COLOMBIA
Family life in turmoil for Camila and Valentina

CONGO
After distress, rebuilding

SWITZERLAND
Goodbye to the illustrator André Paul
**Editorial**

**Commitment to children**

The Convention relative to children’s rights will be thirty in 2019. Today, it is the most ratified human rights treaty and its implementation in public policies and national legislation has fostered real progress. However, several forms of non respect and violation of the fundamental rights of children remain a reality. For many reasons, economic, political, climatic, cultural or social, children are living or surviving in conditions of extreme poverty, are subjected to violence and abuse, have no access to healthcare or clean drinking water, are forced to flee conflict, famine, with or without their families. How many are deprived of their childhood? What will be the consequences for their future adult lives?

Through your solidarity during the last year, you have shown your commitment to supporting children’s rights. And if this commitment, yours and ours, appears to be without end, it has nevertheless a direct, concrete and lasting impact on each child followed and at the same time on his family. Care for, and the defence of, a beaten talibé, a few steps along the way with a young adult whose face has been devoured by noma, a friendly hand held out to a little girl ending up on the streets with her family, represent certainly modest, but infinitely important actions. They make a difference to their lives today and will still be reflected positively in their lives tomorrow.

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**Boring for safe water**

In Niger, the Sahelian climate creates an acute problem to access water. At the Sentinelles Care Centre in Zinder where the children affected by Noma stay, water only runs from taps once every second day or even once every third day at certain times of the year. Furthermore, the development of refineries that divert some of the water from the water table is making the deficit of running water worse in some regions as is the case in Zinder.

This year, the Nigerian office of the Swiss Bureau for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has granted funds to install a drilling site at the Care Centre. After in-depth geological investigations, two pumping areas are being realized to supply the water tower. Good news: the water is drinkable, which isn’t always the case when pumping in some phreatic tables.

As a result, daily hygiene and washing activities can take place without fearing shortages. It will facilitate the awareness efforts about dental and body hygiene that are so important in relation to noma and medical care. This installation will also make it easier to keep clean the place where recovering children stay sometimes for long periods.
Despite a grey and rainy day, Antoinette, Daniela, Jean-Luc and Serge collected more than CHF 1,200.00 on Tuesday, November 13 during the St Martin Fair in Vevey, the 549th!

To anyone who faced the weather conditions and to the people who made the delicious jams or decorated the pots, a huge thank you. Thank you too to the people who, in buying our products, are supporting our projects.

She has also made some recommendations on dental hygiene. The children were in the habit of taking toothpaste to a place far away from the bathroom, then start brushing their teeth on the way, distracted. Vanille advised that this activity take place in full at the same place. Mastering brushing teeth is important to ensure good dental hygiene and prevent any relapse (gingivitis). In some regions, some families use other means to brush their teeth, such as neem wood, sand or even coal. Thus, learning a new technique can become difficult. Adapted solutions also go through a cultural approach to the aid, so children adopt a technique that no one has been using in their community. Doing so, they will continue doing the right moves once the Sentinelles follow-up comes to an end.

In July 2018, Vanille Bioley, an occupational therapist, dedicated part of her vacation to volunteer and visit the Zinder Care Centre for children affected by noma. The objective was to assess how the health care team and the activity leader were doing. Vanille took care of the children in small age groups, doing activities to improve their motor skills, such as ball or dexterity games, or games stimulating their memory. Children who recover at the Care Centre are sometimes lacking the stimulation that is necessary for their development; some of them, especially the younger ones who suffered from noma, are overprotected by their mothers or the people who stay with them. They are carried most of the time, so they don’t have the opportunity to discover their environment. Vanille has worked with a few 2 to 3-year-old children on simple actions like how to grab an object or pass it from one hand to the other.

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Success at the St Martin Fair

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Visit to Zinder of an therapist

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Ita, a young, 20-year-old pygmy from the Central African Republic who was so deeply wounded by noma and about whom we gave regular reports in the last editions, was able to go back home after one year of medical care and operations that took place at the University Hospital of Geneva.

