

# SOS-WISE YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

Steele Family Foundation | August 2021 – June 2023



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
CANADA

[soschildrensvillages.ca](https://soschildrensvillages.ca)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincere gratitude goes to all who contributed to making the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program a successful pilot initiative.

We would like to particularly thank the Steele Family Foundation for their financial and technical support towards the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program.

Thank you to our new partner, the Head of State Award Scheme – a member of the Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award – for their significant contributions toward enhancing the project activities and empowerment of youth.

We send a sincere thank you to Eliz Dadson, Principle of the Hermann Gmeiner International College, along with the staff and Scholarship Administrator of the Hermann Gmeiner International College, for your ongoing support to this initiative.

Finally, we thank the students at the Hermann Gmeiner International College for their participation, engagement and enthusiasm throughout this project. We congratulate you all on your success and future endeavours.

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## MESSAGE FROM SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES CANADA CEO, THOMAS BAUER

Despite being accepted to prominent universities, youth\* from vulnerable backgrounds often must decline post-secondary opportunities because of lack of financial assistance. SOS Children's Villages Canada in partnership with the Steele Family Foundation, The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, and the Hermann Gmeiner International College, came together to pilot a new scholarship program to enable these youth to pursue their post-secondary education at leading African Universities. This pilot project aimed to empower two cohorts of graduating students who have demonstrated leadership and active involvement in their community to take the next step in their education while becoming well-rounded global citizens.

Between 2021–2023, the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program supported 63 underprivileged youth with career guidance, educational assistance and opportunities for skills development. The initiative facilitated interactions with professionals and leading African Universities, while also encouraging participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. Results include 60 students graduating high school with post-secondary scholarships, the execution of several successful career fairs, and the establishment of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award at Hermann Gmeiner International College. The program's intensive support contributed to 6,556 hours of extracurricular activities completed and empowered 25 girls and 38 boys to develop essential life skills.

We send our sincere congratulations to all the exceptional students graduating from SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International College. As they embark on the next steps of their life journey, we relish seeing them further evolve into well-rounded global citizens and witnessing the impacts of their successes and the ripple effects within their families and communities.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed partners including the Steele Family Foundation, the Hermann Gmeiner International College and the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award whose unwavering financial, technical and administrative support has been instrumental in the success of the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program. Your collaborative efforts have truly made a significant impact and we are immensely grateful for the trust and synergy that defines our partnership. Together, we have achieved remarkable milestones and your dedication to our shared goals is deeply appreciated. As we reflect on our accomplishments, we look forward to continuing this journey of growth and innovation together. Thank you for being an integral part of our success.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Thomas Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Thomas Bauer  
President and CEO  
SOS Children's Villages Canada

\*Youth featured in this report, and their caregivers, have given permission for their images and stories to be shared.

## ABOUT SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES CANADA



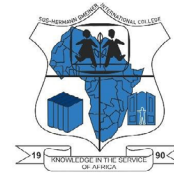
SOS Children's Villages Canada was founded in 1969 by Chief Justice Emmett Hall, The Right Honourable Jeanne Sauvé, Former Attorney General Otto Lang, and former Chair of the Canadian Human Rights Commission Gordon Fairweather. We are an independent, non-governmental and non-denominational organization, as well

as a registered charity in Canada (Charity Registration Number 13824 7259 RR0001) with headquarters in Ottawa.

For over 70 years, SOS Children's Villages Canada has helped make families and communities safer for vulnerable children while expanding access to quality education, primary health care, mental health and psychosocial support, and youth employment programming. Working in Canada and overseas, we provide humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and families in need. In partnership with families, local communities, governments and international agencies, we take a holistic child-centred approach to help children, families and communities succeed in the long term. We strengthen families to prevent child abandonment, provide loving homes for children and youth who lack parental care, educate and empower children to reach their full potential, and advocate for children's rights so their voices can be heard.

We are a member of the SOS Children's Villages International Federation. Each year, over two million girls, boys, women and men in over 130 countries and territories are supported by the Federation. SOS Children's Villages has received and been nominated for numerous awards, including the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the "Women of the World" Award and 16 Nobel Prize nominations.

## ABOUT THE HERMANN GMEINER INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE



In 1990, SOS Children's Villages established the Hermann Gmeiner International College (HGIC) in Tema, Ghana, as a centre for academic excellence. The mission of this secondary school is to provide vulnerable children who grew up in SOS Children's Villages programs across Africa (SOS Children's Village family-like care, or Family Strengthening Programs) with the highest quality education in the spirit of Pan-Africanism. By providing a holistic education, the HGIC aims to help students develop into confident and resilient adults who can thrive in our fast-paced and rapidly changing world. Students are instilled with critical and analytical thinking skills and encouraged to become life-long learners and leaders in their community.

