
SENTINELLES

TO THE RESCUE OF WOUNDED INNOCENCE

N° 274 / February 2021



COLOMBIA

Tierra de Vida welcomes
four new children

CONGO

Véronique : a life pitted
with sufferings

HOUSING

So that everyone
has a decent roof

Editorial

Undernourishment and noma: the harrowing face of the crisis in Niger

In Niger, the convergence of attacks by radical groups, extreme weather conditions and the health crisis is weakening a large section of the already drained population. The children affected by noma, the mothers exhausted and emaciated by so many deprivations, embody the gravity of the humanitarian situation and the urgency of responding to it on a long-term basis.

Emboldened by the presence of our nurse, a mother testifies. She has a baby on her back, another clinging to her breast and, at her feet, her 3-year-old boy, his face literally perforated by noma. With dignity, she evokes her daily life in the bush, the endless walks to collect a little water, the exhausting toil in the fields to feed, alone, her 6 living children, the ones she lost for lack of care, her frustration in the face of her husband's indifference. She also expresses how relieved she has been since she arrived at the Sentinelles Care Centre where hope gradually transcends her feelings of helplessness.

Her story, full of self-restraint, illustrates the importance of welcoming and caring for children with noma in a kind environment and of informing the population on a large scale about this disease of poverty. At the same time, it highlights the need to support mothers in the development of income-generating activities so that they can provide for their children's needs, watch them grow and blossom. Niger is in a state of recurrent food insecurity and there is nothing to predict an improvement for 2021. Sentinelles, with your support, is mobilising to save lives and empower families.



I BURKINA FASO

Resumption of surgical missions

After various postponements due to the coronavirus pandemic, surgical missions for obstetric fistulas and cleft lip and palate were resumed in Burkina Faso.

Nine women were operated on by Dr. Guiro at the Hôpital Saint Camille in Ouagadougou. They then spent a month convalescing in our Reception Centre. During this period, they received training in various income-generating activities that they will be able to carry out once they return to the village, such as the preparation of liquid soap, doughnuts, rice with peanut sauce or other dishes that they can cook and sell.

One of the main difficulties lies in their mastery of financial management to ensure that their activity generates profits and is sustainable. The calculations are not always simple for most of these illiterate women, but it is done in a good mood and with encouragement for each one!



Marlyse Morard
Managing Director

INDEPENDENT OF ANY IDEOLOGY, SENTINELLES, FOUNDED 1980 BY EDMOND KAISER, WORKS TO RESCUE AND ACCOMPANY CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN DEEP DISTRESS.



I TREATMENT

Return home of a young woman from Burkina Faso

After a stay of over one year in Switzerland, Laurence, a 30-year-old young woman, can go home to Burkina Faso. It was the fourth time she came to our country. Victim of horrible sequelae following noma which afflicted her as a child, Laurence was first operated upon when she was two and a half years old at the Geneva Teaching Hospital and then again at ages six and thirteen.

She has just successfully undergone several more operations. Her stay had to be extended because of some medical complications and then because of the pandemic which prevented her from returning home as quickly as she wished. Laurence is very pleased with the improvements made to her face and is now leaving us. She will be able to resume her life at home and look for a position in relation with her legal training which ended with her obtaining a degree. She is very moved to have to say goodbye to the team who took such good care of her and to all the people who supported her. We too are moved by her departure. We wish her a happy return to her people and the best for her future.



I NIGER

Important preventive role of mothers

Although access to information is becoming more democratic thanks to growing internet coverage, part of the world's population remains on the fringes of this digital revolution.

In Niger, people in poor rural areas lack the means and face multiple difficulties such as feeding themselves, obtaining basic health care, or accessing quality information.

In the Sentinelles Reception Centre, our team cares for children suffering from noma. During their stay, their mothers are informed on topics such as the causes of this disease, malaria, childhood illnesses or family planning. Once back in their village, they will act as "messengers" to their community to prevent diseases such as noma from continuing to affect children whose parents are unaware that this disease is easily cured if the child is taken to a health post as soon as the first symptoms appear.

I SWITZERLAND

Ancilla, la jeune fille qui souriait aux étoiles*

(Ancilla, the girl who smiled at the stars)



"I was born in a land in faraway Africa, then in the arms of a Hutu teenager, who pulled me from certain death, then in the arms of the woman who welcomed and loved me when I was 18 months old, and finally in the hands of Wassim Raffoul, the surgeon who reconstructed part of my face."