He left with a reconstructed face and a promising outlook for his future. His farewells were met with deep emotion because of the fondness and relationships he built when he was housed at the Terre des hommes house in Massongex and in a family who had welcomed him warmly.

Going back to his country was also a source of great changes. Ita was reunited with his mother who was believed to have passed away. He’ll need some time to reconnect with his family, his country of origin and his culture. Despite reuniting with his family, Ita preferred returning to Bangui, the capital city, where he’ll have more prospects for his future.

A donation enabled him to purchase a grinding mill, which will provide him with a small income generating activity and will enable him to support himself. For the moment, he stays with a family in the capital city, so that he can find his marks and receive good follow-up care. We wish Ita the best for his future, may his new face give him a life in which he can be integrated among his own people.

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Shifting lives

Justine’s family found itself in unimaginable distress, living in a run-down house. Thanks to Sentinelles’ support, Justine and her children are rebuilding their lives step by step.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, populations fight for the survival of their families in conditions that are difficult to imagine. There is extreme poverty, mainly in the rural environment. Sentinelles is based in South-Kivu, a region often affected for many years by omnipresent violence. Women and children are often the first victims. Therefore, we focus our actions on them. In the Nyantende region, the Sentinelles team has been supporting a family who was discovered in full distress in June 2017. Justine is 51 years old, a widow supporting alone her 15 people family. This is her story.

Justine herself has many siblings and got married very young. She was leading a hassle-free life with her husband and their twelve children. The couple was working as porters (carrying heavy wood burdens) and was managing to make ends meet although with difficulty. But at a certain time, Justine’s husband sunk into alcoholism and became violent. He stopped working and Justine found herself the only family support and carer. Constant hunger and lack of care would enormously affect the children and led the older ones to also succumb to alcohol and substance abuse. Her husband became very sick and died in May 2017.

Justine is totally left to herself. Her oldest son, the unique potential support, leaves the region and is unheard of until now. At the same time, her daughter Marta is abandoned by her husband. Evicted from her home by her in-laws, she has no choice but going back to Justine’s place with her children. Then Claire, another of Justine’s daughters, gets pregnant from a man who doesn’t want to take responsibility for the child.

AVOIDING A DISASTER
They all live together in a tiny, run-down house. The walls and roof, with many holes, don’t hold any more.

During the rainy season, the house is inundated and the family, which doesn’t own any bed, cannot sleep at all at night because of the mud that floods into the hut.

Children are exposed to every danger in this house that anyone can easily enter. Furthermore, during the rainy season the house is more at risk of collapsing. The life conditions are unbearable.

Alerted by a community member, the Sentinelles social workers go to Justine’s village. They are shocked to realize how dilapidated this house is. Building a new place that can house this large family in dignity has become a priority. During the building work, the old house collapses after one night of heavy rainfall. Thankfully, Justine’s family had already started sleeping over in the new house, otherwise the situation could have been dramatic.
**TOWARDS AUTONOMY**

Economic support is provided to Justine, who takes to bean trading and poultry farming with her daughters, Marta and Claire. In parallel, Justine works a few days a week collecting trash for private customers, which provides her with an additional income. Satisfied and motivated by the opportunity to be active again, the three women do their best to succeed with their business. Judith, another girl of the family, is learning sewing and the younger children go to school. The situation is however not yet back to normal. Some of the children are anaemic and all of them have regular bouts of paludism which is very present in the region.

The road leading to autonomy is still long for this family who have been traumatized by years of suffering. This is why a close follow up by our social workers is paramount. Sentinelles commits to supporting every woman and every child until they are ready to take wing. Until then, Justine’s family has already gotten back a smile, and this is priceless… except for your contribution.

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**In South Kivu, supported by Sentinelles, Gislaine could greatly improve her life and those of her children. A beautiful story.**

Whilst new families are being supported, others are ready to take wing. It is the case of Gislaine’s family. When she was discovered by the Sentinelles team in 2013 in the Kabare region, this forty-something woman was living in deep poverty with her five children. Her husband had been killed by a paramilitary organisation two years before and Gislaine was still badly traumatized by this event.

