

HAPPY Child International was founded in 1993 by a Surrey mother who visited Brazil after hearing terrible stories about the plight of poor children there. Since then thousands of youngsters have been rescued from life on the country's streets or in slums, as **Monica Gibson** reports.

Dedicated to saving lives



HAPPY CHILDREN: Founder of Happy Child, Sarah de Carvalho, with children in safe house in Brazil which help youngsters get away from dangerous lives on the streets

SARAH de Carvalho, from Effingham, visited Brazil in 1991 after hearing about children being killed by gangs.

Seeing the plight of young people first hand, she left her promising media career and spent ten years living in the Brazil, working tirelessly to help get children off the street and out of danger.

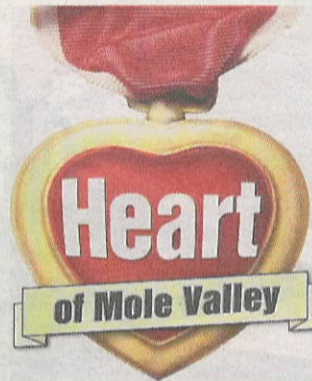
Mrs de Carvalho, 49, said: "I felt such conviction when I heard about what was going on out there that I had to do something.

"I was only expecting to spend a short time but I became so involved I had to keep helping."

Since 1993 Happy Child has rescued more than 8,500 children from an uncertain and dangerous life on the streets.

The charity now has nine safe houses in the city of Belo Horizonte with accommodation and care for children, including a farm community.

Mrs de Carvalho said: "We have opened a second city mission in Recife where child homelessness and prostitution are acute.



"I visit our projects and see children who have been completely transformed and given a chance for their futures. I feel proud of the work that our charity is doing.

"Our goal is to continue to help kids in other areas of Brazil."

Mrs de Carvalho returned to the UK to help raise awareness and now arranges fundraising events from offices in Leather-

head. She added: "The safe houses now have been set up but of course need to be run properly. I have come back to the hope that people here can make a difference.

"We hold an array of events to raise the charity profile and also have partnerships with local schools."

Last month the charity reported on SLUMBER PARTY event where children spent a night in a makeshift slum in Shropshire as part of the cause.

Happy Child also has teams from the UK to go to offer practical support.

Joe Swales, 22, from Mole Valley said: "I spent two months in Belo Horizonte working in the safe houses.

"One of the most interesting things I saw was a six-year-old walking around the street with a gun.

"With the help of Happy Child that girl has the chance of a better future and hopefully there will be many more like her."