On Ancilla's road, there was a multitude of noble people. People moved, more than others, by impulses of love, by commitments. In particular Edmond Kaiser, who decided to take the seriously injured

Rwandan girl back with him to a Swiss hospital for treatment. Then an adoptive mother who is worried, moved and happy for her daughter. A surgeon who says that if medical care stopped at the door of the operating theatre, he would not have chosen this path. It is to him that Ancilla turns when it comes to taking an important decision, such as to leave in search of her African family.

* Favre publishing house, on sale in bookshops and at the Sentinelles Foundation, CHF 24.- (plus postage).

I COLOMBIA

Welcoming four new children to the Tierra de Vida Centre

Despite the pandemic, the Centre remains active and has welcomed four new residents. We welcome Valerin, Isabella, Juan José and Fabian. The story, although condensed, of the journey of these children is a good illustration of the mission of Tierra de Vida (it is Sentinelles' name in Colombia) which is to support each of them to the best of our abilities, for the necessary time, so that they can regain hope, build themselves up and move forward on a brighter path.



ISABELLA, 12 YEARS OLD

was taken in at the Centre because she was being harassed by her 16-year-old sister. Deisy, her mother, is raising her two daughters alone after separating from her partner who was violent towards them. She found a housekeeper job but has to spend the night there, thus leaving her children alone. Wishing to protect Isabella, she asked Tierra de Vida to take her in and provide her with an educational model that would make her feel valued and safe.



FABIAN, 7 YEARS OLD

is a young undocumented Venezuelan migrant who has been living in Minas for two years with his grandfather Julio, his mother Yulexi and his 2-year-old younger sister Ana. He is a very smart child but unfortunately his mother pays very little attention to him. He has already learned to read and write on his own.

This family is one of the 66% of Venezuelan migrants who work in Colombia in an “informal” way (as street vendors in particular are called). The grandfather works on building sites or in the mines as a daily labourer and the family lives on his salary only.

Our goal is to offer Fabian support on a personal, family and social level. He benefits from education support from the Centre and individual therapy with our psychologist. We also work with his grandfather and mother to develop an income-generating activity that will enable them to better manage their daily lives.

VALERIN, 9 YEARS OLD

is a very spontaneous and warm child. She was deprived of tenderness and love by her mother who, like her stepfather, tends to scold her violently. Valerin has a significant delay in her learning development and has difficulty understanding everything she is told. This causes frustration, her own and that of her parents, especially her mother who regularly abuses her physically and psychologically.

Showing aggressive behaviour, Valerin has great difficulty in concentration and language. In particular, she is not able to verbalise certain thoughts. We are planning a neuropsychological evaluation in order to better assess her needs and set up a psycho-pedagogic support.

When she arrived at the Centre, she was opposed to the idea of attending remote school, a necessary measure in the days of Covid-19. After a couple of weeks, Valerin seems more open and is even enjoying doing her homework, although she needs more time for this than the other children.



Outdoor activities during the pandemic

Our new boarders will also benefit from the many sports and cultural activities offered by Tierra de Vida so that the children keep in touch with the outside world and develop their social skills.

Maria Camila, Daisiri, Valentina and Yeferson play at the football school “futbol con corazon”, a sport they practice once a week. This school promotes the child’s well-being and health while reinforcing values such as equality and tolerance. Some of the children staying at Tierra de Vida have learning difficulties due to a lack of stimulation during important stages of their development. Luz Eliana, Carolina and Daisiri follow the state programme of the IAU – Integral Attention Unit – which values difference and is part of the “inclusive schooling” framework. Each municipality works with a group of professionals, mainly speech therapists and educators in order to provide quality school support to all pupils while taking everyone’s singularities and educational needs into account.

During this particular period marked by the pandemic in Colombia, we are witnessing a resurgence of socio-educational programmes that keep reinventing themselves so children can enjoy a minimum of leisure time. All those who are staying at Tierra de Vida participate in “Cultiv-arte”, an initiative proposing a play area in the centre of the village with the possibility of learning theatre, dance, reading and singing. New challenges that stimulate their curiosity and creativity while involving the whole family, are offered every day. Those activities have a very positive impact and Luz Marina, the Centre’s educator, observes that the children feel less stressed and more confident with others.

