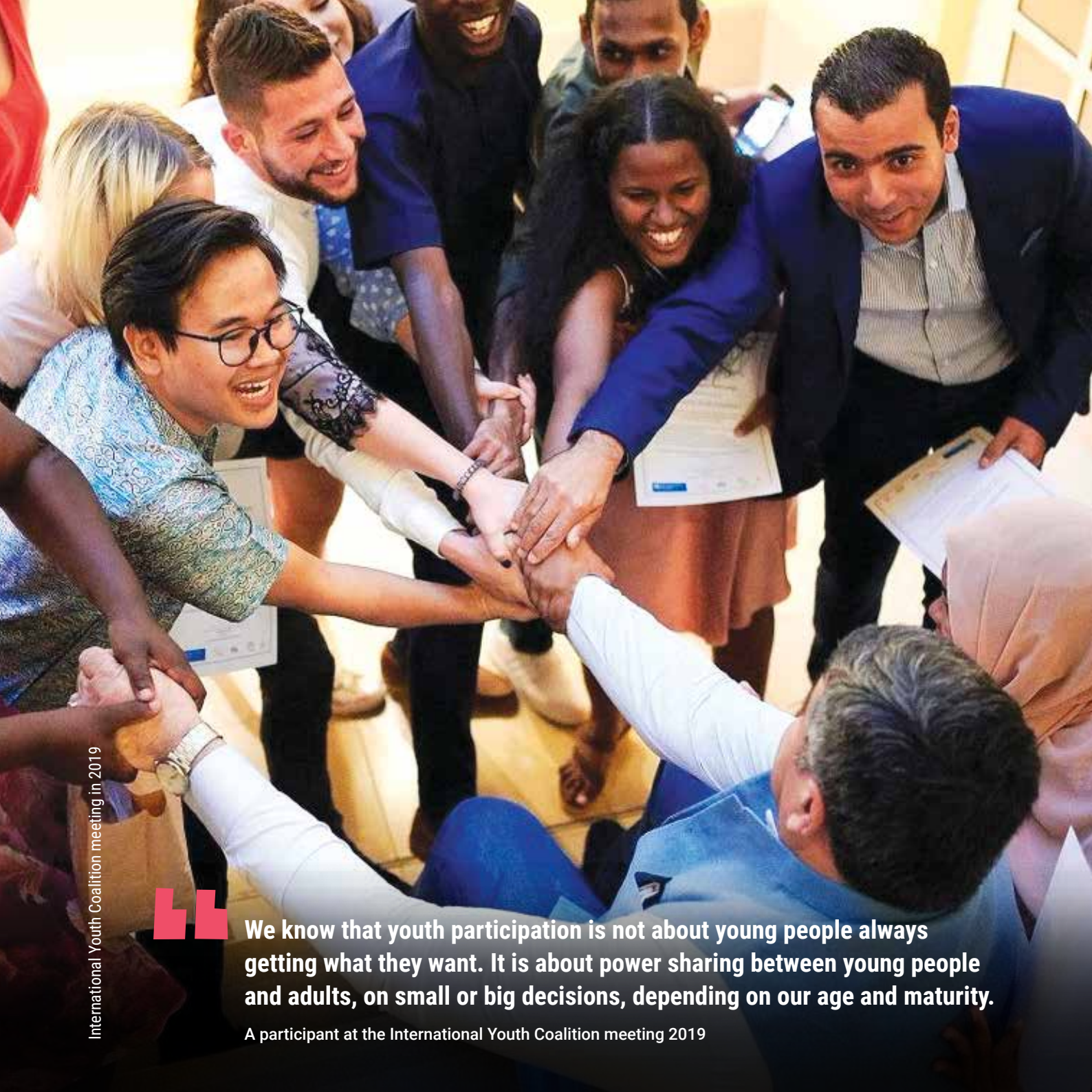
In 2020, youth from the IYC contributed to the development of key recommendations for the Youth Development e-Learning project while giving voices to six characters in it, and also gave inputs to the Child and Youth Participation in Advocacy Toolkit developed by SOS Children's Villages.

## Winning technology concepts created at the 2019 International Youth Coalition meeting

**ONE FINGERTIP** *"Take the world in your palm"* An inclusive app with sound notifications, icons instead of text and intuitive interface to launch a voice or a video calls including instant language translator (proposed by SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka).

**SKILLD4M (skill development for employment)** An app with all the information useful to students from primary school to university, such as digital library with all books in any language, training courses and tuition classes including the details of local and foreign scholarships and job market (proposed by SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka).

