

Newsletter

2015-2016



DIRECTORS MESSAGE



'Service is the rent you pay towards mother earth' – Pearl Stephen

Another year has gone by so fast and I cannot believe that we have already come to the end of 2016. When I recall the events of the year there have been many ups and downs, but I'm happy to say that there are more 'ups' than 'downs'.

It warms my heart to see the lives we have changed and the influence that WDC has had within society throughout its 30-year journey. We have united and brought together many groups, challenged many obstacles faced throughout the past year and overcome them triumphantly. I'm grateful to the many donors, volunteers, well-wishers, the WDC board and the relentless work of the staff and affiliated networks who have supported us throughout the years. The services rendered would not have been possible if not for them.

Some of the notable achievements of this year were the restructuring of the WDC and looking back into its core values, the drafting of a five-year strategic plan, which provides a comprehensive direction towards achieving our organisational goal, and celebrating 30 years of service rendered through the WDC, seeing how far the organisation has come since its inception in 1986.

The vision of creating a dignified society for the marginalized through a holistic approach is quite a challenging feat, but it is one that is reflected through all of our work. WDC as an organisation strives to create a society where women take leadership roles empowering them to become active change-makers for the betterment of society. The woman is the core of the family unit with the capacity to multi task, manage the household and make decisions within the family. If a woman has the ability to endure the burden of the family she possesses the ability to endure the world.

Therefore it is important that women are given a voice to take a stand in striving for equality and justice. WDC is just one drop of water in the ocean but with its networks and links I believe that together we could fill an ocean. By creating synergies at different levels and collaborating with one another we can bring the change we want to see. Therefore, within the coming years we will be focusing on strengthening these ties in order to create a greater impact within the country and eventually the world. In isolation change cannot be achievable but with joint hands change becomes a possibility. As citizens, as decision makers it is our responsibility to plant the seed of unity at its core. To achieve change we have to be willing to change ourselves before imposing change on others. We need to become examples for others and the WDC as a whole will work towards becoming the change we want to see.

“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.”

- Diane Mariechild

A woman is indeed a full circle. She has the power to create, nurture and transform the lives of many. Being a Women's initiative, the Women's Development Centre has proven time and time again that together we can make a difference. A woman is capable of being a pillar that guides society to attain a better living condition. Thus, WDC identifies the critical dilemmas faced by women and children such as gender based violence, discrimination of children and individuals with disabilities, lack of shelter and rehabilitation for sexually abused girls and women, and effects of war. To make a larger impact and to develop as a sustainable organization, WDC constructed a strategic plan to be achieved by the year 2020. The goals of the strategic plan focus upon capacity building, the expansion of WDC to all districts of the island, the mobilization of local resources to implement projects, working with communities for change to create a platform for knowledge action and influence, improving conditions and capabilities of the differently abled, crisis intervention and social reintegration, establishing stable fundraising strategies, establishing effective communication and networking mechanisms, developing model training centres, initiating and implementing a performance management systems, and creating evidence based research mechanisms for national/international level policy reforms.

This issue concentrates upon how WDC has contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), set out by the United Nations in 2015. Since the end of the 30-year civil war, Sri Lanka is focusing on long term strategic and structural development challenges that would enable a smooth transition for a better tomorrow.

Compared to other countries in the region, Sri Lanka has a better living environment attributed to the simplicity of its citizens. However, there are many problems faced due to discrimination, inequality, bias, and prejudice as well as injustice to the environment and unplanned development both internally and externally. In the year 2014, a document was drafted as a collective effort of countries belonging to the United Nations to help guide global effort to ensure people around the world live better without damaging the planet: The Sustainable Development Goals. 17 goals and 168 indicators finalized in the year 2015 where countries strive to achieve by the year 2030.

This year, WDC has made much progress and has provided its services in many different sectors. This issue of the newsletter brings forth the celebration of 30 years since the inception of the organization, including contributions from the Network of Women (NOW), Community Development programme (CD), Community Based Rehabilitation programme (CBR), and Crisis Intervention centre (CI). This year we were able to make significant changes in the financial enterprise of WDC: “Sthree”, with the assistance of international volunteers. WDC opened its doors to many international volunteers this year, providing them with valuable international experience and providing WDC with many varying perspectives.

As you read this year's newsletter, concentrate on how our work as an organization has contributed towards the sustainability and development of the country, which in turn ensures people in Sri Lanka as well as around the globe have better lives and a better future. “The power for creating a better future is contained in the present moment: You create a good future by creating a good present.”



Women in the forefront

The WDC experienced another challenging year in 2016, offering an opportunity to work as a team. We are pleased to have accomplished our mission, overcoming a range of fluctuating situations. A sense of fulfillment abides in our team comprising of the director, staff, women's forum members in the grassroots level and volunteer workers, that we as women leaders could ascertain our strength to secure the rights of persons subject to social injustice. Linking with government and non-governmental organisations allowed us to expand our services and conduct activities in varied aspects. The special project 'Building Peace and Governance through Participation of Women with and without Disabilities in Sri Lanka' is an integrated undertaking done with Handicap International to promote leadership of women with disabilities as well as increase participation of women in a post-war era to work towards sustainable peace. The fellowship among the women's groups of Killinochchi and Kandy has initiated steps in fostering trust between women of the North who survived warfare and women of the South. It epitomizes the collective need of women of one nation to work together.

WDC had the opportunity to contribute to the future planning of the country by drawing the attention of the policy makers to consider the rights of persons with disabilities, to resolve language barriers so that all citizens can access state services without discrimination, to give priority with appropriate fund allocation to address issues of women and children subject to gender based violence, and to increase the possibility for women to participate in active politics.

As an organization, we strived to take advantage of all opportunities to secure the rights of our stakeholders or target communities within the fluctuating socio-economic and political conditions of the country. Numerous issues could be addressed through our efforts by sensitising the relevant authorities. WDC's vision is for these endeavors to bear fruit as long term outcomes for the society.

Our journey ahead is destined far, yet in retrospect, the accomplishments and blessings received amidst many obstacles is our strength for the future.

W.L.A.D. Chandrathilaka
Deputy Coordinator – WDC



Nothing to hold them back

Nethmi, a child with Down's syndrome, speech pronuity Based Rehabilitation Centre a few years ago. Her father is a labourer with daily wages and her mother, a housewife. Their house is made of wattle-and-daub for which electricity has been provided by the government.blems, under-developed motor skills, behavioural problems and reduced social skills, was introduced to our CBR programme.

We made the parents aware at our first visit that Nethmi and her sister should not be isolated in a house and that they can be educated and rehabilitated. At the special education unit of Ulapne, following the rehabilitation activities we were able to develop her sports skills, performance skills and social skills. She won 1st place at the annual sports meet, running event and interacts well with others. She has developed her educational skills in basic numeracy and literacy.

Speech therapy has improved her pronunciation as she has learnt to articulate words and now speaks two-word sentences in Sinhala such as going home, eating rice, crying sister etc. She is able to colour an object within the outline, and identify/describe the object fairly well such as a butterfly, house, flower, square, triangle etc. She manages all her daily living tasks on her own. She is very methodical – washes her hands before meals, wears another garment over her clothes to prevent soiling, keeps her bottle of water at hand, and

spreads a table mat/cloth before starting her meal. She is also keen to help others do things neatly. She likes to imitate the teacher – telling children to sit in a circle, applying honey on their lips for speech therapy, among other things.

Nethmi had a deformity in her leg and was referred to the Centre for Handicapped (CFH - an NGO working with physically disabled persons). After the therapeutic and corrective exercises done at this Centre her leg has improved; her mother has also been instructed to continue exercises at home. Initially Nethmi's mother was illiterate with very little educational exposure. However, she has recently been taught by one of our officers to write her signature. While this may be a very small step towards being literate, it has allowed her to sign documents which led to receiving government incentives.

We mediated with the village government officer (Grama Niladari) and Divisional Secretariat requesting for a suitable plot of land for this family to build a small house. While the house only had one room at the beginning, Nethmi's mother has been able to save enough to build a second room using raw mud bricks. These savings are also inclusive of travel allowance provided to her by KNH. Furthermore, the KNH sponsorship has allowed one of our WDC officers to provide the family with tin sheets for the second room. Looking back today Nethmi's mother is so proud and happy about her children and their achievements.



For an Eco Friendly WDC

Humans are consumers, and in our daily lives produce a lot of waste. Most of us don't even realize our own impact on the planet, but you can't change what you don't know, and so things rarely change without intervention. I have been interested in this idea for my entire life, and have dedicated my years in university to learning as much about it as I could. That is what brought me to Sri Lanka and WDC. I am still a student of International Development, who specializes in Environmental Impact Assessment and Urban Planning. I was given the great opportunity to volunteer at WDC for 8 months, to bring an outsider's perspective to the organization's operations and the environmental impact they might have.

Bringing an environmental focus to an organization that has never worked in the field of environmental justice before is a huge challenge, especially when the organization is so busy with its social justice projects. I have been very privileged, therefore, to have had the full support of Ms. Sashi, Ms. Chandrathilaka, and the rest of the WDC staff. Following the example set by Eco-Friendly Volunteers (Eco-V), a Sri Lankan organization, I have been performing small environmental assessments at WDC's main facilities and making recommendations on how we could improve our scores in areas ranging from electricity bill to waste management. Our first steps together are to conduct trainings in partnership with Eco-V, to bring about awareness of conscious consumerism. Then we will start with small composting projects at WDC's main office and the shelter, using the food waste and paper waste we already produce to make a natural fertilizer for the gardens surrounding the facilities. I also plan to work with the girls living at the shelter and start a larger-scale gardening project as a form of rehabilitation and income generation. The aim of this project is not only to save money and the planet, but also to promote awareness of consumption patterns and build capacity so that our practices at WDC can eventually spread to the community.