The HGIC brings together more than 300 secondary school students from more than 12 African nations, namely Burundi, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The school offers both, an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (for students aged 11-16) and an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (for students aged 16-19). The students live full-time on the campus in the student hostels and return home to their families every summer.

## ABOUT THE SOS-WISE YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



The SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program was a transformative two-year pilot project initiated by SOS Children's Villages Canada and the Steele Family Foundation in partnership with the Hermann Gmeiner International College and the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. Our program aimed at empowering youth through career and guidance counselling and skills development opportunities to ensure they have a better chance at pursuing post-secondary education through potential scholarship opportunities across the African continent.



The SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program was an opportunity to pilot the WISE Youth Empowerment Program Portal. This portal was developed by the Steele Family Foundation and utilized an 'earn to learn' approach where a student's potential to earn a scholarship was based on a points system. Students earned points on a three-part balanced system that included points for academics, hours contributed towards extra-curricular activities and non-formal educational experiences such as The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award levels. This was also complimented with reference letters and a personal essay from students. All the pieces contributed to a participant's potential dollars earned for a scholarship.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program, funded by the Steele Family Foundation, was launched in August 2021 to benefit students at the SOS Herman Gmeiner International College (HGIC) who lack access to sufficient resources to attend post-secondary education. The 24-month pilot program ended in June 2023 with the graduation of the second cohort enrolled in the program; it specifically targeted youth who grew up supported by SOS Children's Villages programming across Africa.

63 students participated in the program including 25 girls and 38 boys. 60 of them (95%) secured scholarships for post-secondary educations following their graduation from the HGIC. The program made it possible for exceptional vulnerable youth to pursue their education and dreams post their graduation from secondary school.

Through this program, students had access to a scholarship administrator who supported them with career guidance, selecting universities and the application processes, and organized activities such as university fairs showcasing different careers or universities. Additionally, participants in the second year of the program were encouraged to enroll in the Head of State Award, the Ghanaian branch of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award which supports youth empowerment and skills development.

Through these various personal development activities and coaching, program participants were empowered to take control of their future, make wise choices regarding their career path, prepare for the next chapter of their education, and become well-rounded global citizens who give back to their community.

### Summary of key results achieved:

- 63 students (25 girls and 38 boys) aged 17–20 benefitted from the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program.
- 60 out of 63 students enrolled in the program graduated successfully and secured a scholarship for post-secondary education.
- A career fair was hosted at the HGIC in November 2022 which showcased various professions that were of interest to the students, such as Dentistry, Engineering, Architecture, Nursing, Finance and Marketing.
- The first 'Why Study in Africa' Fair was coordinated by the scholarship administrator and hosted at the HGIC in April 2022. This fair was followed by two more "Why Study in Africa" fairs in 2023.
- The scholarship administrator spent approximately 20 hours a week conducting one-on-one meetings with students to provide them with career and school counselling.
- 6,556 hours of extracurricular activities were completed by participants.
- 25 students (nine girls and 16 boys) completed the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award with 17 achieving Bronze level award and 14 (including nine girls) achieving both Bronze and Silver level awards.



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

SOS Children's Villages Canada, in partnership with the Steele Family Foundation, designed the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program to enable these youth to pursue their post-secondary education at leading African Universities. The project aimed to empower underprivileged students, who have demonstrated leadership and active involvement in their community, to take the next step in their education.

The program scholarship administrator played a leading role in implementing a multitude of activities for participants and worked closely with each student to guide them towards a successful future.

### Key program activities included:

- Provision of career guidance and counselling to students;
- Support to students in identifying and applying to universities;
- Support to students in securing scholarships for post-secondary education;
- Support to students who wish to develop their life-skills through extra-curricular activities;
- Support to students who wish to contribute to their local community through community service;
- Support to students who wish to develop their personal skills through the Duke of Edinburg's International Award program; and
- Testing of the WISE portal where students' data (academic grades, extra-curricular achievements, etc.) is kept and compiled.

# PROJECT RESULTS

## 1. Providing career guidance and counselling

**Career Exploration Sessions:** The scholarship administrator organized Career Exploration Sessions for students after regular school hours. These sessions were designed to promote both inspiring and practical career knowledge for students, wherein professionals from varying industries shared their roles and responsibilities, career advice and gave the students an opportunity to speak about their career aspirations and how to pursue their passions. These professionals were selected based on the industries of interest to the students, including medicine (cardiology & research), biomedical engineering/biochemistry, computer engineering, product design, economics, entrepreneurship, environmental management, finance, risk analysis and law.