**LET'S LEARN (e-learning)** An app enhancing English teaching and learning with questions and discussions, and virtual meetings between user and certified tutor/teacher. Participatory learning style for young people in the community making English speaking, reading, listening and writing much easier and fun (proposed by SOS Children's Villages Indonesia).



International Youth Coalition meeting in 2019



**We know that youth participation is not about young people always getting what they want. It is about power sharing between young people and adults, on small or big decisions, depending on our age and maturity.**

A participant at the International Youth Coalition meeting 2019

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# The high five

of youth development at  
SOS Children's Villages



Our youth development programme is a comprehensive, highly participatory and powerful initiative, which is governed by what we call the high five of youth development.

High five is a globally recognized gesture, of two people clapping each other's hand held above the head in a victorious spirit to celebrate a small or big success. In order not to miss the hand of your counterpart, high five requires both parties to focus on each other and mutually adjust in order to synchronize and clap at the same time. This is resonant of our SOS staff and young people who need to do just that in order to work together. We believe that high five captures



the spirit of collaboration, of synchrony, of mutuality and ultimate victory in our young people's journey toward independent life.

SOS Children's Villages Youth Development User Guide gives us a detailed conceptual framework and plan of working with young people across all services in SOS programmes. It outlines how we bring to life youth development in five crucial areas in partnership with young people.



Source: *Youth Development User Guide*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

## Best care option for each young person

- We shape a range of relevant quality youth care options with partners and governments in line with national legislation.
- We regularly review the necessity and suitability of the care setting of each individual young person with the young person, a multi-disciplinary team of relevant professionals and the caregiver.
- We accompany each young person in our programmes in their individual development.

Family Strengthening	Alternative Care			
Parental care/ Kinship care	SOS family care	Foster family care	Small group homes	Youth care
<p>Young people live with their biological parents or relatives. The family is supported through family strengthening.</p>	<p>The young person lives in a family-like setting together with children and SOS parents.</p>	<p>The young person lives in family-based care together with children and foster parents.</p>	<p>Small groups of children and/or young people are cared for by child and youth care professionals on a shift and rotational basis.</p>	<p>Young people (aged 14+) living with one or several youth worker/s on a day-to-day basis. This includes (semi) independent living for young people aged 18+</p>

Source: *Youth Development User Guide*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

## Youth care settings

### We aim at small group sizes and an appropriate staff-youth ratio

Our youth care programme provide a home for SOS youth aged fourteen and above, till they leave care by becoming self-reliant or by reunifying with family of origin. We understand that a young person's living environment must be an enabling one. Our youth care settings are designed therefore to equip and strengthen youth who are making the transition to independent living. These spaces are exclusively for youth. The

young people themselves are responsible for organizing their everyday lives, while their counsellors and educators at the youth care homes stand by to support helping them only when needed. SOS counsellors listen to and work with each young person in deciding what he or she wants to do in their lives providing mentorship and making plans for their future and help them deal with ongoing responsibilities at home and at school.

## Assessing suitable youth care settings

- Access to their own space for privacy in their home.
- Easy interaction with community members.
- Access to education and jobs in the community.
- Care options for young people that offer different levels of care intensity in order to meet the varying level of maturity of young people and ensure a smooth phasing out of care.
- Opportunity to maintain and nurture existing emotional bonds to caregivers or adult reference persons, siblings and peers of the former care setting.

## Regular review of the necessity and suitability of the care setting of each young person

- Review of placement annually.
- If the annual review indicates need for transition between care options, the decision is taken in a participatory manner.
- Emotional needs, opportunities for social integration, religion and cultural norms, as well as educational and employability options are taken into account.


## Individual development plan tailored for each young person

- Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a tool to help structure and chart the progress of each young person in alternative care, from childhood to independent living as outlined in the SOS Children's Villages Gatekeeping User Manual. IDPs include goals, timeline to achieve the goals, Indicators, activities and schedule for activities.
- Young people in family strengthening programmes are supported through direct interventions in the fields of education, vocational guidance, employability and other needs related to the prevention of the loss of family care. In parallel, we strengthen the caregivers' ability to care for and accompany the young person. The development of all family members is monitored through the family development plan.

## Young people's psychosocial and physical needs

To develop social and emotional skills in young people and support in the development of personal identity,

- We foster an atmosphere of open communication and empower young people to express their own opinions and concerns.
- We support caregivers to be positive, supportive role models for young people, providing opportunities to learn through guided experience.
- We prioritize strengthening social and emotional skills in young people such as: dealing with past traumas, developing resilience and adaptability, self-care and caring for others, non-violent communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, creativity and innovation.



Akash, a young person with disability, loves to play football with his friends. He grew up in SOS Children's Village Jorpati (Nepal), one of the two SOS Children's Villages in Asia dedicated to looking after children with disabilities.