This project has given me the opportunity to get to know WDC staff at all the different facilities and really get to know Sri Lankan culture. I am grateful to WDC for allowing me to join the team and I look forward to the work we can do together over the next months!

**Linneah Tovstiga
Volunteer (Canada)**

Various forms of counselling services are available to clients at WDC, in order to assist them in overcoming the adversities that they face. The centre provides family counselling, marital counselling, grief counselling and support for psychological and psychotic issues. Counselling efforts often take a holistic approach as we realize that many of the mental struggles facing individuals and families are also connected issues of housing, education and unemployment. The table below provides statistical information on the number of clients who have obtained various forms of counselling services from our centre during the year 2015-2016.

	Family Counselling	Marital Counselling	Psychotic	Psychological	Other Problems
2015	40	18	06	21	15
2016	60	14	09	19	25

WDC's family counselling services works to encourage communication between family members and brings them together to work through issues they may be facing in their relationships. Counselors work with clients to help identify the specific problems they may be facing. Some of the problems which have been identified include, distrust, extramarital affairs, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence and financial complications. Such problems often result in issues such as anxiety, stress, eating and sleeping disorders and reduced concentration. The intervention of counselling services in these situations works to produce changes in thought and behavior, build communication and listening skills and find alternative opportunities.

One of WDC's recent clients, aged 34 and married with two children was being severely abused by her husband who faced an alcohol addiction. She refused to continue living with him but was largely dependent on his income for a living. At this point, WDC's counselling services worked with her to provide legal support, identify potential strengths and next steps. Following this, she has started to cook meals which she provides to two hotels in order to generate an income while living with her mother.

Similarly, the rehabilitative and counselling support being provided to the young girls at WDC's Crisis Intervention Shelter in Haragama works towards a holistic and therapeutic approach. Counselors and staff attempt to improve the physical, mental and social wellbeing of those who suffer from abuse. WDC's current approach attempts to engage the young girls in personality development programs, forming an individual development plan (IDP) and various forms of therapy -art, drama, play, occupational, dance & healing. Both individual and group counselling efforts are made by staff. They work with the girls to instill the self-confidence needed to re-adjust to a new life.

Employees that work on the personal development programme organize activities based on psychology, as well as youth societies. The focus within such programs includes building self-



confidence, developing leadership skills decision making, and teamwork and presentation skills.

Furthermore a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) and career test is performed using each individual's IDP. These are key steps in the process of formulating an action plan which is inclusive of values, strengths, goal setting, educational and career planning, relationship building and skill identification. The primary purpose of this is to assist individuals in reaching both short and long term goals.

Those working in the area of art therapy use it as a form of expressive therapy to engage individuals in the creative process of making art to improve their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The women and children are often active participants in these sessions which allow them to feel happy and relaxed.

Similarly, the therapeutic approach taken in Drama Therapy activities work towards changing and promoting mental health. Individual's inner experiences can be explored and interpersonal relationship skills enhanced. Many have proven to be talented actors when participating in drama competitions, many of which they have won. Drama therapy continues to play a vital role in personality development and emotional healing. Dance therapy is also said to have a similar impact among participants. Play therapy is also used as a method to relax the mind and body. It acts as an avenue through which their able to build their communication skills and teamwork abilities. Staff and counselors work to facilitate both indoor and outdoor games.

Last but not least, as a form of healing therapy, staff and counselors facilitate yoga classes for women and children. The purpose of this is to grow a healthy and peaceful life.

Gayani Batapola
Counsellor - WDC

For I Intend to return...

During the two weeks in March/April 2016, Joe and I worked at the WDC in Kandy. This has not only become an annual tradition for us but also a highlight of our year. We left the UK with a suitcase full of stationary and other equipment to hand out in schools and Centres that were in need of it. This material was collected by Joe beforehand, at his school, and through his clubs and friends back home.

Joe and I provided support to the work at WDC wherever it was required. This year I focused on mentoring and coaching key individuals at the headquarters of WDC in Kandy. I also helped establishing the new appraisal systems for the staff and worked together with Tamara Stephen on developing strategies for fundraising.

Together with Joe, I visited different projects from WDC that focus on changing lives through community partnerships. First of all, we paid a visit to the Kirimitiya village, along with Ms.Chandrathilaka and Ms.Shiyamalla. This project focused upon uplifting extreme poverty situations of these families. On our visit to the Vocational Training Centre in Ampitya, we discussed some ideas to attract more overseas volunteers to help develop vocational training courses. These courses contribute largely to a more inclusive society as they provide skills that are much needed at the labor market.

Finally, we visited Haragama, the shelter for women and girls where WDC is striving to empower and provide opportunities for social inclusion of the residents. We bought hand-woven napkins and mats, made at the shelter, to sell to friends at home. All of these items were sold beforehand through orders placed on Facebook based on the pictures. The profits of this went to the women at the shelter. Our next steps are to identify further saleable items in the UK that the girls in Haragama can produce. This can help provide much needed funding for the support of running Haragama and ensuring the self-sufficiency of the girls living there.

Joe and I are looking forward to returning in March 2017.

Marcia Summers
Volunteer (UK)



Sthree" - Indeed a Women's Initiative



Sthree-A Women's Initiative', WDC's social enterprise, celebrated its 9th anniversary July 11, 2016. 'Sthree' which means 'Woman' in both Sinhala and Tamil was opened nine years ago by WDC to provide a place for Sri Lankan women and differently-abled entrepreneurs to sell their hand-made products. Financial economic empowerment can also empower the entrepreneurs in their home, community and political spheres.

I arrived back to Kandy, back to WDC and back to Sthree after the opening anniversary. Nine years ago, I worked hard with WDC and its network of women entrepreneurs to open the boutique. I am now back, again sponsored by the Canadian government's Uniterra program, to help to move forward Sthree and its entrepreneurs.

It was heart-warming to come back to Sthree and see Nithya and Swarna, committed Sthree staff since its opening 9 years ago. It has also been heart-warming to see and speak with entrepreneurs from the store's inception such as Dineshini who makes striking collage wall art work pieces (I have one framed in my bedroom in Canada) and Leyhka who makes beautiful batik silk scarves. It has also been wonderful to meet new entrepreneurs to Sthree such as Nilmini. We visited her home just a few weeks

ago. She learnt of Sthree after being involved with WDC's Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program with her son who experiences seizures and some related challenges. Nilmini makes high quality cushion covers and table clothes sold in Sthree which supplements the family's income.

Sthree is also now selling colourful hand woven Palmyrah purses and baskets from Kilinochchi, in northern Sri Lanka, an area that was greatly affected by the civil war. Sthree is also looking to promote jewellery-making women producers in Matara, southern Sri Lanka.

In November, Sthree had an exhibition and sale in Sweden, thus expanding its market to include international customers. The store's first ever international order was fulfilled in November as well! Gorgeous Christmas cards made from elephant dung paper made by Kandy area entrepreneur Chamila along with silk scarves from Leyhka were sent to Canada. Experiences and memories in Sri Lanka and WDC are ones I will cherish all my life. I wish the organization its best.

**Jasmin Paschek
Volunteer (Canada)**



I would like to share one of my current experiences as the legal officer of WDC. I consider it to be a great success, reuniting a family and promoting a successful life.

A woman was referred to WDC few years back through the Network of Women (NOW) – Haguranketha. At the time, she was a pregnant mother and had left her family due to harassments from her mother-in-law as well as her husband. She was emotionally suffering for many reasons, especially since her jewelry had been pawned without her permission. There was no one to attend to her matters as she had lost her mother when she was young. I requested both parties to attend a counselling session which did not succeed. The baby born was a child with a disability. On this issue I decided to file a maintenance case at the Magistrate Court Kandy which entitled her child to receive an amount of Rs. 7000 per month. Further, her child was referred to the Community Based Rehabilitation centre for therapeutic exercises.

Two years after, upon the request of her husband, both parties were called for a family counselling session. The session led to her husband agreeing to live at her parent's home together as a family. Her

pawned jewelry was returned. Though the husband refused to withhold the maintenance case filed, with my intervention and follow up, the maintenance case was closed. Now, they have grown as individuals and are functioning as a happy family unit. With my reference to the Divisional Secretariat she received a sum of Rs.10 000 allocated by the government for self-employment. She now has her own grocery shop in the village. The mother in law no longer intervenes, as the husband is quite protective of the child and his wife. Providing services for 8 years at WDC, my understanding is that women and children are often subjected to violence due to the high intake of alcohol and extra marital affairs. Family problems occur mainly due to responsibilities being neglected. When we come across family problems we normally request both parties to attend to an open discussion on the conflicting matters followed by individual counselling sessions. I can assure that many issues have been settled at this stage. If it fails, the alternative will be filing a maintenance case to support the victims and the children economically on a monthly basis. 17 undergraduates from the faculty of law from the University of Peradeniya have joined the legal counselling unit at WDC, receiving essential training. We made them aware of the relevant theories of law as well the practical knowledge of court affairs.

36 victims were able to receive sum of Rs. 260,000.00 as their maintenance expenses in October 2016. Legal Services are provided free of charge here at WDC ensuring that justice is served for all individuals without any discrimination.

Renuka Dehigama
Legal officer

The Founders Day

A day of reminiscence

Bright flowers adorned the WDC head office on 31st July 2016. It was Founder's Day, a special day in our calendar when we had the 3rd year remembrance and Celebration of Life of the revered Founder of WDC, the late Mrs. Pearl Stephen. 2016 also marked the 30th Anniversary of WDC, founded in 1986.