Her life had become a continuous fight to feed her family. Her children didn’t go to school and her eldest daughter Nsimire would prostitute herself to provide financial support to her mother. She would also do some farming for a meagre income and would take care of her younger brothers. Their house was totally run-down, as is the case for most of the families supported by Sentinelles in South Kivu.

The first step was to rebuild the family house. In parallel, with our social workers’ support, Gislaine started a small soap and banana juice business. Selling started very slowly but she got regular follow-up and visits by our workers which enabled her to gain skills and learn from her mistakes. Today, capable of diversifying her business according to seasons and demand, she manages to earn a profit that is high enough to tend to her family needs.

Nsimire, who is now 18, has quit prostitution and has now become a mother. She attended vocational training at the “Cité de la Joie” in Bukavu as part of their programme aiming at “transmuting pain into power”. From this point forward, full of energy and motivation, she helps her mother with the business and owns a guinea pig business, good sources of proteins. Her younger brothers attend school and get good grades. The family is in good health.

Today, the family dynamics are back on track and Sentinelles can let them carry on their path serenely. The reconstruction process of a family, when it was wounded at several levels, is long and often complex. However, with compassion, patience and perseverance, hope can return, and individual situations do improve.

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**In the Democratic Republic of Congo,**

- **CHF 30.–** are sufficient to bring one piglet to a family in extreme precariousness.
- **CHF 80.–,** are enough to pay school fees and equipment during one year for one child
- **CHF 500.–** are enough to build a clay or wooden house for a family

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**A fresh start**

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In December 2017, the Care Centre welcomes Camila, who is ten. The following year, her sister Valentina joins her. Violence has torn this family to pieces: Julieth Taborda, the mother, has been in prison since 2017, implicated in drug smuggling and robberies organised by young thugs. Luis David, her son, was also working for them until a confrontation with the police left him paralysed. He was 19.

Julieth Taborda, 38, is the mother to seven children. Since they were babies, four of them were taken away from her by the Colombian office for child and youth protection and were placed in a boarding school because they were living in a state of precariousness, malnourishment, abandon and violence. Mariana was entrusted to a foster family, Danilo, Daniel and Jacqueline followed the adoption process. Luis David, 7 years old, was placed in the Care Centre of Tierra de Vida, Sentinelles’ shelter centre in Colombia, and later placed in a boarding school.

During the 90s, the protection office for child and youth protection intervened and took away the custody of all her children. Consequently, since Camila and Valentina’s birth, Julieth has fought to prove she is capable of caring for her new-born children. She took good care of them and started looking for odd jobs. Sentinelles encouraged her in her job search.

**PROTECTION AGAINST VIOLENCE**

When the girls turned 2 and 3, Sentinelles took them to the Day Centre. They were in a position of insecurity, without access to health care or to a healthy nutrition (the younger one was underweight). This follow-up brings some stability to the little ones. The support to their mother is, on the other hand, chaotic. She has alcohol and substance abuse issues, she is manipulative. Julieth has a difficult life, Fredy, the girls’ father, beats her up and sometimes sexually abuses her. He is occasionally also violent towards his daughters. Julieth tries with much difficulty to
work and keep her daughters with her but, in April 2017, she loses her freedom. She is implicated in drug smuggling and robberies organised by a local mob of young thugs.

Since she’s been incarcerated, Fredy takes care of Valentina and Camila. After Julieth’s departure, life becomes especially harsh for Camila. Doña Maria Victoria, the grandmother, supports her son and takes care of the girls but she doesn’t like Camila; she discriminates against her because of her skin tone, black like Julieth’s, whilst Valentina, who is as white as her father, gets her preference. Camila must do all the household chores. She faces constant humiliations and her father remains indifferent to his daughter’s suffering.

In December 2017, considering the neglect and proven bad treatment Camilla suffers by her family, we suggest taking her to the Care Centre. Her father accepts, and the girl is very happy. Our objective is to provide her with a social life and kind support helping her reassert her own value and rebuilding her self-confidence, whilst at the same time trying to strengthen the relationship with her father, her sister and her grandmother. Valentina and Camila meet every afternoon after school at the Don Bosco centre (an institution run by Salesian fathers which provides play and school support after school). After which, Valentina goes back to her father’s place and Camila to the Centre. Both sisters visit their mother in prison once a month.

