

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



Colombia

Lina regains her confidence

Senegal

Fatou, an example of courage and resilience

Switzerland

The testimony of Stéfanie, a trainee at Sentinelles

Editorial

Mental health - a matter of priority

The children of the coal-mining region of south-western Colombia are a prime example of the challenges of mental health care. Despite government efforts, the number of mental health professionals remains well below WHO recommendations, and the stigma associated with mental illness is widespread, hampering the use of the few services available. When mental illness goes unnoticed in the family and at school, it is a source of distress and school dropout, contributing to the vicious cycle of vulnerability. In the heart of the Antioquia Carboniferous Belt, our multidisciplinary team works to identify mental disorders at an early stage and provide children with a caring environment. It provides them with medical care and strengthens their social skills. At the same time, we are working to improve cooperation between medical and educational staff and the community.

In Senegal, the cost of health care is a heavy burden on households, and access to quality care, especially outside the capital, is difficult. The situation of the Diop siblings, featured in this issue, illustrates this grim reality. Fatou and Babacar's remarkable ability to persevere in the face of adversity deserves to be highlighted.

This determination to overcome obstacles is also demonstrated by Stéfanie's story: she is suffering from ill-health and has been taken on by Sentinelles for a vocational rehabilitation programme, much to our delight.

Through these stories, we want to remind people of the importance of overcoming stigmas and reaffirm our commitment to offering each and every person humane and individualised medical and social support with the aim of achieving independence. Let's work together to make a positive and lasting difference. Thank you for your support!

Sentinelles has been fighting for noma to be recognised for the last 35 years. The WHO has finally included noma in the list of neglected tropical diseases. We welcome this decision. It offers hope of better care for children suffering from this disease.



Marlyse Morard
Director

Become a Sentinelles journal distributor

If you're retired and/or have some spare time, and enjoy walking, why not help us deliver the Sentinelles journal?

We are actively looking for volunteer door-to-door deliverers in all regions of Switzerland, but especially in Valais, Neuchâtel, Biel, Fribourg, Bulle, Nyon, the Geneva area, Montreux, and Pays d'Enhaut.

The journal is published 6 times a year, in French, German and English. The papers can be posted directly to you or collected from our offices. You will be given a mini-training course with your distribution area.

If you are interested, please call us on 021 646 19 46 or send an e-mail to: nicole.emonet@sentinelles.org.



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Luc Dupraz is looking for a successor!

Exhibition at EMS Petit-Flon Care Home

Sentinelles is organising an exhibition of photographs and texts recounting Edmond Kaiser's commitment, from **13 March to 31 May 2024** at the Fondation Bois-Gentil's EMS Petit-Flon Care Home in Lausanne. Located in northern Lausanne, the EMS Petit-Flon is an open and welcoming care home that current residents call «La Grande Maison». We hope to see you there for the vernissage will be held on 13 March 2024 at 4 pm.

Address : EMS Petit-Flon, Chemin du Petit-Flon 49,
1000 Lausanne 18, www.fbg.ch.

BURKINA FASO

The workshops aimed to develop self-confidence

Seventeen children and teenagers from Burkina Faso who are being monitored as part of the noma programme participated in educational support and art therapy workshops at our Centre in Ougadougou during the holidays. A teacher was hired for three weeks to assist primary and secondary school pupils with their revision work. Simultaneously, two art therapists conducted workshops in physical and pictorial expression, theatre, and dance. The program aimed to achieve several objectives, such as developing self-confidence, learning to face others, and building



confidence in oneself and one's abilities. Additionally, the children and teenagers rehearsed a show that they presented to the local staff and children, which delighted them. They also received the necessary supplies for the new school year.



NIGER

Raising awareness about recycling

During an educational outing, the children living in the Sentinelles reception centre in Zinder visited the project run by the waste management and recycling NGO GVD-Afrique. This organisation turns plastic waste into different products such as tiles, paving stones and latrines, which are then used in camps for internally displaced persons in the Diffa region. Other organic waste is also recycled to the complete cycle, clean up public spaces and help protect the environment and human health.

The 36 children present were very interested in the explanations given by the head of the waste treatment unit. They were genuinely curious and asked lots of questions. The whole recycling process was explained, from collection by a mobile team to the finished products. The children were made aware of the importance of not littering. They were able to testify to the abundance of plastic they see every day on their way to school.



COLOMBIA

Lina has learned to manage her emotions

Mental health is crucial for people's well-being. The World Health Organisation recommends that governments implement policies to promote mental health and improve prevention. Sentinelles assisted fourteen children and their families in Colombia last year, including Lina*, who gradually regained her self-confidence.

