MADAGASCAR
A teacher’s testimony

COLOMBIA
Meliza’s achievements

EDMOND KAISER
One by one
Abuse, a powerful poison

Insidious, invisible or brutal, skillfully orchestrated or even disorganised, institutional or cultural, abuse displays many faces. It generates a high level of anxiety, of depression, tramples on one’s self-esteem and sometimes creates trauma so profound that it resists the test of time. Vulnerable just by their situation as talibés, as prisoners, because of their handicap or their social status, children are often the first victims. Helpless, they suffer the negligence, abuse of power or confidence, blows to their bodies or their souls, the complicit silence.

Tender gestures to dry the tears, an attentive ear and a kindly accompaniment contribute to the reconstruction of their identity. The prevention of this scourge with such devastating consequences is essential. Isn’t awareness of abuse a decisive step towards freeing oneself from it? Towards breaking the schema of violence? It is a long, complex path, but at the same time promising. In this way, in Senegal, our actions to raise awareness amongst the children is being strengthened, notably thanks to the tremendous work by a team which is now active amongst the adults, the parents and representatives of different communities.

To his great joy, Boureima will soon be able to go home after a stay of nine months in Switzerland. He arrived in Switzerland to be treated for the sequels to noma and was operated on with success at the University Hospital of Geneva.

Boureima underwent several surgical operations to reconstruct his nose, destroyed by this disease. He showed great courage faced with his treatment and different stays in hospital. He is now very happy with the result. Boureima arrived looking like a child and he is going home with the face of a young man.

Boureima is a happy boy, warm, a little mischievous, who loves to joke and appreciates contact with adults and his peers. During his stay in Switzerland, he has lived in the Terre des hommes home in Massongex, Valais. He adapted well to community life, which reminded him of his village and was very happy there. He also went to school and to a tailoring workshop.

Boureima is at last going home, back to his family. His father is a farmer and his mother looks after the family. He is looking forward to seeing his four little brothers and sisters again, who will be surprised to see how much he has changed! When he is home, Sentinelles will be by his side to help him to acquire professional training. Boureima would like to learn to be a mechanic.

The last consultation at the hospital was full of emotion when the moment came to say goodbye to the medical team who looked after him. We wish him a happy return to his family and a wonderful future for his life in Burkina Faso.
NIGER

3 children operated in Nyamey

Three children were operated on in the clinic “La Magia” in Nyamey by Dr. Issa Ousmane Hamady (Niger) and Prof. Andreas Schmidt (Germany) in collaboration with the Hilfsaktion Noma organisation. The children were then brought back to our Zinder Centre for the postoperative care before they could go back to their families. They are all well. Others will be able to benefit from these surgical missions in the future.

Among the recently operated children, Habsa, a young girl who had been welcomed in the Centre in 2010 for an acute noma with fever, anaemia and malnutrition. The Head Nurse of a dispensary had guided the mother to Sentinelles, and we have been looking after this family ever since. Aged two, the little one was too weak and way too young to go under reconstructive surgery considering the extent of her facial damages. The team focused on medical treatment and re-nutrition. As a matter of fact, the child has progressively recovered. “She is a wonderful, trustful, smiling and lively little one, she spends her time with us during activities and her mother takes good care of her” writes our worker on site.

After a few months here, Habsa and her mother went back home. Our workers do regular home visits to check on her. Despite the large lesion on her face, the young girl lives the same life as any other village child without feeling discomfort.

When it is time to start school, our social worker still has to make sure that Habsa is admitted as the teachers showed some reluctance to include her. Nowadays, she is a good pupil. An income-generating project has been implemented with her mother, an oil retail store that improves their conditions of life and especially that fights against malnourishment – one of the major factors in the noma development -, while at the same time strengthening her mother’s position in the family.

This year, Habsa has reached an age enabling her to be successfully operated. Her courage and spirits will enable her to regain her life after this terrible disease that brutally struck her at a very young age. Sentinelles will still be with her to make sure that everything is alright and to build a future with her.

SENEGAL

Prevention of child abuse continues

In Senegal, Sentinelles has developed since 2018 an awareness programme against child abuse. Moreover, we had featured this topic in the 260th edition of our bulletin. A theatre play about the various topics related to violence against children was acted out in several Mbour schools. The shows were always followed by a debate with the young audience to further explore the depicted topics and allow the children to express themselves. They all paid close attention during the show and actively participated in the discussion that followed. They expressed their indignation for the violence but also their desire for justice. The success of these sessions proved so positive that we chose to shoot a movie based on the show in order to bring this message to a broader audience of children, thus preventing as much as possible the abuse they suffer of. The movie was shot and performed by local actors. By doing so, Sentinelles has entered into a new phase of the awareness project by organising sessions and screenings not only in schools but also with adults, notably through a collaboration with the community relays.
Meliza is taking wing

Tierra de Vida, is helping in the course of their lives and taking care of people who are in total distress. Here is the story of one of them.

We hear about Meliza for the first time on September 15, 2011. She is a 10-year old abused girl who lives in a Medellin slum. Liliana, Meliza’s mum, wasn’t even 15 years old when she gave birth to her little girl. The father left when the baby was born.