Consider the amazing story of Buddhi who grew up in SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka, starting off as a vulnerable transgender young boy to an accomplished classical Odissi dancer and a self-assured, confident, well-adjusted woman. Hear her say how SOS Children's Villages supported her through these momentous upheavals and changes in her life.

**READ MORE:** Read her full story on page 44.

### **To promote social integration and strong networks,**

- We support young people to establish and maintain supportive and safe relationships with peers and family members and become independent, contributing adults.
- We involve young people in social and community services as well as youth networks, creating a vital sense of belonging to a community.

### **To empower young people to progressively take responsibility for their own health and well-being,**

- We encourage them to do sports and physical activities and to pay attention to their nutrition and personal hygiene.
- We provide access to health care and counselling services that are gender-responsive.

### **To foster young people's psychosocial well-being, their mental health and stability,**

- We offer special support and professional help to young people who have experienced trauma and enable them to build resilience.
- We offer specialized mental health and psychosocial support to manage self-destructive habits or behavioural issues affecting health (e.g. abuse of alcohol, medicine/other substances or use of illegal drugs, self-harm, violence, or others).
- We educate and enable our youth to recognize discrimination and abuse and strongly advocate against them, and implement prevention strategies to break cycles of physical, sexual and gender-based discrimination and abuse.



Two young boys enjoying a game of chess - SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh

## To foster sexual and reproductive health awareness through open communication and comprehensive education,

- We make SOS family a safe place for any young person even from early childhood onwards, to learn about their bodies, relationships, sexuality, gender and diversity issues.
- We encourage open and honest conversations between our young people, care professionals and SOS mothers.
- We create a respectful, enabling environment. We strongly respect privacy and confidentiality.
- In case a young woman becomes pregnant or a young man becomes a father, we provide special support to both the young mother and father, to make this a meaningful time of learning and inner growth rather than rejection and humiliation.

## Things we learn about

- How girls and boys are equal in value and how our gender roles are shaped, what gender equity means and how we can prevent gender-based violence.
- Understanding tough and taboo issues that affect some young people like early marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Protecting myself as a young person, risks and vulnerabilities in my world.
- What are my rights, when are they violated, what I can do if this happens.
- Coping strategies in the face of various tough situations and experiences.



# Education and skills development, including employability and entrepreneurial skills

- We ensure that all young people in SOS programmes have equal access to relevant education according to their needs and capacities. We discourage gender stereotyping in career choices and promote inclusion of youth with special needs.
- Through individual education and career counselling, we encourage and support young people to achieve the level of education and training that best corresponds to their individual interests and talents.
- We support young people to develop the skills required to become self-reliant and contributing members of their communities, together with partners.
- We support young people to build their soft skills in order to have a solid basis for developing further skills necessary in the labour market.
- We approach local training providers or employers to offer relevant training, mentorship or work experience.
- We facilitate opportunities for young people to get first work experience if needed, in partnership with public and private bodies. Towards this, we also facilitate exchange and knowledge sharing platforms with other young people or adults who have already entered the job market.
- We promote the involvement of young people in designing and implementing partnerships.
- The personal development plan and the family development plan are tools that help young people to identify the steps they need to take to reach their goals.
- Changing pathways due to failure or change of interest is recognized as part of the process to find the most meaningful rewarding education and career path for each young person.



# The skills I need...



## Social and emotional skills

such as self-confidence, ability to have good relationships, skills to deal with bad experiences of the past and not let them affect me, better resilience to face anything and flexibility to adapt to changing realities, practice self-care, caring for others, and skills like non-violent communication, conflict resolution, decision making, creativity and innovation.



## Practical life skills

such as cooking, laundry, cleaning, budgeting, basic house maintenance.



## Employability skills

such as leadership skills, network building, punctuality, personal appearance, working in a team, decision-making, effective communication, coping with stress, job seeking, application, and interview skills.



## Information & Communication Technology (ICT) skills

such as digital skills, how to deal with social media, online platforms (balancing the opportunities with the risks).



## Entrepreneurial skills

such as business planning, fundraising, financial management, marketing, time management, critical analysis, innovative thinking, and the ability to set and achieve goals.



## Skills to advocate for my rights at all levels

such as understanding how democratic processes work in society, analyzing youth and labour rights and violations, networking with other youth groups and civil society organizations and engaging in dialogue with decision-makers.



## Participation skills

such as claiming spaces for participation, inventing new modes of participation, and developing campaigns and action plans.