Mrs. Stephen's original purpose in starting WDC was to initiate action and assure the sustainability of their lives within their families and household. WDC facilitated an environment to provide a lasting solution to the main issues faced by women and children, also focusing activities for more violence discrimination prevention. Empowerment of women economically and socially is the declared strategy of WDC throughout its journey of the past 30 years. WDC believes that discrimination is a direct result of lack of active involvement of women in social and economic activities and such empowerment would make women stronger in their bargaining capabilities. Thus it was a coupled celebration of the founder and the movement.

It was also an occasion of thanksgiving for Rev. George Stephen, who passed on a week before the event, remembered endearingly for his paternal and pastoral disposition, by all associated with WDC, and as the exemplary supportive partner of its leader.

Scheduled at 2.00 p.m. the distinguished guests comprising several members of the board of directors, longstanding well-wishers, friends and family members of Mrs. Stephen together with staff and volunteer workers gathered in the hall to participate in the event. A notable participation of officers from several relevant government departments demonstrated the recognition of WDC's undertakings to promote peace through inclusive and integrated activities at the regional and national level. The agenda began with Christian worship and prayer including reading of scriptures and a message from Rev. Saman Perera.

Several staff members who served at WDC since the inception reminisced their learnings and experiences of over 25 years with their role model and leader. Representatives from Women's Forums of the WDC Women's Network expressed their appreciation of Ms. Stephen and her work. Mr. Frank Stephen, the Country Manager of Diakonia, shared his sentiments as a son who acquired meaningful qualities and characteristics in life from his parents. Rev. Reggie Ebenezer delivered a

message of motivation to the staff of WDC, to serve the community in unity, crossing barriers of race, religion and ethnicity.

Epitomising the endeavours of WDC, a scholarship was launched to educate a deserving student from secondary to tertiary education, which served to make the aspiration of our late founder a reality. The scholarship was sponsored by the Pearl Stephen Memorial Fund which was initiated in 2015 with contributions by the director and the staff of WDC. Harsha Bandara, a boy from a low income family in Galagedera was the selected student who received the introductory scholarship, promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Studying in a rural school he has passed the GCE Ordinary Level Examination and secured admission to Dharmaraja College, a leading school in Kandy to continue his higher education. It is expected that, relative to the progress of the fund, the number of scholarships will increase in the coming years. Enjoying a time of fellowship and refreshments with guests, a gratifying sense of fulfillment radiated among the staff that organised and conducted this memorable event in celebration of their founder. the Country Manager of Diakonia, shared his sentiments as a son who acquired meaningful qualities and characteristics in life from his parents. Rev. Reggie Ebenezer delivered a message of motivation to the staff of WDC, to serve the community in unity, crossing barriers of race, religion and ethnicity.

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Community Based Rehabilitation Programme

Initiated in the year 1990, the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Programme aims to directly involve the community in the rehabilitation process and requires that they take a prominent role in the activities of the centre. Targeting the parents of these differently abled children we provide services to ensure that they are involved in their child's development and rehabilitation process which ensures prevention of further disabilities, identification of the deficiencies, intervention in the matter of crisis and provide rehabilitation as a learning process. The programme has a broader aim of inclusion in both education and social systems, ensuring that the differently abled children are provided the same opportunities as the other children. WDC has 9 CBR Centres or units in the central province. This year there were many programmes organized to ensure the development and the control of a wide array of cognitive and physical understanding

government and non-government officials that participated as well. The winners were provided with medals and the others with consolation prizes. The event was largely organized with the collaborative support of the parents.

Religious Festivals

WDC promotes the idea of secularism along with the development of spirituality and respecting others. Thus, festivals of many religions are celebrated. This year the **Sinhala and Tamil new year** was celebrated at the Kandy CBR centre with the participation of about 30 students and 40 parents on the 6th of April 2016. The main aim was to provide an understanding about the customs and traditions followed on the day as well as to promote harmony amongst all races despite any differences in caste or creed. The children were invested in playing the traditional drum as well as directed towards the different cultural practices according to auspicious times set by the centre.

Milath Vila was celebrated on the 22nd of September this year. Headed by the Muslim priest Maulavi Mohammad Rafi from the Katukale Jumma Masjid, the children and their parents were provided insight into the preaching's of Islam. Milath Vila allowed deeper understanding of the Islamic faith and brought forth the ideas that connected all religions.

The Annual Sports meet

Sports games and other physical activities enable the development of many skills in children. The annual sports meet organized by WDC, was held on the 29th of March this year. The children were allowed to participate in the events

organized only with a medical certificate ensuring their well-being and fitness. There were about 126 children and over 400 parents and guardians. The guest of honor along with other invitees was received by the differently-abled children's musical band. There were many events organized which included track events, obstacle course, lime and spoon game, throw ball etc. The lamp was lit to officially inaugurate the sports meet. The drill display was indeed a colourful event. There were events organized for the parents and the





The **Sarasvati Puja** held on the 6th of October this year. The puja was mainly a form of blessing and an introduction to the customs and traditions of the Hindu culture. With the offerings and incantations to evoke the blessings of the goddess Sarasvati, the Hindu priest blessed all those who were present.

The **annual Christmas programme** which is conducted with an ambience of festivity was organized at the St. Mary's Church, Ampitiya this year. Quoting the scriptures, 'Let the children come to me', the minister at the church, conducted a session of worship and prayer at the Christmas Celebration – 2016. Over 80 children, their parents, staff and several members of the church participated in the occasion. Emphasizing that all children need care and love from their parents or guardians, the priest expressed that more attention and understanding is essential when dealing with children with disabilities. Noting that the children sitting alongside their family, teachers and others conducted themselves in a calm and controlled disposition, the priest commended the commitment and skills of the rehabilitation staff. Thus saying he invoked blessings on all the children present at the church. The much awaited nativity display, joyful singing, dancing and presentation of gifts followed immediately after the spiritual observances. The children

with disabilities dressed in colourful costumes amidst the glistening decorations demonstrated a sense of partaking and dignity. A pleasing sensation was obvious on the faces of the parents who enjoyed the activities together with their children. Refreshments and Christmas gifts for all children was a generous contribution from the parishioners of the St. Mary's Church, who briskly served food and distributed presents humbly content of their delightful efforts.

Respect for all religions ensured and promoted at the Community Based Rehabilitation Centres of WDC, observes festivals of all faiths where all children and parents participate with enthusiasm. The expenses of the event were held collectively by the parents ensuring their involvement in the Centres activities.

Excursions for exposure

Every year the children belonging to the CBR programme are provided with an opportunity to travel on the exposure excursions organized by WDC. These excursions aim for these children to grow as individuals with visiting new places, learning to behave and control their behaviour and especially improve their social skills. Above all it ensures their right to play and recreation. This year plans were drawn to travel to the Negambo

beach. Children of 9 CBR Centres, Youth of the VTC Ampitiya and Children from the Mahinda Government School for special children joined the trip along with the CBR staff members. The children were accompanied by their parents or guardian ensuring their safety. 10 buses travelled the beach. The beach proved an enjoyable place for all especially for the ones that were seeing the sea for the first time. Many parents were thankful for their participation in the excursion since their child's disabilities had prevented recreational activities. Post lunch the group visited the Children's Park in the vicinity as well. The park management was generous enough to grant free entrance to the entire group. The excursion was successful and provided the opportunity for the parents to witness their child's ability to enjoy and communicate with each other proving that they are rightful members of the society. WDC records a special appreciation to the generous sponsor who annually made it possible for these children with disability to travel such far distances. This year we acknowledge the gift of €370 and €185 which supported our efforts to provide these children their right to enjoyment. Parents of Amandi Randeniya, a child from CBR centre Kandy, sponsored a trip to Kotmale reservoir and other places of interest for children of the Kandy centre. They travelled by train from Kandy to Kotmale and thereafter they were provided a bus to visit

places. For some children and parents it was a first-time experience to travel by train.

Universal Children's Day

The Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) unit of WDC celebrated their Universal Children's Day on the 1st of October 2016 at the Botanical Gardens Peradeniya with an art competition and an awareness programme for the parents of the differently abled children. The entire event was sponsored by the company "Pentium 2000". Children from all 9 Centres participated and were judged based upon their talent to express, considering age and type of disability. The exhibition consisted of work from 180 children from whom the winners were provided gifts and certificates from our main sponsor as well as consolation prizes for the other children. The day was well spent as the children enjoyed the open space. The art exhibition proved that children with disabilities have a stupendous amount of talent and skill. The community including the parents was quite involved in organizing the event along with the staff.



International Women's Day

products. This was the first year that the celebration after the walk was held outside, and this was a great success. The location, donated by the Kandy Municipal Council, was ideal for attracting people in the community, and the entrepreneurs were able to make more sales than ever before. The handbills, printed in Tamil and Sinhala, gave people passing by the information they needed about the event, and drew them into the park to engage with the participants. There was an excellent response from both locals and foreigners, who found all of



March 8, 2016 was International Women's Day, and at WDC it was commemorated with a celebration and walk through the city. The theme of this year's celebration was "Empowering Women with Disabilities", and WDC staff was joined by 250 members of the Network of Women(NOW), CBR staff, and men and women of different abilities. WDC provided signs for the participants, to make observers aware of the purpose of the march: to raise awareness of the rights of differently abled women. It ended in George E de Silva Park with a celebration of differently abled entrepreneurs and a market for them to sell their

the participants inspiring and were eager to help in whatever way they could, even going so far as to physically help them walk through Kandy's hilly terrain and into the park. The walk and celebration received a very good response and it was encouraging to see the community come together for such an important cause. WDC was honoured by the attendance of Ms. Shanthini Kongahage, member of the provincial council – Kandy, Mr. Prabash Yatawara, a member of Kandy Municipal Council, and Mr. Frank Stephen, the Diakonia Representative for South Asia. The food for morning refreshments and lunch was generously donated with many well wishes.