The Antioquia region where Sentinelles operates has adopted a policy to promote mental health. In practice, however, providing care in rural areas far from the capital remains a challenge. To address this issue, Sentinelles employs awareness-raising strategies with beneficiary families to detect children's needs early and facilitate prompt care.

According to the Pan American Health Organisation, many harmful habits develop during adolescence and youth. They can become health problems later on in life, which is why it is so crucial to prevent them during childhood.

The families we work with are dysfunctional. Acts of violence such as ill-treatment or sexual abuse frequently occur against a backdrop of insecurity triggered by low-income levels.

Put together, these factors are a flash point for difficulties such as cognitive impairment, anxiety, bouts of depression and chronic depression, attention deficit disorder or bipolar affective disorder in the children we care for.

Socialisation difficulties

At Sentinelles Centre, one in two children suffers from a mental health problem, but their families are often unaware of this. As a result, the child and their next of kin become accustomed to atypical behaviour, which they end up accepting as normal behaviour. Difficulties with socialisation, concentration, or learning are not identified as a source of suffering for the child, and therefore, consulting a doctor is never considered.

This is the case with Lina, aged 9, who has been staying at the Centre for a year. Her adoptive father being unable to look after her because of his work. Her father's partner, who has no biological relation to her, suffers from schizophrenia and mis-

treats the child. Lina was initially aggressive and spent a lot of time alone when she arrived at the Centre. Her social difficulties also caused her to become isolated at school.

Upon admission to the Centre, she received assessments from a neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, and psychologist. After the tests, she received a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and a slight cognitive deficit.

Her father has noticed progress

Once a year Lina has to go to Medellin for psychiatric treatment. At the beginning, she was very tired, isolated and had difficulty participating in the activities in the home. Gradually, she has learned to manage her emotions. Today, she can relate to a child her own age, enjoys playing with others and feels happy at the Foundation. Her father, Luis*, has noticed significant changes. She now has friends and is able to concentrate in class.

At school, despite requests from the Foundation and her doctor, the curriculum has not yet been adapted to her diagnosis. That's why we offer remedial classes at the Centre to support her so that she doesn't lose her confidence.



As for Luis, he attends workshops for parents to learn about different mental illnesses and how to support his daughter as a tutor.

In the Antioquia region, we are making great efforts to give children and families access to mental health services, but the use of these services is a source of stigma and discrimination in the community, and unfortunately, public opinion still underestimates how important they are.

In 2022, Sentinelles helped fourteen children and their families. We still face many challenges, but we are making progress daily in providing personalised support to families.

* Assumed name.

Sentinelles' **Health and access to care** theme is active on several levels in Colombia. All our intervention and monitoring plans include :

1. A visit to the doctor for a general assessment of the patient to obtain an evaluation of his or her condition.
2. Assistance with administrative formalities or with finding partners to provide psychological care for the child.
3. External talks on the impact of mental health on quality of life for children and families are held once or twice a year.



SENEGAL

From life-saving emergency to autonomy

In Senegal, we welcomed Fatou into our care programme in November 2012 when she was just 11 years old*. At the time, she was suffering from bone tuberculosis. Since then, Sentinelles has supported her on her journey towards independence. She took a sewing course and started a small cosmetics business, demonstrating exceptional resilience and courage in the face of adversity. This is her story.

Discovered by one of our staff in 2012, lying on the floor in front of our house, Fatou had two huge, deep bedsores, one on each hip. Her eyes were bright with fever and her forehead burning, she was in dire need of help. A green powder covered her wounds. Lacking sufficient financial resources, her family had sought treatment from a traditional practitioner who used natural remedies. Due to the urgency of her situation, our team decided to take her to the hospital in M'bour immediately.

A long period of treatment

Fatou received treatment for her bedsores for several weeks,

but her recovery was particularly slow. She was in and out of hospital several times. Fatou had Pott's disease, a form of tuberculosis that affected her vertebrae and deformed her spine. Over time, this deformity could affect her ribcage and hinder her breathing. The disease not only deprived her of the use of her legs but also caused incontinence. Although she was scheduled for an operation, it was too complicated to be performed in her home country. In June 2013, she was transferred to the orthopaedic department of the Geneva Children's Hospital.

After four months of treatment, her bedsores finally healed. The improvement in Fatou's health enabled the surgeons to operate on her back. They had to straighten her spine to prevent suffocation and there was a small chance of restoring the use of her legs. The operation was successful, but unfortunately, the injury was too severe, and Fatou will never walk again.