## Skill building of vulnerable youth from the communities through SOS Vocational Training Centres

SOS Children's Villages Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) have been set up to provide vocational skills to young people from SOS families and the local community. In fact, the majority of the programme participants are from the surrounding communities. In these VTCs, we provide capacity building for life skills and employability, financial support, advisory support and accommodation during the training period.

**1726** YOUTH UNDERWENT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

IN 18 VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRES IN ASIA, IN 2020

**2700** YOUTH BENEFIT EVERY YEAR BY ATTENDING TRAININGS AT THESE VTCs

**73%** OF THE PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THESE COURSES GET GOOD PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES OR START THEIR OWN SMALL BUSINESSES. OTHERS PREFER TO EITHER GO FOR HIGHER EDUCATION OR EXPLORE OTHER JOB OPPORTUNITIES

(Data as on December 31, 2020, excluding VTCs run by SOS Philippines and the Tibetan Home Foundation)



Students learning carpentry skills at the Siem Reap VTC of SOS Children's Villages Cambodia



Students following the bakery course being guided by the chef to prepare a meal, at the Monaragala VTC of SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka

© Lydia Mantler

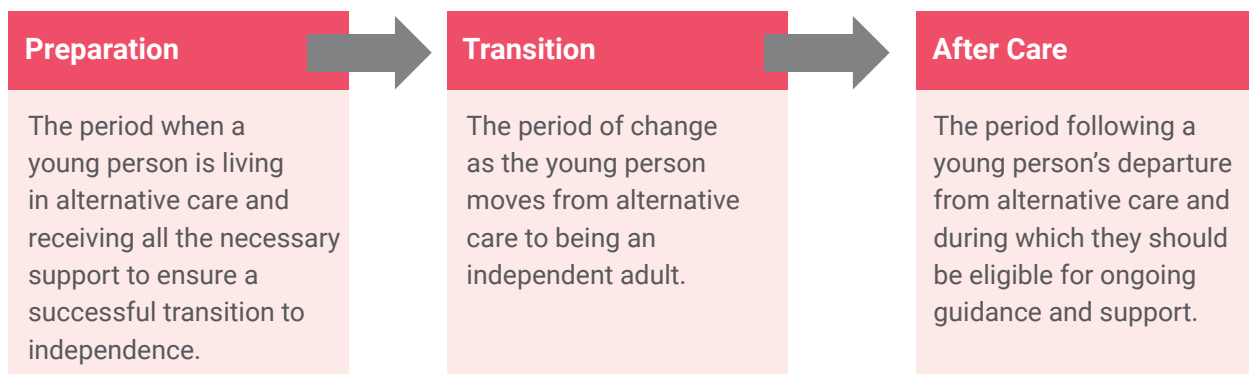
## RANGE OF COURSES OFFERED

- Accounting Assistant
- Agriculture Field Assistant
- Automotive/Automobile Mechanic
- Bakery
- Beauty Culture
- Carpentry
- Computer Application Assistant/Computer Operator/IT Skills
- Dressmaking
- DTP/Print Publishing
- Electronics
- Electrical Mechanist/Electrician/Building Electrician
- Food & Beverage Services
- Furniture Making
- Housekeeping
- Lathe Setting
- Light Engine Mechanic
- Plumbing
- Refrigeration & Air Conditioning
- Small Engine Repairing
- Soft Skills for Supervisors/Associates
- Spoken English
- Web Designing and Publication
- Welding
- Wood Crafting

## Accompaniment on the journey to independent life

A semi-independent youth from SOS Children's Villages Philippines, learning the life skills needed to live life independently, on her own terms

### A CONTINUOUS PROCESS FROM CARE TO INDEPENDANCE



Source: *Youth Development User Guide*. SOS Children's Villages International, 2020.

## Partnering with every young person to ensure a holistic preparation process towards independent life

- The preparation towards an independent life is gradually built from the time the young person enters an SOS programme.
- In alternative care, the concrete planning process for transitioning to independent life should start at least two years before the young person leaves their care setting. This process is monitored and revised by the young person and the SOS parent, foster parent or youth worker at least twice a year.
- In family strengthening, case managers work together with the families and the young person to identify the specific interventions that are needed to prepare the young person toward independent life (e.g. with a focus on education, social inclusion, career guidance).

## At SOS Children's Villages, we define self-reliance as having:

- Stable and sufficient income.
- Social support networks, good relationships with neighbours, friends, family and community.
- Employability/entrepreneurial skills, formal education, vocational training, language, IT, financial skills, technical skills, or labour market orientation.

We constantly aim to achieve this status for all children coming into our care and relentlessly work towards achieving our goal. Wherever applicable, reunification with family of origin is also considered if it is in the best interest of the child/young person.