Experiences that make up the greatest memories

I began my placement at Women's Development Center (WDC) in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in mid-September. Since then I have been incredibly privileged to accompany the staff of WDC on various field visits, programmes and meetings. As a Gender Inclusion Program Officer, I often have the chance to participate in gender-based trainings, Women's network meetings and provide feedback on various events organized by the community development committee. Working alongside the women on this committee I have been extremely fortunate to learn of the overarching frameworks and strategies being used to empower women and reduce the marginal circumstances facing them and their families.

From Ms. Chandrathilaka, I have had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the Women's Entrepreneurship Program, and to acquire knowledge about strategies used to empower women and provide them with the skills needed to be self-sufficient that enable them to step out of poverty. It has been great to see the ways in which WDC not only works with women but also includes their families in the planning process. When women entrepreneurs are given training to develop a business plan they are asked to simultaneously develop a family development plan with their families. This strategy approaches the circumstances faced by women with the understanding that if you empower a woman you also empower her family. Furthermore, including the husband and children in the planning process ensures that there is a sharing of responsibilities among all members of the household. This is done with the hope that women are not overwhelmed with multiple responsibilities and are supported in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Located high up in the hill country region, Kirimitiya is a relatively isolated village where families were initially unaware of the possibility to build a supportive community. However, various committees such as a women's group and a children's club have been formed with assistance from Shining Life Children's Trust (SLCT) Fund and WDC's Community Development team. These committees come together to organize events such as the Children's Day event which took place. It was amazing to see the way the members of the Children's club took leadership during the Children's Day activities. While members of WDC's Community Development team had been assisting them in preparing for the event, it was evident that the children from the village had ownership over the activities that were planned for the day, from the food that was prepared to the ribbons that were worn by the children. This was clearly an event which was organized with the participation of the community. It is through such events that a sense of community has been built within the village and it is WDC's hope to be able to continue having various events and programs for the women and children in this community.

My visits to WDC's Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in Ampitiya and its Crisis Intervention Shelter in Haragama have deepened my understanding of how concepts such as integration and inclusion are practiced among various groups. While one of the primary goals of the VTC is inclusion, the shelter in Haragama puts more emphasis on integration. Many of the girls being housed at Haragama are under the age of eighteen and have experienced various forms of abuse. Thus, the shelter functions as a space where the girls are simultaneously provided with therapy and life skills to be reintegrated into society. The VTC in Ampitiya is home to a number of differently abled youth – both male and female – who are provided with training in various life skills. In communities where being differently abled often tends to be associated with a sense of shame, these skills provide differently abled youth with greater value among their families and communities. They become empowered individuals with a greater sense of purpose.

While I have always had a basic understanding of these ideas as a student, it has been quite inspiring to see how such concepts manifest in practice. I am definitely looking forward to all the learning that awaits me during my next six months in Sri Lanka.

Banusha Mahendren
Volunteer (Canada)



Ampitiya Vocational Training Centre for Youth with disabilities



Established in the year 2001, the Vocational Training Centre at Ampitiya provides services to differently abled individuals above the age of 16. The Centre offers a wide range of Vocational training activities. The instructors themselves are Equality trainers with impairments but are quite enthusiastic to teach and share their skills and experience with the younger generation. The Vocational training centre has its own production unit where many products are manufactured by older differently abled individuals and is sold to generate income for the centre for its sustainability. The centre enables recreation of these individuals which would provide them with the opportunity of social integration. This year, the centre was able to provide a wide range of activities that would enable individual growth and allow them to be self-sufficient in the years to come.

Awareness and sales Centre at KCC

Awareness and sales Centre at KCC For nearly 15 years the Ampitiya Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has been providing opportunities to youth with disability, enabling them to obtain employment. In particular, youth and adults with intellectual disability, hearing deficiency and learning difficulties receive vocational training with residential facility on carpentry, horticulture/agriculture, eacle broom, candles, paper related productions, sewing, fabric

paining and cement flower pots. The 4 instructors do struggle with hearing deficiencies but continue to use their knowledge to assist other individuals.

During the Kandy Esala Perahera season from 8th -19 August, Kandy City Centre offered space (since the year 2014) for WDC to have a sales outlet free of charge. It was a great honour to have the production quality to be recognized in comparison to the other sales outlets KCC. This is the best season to reach local and foreign customers in Kandy. Products produced by students of the Ampitiya VTC were exhibited for sale. This enabled an opportunity to improve marketing skills, communication with others, describing their products and to build their self-esteem. This also provided an opportunity to make the society aware on the rights of people with disabilities. The sales outlet and the services of WDC were appreciated by parents of differently abled children.

Some well-wishers were happy to help the VTC with their donation for food. We were able to market our products not only because they were produced by differently abled individuals but also because the products were of great quality. The officers of the KCC granted us a good hand during this period.

Job Fair 2016

On the 29th of November 2016,

the VTC of Ampitiya organized a Job bank to which they invited several companies and organizations. In accordance with the Sri Lankan policy of inclusion, 3% of the hired employees in the corporate sector should be people with a disability in order to create more chances for this minority group. Ampitiya tries to engage in this and prepare the children for the job market. Through skills training on for example sewing and woodworking this vocational training aspires to mobilize them in the job market. Thanks to this event the disabled children of Ampitiya get more visibility and higher chances of getting hired in an employment context. Companies were offered a tour at the centre to get an impression of the organization. Furthermore, they got the opportunity to get to know the centre more in depth, talk to the children and the staff about the skills they have achieved and about the future demands and desires both parties have. Alumni students from the centre who were educated in Ampitiya were also attending the event. The job bank was a big success and well organized. Both the companies at the centre were enthusiastic about a closer cooperation. Further agreements still has to be made, but some promising deals are on the table.

Striving for a better tomorrow

Mobilizing Communities in Kirimetiyaawatta

Kirimetiyaawatte was an old tea estate isolated in a remote area of Pathahewaheta division in Kandy district. As WDC identified it was a village with a high number of unreported child abuse cases and lack of basic facilities, education for children, public health, public transport, communication and connection with the government officials. Corresponding to the vision and mission of WDC, we mediated to develop a method of obtaining these basic necessities. We established an active children's club, women's group, community development society and a school development society. Awareness on child protection and child rights, leadership, gender, community health issues, values of education and group formation was provided. With guidance of SLCT we were able to

o Achieve support from the Government officers, (Grama niladharri, MOH, PHI, School Principal and teachers), at community activities.

o Formed active groups in the community.

o Make residents understand the importance of education and ensure that they are the aware of community health issues.

o Ensure the community is aware of the concepts of child rights and act accordingly.

o Promote cultural and religious activities.

o Develop the drainage system as to ensure sanitation.

The community at Kirimetiyaawatte shows interest in learning about their fundamental rights based on women, gender, and child protection. It is quite evident that this awareness has provided them an opportunity to expand their capacities along with fulfilling their basic necessities which will eventually lead towards the formation of a self-sufficient and self-actualized individuals.



COMMUNITY OWNED REHABILITATION CENTRES

A Strategy for sustainability

For 28 years, WDC has worked in rehabilitation of children with disabilities through its programme for Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR). 2016 has been a period of optimism since we embarked on a 'change of approach' in 2013. In keeping with our renewed strategy to establish WDC and its activities in all regions of Sri Lanka within the next 5 years, we planned to transfer ownership and management responsibilities of the presently

THE PROCESS OUTLINED FOR PHASING OUT OF CBR CENTRES

- Conduct individual assessments of all CBR centres presently functioning with WDC.
 - Resolve issues identified during assessment
 - Select volunteer workers, train them in rehabilitation and assign to respective centres in replacement of withdrawn WDC staff who will be delegated as resource persons at newly setup CBR centres
 - Strengthen the already functioning parents' societies at all centres
 - Establish community collectives – assemble suitable persons with expertise, influence and resources
 - Formulate constitutions for community groups and parents' societies
- Conduct awareness sessions on WDC, and community owned CBR centres for the respective community

functioning CBR centres to the respective communities. Thereby our capacities will be enhanced to set up rehabilitation centres in newly identified and unreached locations for expansion of WDC activities.

Having never done this before, it was an arduous task for my colleagues and myself, and we required time to adapt our activities positively towards the approach. How can we do this? With whom should we coordinate? How do we delegate responsibilities? Numerous anxieties caused the outlining of activities stage to last 5 – 6 months.

The new concept is expected to give communities a greater opportunity to participate in the rehabilitation activities of children within their own community with disabilities, to ensure that they provide the maximum benefit to the children. Increased sensitivity is also anticipated towards the needs of the children and the community to attach more importance to relevant activities. Initially the centre at Menikhinne accepted the challenge to commence the new process, and today has

achieved the objective of functioning independently through persistent efforts of the WDC staff with community support. We are extremely pleased about the successful results although we encountered hesitation when transforming initial awareness to responsibilities of the community, as they had doubts of committing excessive time towards activities.

We can be gratified that an enabling environment could be created through this concept so that the rights of children with disabilities, their security, and the opportunities for them to be recognised empowered members of society living independently with dignity according to their abilities has been realised.