**Career Guidance:** In preparation for university, students were assisted by the scholarship administrator to select their high school classes in alignment with their career aspirations. The scholarship administrator carefully considered the various goals of students, their interests and strengths, and then researched institutions that align with these factors. Career guidance sessions were done in groups and through one-on-one sessions. Four one-hour blocks were available every day for students to sign up to meet the scholarship administrator. Students typically met with the administrator at least once a month over the school year. These sessions helped the scholarship administrator to learn more about the students' interests and enabled them to talk comfortably about their goals with the scholarship administrator. Together, the scholarship administrator and each student created their personalized goals and strategies regarding academics and personal development. In collaboration with the HGIC Counselling Department, the students were also given access to Time Management & Effective Planning sessions after these skills were identified to be lacking among many students.

**Career Fair:** In 2022, the scholarship administrator along with the HGIC coordinated a Career Fair for students. The primary goal of the fair was to provide students with an opportunity to explore a multitude of career options and connect with professionals possessing valuable knowledge and perspectives.

**“We strongly encourage students to consider not only the technical skills required for specific careers, but also the mindset and attitudes that can be beneficial. In this year’s edition, we conducted interactive sessions with students to shed light on various pathways that have a positive impact on our communities. The ultimate objective was to inspire students to actively contribute to Africa’s development and transformation.”**

**– Beatrice Agyekum,  
Scholarship Administrator**



**GRIT ‘The Final Push’:** In February 2023, the scholarship administrator and HGIC guidance counsellor invited a motivational speaker, Dr. Yaw Perbi to address the graduating class and encourage the students to continue their efforts as they enter their exams. This activity was helpful to many students who were feeling overwhelmed in their final semester of school and inspired them to make the ‘final push’ towards graduation. The motivational speaker provided a beacon of hope, helping students believe in themselves, set meaningful goals and navigate their journeys toward success and fulfillment.

## 1. Supporting students with university selection and application processes

Navigating the university selection and application processes is a pivotal step in shaping one's academic and professional journey, and was a crucial component of the program. To support students in selecting a university, the scholarship administrator organized three ‘Study in Africa’ fairs for the students to learn about universities available to them in Africa. These events, both in person and virtual, were about 2.5 hours long and showcased universities such as Academic City, Accra College of Medicine, African Leadership University, Ashesi University, Central University, Lancaster University, University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana and Webster University.

The third Career Fair was fully virtual and showcased multiple universities, including Botho University, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Middlesex University (Mauritius), University of Pretoria and

“I found the ‘Study in Africa’ Fair very insightful and worthwhile while I also got the chance to ask questions to the representatives of the universities that I had already applied to, i.e., Ashesi and Middlesex, University of Mauritius. I was able to engage with the representatives about their university’s application portals and got first hand clarifications which was very helpful for me. For me, it was more than a pleasure, seeing what I perceived as a small idea coming to life and seeing it benefiting more generations of SOS-HGIC students. With a grand total of 10 universities around the continent joining the first ever ‘Why Study in Africa’ Fair, it was a success and I have hope that more and more universities will join the fair next year. The Fair will take bigger steps in ensuring that students acquire perpetual excellent education in Africa’s finest universities while upholding the School’s motto ‘Knowledge in the Service of Africa’.”

– *Program Participant,  
HGIC Graduate, 2022*

United States International University (Kenya). These university fairs contributed to encouraging students to consider high-quality universities in Africa; all the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program participants were enthusiastic at the idea of applying to a university in Africa.

Once potential universities were identified by students, the scholarship administrator guided students through the application process, including crafting compelling personal statements, gathering recommendation letters, meeting deadlines, etc.

The scholarship administrator also organized an alumni session, where HGIC alumni shared their insights on life post SOS HGIC and anticipated challenges, while emphasizing the value of higher education and the imperative of diligent effort to secure scholarships in pursuit of their aspirations. This was key in preparing the youth for their next step and building connections between current and past HGIC students.



### 3. Ensuring academic excellence

Good academic standing is a key component of the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program as it demonstrates a student's commitment to learning and excellence. Grades not only provide a tangible representation of a student's hard work, dedication and mastery of the material, but also open doors to various opportunities, such as scholarships, internships and advanced educational pathways. Students enrolled in the program had to commit to focusing on their studies and were supported by the scholarship administrator to identify their academic strengths and necessary improvements. This was key in developing an academic plan that aligns with the students' post-secondary goals.