## Partnerships with key stakeholders

- Together with young people, we identify and build positive relationships and partnerships with other relevant stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of the part they play in supporting the young person in the process towards independence. These include caregivers, other family members and professionals such as social workers, teachers, and psychologists on the young person's journey towards an independent life.
- We help young people to develop and/or take part in social networks, youth networks as well as SOS alumni groups and other care leavers' networks where they can receive support and guidance from their peers.

# Equipping caregivers and support staff with skills and knowledge to support the development of young people

## Strengthened relationships between caregivers and young people

- In alternative care, we strengthen the profession of SOS parents and youth workers so that they can be persons of trust with strong and healthy emotional bonds with young people.
- Our mothers and youth workers are selected very carefully and trained to have a positive, strength based view of young people.
- For young people who have grown up in SOS families, the SOS parent is the key point of reference and continues to support them on their journey to independence. The youth worker supports young people to nurture those bonds.
- Our SOS mothers are enabled to include the young person in decision-making, following up on the young person to ensure that she/he has a stable income and access to all relevant sources of financial support.
- Our staff understand the crucial role they play in mentoring and guiding our young people, and commit themselves to be role models and coaches and lead by example.

## Youth-related training and skills building

- We provide caregivers and support staff with continuous training and skills development related to youth issues, together with partners.
- Caregivers of young people themselves are provided with a supportive environment in order that they might be refreshed, and have quality well-being.

## Youth work is anchored at the national level

- Member associations ensure that there is a position on national level responsible to oversee youth care and development.
- One person at the national level oversees the youth care and development work in the programmes and develops and implements activities to implement the contextualized national Youth Development User Guide.
- She/he is also a key cooperation partner for the human resources department regarding the capacity building of care professionals, biological parents and other key stakeholders related to youth care, analyzing existing needs and gaps in youth work and freeing resources so that youth-related issues can be addressed systematically.

5

## Planning for leaving care



A group of young boys from the youth care programme of SOS Children's Village Bien, Viet Nam, learning how to cook, in preparation for leaving care and living independently

The preparation towards an independent life is gradually built from the time the young person enters an SOS programme in accordance with the SOS Care Promise. In alternative care, the concrete planning process for transitioning to independent life starts at least two years before the young person leaves, is monitored and revised as required. Planning tools such as Life Project, semi-independent living and Pathway Plan are also used to support our youth.<sup>9</sup>

**The Leaving Care Plan consists of five major aspects:**

- 1 Health and well-being**
- 2 Education, training and employment**
- 3 Family friends and social support network**
- 4 Practical life and independent living skills**
- 5 Accommodation**

The Leaving Care Plan is prepared and managed by young people themselves as a step towards taking full responsibility for their lives, decisions, and preparation to move out into an independent living environment.

### **Contingencies and special circumstances**

The Leaving Care Plan also calls for having a contingency plan ready in situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people might not be able to leave care as planned, as the external environment is not suitable for them to leave care. As a federation, we take the responsibility to provide extra care and support to all young people during such tough times caused due to natural or human made disasters. We look into the skilling and re-skilling needs of young persons during such challenges and plan our course of action to make them more resilient, ductile and robust in the face of disaster.

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<sup>9</sup> SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS - Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, *Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance* (Austria: SOS Children's Villages International, Edition II, 2018).



## After care support

Young people who have grown up in alternative care are eligible for aftercare support in line with the social and cultural context of the country, and possibly in partnership with other service providers.

Whenever needed, young people who have transitioned from alternative care to an independent life are welcome to come back to their caregivers for emotional support. It is vital that young people are aware that they can seek support at any time.

When it is needed, SOS Children's Villages offers financial or other material support, on a case-by-case basis, to young people who have left our programmes, even when the state is no longer legally responsible. This is supported by a clear and time-bound plan with clear goals and objectives, which has been agreed on by the young person and the SOS programme.



A care leaver of SOS Children's Villages Laos at her wedding ceremony, with her SOS mother and family by her side



6

Our key  
**achievements**



Four young women who grew up in SOS Children's Villages India participated in the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2017 in Austria. Diksha, Kiran, and Dulfisha won the Bronze Medal for India in Floor Hockey and Vidushi was awarded Best Player of Floor

9553

YOUTH (14+) RECEIVED FAMILY-LIKE CARE IN 111 CHILDREN'S VILLAGES IN ASIA, IN 2020

6312

YOUTH WERE ACCOMMODATED & SUPPORTED THROUGH 113 YOUTH CARE PROGRAMMES IN ASIA, IN 2020

1282

YOUTH (15+) REUNIFIED WITH THEIR FAMILIES OF ORIGIN DURING 2014-2020

4413

YOUTH (15+) BECAME INDEPENDENT DURING 2014-2020

2342

YOUTH ATTENDED UNIVERSITY IN 2020

(Data as on December 31, 2020, some excluding member associating in China, Japan and South Korea and the 2 Tibetan partnerships)

Our best achievements are our young people, their lives and their stories. We look back with pride and joy at the hundreds of youth and care leavers who have turned tough beginnings in to thrilling victories. Out of many an inspiring story from our youth in Asia, we would like to share just a few...