She received post-operative care at Maison de Terre des hommes Valais in Massongex. After several months of treatment, she regained her strength. She was able to return to her family in Senegal. A member of our staff accompanied her on a flight to her home country in her wheelchair. In Senegal, our local team prepared for her return. They built a small bedroom and a suitable area for Fatou to clean herself in her family home.



On the road to independence

Since Fatou's stay in Switzerland, we have remained committed to her medical care and path to independence.

She attended a cutting and sewing course for several months. After completing the course, she received a sewing machine. We also helped her set up a small business selling cosmetics and hair highlights. For a fee, she often braids the hair of local women. She has set up a small room in her home, facing the street, and thanks to these activities, Fatou is gradually becoming independent. However, her family life remains difficult as her father has completely rejected her, reproaching her for being useless. Mediation has been organized several times, but the situation remains complicated.

Recently, Fatou's life was further disrupted by two burglaries that occurred three weeks apart. During these incidents, her sales equipment was stolen, which had a significant impact on her financial resources. However, Fatou remains undeterred and perseveres in

her desire to maintain her small business, and we support her. Despite facing significant hardship and suffering in her short life, she has shown great resilience and admirable courage

An important support for Fatou

Babacar has always been a great support to his sister Fatou. In 2023, he suffered serious health problems and was diagnosed with oropharyngeal tuberculosis during a medical consultation. He underwent an operation at Fann Hospital in Dakar to improve his breathing and enable him to eat, with the help of a cannula and a stomach tube. After the operation, Babacar returned home and received regular post-operative monitoring to assess his condition's progress. Unfortunately, he developed an infection at the catheter site, which caused him unbearable pain. When all the hospitals in Dakar went on strike for several weeks, medical facilities faced numerous malfunctions.

It was only then that Babacar turned to Sentinelles for help, and a race against time began. The team was aware of the situation and attempted to organize emergency treatment, fearing that the

infection would worsen. Our mobile nurse redid the dressings every day. Time was running out, and the search for a suitable facility continued. Finally, Babacar was examined at a private clinic in M'bour, where a full check-up and abdominal ultrasound were quickly performed. The doctor advised removing the cannula and gastric tube, which were no longer needed, as Babacar was now able to eat normally.

After the operations, he was fit and smiling again. With our support, he began training in screen printing in M'bour.

Babacar's recovery was made possible by the intervention of Sentinelles and several months of faithful and rigorous monitoring by our team. His situation highlights the challenges faced by health facilities in Senegal.

***Sentinelles 232, February 2014.**



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SWITZERLAND

“I’ve regained my self-confidence”

Sentinelles is also active in Switzerland. Since 2015, it has taken on around sixty trainees in professional reintegration, in partnership with the Fondation Intégration pour Tous (IPT). Stéfanie completed an 8-month internship at Sentinelles, which ended in May 2023. She agreed to answer a few questions and give us her feedback.

Stéfanie, why did you choose to carry out your internship at Sentinelles?

Paradoxically, I didn't really have a choice to make. It would be more appropriate to say that it was the Sentinelles Foundation that chose me. In fact, I found out about it through the IPT Foundation. I was contacted very quickly; my application seems to have been looked on favourably. I enjoy meeting and interacting with

others. Empathy and kindness are essential to me and fit right in with the values of Sentinelles.

What did you gain from this experience?

There is no doubt that this internship was helpful to me. It went beyond that, however. The course has also helped me in my day-to-day life, especially following the recent birth of my baby daughter. I often have doubts, but the cross-disciplinary skills I learnt at Sentinelles, such as organisation, priority management, interpersonal skills and multi-tasking, can be used in my family life and have boosted my self-confidence.

At Sentinelles, I've met people who are incredibly sensitive and open to many different fields, like art for example. I've got a passion for painting. In fact, I held my first exhibition at the same time as I was doing my work placement.

Would you recommend this experience?

Absolutely! I would recommend Sentinelles 'with my eyes closed' to anyone who wants to rebuild their life, whatever kind of problem they might be facing. I could see myself working with the Foundation as a volunteer in the near future. I'd like to thank Sentinelles, the people who work there and my colleagues.

A successful career change

In 2015, Stéfanie began a long process of professional retraining due to a health problem. She completed her apprenticeship as a commercial employee in June 2022. She had her first long-term placement in human resources in Yverdon-les-Bains. After that, she completed an eight-month internship with the Sentinelles Foundation. Now, she is a contented young mother.

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DONATION



Bâtiment Les Cerisiers, Route de Cery 16
CH-1008 Prilly / Lausanne (Suisse)
Tél. +41 21 646 19 46
f @sentinellesfondation
info@sentinelles.org, www.sentinelles.org

Banque cantonale vaudoise, 1001 Lausanne: BIC/SWIFT BCVLCH2LXXX
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