This support made it possible for students to improve their grades and graduate with a high average, thus boosting their chances of securing a scholarship. For example, in 2023, nearly half of the participants achieved grades higher than 80% in their main courses (nine students scored over 80%, and four achieved over 90%). Considering that the program participants come from challenging backgrounds and had often missed years of early education prior to high school or had limited English skills, these academic grades reflect their hard work and commitment to education.

### 4. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities

The HGIC offered a variety of extra-curriculars in their top tier facilities, and since program participants lived on the campus, the school organized such activities over the weekends. These included sports tournaments and friendly hostel competitions between different

youth groups living in the hostels, such as singing or swimming. Engagement in extra-curricular activities was crucial to ensure students receive a well-rounded education beyond the classroom, develop teamwork skills and explore their interests outside of academics. These experiences also taught the students about time management and shouldering responsibilities as they learned to balance their academic commitments with their passions. Furthermore, involvement in extra-curricular activities can greatly enrich a student's college application, showcasing their diverse talents and demonstrating their dedication to holistic personal development.



Other program participants were part of athletic teams or campus clubs. For example, program participants included members and captains of the swimming team, and members of the basketball, tennis, track and soccer teams. Several WISE scholars were also active members in their school clubs, following their passions in areas such as the Model UN, robotics club, modern languages clubs and chess club.

The top program participants cumulatively completed 6,556 hours in extra-curricular activities. The average program participant put in 96 hours of extra-curricular activities per year. Several students completed between 500 to 1,000 hours of community and extra-curricular participation during their four years of secondary school studies.

## **5. Opportunities for community service**

The scholarship administrator encouraged students to give back to their community by doing volunteer work. As students typically go back home during the summer break, some of their community service took place away from the HGIC. Some of the activities favoured by participants included volunteering at the local health clinic, helping children living in an SOS Children's Village with their homework, volunteering to file documents with the SOS Children's Village administration team, tutoring children in learning English over the summer, etc. During the school year, some students benefitted from volunteering opportunities organized by the HGIC such as planning school fundraisers for varying causes such as breast cancer and raising funds for children's school supplies at local primary schools in Tema, Ghana.

Contributions to the community provided participants with a sense of pride and accomplishment. It also encouraged them to build connections and become responsible members of their communities.

## THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S INTERNATIONAL AWARD (DofE)



In the second year of the program, the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program partnered with the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (DofE) and introduced the award program as an additional component of the scholarship program. This was the first time the DofE was implemented at the HGIC and it was an exciting new partnership for all parties, especially for the students who otherwise might not be able to get the opportunity to participate in outdoor leadership excursions.

As part of the requirements to receive this internationally recognized award, students completed a series of personal development activities that aimed to improve their fitness and lifestyle for good mental and physical well-being, expose them to outdoor challenges with their peers, learn valuable practical and social skills for career development, and make a positive impact on the lives of others through community service.

Between January and April 2023, 26 students enrolled in a 'super-charged' version of the DofE program. This meant participants had the chance to earn their Silver and Bronze medals in a shorter amount of time than usual (approximately 20 weeks as opposed to the regular 78 weeks). The DofE coordinator, with the support of the scholarship administrator, organized activities during the school's last semester. This included a Trial Adventure Journey and a Final Adventure, a prerequisite to earn both Silver and Bronze award levels.



The Trial Adventure Journey consisted of a visit to the Shai Hills Forest Reserve in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana where students hiked in the reserve and learned about the history of the area. The Final Adventure consisted of a two-day overnight adventure to Trident Island where students developed basic camping skills and went kayaking and hiking.

Achieving the DofE award required commitment, a spirit of adventure, wise decision-making and goal setting. The students demonstrated excellence by displaying resilience in overcoming challenges, hard work, and perseverance in going beyond their comfort zone.

In celebration of the success of the students who completed the DofE program, an award ceremony was held in June 2023 at the Aliisa Hotel in Ghana. The event was held in the presence of students' families, including their caregivers from their SOS Villages, and representatives of the HGIC and DofE. Students received a certificate acknowledging their award level achieved. 25 students (nine girls and 16 boys) completed the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program, of which 17 completed their Bronze level, and 14 completed both Bronze and Silver levels.

**“The DofE program challenged me to be independent in my learning. I decided on video editing as my ideal skill to develop, and through the DofE I was pushed to be more motivated to set aside time for myself to learn this skill more fully. I learn so much in school but learning new skills such as leadership and communication with others through the DofE adventure was meaningful”.**

**– Ahmed,  
Program Participant**



## TESTING OF THE WISE PORTAL

One of the key features of the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program was utilizing technology to capture the grades, extra-curricular activities, tracking skills development and letters of reference all in one place so that students could see their progress towards potentially achieving a scholarship.