**From a  
neglected little girl  
to the founder  
CEO of an international  
manpower training and supply company**

Meet Nguyen Thu Hien from Viet Nam. She was once a little girl needing care who was brought to SOS Children's Village Hanoi. She was raised, educated and given a vision of what could be. Hien participates in youth activities, training and in developing herself with the help of her SOS mother, mentor and counsellor. She plans her life and her career pathway.

Meet Hien again in a few years' time, as a care leaver. She has done extremely well in her studies and gone to university. She has obtained her degree, with very good results once again. She immediately starts work in a joint stock company, while also applying to Japan for a scholarship for postgraduate education. In Japan, Hien obtains her postgraduate degree, learns Japanese, and also meets and marries her husband!

Finally, meet Hien again in 2020. She now has a family of her own. She has also launched her own company, The Dong Phuong International Manpower Training and Supply Company! Hien now trains and finds job placements for literally hundreds of young people both in Japan and in other countries.



No matter how successful and busy Hien is, she never forgets to visit her mother at SOS Children's Village Hanoi

# Swimming against the tide: Living with a transgender identity



Success for us at SOS Children's Villages is measured in a number of ways and financial success is but one of them. Our youth have many other forms of achievement. Finding one's own identity and negotiating societal rejection to establish one's authentic self, demands courage inner strength and willingness to swim against the tide.

Buddhi is an Odissi dancer and teacher. Odissi is a classical Indian dance form. Buddhi holds a first class honours degree in classical dance and a Master of Arts with first class in the same. She has been

Buddhi, with her strong, unfettered spirit and passion for dance and life, determining her own identity and destiny

an accomplished scholar at the Rabindranath Tagore University in India. Buddhi however is from Sri Lanka. Her story itself spans not only art and culture but is also a heroic quest for establishing her gender identity as a transgender woman in a harsh society rife with prejudice and oppression.

Buddhi entered SOS Children's Village Galle, in the south of Sri Lanka, as a boy child called Buddhika. She studied in a prestigious boys' school in Galle until her Advanced Level. From her formative days as a boy, she excelled in dance and claimed a place of honour on the school stages. Upon leaving school, she applied for and was awarded a scholarship to the Indian university. She excelled there too, all the way to a master's degree.

It was after her academic successes that she felt prepared enough to reveal to her SOS family that she in truth identified as a woman and wished to go through gender reassignment surgery. It had taken her years to come to this point.

*"There were many obstacles. I used to cry a lot as a young person wanting to be a woman. I used to look at pretty women and wish I could dress like them or have my hair like them...I used to just hug my pillow and cry."*

She met with the SOS family leaders and spoke to them openly. *"They were shocked but very supportive. They told me they would*

*provide all the psychological support needed."* But later in fact it was through SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka that all of the necessary funding for the different gender reassignment surgeries were arranged.

*"They told me I have been an SOS child and will always be treated as one and that I will have all the support they could give me. Today, it's as if another dream has come true. Each day when I awake, it's a fantastic feeling to know I can wear what I like, I can do what I want as a woman..."*

There are mixed emotions as she recalls the blessing SOS Children's Villages has been to her in her quest to make a good life for herself and gain acceptance in society.

*"Many of the transgender people I meet have never had the opportunity to live a safe and stable life as I have had in SOS Children's Villages. Many of them as I know are thrown out of their homes, many are treated badly and end up in the sex trade due to the lack of any other opportunity. I often think that my life could have been so very bleak were it not for SOS Children's Villages, which not only took me in, but nurtured me to find my true gender identity and self, and gave wings to my dreams",* says Buddhi.

She is now headed towards her next dream, to become an international dancer, and nothing is going to stop her now!

## Our COVID Hero from Dhaka

হাত ধোয়ার গতিবিধি শিখান

A life of service to the community has been another hallmark of success our care leavers have demonstrated. Many care leavers tend to find ways of giving back to society and to SOS Children's Villages by volunteering and sharing their skills, money and talents. But some like Istiak take up dedicated hands-on care work with sick and vulnerable people, making healing others a way of life.