Dammika Podimenike (CBR Coordinator)

Handicap International is an independent and impartial international organization working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster. They work with individuals with disabilities to ensure that essential needs are met, living conditions are improved and the promotion of respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

Together with WDC, Handicap International ensures motivating leadership qualities of disabled women, integrating them into the society with employment opportunities and provides them with a platform that allows them to contribute to the development of the current society. Equality training (ET) is a platform that enables individuals to receive awareness and information on different aspects as well as be trained in certain skills that they would be able to in turn pass on to another individual. Accordingly, 29 chosen individuals were provided awareness on types of disabilities and their fundamental rights, gender issues and peace and reconciliation. 21 individuals are currently employed as equality trainers, which includes 10 disabled individuals from which 2 women are employed as instructors; Dilhani Warushavithana and Nishadi Sarifa; who travel to different rural areas and provide equality training with assistance provided by WDC whenever necessary. As a result, almost 600 individuals have been provided with Equality Training. This project will be expanded further with programmes that would be conducted in the 29 selected women's groups belonging to the Divisional Secretariat of the Kandy District. Surveys were conducted to identify the problems faced in these

divisions (One with a survey and the other done with collective groups) thus, involving government officials in the project. The survey showed that the majority of the disabled

At the main event, three disabled women were awarded for their contributions to the community during the past year. Apart from these activities, WDC works with Disabled People's



individuals were unaware about other types of disabilities or resources provided for them by the government. Communication with government officials remained limited especially in the rural communities. The survey also enabled the results to be uncovered from a project WDC had conducted, six years ago, in these areas together with Sight Savers Sri Lanka. The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) acknowledged this progress made with a letter of appreciation. The White Cane day was celebrated on the 13th of October 2016. In keeping with the main goal of motivating leadership qualities in disabled women, it was satisfying to see that most of the participants were women. Along with individuals with disabilities, governmental and non-governmental delegates participated in the walk organized from the Kandy Municipal council to the E.L. Senanayake Children's Library.

Organizations (DPO'S) that have been established in the district. Along with the affiliations of Sight Savers Sri Lanka, we managed to establish 2 DPO's in the Nuwara Eliya district, one within the city limits of Nuwara Eliya and the other at the Kothmale Divisional secretariat. The DPO's have been provided awareness about their fundamental rights enabling them to secure and be advocates on these rights. It is evident that the formation of these groups has provided them with a sense of empowerment to continue on with their work.

Involvement with the projects affiliated to Handicap International enables the incorporation of our organizations' vision as well as providing empowerment for all individuals to meet essential needs, ensure fundamental rights and social integration, and to be productive citizens to our country



Hope through the darkness...

The Crisis centre at Haragama is one of the largest establishments for crisis intervention and shelter located in Sri Lanka. The centre provides many facilities that enable a safe environment for women and girls to recover from violence and abuse with a great amount of support and care. The centre provides a home to victims of many different forms of violence (i.e. physical, mental and sexual) thus since its inception, the priorities have been safety, security and ensuring empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. The activities at the centre encourage these women and girls to participate in many community and public spheres ensuring social inclusion and integration. 2015-2016 provided many opportunities that enabled development of knowledge and skills along with good habits, healthy relationships and self-discipline. The ultimate goal is to motivate these women and girls to reach a state of self-actualization and empowerment.

Established in May 2015 with 4 girls from the centre, the production unit focuses mainly upon sewing and the sales of products. Reusable sanitary pads for women are the current main product that the girls neatly stitch, iron and pack. The girls are paid a sum of Rs.35 with every packet they successfully complete which has led to a competitive atmosphere at the production unit. The income they receive is deposited at the bank and used for personal needs.

The girls are also provided instructions for different other creative products by Mr. Takashi. Hailing from Japan, Mr. Takashi provides instructions for the girls to produce different products such as flowers, wall decorations, cushion covers, and other handmade crafts. The girls show great amount of enthusiasm to attend the centre which opens at 8.30 a.m. It provides them with the learning experience of a variety of different crafts, improves positive mental well-being, teaches them to work cooperatively, and be responsible individuals. The unit collectively aims to provide them with an opportunity to be independent, along with self-employment options that enable reintegration with their families and community.

Sales at the Kandy City Centre

The Kandy City Centre's annual trade exhibition

was held from the 8th of August to the 18th of August 2016. This provided a platform for the girls to improve their marketing skills, make sales and showcase products that had been made at the production unit. The sales amounted to a massive sum of Rs.25,500 within the 11 days. This provided exposure and marketing experience for the girls as well as an opportunity to receive positive feedback from the customers.

Home gardening and Animal husbandry

Home gardening and animal husbandry at the Centre provides great experiences residents. Home gardening is done according to a roster of 2 girls per day. Seeds used for germination are acquired from "hadabima" and other stores. The girls are then provided with instructions on the different types of vegetables and about the maintenance and growth process. The girls were able to harvest for a few months, and they sold their harvest to the unit and earned an income. However, due to the drought in the area their next harvest reduced which led the girls to lose interest in it. Now, they have started gardening flower plants which they maintain well and sell, providing them with another opportunity for an income.

Currently the shelter owns 2 cows, 37 hens and 4 roosters. The animals are taken care of according to their needs. Though milk cannot be obtained from the cows at the moment, the eggs produced are sold or used at the centre. The Katawala veterinarian visits every 2 months to check upon the animals and provide instructions about the necessary medication when needed.

Celebrating the Sinhala and Tamil New Year

As the green trees swayed and the flowers bloomed, the cuckoo cawed as the Sinhala and Tamil New Year was celebrated with all its splendor at the crisis centre. Along with the esteemed presence of the Director and CEO of the women's development centre and the staff, the event indeed brought forth laughter and enjoyment as well as promoted inte of cultures and customs among all participants present there. ration

The day began with the rhythmic beats on the traditional drum, the loud sounds from the lighted crackers along with milk boiled until it spills over the new earthen pot that marked the beginning of a prosperous year ahead. In keeping with the traditions, the traditional oil lamp was lit by the director and other prominent staff members to establish the beginning of the day's proceedings.

The events of the day unfolded with the many outdoor games. The air was filled with avurudu songs and laughter as all present there participated in the games with great enthusiasm. The winners of the games were provided gifts at the end of the day.

The celebration enabled the girls an opportunity to learn about the customs and traditions of the New Year along with organizing an event whilst cooperating with each other. It provided a platform to be integrated into social events that allowed entertainment as well as a positive mental health. Facing challenges and accepting defeat in a constructive manner, the girls seem to leave their troubled past behind. It seemed like a rise to a self-sufficient and prosperous life ahead.

The New Year celebration hoped to incorporate and integrate community values that would bring forth a positive influence upon the lives of these girls.

Sports meet for the school-going children

The annual sports meet provided a platform for children from both Thannakumbura Muslim School and the Haragama Government School to perform in sports and other games. The day unfolded with many events that were awarded with medals and certificates at the end of the day. Thannekumbura Muslim School produced the most skilled and talented, who won 7 medals at the end of the day bagging the trophy for the most talented sportswoman.

The girls from the shelter had participated in many other programmes and competitions where they won many awards. A child from the shelter who had been handed over to her mother had won 1st place in an art competition organized by the Maharagama Department of Education. The children from the shelter participated in the debating, speech and drama competition along with a netball tournament organized by the Department of Probation and childcare – Kandy district, on behalf of the Children's Day 2016. 14 children from the shelter participated in these events. Deepika, a grade 10 student from the Haragama Government School, won third place in the Speech competition. The other children managed to win prizes for debating competition and the netball tournament. The drama 'pilima deka'(Two Statues) presented by the girls from the shelter won third place at the event with one of the girls winning the award for the best performance by a female actor.

Destitution not her destiny

Deftly operating the loom machine to interlace multi-coloured threads, Irangani has mastered the skill of handloom weaving during the past 3 years, at the Vocational Training Centre, in Seeduwa. Completing 2 years of training and now earning a modest wage, while provided with meals and accommodation, Irangani has reasons to smile today because her life changed from desperation to hope.

Four years ago, Irangani was a resident at a 'home for the destitute' in Kandy. Born with impaired vision she attended regular school in her childhood. However, in the prime of her life she became irreversibly blind, having been victim to a landslide when she also lost her mother. Neglected by her father and stepmother she ended up as a desperate young girl in this 'home'. Realising that Irangani had aptitude to

learn, the caregivers at this institution referred her to WDC for awareness on Braille. She found a warm-hearted mentor in Ms. Bisomenike, her Braille tutor and counsellor, to whom she revealed her life's despairs during the 12 months of learning Braille. Recognizing Irangani's potential to lead a better life as a young woman, the counsellor directed her for vocational training in handloom at the Seeduwa centre. Turning out yards of colourful material to be sold as bed linen, serviettes and other products, Irangani has dignity in her occupation.

Ms. Bisomenike expressed her fulfilment of having been a partner with WDC in ensuring sustained economic and social empowerment of Irangani who is recognised as a citizen contributing to the country's development process.

She believed she could...so she did...

Indika Lakmali's very first interaction with WDC was at the Katugastota clinic, where she was a patient. Her journey since that initial meeting to today, where she works for an internationally recognized organization has been full of ups and downs. Her life changed at that clinic, in ways she never thought possible. After learning about WDC's efforts to address and assist vulnerable groups of women like her. She and some of her colleagues began taking part in various programmes and meetings. In addition to participating in various awareness programs, Indika and her colleagues were taught how to make various products such as rugs and candles as an alternative self-employment opportunity, alongside fruit stalls and selling sweep tickets. These skills have allowed them to develop strategies that continue to sustain many of their livelihoods. Many have also been able to build on these skills to bring themselves to even higher positions. Indika now earns a good salary working for a respectable organization, but she still continues to work with WDC, participating in meetings with women's groups and working alongside the field officers. She has directed other women to WDC -

including its free legal and counselling services - in full confidence that they will be well taken care of. Indika has directed eight members of her women's group to WDC's low vision program, offering them the opportunity to have their vision assessed and obtain spectacles. Similarly, she has also been able to refer one of the members of her group to the right sources to obtain a wheelchair for her child. It is a great advantage to be able to offer these services free of charge, as most of the beneficiaries are those facing multiple layers of vulnerability and discrimination.