In 2007, Liliana meets Victor, a partner with whom she is still living, and together they have 7 children. Both are drug addicts, abusers and negligent. Victor is unemployed, he stays home while Lilian works in town as a street vendor. She served prison sentences several times for selling drugs. Meliza is forced to act like an adult in charge; she has to watch her brothers and sisters and can’t go to school. Her living conditions are also very difficult emotionally because Victor would sometimes beat her with his belt.

Following this observation, Sentinelles applies for Meliza placement at the relevant police station; she comes and lives in our children’s home because the parental neglect, family violence and risk of sexual abuse from her stepfather speak for themselves. It doesn’t mean however that the situation is settled. Because, once the girl is safe, Sentinelles faces another issue: the situation of Meliza’s brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, despite several denunciations for extreme neglect towards the younger ones, we still don’t manage, after all these years, to obtain their placement. Another reality prevails: even though the neighbours and their mother of course are aware of this violence towards the children, as well as of the death threats against her, no one dares to report him to the authorities. Yet these testimonies are crucial so Bienestar (the child protection service) can act and withdraw the children from this very difficult family background.

As a matter of fact, since her first day at the children’s house, her brothers and sisters remain a constant worry for Meliza. For her to go and visit, despite Victor’s attempts to stop her, we take her home to visit them. It has been several years that we use strategies to make these meetups happen. Sometimes we invite all siblings to the children’s home for the holidays; sometimes, too, Victor would, in between two refusals, become more cooperative and accept our requests. However, because the official documents from authorities (Bienestar and the police station) are missing that would authorize it, we are not legally allowed to welcome them during a couple of days.

In 2018, despite Victor’s refusal but with Liliana’s agreement and support, we manage to welcome at the children’s house Dulce, the nine-year old sister. A few weeks later, we went to the police station to obtain legal custody over the child. That is when Dulce, who was in tears while we were speaking about her mother, expresses the desire to go back and live with her. The case was immediately closed without the state services even going there to assess the situation of the mother and children, especially the issue of Liliana prostituting herself in her children’s presence. The police station has only accepted to consider Dulce’s feelings as she was sad to be away from her mother. However, when the later leaves the house to be away from Victor and his abuse, she lives on the street with her two last-born and Dulce, exposing her children to every danger.
Meliza is persistent and very committed. She still comes with us in every request to protect her siblings. Will we make it one day? We hope so and we don’t relent. Meliza keeps a close relationship with her grandmother and both communicate regularly by phone.

Now that Meliza has come of age, our objective is to support her in her adult life and to guide her toward autonomy. For a year, we have been working with her on her life project. Last year, she expressed the desire to attend a hairdressing course. We found her a mentor in Minas who agreed to support her. Doña Consuelo is a lady who regularly participates in various leisure activities for the children’s house children, with a local group that knows Tierra de Vida (Sentinelles) well. This group has committed to organizing at least one activity per quarter with the children. As she knows Meliza well, Doña Consuelo believes she has a lot of courage to attend this educational programme while completing her last school year. We are all very proud of her because she’s been very persistent. For a year, every Sunday, she travelled to Medellin to attend her hairdressing class that ended in June. On June 4th, Meliza took the admission exam to the public university because she would like to study and become a social worker; she has been preparing for this exam for six months. She is waiting for the results. If she passes, she’ll start university in August. We are sure that her hairdressing training will enable her to do some work besides studying to cover for her minor expenses.

In Colombia, education isn’t really a right but is instead a privilege. Except for the Antioquia university that is free, the other ones are expensive. However, if Meliza isn’t accepted in this very popular university, we shall continue supporting her in her quest for education in another university.

We strongly believe that, thanks to her studies, Meliza will be able to reach autonomy, which will enable her to eventually support her brothers and sisters.

She will have to leave our children’s house to study at the university in Medellin. We are counting on her grandmother’s support, as she lives there, for accommodation and food. On its side, Sentinelles will cover the costs related to her education such as university fees, transportation, etc.

The way Meliza has to continue following isn’t very easy and is going to demand a lot of engagement; however, because we believe in her, we are ready to help her and walk by her side. For her, for her brothers and sisters.

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**URGENT**

It is necessary to make known our work in helping the most wounded and the most helpless

AND FOR THIS WE NEED YOU

BECAUSE A LARGE MAJORITY OF THE DONATIONS RECEIVED COMES FROM THE DISTRIBUTION OF THIS BULLETIN.

Therefore, we are looking for volunteers to distribute Sentinelles’ bulletin in letterboxes, to your friends and acquaintances.

Contact us by phone on 021 646 19 46 or by email info@sentinelles.org
MADAGASCAR

Three brothers with a thirst for knowledge

Here is a really nice story that happened in the Sentinelles care Centre in Madagascar. It was told us by Ramaro Narisolo, whom everybody calls Mr. Solo. Let’s start by portraying this man.