Camila’s progression is fast, she feels good, she is a sociable and very smart girl. For her who was sometimes considering suicide before coming to the Centre, the changes are huge!

On the other hand, Valentina has been participating less in the Centre’s activities for several months. The Don Bosco social worker also expresses her concern because she doesn’t go there regularly any longer, nor to school. Valentina spends her evenings locked away alone at home or with Juan Felipe, the son of her father’s new partner.

We set off to Valentina’s place and realise that Fredy and his partner Luz Mery are overwhelmed by their work in a coal mine. They don’t have the time to take care of Valentina. The grandmother, who cares for the girl, has health issues and cannot take care of her any more. On some weekends and nights, Valentina, who is only 9 years old, is under the supervision of Luz Mery’s son who is only five years older than her.

TOGETHER AGAIN

Considering the preoccupying situation in terms of education and upbringing and also the physical risks Valentina faces, we talk to the whole family. Camila, Julieth and Fredy agree that we take her to the Centre until Julieth gets out of prison. We ask Fredy and his new partner to commit and pick up the girls every weekend. Luz Mery opposes this and argues she doesn’t want to welcome Camila who allegedly behaves badly. We suggest to Fredy to take her during one weekend of reflection. On Monday, during the planned meeting, Luz Mery and Fredy are very happy with the time spent with Camila and say she is very nice, organized and sensible. They decide to formally request Julieth’s placement in the Care Centre and commit to pick both girls up on Fridays.

Camila and Valentina are very happy to live together again. Julieth, their mother, is relieved. Valentina goes back to school on a regular basis, shares the everyday life of the children and of her sister, she enjoys playing with them all. We keep bringing them every month to visit their mother in her prison. Their father, who picks them up every weekend, still doesn’t spend much time with them. We still have some way to go but at least Camila’s change is telling. Away from mistreatment, she regains her little life.

We shall be relentlessly working with their father and we’ll take the opportunity of the visits to prison for Valentina and Camila to fortify the relationship with their mother. We have high hopes for the future of both sisters.
The old lady and the black man

“My story, certified as true, takes place in the restaurant of a department store in Lausanne. A restaurant-cafeteria.

An old lady is sitting in front of a large bowl of steaming soup. She is getting ready to eat when she realises that she has forgotten to take a spoon. She gets up, goes to the cutlery box, takes a spoon and comes back to her place.

Astonishment! Opposite her, at her table, there is a black man who is cheerfully tucking into the bowl of soup. Her bowl of soup.

The old lady, stunned, stares at the black man, who calmly continues to plunge his spoon into the bowl... So then, without a second thought, the old lady in turn plunges her spoon into the bowl (“a fine thing for her to see her meagre meal being stolen by any old beanpole...”).

And it is in this way that an old lady and a black man share a bowl of soup with a good appetite and without exchanging a single word. A bowl of soup doesn’t last long when there are two people sharing it.

End of the first act. The black man, still impassive, gets up, takes the empty bowl and goes towards the counter. Two minutes later, he comes back with a plate of spaghetti bolognese and two forks. Without saying a word, he hands one of the forks to the old lady and the ceremony of the shared meal begins again. Each in turn, vigorously and with a still intact appetite, the old lady and the black man finish off the plate of pasta. Still in silence, without a complicit nod, as if they had eaten from the same plate for all eternity.

Finished the spaghetti bolognese!

The old lady and the black man seem to be full. They stay there, face to face, deep in their thoughts, feeling no need to break their silence. This lasts for one or two minutes.

Then, suddenly... the old lady’s eyes move from the table and her partner and settle on something a little further away in the restaurant.

And it is in this way that an old lady and a black man share a bowl of soup with a good appetite and without exchanging a single word. A bowl of soup doesn’t last long when there are two people sharing it.

A little further away... oh... not too far! Just a few metres... on a nearby table where... in pride of place... all alone... abandoned for a long time... stands a bowl of soup awaiting a difficult client... There.”