Today, Indika is fortunate enough to be a professionally recognized leader among both governmental and non-governmental organizations. With the assistance of WDC, she has been able to build a reputation as a responsible and dedicated community leader, and as the president of a women's group Indika is now able to assist other vulnerable women who are currently faced with the circumstances she once faced. Whether it is going with them to clinics for treatment, or conversing with them during their meetings with the WDC offers, she continues to offer all the support she can

Low vision is the term used to refer to a visual impairment that is not correctable through surgery, pharmaceuticals, glasses or contact lenses. It is often characterized by partial sight, such as blurred vision, blind spots or tunnel vision, but also includes legal blindness. The National Low Vision Programme has progressed steadily since 2007 and has achieved many goals in the areas of infrastructure development, human resource development, and the provision of low vision devices free of charge to everybody who needs them.

According to a survey done in the year 2000 by WDC, we identified more than 100 individuals who suffered from the condition of being completely blind. The survey brought forth that the identified individuals were mostly school going children who suffered from a visual impairment recognized as Low Vision. To further prevent conditions of visual impairments we organized a clinic that provided the Rubella vaccination.

This programme has been expanded into more areas and is successfully continued with the efforts provided by the Ministry of Health. Further, awareness programmes are conducted for women, adolescents and teachers.

However though these programmes were conducted; the conditions were still prevalent in a large manner. As a solution, the Low vision unit along with an accessible lavatory was established at our organization with the support of the Eye Hospital-Kandy and Sight Savers Organization. The Unit provides facilities such as Low Vision Assessment, training in activities of daily living, training in



the usage of the white cane, and prescribing and issuing low vision devices with the recommendations provided by relevant doctors. Facilities are available to provide required optical devices to individuals that need them. This year we have managed to provide necessary services to more than 50

individuals suffering from low vision. Plans have been drawn to improve the number of recipients of these facilities. The Women's Development Centre (WDC) currently has 7 individuals who have been trained to provide these services. In turn through the Training of Trainers (TOT) programme, 30 other individuals have been

trained. The main aim is to expand these services to the rural areas. Equipment is available to assess conditions of visual impairment at any given situation along with referral systems that cater to individual necessities.

With the aim of creating a change, the renovation of the D.S.Sennanyake Library facilities for visually impaired individuals was conducted this year.

With a large investment of almost 300 lacks, the facilities enable a wide range of access to information in Braille. Further facilities have been provided on the internet for individuals of other districts to acquire available facilities and be a part of the National Low Vision Programme. The White Cane Day celebrated on the 13th of October 2016

provided a platform to influence politicians and other delegates about our aims especially in acquiring necessary access in the city for individuals with visual impairments. The Unit as a whole, plan to make services accessible and available to as many individuals as possible.

The Network of Women

Together we achieve...

The Network of Women's Organization affiliated to WDC, comprising 10 regional women's forums, has worked to continue their mission among the women, children and other vulnerable groups at the grassroots level. Representatives from all network forums gathered on 17th and 18th November for a time of information sharing and capacity building.

Women leaders were assembled by the **Kandy Women's Forum** promoting urban agriculture and peace and reconciliation. Linking with women from the Siragugal and Manashakthi Women's Organizations of Kilinochchi, activities were conducted with the aim to build relationships and cooperation among the women from the two regions, with and without disabilities. Unity and understanding has developed among these women throughout the year of working together, prompting action to safeguard the rights of women with disabilities and addressing issues of violations of these safeguards.

Comprising of 547 women in 18 groups, the Matale Women's Forum has recently improved its membership, expanding further into their community. Working with state institutes and non-governmental organizations in the area, it has forged ahead to create community awareness on the rights of women and children. A protest walk by women and school

children was held to alert the public and focus the attention of authorities towards the numerous issues of child abuse in the country. Vocational training for women was conducted, aiming to empower them economically within their households. Encouraging organic home gardening to promote sustainable development, the women were educated to adapt methods which are environmentally sound while reducing poverty conditions. Complying with many requests from the schools in Matale, the women's forum implemented several awareness activities for school children focusing on attitudinal development and how to deal with adolescence.

The Women's Forum of Ampara, performed well during this year conducting activities independently, especially working with children and others with disabilities with the objective of encouraging inclusive living. Liaising mainly with Navajeewana, an NGO based in the region and the eye clinic of the Kandy General Hospital, they were able to support many persons with a range of prosthetic and orthotic devices such as limbs, hearing –aids and spectacles. Women entrepreneurs were provided increased opportunities to access marketing possibilities. The forum was actively involved in issues of violence against women and children, providing counselling services, referring clients to legal aid, hospitals, or other relevant services for redress. The forum has outlined a series of activities for 2017,

especially involving women afflicted by the prolonged war in building peace and coexistence.

Transitional Justice was the focus of activities implemented by **the Women's Forum of Batticaloa** during the past year, with continued community awareness and cooperation with other NGOs to determine the level and extent of state mediation in this area. Besides regular activities of intervention in violence against women and children, promoting gender equality through social and economic empowerment, the forum also conducted concerted awareness sessions on minimizing negative impacts of cyber space and graphic movies on adolescents and youth.

Intervening in issues of violations concerning women traumatized by war, the **Women's Forum of Akkaraipattu** was emphatic in psychosocial development of these women. The forum categorically involved itself in activities to solve severely neglected issues of violations which were identified through case studies. Broadening its undertakings, aiming to educate women on conflict transformation and the 'Do No Harm' concept, further activities were outlined and implemented by the forum during the year.

The Women's Forum of Vavuniya has experienced severe drawbacks, however, the group has functioned independently utilizing its available resources of knowledge and experience in minimizing gender based violence by aligning with other NGOs in the area. Women and children abused and victimized due to gender inequality have been guided to access services through the mediation of the women's forum. During the past few years the women's forum pressurized for the rights of displaced persons in Sidambarapuram camp to acquire their lost land and the outcome is proven today as

many families have been restored the legal right to their property in the village. Engaging in group formation, to empower and mobilize women in order to identify and apply appropriate solutions to the prevalent issues within the community.

Extending a range of services within the district of Anuradhapura, the **Rajarata Women's Forum** has proven its strength as the most self-reliant women's collective within the WDC Women's Network. Year 2016 was special, as the forum marked two decades of its founding and mission to its community. With a dignified sense of achievement the forum takes pride in a membership of 10,000 women within 5 divisions of the district.

Promoting women to actively participate and contribute to the development process, the Micro Credit Programme functioning within the forum serves to empower women economically. Community awareness on prevention of violence against women and children is a



continuous activity within the forum while victims of violence are referred to counselling and other required services through the forum's mediation.

'Establishing a cooperative society within the forum has been a great achievement for them this year; registering an affiliated women's group in the region as a cooperative society has added to their success. The forum has high capacity and skill for community development and mobilization and they willingly share their expertise and experiences with other members of the WDC network. Monitoring the progress of the target groups can be done effectively due to the systematic individual family plan and group plan formulated to implement activities. The Rajarata Women's Forum has succeeded in attracting other funding organizations, and in 2017, they will be supported by a sponsor to improve vocational education for youth. We expect to garner the forum's active contribution in our efforts to facilitate sustainable peace and coexistence by awakening the voice of Sinhala women of the border villages who have experienced the bitterness of war. WDC will mediate to expand the synergy concept adapted by the Rajarata Women's Forum as a learning experience to other forum members of the Women's Network.

The Women's Forum of Hanguranketha focused its attention this year on economic development of their women leaders and on increasing opportunities of education for girls. The forum's counselling unit has recorded a growing number of clients seeking guidance and the Child Protection Forum intervened to provide redress to them. Networking with other state and non-state organizations functioning in the area, the Hanguranketha Forum provided enhanced services to the community. Raising awareness on a range of topics among school children has prompted them to seek assistance to solve troubling

issues in their young lives. In recent times, an increased number of girls referred to the Shelter for Girls at Haragama for protection or rehabilitation have been from the plantation areas of the hill country. As such, the Hanguranketha Women's Forum which is based in the plantation areas actively mediates legal procedures, follow-up of girls when re-integrated with the families etc.

Nuwaraeliya Women's Forum, the newest member of the Women's Network, has been functioning for one year. It has attracted the attention of the community especially in issues of violence against women and children. Numerous women and youth have been ensured their right to access available services through the intervention of the women's forum. It is noteworthy that the forum members comprising women of diverse ethnicities and religions work as a team with unity and understanding. In addition to economic growth, activities also focus on attitudinal development denoting holistic empowerment. Activities are already outlined for 2017, aiming to network with other NGOs in the locality to access essential resources and services to its membership of 1500 women.

All of the women's forums have done good work in accordance to the organizational vision and objectives, and aligning with the needs of their communities. We commend the hard work and good progress of each of the forums and eagerly look forward to the accomplishments we are sure will be achieved in the next year.