The most attractive challenge was “Cosplay”, a role-playing game that consists of imitating a famous character by dressing up and putting on make-up to make the other players guess. On the pictures you can guess who the children are dressed up as...



JUAN JOSÉ, 10 YEARS OLD

has been receiving psychosocial support for the last eight years from the Authority for families in Angelopolis which placed him in a foster home in Medellin because Lina, his mother, was sharing her life with a partner who mistreated him. This period estranged him from his mother who did not have the financial means to visit him.

For the past year, Lina has been enrolled in a programme enabling her to benefit from social housing. She could be granted a house within one or two years. At the moment, she leads a relatively nomadic life as she frequently changes partners. Without a family or fixed abode, Lina also has a slight psychological handicap.

The social worker at the family authority therefore suggested placing Juan José in the Tierra de Vida Centre while the house was being built.

In addition to protecting the young boy, our objective is to support his mother to develop an income generating activity adapted to her handicap, so that she can find stability for her son and herself.

Juan José is active, very smart and very enthusiastic, which enables us to work with him on managing emotions and stress as well as strengthening his self-esteem. He will thus be able to cope better with negative emotions and improve his relationship with his mother.



ICONGO

Véronique, a mother's fight for her children

Véronique was 38 years old when she was referred to us in May 2019 by the psychologist of the organisation Mamas for Africa, of which we are partners. She was the mother of five children, four boys aged 15, 13, 10 and 9 and a girl aged 16.

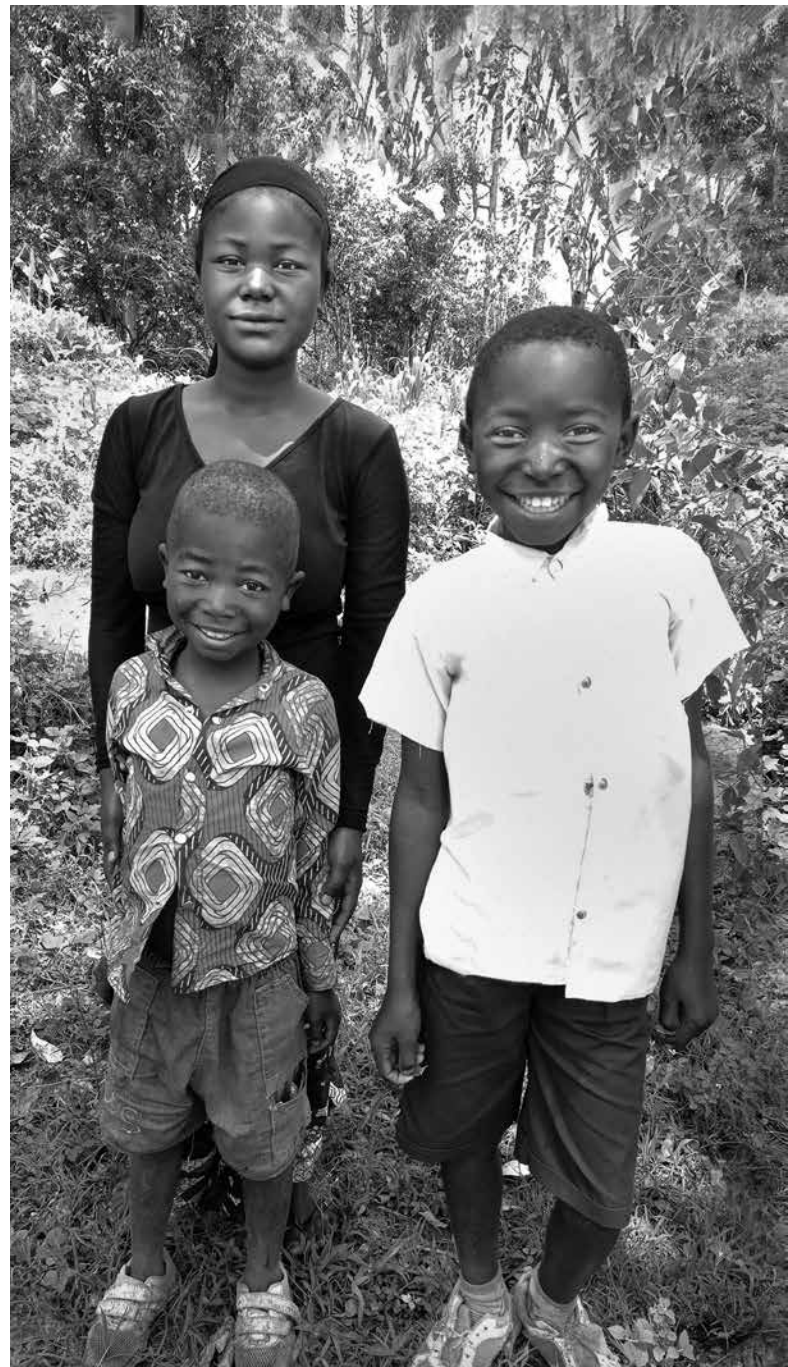
She had been traumatised following a militia attack in her village in 2014. That day, she and several of her neighbours were raped by these men in front of their families. Her husband was abducted, tortured and then found dead the day after the tragedy. The militias stole everything they could find, leaving dozens of families in misery.