In the first year of the program, while the WISE Portal was in development phase, students used the WISE JotForm Application to submit their applications for WISE scholarship along with official documentation of their grades and letters of reference.

In the second year, the scholarship administrator manually input student data in the WISE Portal, including their grades, extra-curricular hours and letters of reference. The portal assigned points to their grades and hours of extra-curricular activities, which supported the selection of students eligible for scholarships.

The testing of the WISE Portal was a good learning opportunity for SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program implementors to learn how the students and scholarship administrator could use and perfect the portal and highlight the importance of validating the data input by students.



## LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program pilot implementation will be kept in mind to improve future iterations of the program.

### These include:

- Program participants should upload their own data to the WISE Portal, to be reviewed by a scholarship administrator. This will encourage ownership and accountability for the students, and ensure the administrative burden is reduced when a large number of students are enrolled in the program;
- For the most successful students with exceptional grades and ambition, it is recommended to be open to supporting their transition to universities outside of Africa and therefore allow for a few international scholarships to be part of the program;
- A multi-year program of a minimum of four years would be beneficial to ensure that students are enrolled at an earlier age and are engaging with the portal over several years; and
- Scholarship administrative staff should be hired early in the project's formulation phase, prior to the launch of the program. This person must have a deep understanding of the program and should be part of the planning done ahead of working with students.

## CONCLUSION

The project achieved notable results with 95% of program participants (60 out of 63) receiving scholarships for post-secondary education and 100% reporting positively on the impact the DofE program on their personal development.

Notably, all 30 students in the 2023 cohort were granted the esteemed Global Scholarship from Hermann Gmeiner Fonds Deutschland supporting their journey towards post-secondary education and a bright future.

The 'Study in Africa' Fair that took place at the HGIC also successfully enhanced awareness of diverse higher education opportunities within Africa, promoting the idea of investing in African institutions and highlighting the importance for students to give back to their homeland. Furthermore, the DofE program provided students with invaluable opportunities that fostered self-confidence and enabled them to assume leadership roles. The involvement of a scholarship administrator played a vital role in the development of students' career plans, as they received guidance and support through career exploration sessions, a Career Day event and personalized consultations with professionals. The Career Fairs and one-on-one meetings with professionals facilitated advantageous connections between the students and potential career pathways.

Overall, the SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program successfully fulfilled its objectives of providing support and resources for the educational and personal development of these vulnerable students. This pilot program has been an insightful learning experience for SOS Children's Villages Canada to move forward with future WISE Scholarship initiatives. We thank all our partners for their cooperation in bringing this project's vision to fruition, and for the positive impacts they have helped create for the students.

**“By providing them with access to hands-on workshops, mentorship and exposure to targeted counselling support from Ms. Beatrice Agyekum-Amfo (Scholarship Administrator), they have been able to grow. The support from the WISE program has ignited their passion and curiosity, encouraging them to explore new horizons and pursue careers that they were not considering initially.”**

**– Eliz Dadson,  
Principal of HGIC**

## The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (Head of State Award) | SOS-WISE Youth Scholarship Program



The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is a prestigious program that comes with a lot of benefits to develop the young people participating in the program. It is divided into three award levels of Bronze, Silver and Gold. Each level is broken into four sections, namely Physical, Skills, Service and Adventurous journey.

Since I started the Duke of Edinburgh Head of State Award, I have been able to pick up a lot of experiences, which have been transformative and very significant. Participating

in the award has allowed me to explore outside my comfort zone. I polished up my leadership skills, played my favourite sport, football for physical recreation, performed hostel chores for service and undertook a hiking challenge for my adventurous journey and embarked on a three-day camping in the wilderness over the semester break. I have been able to exercise self-management and organizational skills to keep up with these activities while also finding time for my academics.

Furthermore, the DofE has encouraged me to take on challenges and become a risk-taker, developing valuable skills such as leadership, responsibility, teamwork and resilience, which I can apply to all areas of my life. These life-changing experiences have helped me reach closer to my full potential and make positive impacts on my community, developing a creative and appreciative mind.

Finally, the DofE is highly regarded by universities since completing this program demonstrates a commitment to personal and professional development and willingness to take on challenges, therefore, completing this program exposes me to a variety of opportunities.

**– Solomon O. Edatu, SOS Hermann Gmeiner International College**



**Thank you for your support!**



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