**Q** Dr. Istiak, tell us who you are and what is your mission in life?

**A** I'm Bangladeshi, recently graduated as an MBBS medical doctor, with a strong passion to help the disadvantaged people in the remote parts of my country. A huge part of my identity comes from my home, which is SOS Children's Village Dhaka. This is the only home and family I have ever known. I was brought to this home when I was two days old. My mother is the SOS mother of the family house where I grew up. My siblings are all the brothers and sisters I had in this home. My lifelong inspiration is Dr. Hermann Gmeiner himself, the illustrious founder of the SOS movement. His ideals are in my heart, and I intend upholding them for as long as I live.



Dr. Istiak conducting a health awareness programme for the SOS Rohingya Host Community 12



**Q What have you been doing lately?**

**A** I work currently as a Junior Medical Officer at Gonoshasthaya Samaj Vittik Medical College Hospital. During this COVID-19 pandemic, I treated many patients at the designated Fever and Flu Corner set up for patients with Corona symptoms. I am also a volunteer physician at Government Corona Control Hotline run by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). I also participated in the Emergency Food Assistance Programme among the vulnerable families affected by COVID-19. I have reached out to my own family in SOS Children's Village Dhaka in the month of March 2020 and conducted a health seminar on Prevention and Precaution against Corona Virus. I was also for the first time able to practice as a Telemedicine Physician, which is an innovative way of reaching people during lockdowns and social distancing.

**Q What have you found most difficult in your work so far?**

**A** Coming in such close contact with suspected COVID patients has been unnerving, especially in the absence of adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment for us younger medics and we have had to often buy our own. It's also been hard to get accommodation in rural areas because house owners have been afraid to rent accommodation to those working with COVID

patients. The worst has been the loneliness and inability to be with our loved ones. It has been so painful to be cut off but I guess it is important to show love by protecting loved ones and staying away. Yet the oath I have taken to serve the country and the people as a physician compels me, and the SOS family has always been my biggest source of strength.

**Q What do you see happening in your life in the future?**

**A** I have been offered a position as a medical doctor at a medical humanitarian organization, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). I have always wanted to work in the most remote places with the most vulnerable people. Through MSF I will have all the opportunity to do so.

I have two other dreams I hold dear. I want to be able to do my medical post-graduation in infectious disease, tropical medicine and public health and coming back to make a big impact in the health care system here. My second dream is to be like Dr. Hermann Gmeiner and influence society in crucial ways. I dream of opening health care centres throughout the country specially in remote areas, and I also want to promote online health care facilities through which many specialists can be connected with patients online to provide telemedicine services.

# A paediatrician from Chiang Rai

Khla\* is a 19 year-old boy from SOS Children' Village Chiang Rai. Khla in Thai means courage and the name speaks for itself in many ways. Khla was brought to SOS Children's Villages Thailand at the age of six in 2008, along with his three elder siblings: King\*, Keng\*, and Keam\*. They have been supporting each other for almost 20 years.


As a boy who was driven by curiosity, at the age of 16 Khla was inspired to become a doctor. While studying Biology he was intrigued by the complexity of the human body and how it could be managed. Since then Khla has worked hard with determination. He has also engaged in self-development activities seeking support of the village director.

Even though the road was rough with occasional tiredness or discouragement, Khla pursued his dream relentlessly. Acknowledging the need for a balanced life, he would jog in the mornings. He also collected money to buy a guitar so that he could play for relaxation and spend quality time with his SOS family. Visits from his SOS family and their constant support helped him overcome feeling isolated at the boarding school.

\* Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the young people.

Khla, on the road to realizing his dreams of becoming a paediatrician





In 2020, Khla was accepted to the Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, which is one of the leading universities in Thailand. Additionally, Khla has also started a YouTube channel named “Korkai Family” (Korkai means the ‘K’ consonant in Thai, which is the naming system in SOS Children’s Villages Thailand. All of his family members’ names start with K.). The channel aims to inspire and guide those who want to study medicine. In January 2021, Khla’s channel reached 2,630 followers and the most popular video received 22,000 views.

Khla dreams of becoming a paediatrician. He says the experience of growing up in SOS Children’s Villages taking care of younger siblings, interacting with kids, and exposure to positivity required when raising children, together with his academic learning, gives him a deeper understanding and the inspiration required to pursue higher education in pediatrics.

Khla is a model of courage and determination who sets an example to SOS children and young people as well as the rest of the world.

# 7

## The future of youth care

As we look in to the future of SOS Children's Villages youth care programme, we are learning and recalibrating. COVID has changed everything.

As an SOS family in Asia, we are taking stock of who we are and how we can navigate a post-pandemic world. We were thrown into the deep end by a pandemic that was unprecedented. However, almost instantaneously we started to look at the new needs, risks and vulnerabilities. Then we started to rethink and re-strategize.