Véronique was left completely destroyed and without any resources, but continued to look after her children alone. She was forced to sell her land and her house for a little money in order to survive. Her in-laws then gave her children a small plot of land and took them in temporarily to give their mother time to build a new home. Through hard work in the fields for private individuals, she managed little by little to build their home. However the relationship with her late husband's parents and sisters was conflictual and, day after day, she suffered in silence.

Véronique somehow managed to house and feed her children but, due to lack of means, none of them went to school and her youngest son who was epileptic was unable to receive treatment. The family tried to survive through stress and constant difficulty.

The meetings with the Mamas for Africa team and then with the Sentinelles team, were a breath of fresh air for this woman who had been sorely tested by life. In June 2019, she received economic aid in order to be able to start a small business of soy flour and small fish. We also supported her for the family's medical expenses and the children's schooling.

However a few weeks later, she learns that she is pregnant by her neighbour with whom she had a brief relationship. This was now an additional burden on her shoulders. The misfortunes continued when she gave birth in October 2019. She lost a great deal of blood and could not have a transfusion, due to the lack of a compatible donor. Véronique died, leaving six orphans including a newborn baby. The father of the youngest child disappeared through fear of reprisals from the family. The baby was taken in by her brothers and sisters and was then rushed to a neighbour who had recently given birth and who offered to breastfeed her.

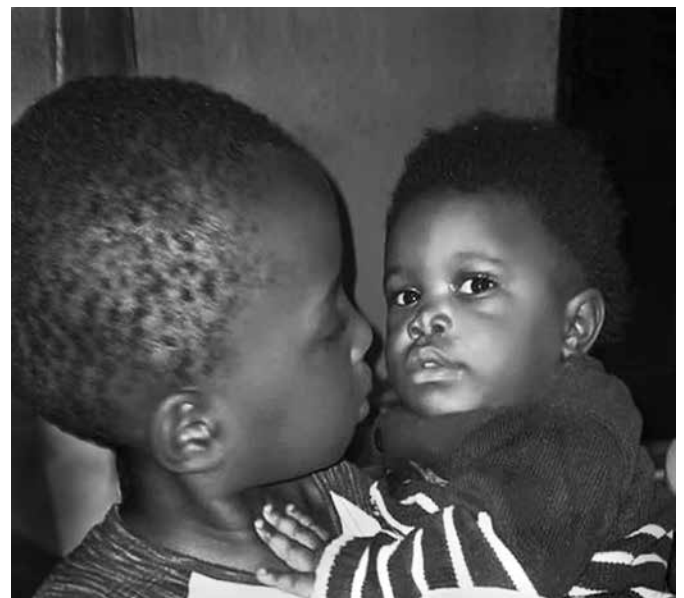




On learning this news, the Sentinelles team went immediately to the children, the eldest of whom was only 16 years old. As it was impossible to leave this baby in the care of her brothers and sisters or with her in-laws, a mutual agreement was reached that the team would look for an orphanage that could take her for the first years of her life. Sentinelles followed up on the five orphans who stayed in their home, close to their paternal grandparents.

After several refusals from orphanages that did not accept infants, the baby was taken into the Mamma della Pace orphanage, in the town centre of Bukavu. This is where the baby was baptised Irène. Our team visits her regularly and ensures that her needs are taken care of in terms of food, hygiene and medical care. One of the important aspects of Sentinelles' follow-up is to maintain the family bond with her brothers and sisters by organising regular visits of her siblings to the orphanage. This will facilitate her return to the family in a few years' time. In the meantime, Irène is growing up and thriving surrounded by the children at the orphanage.