Ramaro Narisolo, also called Mr. Solo, 71 years old, is the educational manager of the Sentinelles care Centre in Madagascar. Although having reached the age of retirement in 2007 Mr. Solo has been collaborating with Sentinelles since 2009. He started as a volunteer during a vacation period and was later permanently hired as educational manager, a role he has always embraced with a lot of enthusiasm and commitment. A student in the teacher’s college in Tamatave, he became a teacher in a public school of the same town in 1967 and worked there for 3 years. After additional education in youth animation and community education, he was affected to the Ministry of Youth and Sports as a youth worker. He stayed there for 37 years during which he, among other things, facilitated workshops, trained group and youth association leaders; he was able to discover many regions of the country and their respective cultures. Ever since he’s been working at the care Centre, he has seen many children, each of them with complicated stories. The situation of these three brothers (we talked about them in our edition #258) who have been placed in our centre for nearly 1½ years has deeply touched him and he has expressed the desire to share it with a text that we reproduce below.

MISTER SOLO AND THE “STREET CHILDREN”

On a morning of November 2017, one of our social workers (SW) came to ATAFo (it is the name of the Sentinelles care Centre) with three children who wore simple and clean clothes but didn’t look very comfortable in those clothes. I was teaching a young boarder and couldn’t listen to the dialogue between the SW and the educator. I was however able to hear someone say this phrase: “they are street children.”

At the beginning of their stay, these three boys would stick to their old habits. They
If another boarder lost a shirt button and one of the three found it, it was difficult for him to give it back unless an educator would patiently show him with visual evidence that this button was missing from someone's piece of clothing. Such situations would happen quite often, but we were always able to make them come to their senses.

As far as hitting was concerned, the three boys wouldn’t hesitate to hit those who would pester them or didn’t agree with them. The boarders, who weren’t used to such behaviour, would have difficulty coping with such violence.

We had to explain to the brothers that hitting someone wasn’t a common and minor gesture but on the contrary an abrupt and aggressive act. It took us a long time, but we managed to do it.

Another distinctive characteristic of street children anywhere in the world, knowing that those in Madagascar are no different, is that they develop their own language. In the beginning, they would communicate among themselves in their own way with their own vocabulary. But step by step, with the educators’ support, the three brothers changed their habits and eventually expressed themselves in the right way.

Something else I would like to mention here is Mahery’s sense of responsibility, the second of the siblings. He would always take care of Fetra, the youngest one. As a matter of fact, the latter would in the beginning always stay alongside his elder brother. It is only later that I learn, thanks to their elder sister (she also stays at the care centre and attends our little school), that on the street it was always Mahery who would make sure he could find something to eat for both. Still now in ATAFo, it can happen that, when he doesn’t finish his meal, Mahery gives it to Fetra. It illustrates the fact that he keeps the same reflex even though he doesn’t always have to. As far as Feno, the oldest one, is concerned, he would never really care about his younger brothers even though he remains an obliging and obedient child.

With regard to schooling, after the New Year celebration of 2017-2018, the three brothers’ social worker came specially to meet with me and talk about her objective: integrate the boys in a school the following school year. As the educational manager, I was the one to prepare them for it. We told them they would be taking lessons with me. For the three of them, it was a day to celebrate. I felt this news was a big turnaround in their lives. Their behaviour changed. Before, they would never talk about studying but it has become a source of pride for them to say “we study with Dadatoa”.

They were really eager to learn, and they were able to assimilate very fast. The oldest brother spent very little time in school, only a few months in primary school, but the other two had never been in school. When I teach illiterate people, I use pieces as in Scrabble. In the beginning this is how they learned vowels, it took a month, then we started syllables, which took us about three months. After they assimilated all syllables, I asked them to form words they would hear every day, such as rice, meat, plate, pot, etc. Learning how to read progressed smoothly but learning how to write was a bit more difficult.

I would like to highlight the fact that during this apprenticeship I didn’t teach them how to count because I knew that, on the street, money plays a very important role. Therefore, adding and subtracting are for them usual operations. About twenty days before the term’s beginning, the three of them had to take a test. We went there with their social worker. They passed the reading test. At the writing test the oldest boy did OK, but the younger two did really well. But I was totally surprised by the outcome of the arithmetic test during which they were asked to add numbers and then subtract them: they were able to write numbers, something I wasn’t expecting. They successfully managed both operations without hesitation.

These three boys made considerable efforts to be admitted into an educational institution because it is what they really wanted to achieve. Currently, they have nearly forgotten their life on the street. They go to school every day and it is a source of pride for Sentinelles because it is the first time that street children entrusted to us were able to be integrated into an educational institution. I hope that others will follow the same path.
SENTINELLES
Suffering and consolation in each other’s arms

So that others survive, hurt but not dead, and live, our work is to pick them up, bring them back to life, and especially to accompany them until they take flight.

One by one.

Rather than the “development” of the planet, with a slow trajectory during an infinite space of time, it is individual and personal development, in as far as possible, of wounded innocents.

Babies, children, adolescents, adults, these little ones, they too produce, though very humbly developed, but also more surely and more quickly, the whole of humanity.

With what we are and what we have, we do what we can. trying to be, truly, suffering and consolation in each other’s arms.

A smiling future in inheritance

For a legacy, you have the opportunity to continue your generous commitment to helping people in distress and particularly battered children.

Our legal counsel will answer in confidence.

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