

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week: Bringing Global Expertise on Caring for Foster Children to British Columbia**

**Surrey, British Columbia** Do the scars left beneath the tears ever really fade? It is clear that every child that enters the provincial foster care system has been traumatized. Some arrive on the doorstep of a foster home with only a bag of belongings, within the shadows of a rainy Vancouver night. Their family has fallen apart, and no doubt they have been through tumultuous times up to this point. But entering the child welfare system is sadly only the beginning. **With B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week in full swing, it is suitable to reflect on the bona fide hope of a better system that takes best practices from around the globe and heals the scars beneath the tears.**

SOS Children's Village B.C., a charity supporting foster children and youth in need, recently sent executive director Douglas Dunn and village director Kistie Singh to the **SOS Children's Villages EUNA (Europe North America) Program Conference** in Berlin. "It was a gathering of child development program leaders representing 36 national SOS Children's Villages organizations," explained Kistie Singh.

Douglas and Kistie had much to reflect on after the conference, on the flight back from Germany. In Europe, the social support system is far better funded and considered a vital part of every country's structure. For example, in Finland foster homes have a full-time caregiver caring for three to five children – much like in B.C. – however, they also have five to seven full-time staff supporting **each** home. Lithuania was in attendance and described their battle to move from the communist-era same age, same sex 'orphan warehouses' to the exact model that SOS B.C. is moving towards: professional caregivers in a foster home structure.

**For the most part, the European programs are funded and staffed at a level we could only dream of here in British Columbia.** And being part of the world's largest child development organization and working in national government-funded social structures, they are simply looking to supplement, add on, or refine their systems. They are in the heart of a huge system and things are calm and carrying on. The rate of children in care across the European Union is approximately 1 child per 1,000.

**The time had come for British Columbia to crash the party.** Douglas and Kistie explained our province's gloomy foster care situation to the conference attendees: approximately 8 children per 1,000 in care, the huge percentage of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care (a vestige of the Canadian Residential School System), the abysmal high school graduation rates, the high level of involvement in crime, the frequent homelessness after aging out of care, and the legacy of insufficient government funding.

**The attendees were shocked.**

Next, Douglas and Kistie outlined SOS Children's Village B.C.'s plans to use the best practices of the SOS model of care to inspire indubitable change within the B.C. foster care system.

**“With the collective knowledge and experience of over 65 years in child development, and with the support of leaders of the incredible EUNA programs, we at SOS B.C. will work tirelessly towards a positive future for our province’s child care system,”** said Douglas Dunn. “We envision a system that will heal the scars and tears of foster children and youth, giving them the same opportunity as other children in B.C. to become productive members of society.”

Proving the adage that scars never fade, Douglas fondly recalls when a young woman came in to the office to make a donation in her boyfriend's name: “You see, **she had not known that he had been a foster child** until they happened to read an article in the Cloverdale Reporter about our donation drive for youth aging out of care, which evoked a very strong emotional reaction from him. She knew that helping youth in need, instead of just getting him another present, would be something that would bring him far more happiness.”

**About SOS Children's Village BC**

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization and cares for fostered, orphaned, or abandoned children. It has existed for over 65 years with presence in 134 countries and 572 Villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides homes, a supportive community, and programs to help foster children and youth in need grow into caring, self-reliant adults.

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**For more information please contact:**

William Brennan, Manager of Communications  
SOS Children's Village BC  
T: (604) 574-2964 ext. 104  
E: [williambrennan@sosbc.org](mailto:williambrennan@sosbc.org) Web: [www.sosbc.org](http://www.sosbc.org)

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