After the closure of the schools due to the health measures and the school holidays, classes recommenced in October 2020 for Irène's four brothers. Her sister is currently choosing what training to follow in order to get a job that will enable her to partly support her family. Life has meant that these children have had to grow up faster than expected, in the least tender of ways. Support of this family will no doubt last for many years, but we are confident. Once all the cards are in hand, these siblings will be able to forge a better future for themselves.



SENTINELLES works in the open and in the flesh, searching, discovering and rescuing the most wounded, to whom life can be given back.

WE NEED YOU!

| MADAGASCAR | SENEGAL | CONGO

Thank you for your help with building decent housing.

We have repeatedly appealed to you for the construction of houses for families living in particularly difficult conditions. Many of you have responded generously and the estimates submitted have been largely covered. For this we would like to thank you most sincerely.

Two other housing aid projects are being implemented progressively thanks to your donations and will enable these families to have a proper roof over their heads.

There are still many families who in Congo, Madagascar or Senegal, live in dilapidated, damp and substandard housing. We will again need your support so that each one can have a decent, safe and worthy shelter in the future.

Miaro family house (Madagascar)



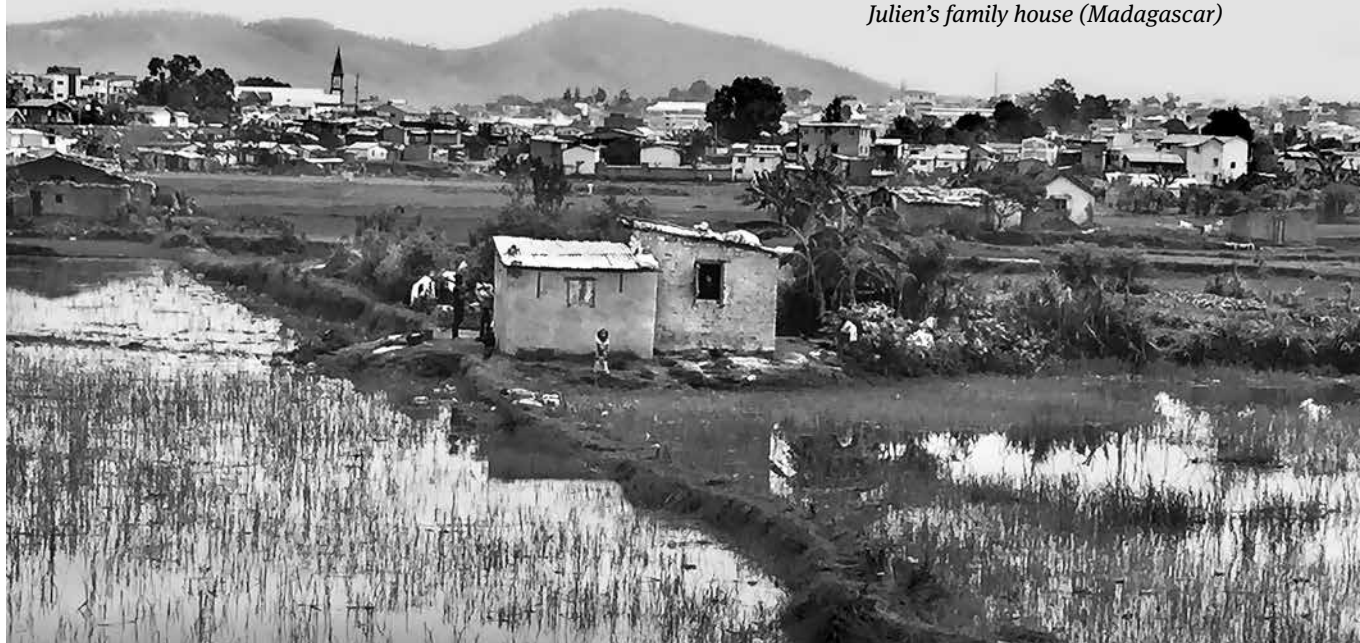
Seck family house (Senegal)



Coura's family house (Senegal)



Julien's family house (Madagascar)



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Euros account: IBAN CH14 0076 7000 T511 2794 9

Edition: 30'000 copies (fr/de/eng)
Publisher: Sentinelles
Layout: Mathias Regamey
Translations: Volunteers and PerMondo
Subscription: \$30/year