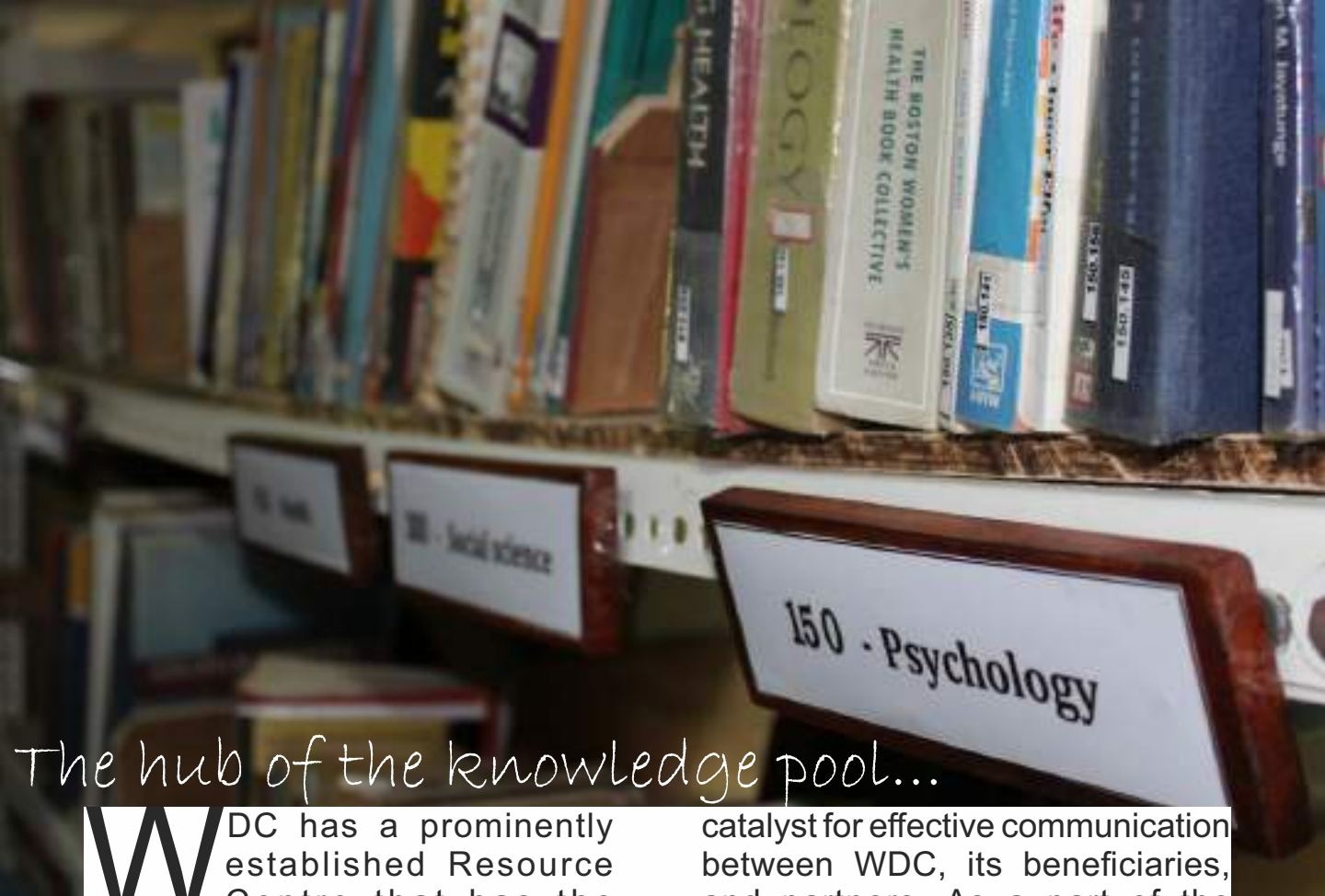


Empowerment through self-employment

Shining Life Children's Trust (SLCT) is one of the primary partners of WDC. In addition to a past project that WDC had completed in 2012 with SLCT, we have worked together to establish sewing classes, as a form of capacity building and empowerment, at the Purpressa estate located within the Kandy district.

With the knowledge of the estate management, a notice posted calling all women interested in taking part in such a programme. All women who attended the program were under the age of forty with one woman being differently abled. While the program initially began with thirty-six women participants, it dropped to twenty six and eventually to twenty-two a few months later. Within those who had dropped out of the program, four had become pregnant which was what led to their withdrawal from the program. After a six month course lead by Mrs.Thureiraja, one of the women had left for a job in Colombo, another had left for job in the garment sector and some became employed in the teaching sector. Unfortunately, following this six month period we were left without a place to continue our classes. However, after speaking to the MOH office (Medical Office of Health) they were able to provide us with a previously used maternity ward as a room to continue our classes in. SLCT also donated two sewing machines and raw material such as thread, needles and cloth. WDC was also able to provide them with a cupboard, table, thirty six chairs and four scissors to continue the program. During these classes women learned how to sew shirts for boys, dresses for girls, night gowns, housecoats, saree jackets, under-skirts, school uniforms for girls, maxi dresses, shalwars and tops. While there were only thirteen people left in the class following the end of the next six months, an exhibition was still held for the products which were developed at the estate through the programme.

From the thirteen women who were able to sustain their participation throughout the entire program, six were ready to start working at the tailoring shop. At this point WDC was in need of a space to continue our classes and training sessions but the estate also needed the space provided by the maternity ward for their own purposes. Fortunately they were able to meet us half way by providing us with another small space to continue the work we had began with the women of Purpressa. This space was provided to us for free for a period of one year. There are currently three people at the tailoring shop while the other ten are working from their respective homes, preparing items for neighbours, using their skills as a form of self-employment. Even those who are unable to attend our classes or have found alternative forms of employment continue to use the skills they have learned to earn at least a small additional income. This is of great significance for women living in the plantation regions where there is an overwhelming sense of patriarchal dependence. Since most women tend to be dependent on the income of their husband, the often lack a sense of self-empowerment. Consequently, the few women who are able to attend our sewing classes are able to become self-sufficient through the skills that they learn. This eventually leads to a sense of self-empowerment. With the New Year ahead of us the women at the tailor shop and those working from their homes have many orders coming their way. In order to monitor progress and oversee any potential gaps in the process Thilaka and I visit the tailoring shop every four months. Approximately two months ago, we placed a billboard in front of the centre to advertise the women's sewing skills and the opportunity to buy their products. In the future, we hope to continue supporting the women by providing additional materials, promoting their skills and providing them with orders from schools and other such places.



The hub of the knowledge pool...

WDC has a prominently established Resource Centre that has the capacity to be the central source of information on the endeavours conducted by the different sectors of the organization. The resource centre is used by the Network of Women (NOW), local and international university students, and various institutions for learning and teaching purposes. In particular, university students often refer to the resource centre for their thesis research. The centre is also used to update the knowledge of the staff who are with us as resource persons and for the parents of the children who are being rehabilitated at the Community Based Rehabilitation centre.

The Resource centre serves as a

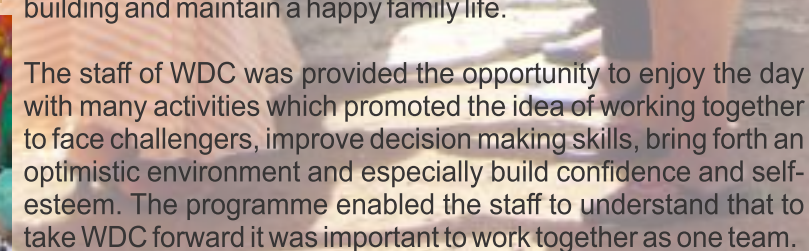
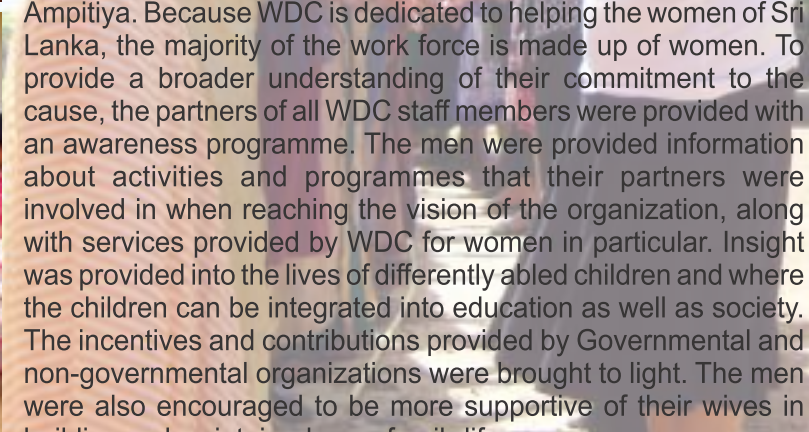
catalyst for effective communication between WDC, its beneficiaries, and partners. As a part of the organization's mission of working with women and children in the areas of prevention, intervention, advocacy and rehabilitation, awareness programmes have been conducted through the resource centre on current issues such as Child protection policy, attitude development, communication and gender. It also produces relevant audio visual devices (e.g.; presentations, clip charts, stickers, posters & hand bills) to be used in various awareness programmes to cater to different learning styles. Much of the work carried out by the resource centre assists in the collection and analysis of all kinds of information in order to prepare progress reports

Together we stand

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."

Since its inception, the Women's Development Centre stands strong purely because of its dedicated staff that is committed to its cause of fulfilling the aspirations of a better tomorrow. With this in mind, the annual get together of the WDC staff members was held in December 2015 at the Vocational Training Centre in Ampitiya. Because WDC is dedicated to helping the women of Sri Lanka, the majority of the work force is made up of women. To provide a broader understanding of their commitment to the cause, the partners of all WDC staff members were provided with an awareness programme. The men were provided information about activities and programmes that their partners were involved in when reaching the vision of the organization, along with services provided by WDC for women in particular. Insight was provided into the lives of differently abled children and where the children can be integrated into education as well as society. The incentives and contributions provided by Governmental and non-governmental organizations were brought to light. The men were also encouraged to be more supportive of their wives in building and maintain a happy family life.

The staff of WDC was provided the opportunity to enjoy the day with many activities which promoted the idea of working together to face challengers, improve decision making skills, bring forth an optimistic environment and especially build confidence and self-esteem. The programme enabled the staff to understand that to take WDC forward it was important to work together as one team.