These are some vulnerabilities we observed during COVID and these will be our targets for interventions and prevention in the future.



Youth in SOS Children's Villages Laos practicing yoga for mental and physical wellness during the COVID pandemic.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY CARE LEAVERS DURING COVID-19

Accommodation challenges	No food security	Missing financial security	Reduced income	Missing social networks
Care leavers residing in rented accommodation faced challenges in paying rents and had to look for alternative support of residence.	Stocking advance essential commodities was not easy for the care leavers. Due to the nation-wide lockdown, they started facing challenges in purchasing essential food items.	Care leavers lacked financial security and faced an immediate set-back because of the pandemic and nationwide lockdown.	Care leavers started losing their jobs, facing salary cut issues, and hence immediate support was required. All income-generating sources were disturbed due to this pandemic.	The prevention of this virus called for maintaining social distance, however this leads to emotional challenges faced by care leavers who are isolating without family and friends.

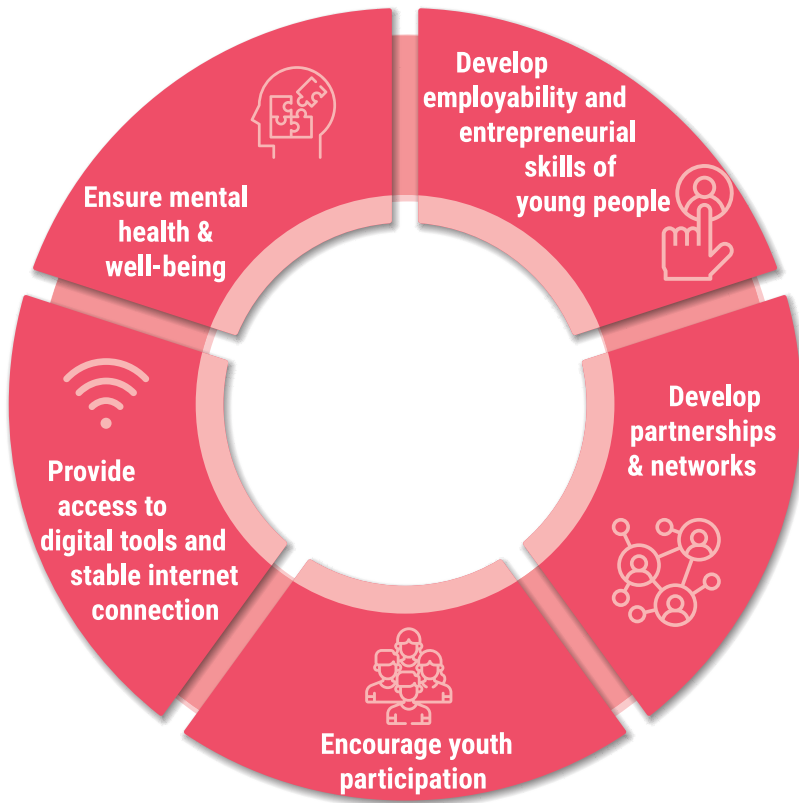
**SOS Children's Villages in Asia reached out to almost 1,500 care leavers during this COVID-19 pandemic.**

### Extending support to care leavers in Asia amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: A regional survey

SOS Children's Villages International Office Asia together with nine member associations namely Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam, conducted a survey between June 15 and July 15, 2020, with the participation of 821 respondents. It was principally a purposive sampling where 728 young people from SOS Children's Villages and family strengthening programmes with digital devices, internet connectivity and engaged in building skills during this pandemic participated. In addition, 93 trainers/mentors/volunteers who supported these young people in enhancing their skills virtually took part in the survey.

This study found that COVID-19 pandemic has profound impact on young people as they are worried about their health, their education and their future and calls for a clear and targeted interventions with young people to make them more employable in a post-COVID world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS BY YOUNG PEOPLE TO MEET THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THEM



New efforts, new partnerships, new learning and new resolve had to be found somehow. We are now realigning our individual development plans. We are looking at what industries were hit and which ones survived COVID. Armed with these new ideas and some age-old wisdom we are looking to the future with some trepidation but with great hope and greater resolve.

Building economic resilience in our care leavers is a priority for our future. Building safety nets for unforeseen events, preparing them psychologically for the unexpected, and helping them maximize their potential at adapting to new situations.

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A young girl from SOS Children's Village Nuwara-Eliya, Sri Lanka enjoying the evening with her best canine friend



Ly, a care leaver of SOS Children's Village Hue, Viet Nam, capturing a moment of love and contentment with her own small family



**SOS CHILDREN'S  
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