BRAILLE

The world at his finger tips

Saartha Pavith Rajapakse an endearing 6-year-old boy, walked in to WDC in 2012 with his parents, who were seeking a Braille teacher to educate their son. This little boy, being irreparably blind due to an illness when he was 4 years old, chatted freely with late Ms. Pearl Stephen, and Ms. Bisomenike, the Braille teacher cum counsellor. In keeping with WDC's vision of empowering children knowledgeably and socially Saartha was enlisted to learn Braille. Although initially he attended lessons at the WDC, his mother, who had to tend to an older child also physically challenged, requested the teacher to conduct the lessons at home, as she could not bring Saartha for lessons regularly. Complying with this request,



Saartha was given the opportunity to continue his learning of Braille in his home. His supportive parents provided everything that the teacher required. Ms. Bisomenike did not only teach Braille to Saartha but also coached him in elementary studies using the national text books of Grade 1-3, which helped him learn basic skills in areas such as reading, writing, math and other subjects. He was gradually guided to formal education and having gained sufficient knowledge they sought to admit Saartha in a government school in Kandy. However, it seemed an uphill task as several leading schools rejected him, thereby suppressing his right to education and opportunities to inclusive living and independence. Nevertheless, his parents and Ms. Bisomenike were not deterred by obstacles and pursued the mission, sensitising authorities at the department of education

on the rights of a child, and persons with disabilities. Finally, he was accepted to mainstream education at the D.S. Senanayake Government School. Experiencing school life through Grade 1 – 5, Saartha proved to be clever in his studies, receiving inclusive and equitable quality education.

In August 2016, Saartha sat the Grade 5 Government Scholarship Examination and obtained excellent results with 181 out of a possible 200 marks. He has earned the confidence and respect of his teachers and peers, and promoted recognition for his school. The parents are overjoyed and appreciate WDC's role in helping socially challenged individuals become self-reliant. They are grateful for the dedication of Ms. Bisomenike, who still continues to counsel them and Saartha, and recollect her words at their first encounter when she said “today you are in tears being uncertain of his future but one day Saartha will make you proud and bring you tears of joy”

Affliction to enhancement

Nirmal is a boy with a physical disability. He faces speech problems and low vision. He is intellectually limited, his nutrition level is poor - with a liquid diet only - and also a disturbed sleeping pattern and various health problems make Nirmal unable to engage in any daily living activities. Nirmal's parents, left in a state of severe mental distress, decided to send him to the WDC community based rehabilitation centre (CBR). The staff of CBR began therapeutic activities in order to monitor Nirmal's nutritional levels and conducted awareness sessions on food and nutrition for his parents. The educators provided the parents with advice and tools how they could continue the practices at home and how to implement changes. The activities showed their results, and Nirmal's nutrition condition gradually improved. Simultaneously, therapeutic physical exercises were started. The staff instructed and guided Nirmal's parents during home visits on how to do appropriate rehabilitation activities. These exercises were successful and in October 2004 Nirmal was able to raise his head. Encouraged by the quick improvements, Nirmal was stimulated to participate in several medical and physiotherapy clinics organized by WDC to develop his physical and mental condition. More equipment was also used to improve his mobility and strength.

By July 2005, Nirmal's sleeping patterns and nutrition levels had improved. Clinics were slowly decreased, as his improvements made it less necessary. In

2006, Nirmal could be seated on his own and play with toys, listen to music or watch television. He was able to pick up and eat food such as biscuits and fruits by August 2007. The next step in the rehabilitation activities was the standing frame. Due to Nirmal's impressive progress, his parents became more and more interested and satisfied with the services which WDC provided. In July 2008, Nirmal was able to stand for one hour with the support of the frame and by 2009 he started walking thanks to the frame. Besides this also his social interaction, his ability to recognize people like his mother, produce sounds, develop a longer span of attention and showing interest in a variety of food started improving.

In 2010, he was able to walk in a balanced manner by using the framework which he was also allowed to use at home. The fact that Nirmal became more independent, allowed his mother to attend more household activities. By 2011, he could walk without the frame and with only using the support of walls and furniture. In order to give him more independence, WDC provided him with a walking frame with wheels for LKR 5000. Unfortunately, in 2014 Nirmal's parents started suffering health problems themselves and this made it difficult to bring him to the rehabilitation centre. Consequently, WDC continued his rehabilitation through home-based therapeutic activities and tried to bring him to the centre two days a week.

In June 2015, Nirmal, a Roman Catholic, received his first communion. He enjoyed playing the role of shepherd in the annual nativity play held at the centre. In January 2016, Nirmal's father had a heart attack and due to this circumstance Nirmal had to stop attending the centre again. However, the staff continued his rehabilitation activities through home visits and plans were made for further trainings to ensure progress in the future as well.

Empowerment through entrepreneurship

Nayana is a stay-at-home mom. Even though her family had no permanent source of income, she has always wanted to provide the best education possible for her children. She knew that she had to do something to ensure a steady income flow and bring financial stability to her family. Since she had prior knowledge and skills on handicrafts and ornament-making, it was a good means of generating a small income. Through the sponsorship of many organizations, she was able to attend a few skills training programs and learnt more and more about making new handicrafts and ornaments suitable for the market. Not only was she able to enhance her skill set, she was also able to find a better market for her products through the Women's Development Centre's (WDC) 'Sthree-A Woman's Initiative' social enterprise boutique. Since her association with the WDC in 2010 she has been given a better market for her products, namely wall hangers, handloom bags, cushion covers and the like. Now, her family has a permanent source of income. There is visible growth in their financial and economic status daily. Nayana's daughters willingly support her in her business and she is even able to facilitate income generation for a few of her neighbours. Thanks to the Sthree boutique, Nayana's dream of giving her children a good education has become a reality.

Nilmini is a mother of a 13-year old. Her child was a perfectly healthy baby boy but one year after he was born he was diagnosed with a neurological disease. Since then, she has been working with the support of Rajawe Arya Hospital in finding a cure for his disease. Due to her son's situation, her family is at constant risk of being financially burdened. Eight years ago she approached the Women's Development Centre – Community Based Rehabilitation centre seeking rehabilitation support for her child. With the intention of finding a cure for their child, her husband resigned his employment. They were going through a tough period. Financially they had no assurance for a better future. As a solution to the financial situation of her family she decided to use her knowledge on stitching to produce and sell handicrafts to the market. During that period, she came to know about the 'Sthree-A Women's Initiative' social enterprise that supports in finding markets for individual entrepreneurs like her. She was able to acquire Sthree's support for both her professional and personal development to be financially stable. Since then, there has been a boost in her production sales, namely cushion covers, wall hangers, bags, table cloths, side bags, and batik. Nilmini's family is now living a happy life with less stress and fear about their future.





Training programme in Warangal, India

The Bala Visaka Community Driven Development Programme was held in Warangal, India from the 5th to 29th September 2016. It was organized by Bala Vikasa, a non-profit organization devoted to sustainable development in India. Their approach is to support communities to help themselves by providing rural villagers with the tools and resources they need to transform their lives. 18 individuals belonging to 8 different nationalities (Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Italy, Guainia, Spain, Canada, Nepal and India) participated in the programme. Three WDC staff members participated in the training programme: Ms. Sujeewa Damayanthi Egodaarachchi (Resource Centre), Ms. Sandamali Geethika Herath (Reporting Section) and Ms. Chandani Pushpalatha (Coordinator- Ampitiya VTC). The programme was conducted by a group of experienced lecturers who had been working in this field for a long period.

The training was on par with activities that were executed by WDC and its entities. It provided updated knowledge about methods, tools, plans and systems related to Community Development and both theoretical and practical knowledge which was enabled through field visits. This created the opportunity to give an insight into the different problems faced by the community as well as in actions taken to resolve these problems. Further, the training offered practical information on the different community development aspects: planning, organizing, implementing, leading, controlling and evaluating. Subjects such as Culture and Sustainable Development, Assets Based Community Development (ABCD), Social Entrepreneurship and Development Communications were covered in combination with several exposure visits.

In order to provide the maximal services to develop the community, Bala Vikasa equally and fairly distributed their scarce resources. Hereby, a considerable progress in every activity was achieved by performing on behalf of the community along with the empowering community leaders. The training informed on the one hand how to identify and analyse resources and community requirements and on the other hand how to prioritize them. Afterwards, the programme offered knowledge in how to utilise the resources for the sustainability of the organization. This helps in fulfilling the requirements of the community by motivating them to improve their skills. Further, mechanisms on the identification of community needs were studied and how to utilize them. Additionally, knowledge was gained on social enterprises and the strategic plan for further development. Lastly, group discussions were held about international social services and community development.

WDC expects the gained knowledge to be useful in the training and capacity building of co-workers/colleagues and in providing ideas and opinions about strategic planning. Furthermore, this information needs to be written down in reports and utilized for the development of the ongoing programmes. The gathered knowledge can also help formulate sustainable development goals for the future programmes of our organization, while paying more attention towards the Assets Based Community Development (ABCD) theory. In this way, WDC hopes to translate the gained experience of the Bala Vikasa programme to our own community development programmes.

We at WDC, extend our sincere appreciation to all our donors and well wishers whose steadfast support has strengthened our initiatives to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups within the communities.

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Kindernothilfe
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Inner wheel Club Kandy
PEACE
Rotary Club - Kandy
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Department of probation
Chairman and staff of Kandy City Centre
Pentium 2000
ESOFT Kandy

All other organizations, social groups and individuals that shared our interest towards the wellbeing of women and children.

We thank you for your generous thoughts and contributions!