

Newsletter

2016-2017



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Director's Message

Dear Friends

This year has been one of the fastest years for me and I didn't realize it coming to an end. As I reflect back contemplating on writing this message, so many emotions flood back. There have been instances where I was desperate not knowing how to move forward with the burden of not having adequate funding for most of the programs, saddened by many donors changing their priority and moving out of the country due to shrinking space in the country giving us little hope. However we did not falter on our vision and never gave up hope. Opportunities were presented to us through new propositions for funding and we received these opportunities with open arms and grateful hearts.

Despite these emotions, I must acknowledge every single person who has been associated with the WDC in thought and deed, who have kept in touch through our difficult times and happy times and that was the reason all of us at WDC did not to give up hope. Our dedicated staff was even willing to serve without anticipating on any salary. Only at times like this one realizes the value of humanity. They come in different means and forms, having the same senses but being so different to each other. My thoughts go to the countries facing various issues and are going through difficult situations, including man made and natural disasters. My thoughts go beyond the horizon where one have only limited time on this earth but aiding and abiding with hatred, envy, self centeredness and greed taking over, one ends up losing ones-self. This has been the life cycle for generations and generations to come, still failing to realize the temporary life we are living. The responsibility lies within us to make a positive change within the world, starting with you and me, to bring back our good values, show kindness and love with no barriers and to hope for a better tomorrow.

With this thought I hope you enjoy reading our Newsletter and that it would inspire you to help us share our work in ensuring equity and equality amongst living beings. I must acknowledge the donors who have and are supporting us to make that difference.

I wish you all the best for 2018 and look forward to working together in creating a Just and Peaceful society.

Sashi Stephen
Director/CEO

Working towards change together



2017 is a year of achievement for WDC....

**To have been able to initiate change moving speedily with time,
the staff can be proud of its untiring efforts.**

Stories of rebuilding of the lives of women and girls who have survived violence, the voice of brave women who stand in solidarity with others whose rights have been violated and the collective preparedness enlivened and strengthened the WDC team. WDC's mission is fortified as a symbol of success in an era when Sri Lanka as a country is endeavouring to establish change and good governance.

In a global socio-economic scenario where the focus is on sustainable development goals, WDC strategized to encourage women to be involved in the development process innovatively by sensitising them to preserve and protect the environment. It was a success. Women linked to WDC create eco-friendly products and services.

Encouraging and promoting the success of women political leaders in the recent future, WDC wishes for more women participation in policy planning and decision-making.

W.L.A.D. Chandrathilaka
Deputy Coordinator



The year 2017 was a hive of activity for WDC's Community Development programme and its Network of Women's Organisation. The NOW present in several districts around Sri Lanka is involved in various initiatives ranging from social mobilization, democracy, social economic justice along with peace and reconciliation, all done through mobilized rural women's groups. In addition the NOW, supported by the WDC and other aligned NGOs and CSOs, is working towards its involvement in increased political participation of women, Right To Information (RTI), transitional justice processes and environment sustainability, influencing national policy to make a change.

Creating a platform for knowledge building action and influence



Contributing towards peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka Women with and without disabilities join hands from North and South

Partnering with Handicap International (HI), the WDC encountered upon a 2-year project on involving women with and without disabilities in the peace building and governance process. The project aimed to build leadership skills, increase participation within established local organisations and groups and advocate facilitating community reconciliation, social inclusion, protection and rights, contributing towards a sustainable reconciliation process through women leaders representing the districts of Kandy and Kilinochchi. Through acquiring



knowledge on issues of gender, equality, disability rights, as well as promoting Peace Building Priority Plan of Sri Lanka the endeavour focused on non-recurrence, as the 30-year conflict has direct effect on women and children. Women of families



affected by war learnt to build trust through the home stay programme initiated by the project, uniting them across socio-political and cultural dividers, with added value for the country's sustainable development. The relationships established during this activity still continue deepening their bonds with time. Both groups of women including groups of the Kandurata (Hill

country) Women's Forum started becoming sensitive to issues of women particularly with disability. Lobbying to create an environment conducive for social inclusion and integration of women with disabilities, and also being capacitated as Equality Trainers (ETs), they worked towards alerting the community on the process of transitional justice in Sri Lanka. Promoting political participation of women, WDC is exploiting the 25% mandatory quota for women in local government, and promoting women from NOW to represent at the local government election, which is to be held in February 2018. More than 20 women from NOW have been given nomination in their respective regions to date and we hope the number will be more before the nominations close in December. This is a great achievement in order to prepare for the National election in 2020. Strengthened women's leadership has proved the engagement in decision-making processes within their communities.



Portraying the resilience of women, leader of Hanguranketha forum Anula Dissanayake, initiated an innovative venture to raise funds for her programme. The 'Hela Bojun' social enterprise (indigenous food cafeteria) is in operation with 20 members from their women's groups. She trained the workers with the support of the Department of Agriculture. She was able to strengthen the women's income while supplementing the forum's

operational costs. The enterprise has received high commendation from the Department of Health of Nuwara-eliya district. The forum's networking abilities and recognition among the state institutions, business community and the community at-large underscores the potential of women.

Hanguranketha Forum which worked towards empowering young adults added another great achievement to their record through increased participation of youth in decision making spheres. A 20 year old youth Vimarsha who was involved in the national youth movement was elected a Member of Parliament and minister of Mass Media & Information Technology, in the Youth Parliament 2017 of Nuwara-eliya district. .



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH FOOD CULTURE

women of Kandurata (hillcountry) forum

In a post-war context, the role of women in the process of **Transitional Justice and Reconciliation** has been the focus of a programme implemented by WDC with women from 5 NOW members - Kandurata Women's Forum, Rajarata Women's Forum, Negenahira Diriya Kantha Forum of Ampara, Akkaraipattu Women's Development Foundation and Kalmunai Women's Development Council. Functioning as mobilisers in this programme, they create awareness amongst diverse communities on the process of accountability, RTI, reconciliation and healing,

creating an opportunity to effectively contribute towards the sustainability of peace in Sri Lanka.

The programme supported by Handicap International and partnered with two other implementers - Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Viludu, incorporates newly identified partner organisations in Hambantota and Mata ra districts.

**Empowering women
for an inclusive and
sustainable
transitional justice
and reconciliation
process in Sri Lanka**



We are for Rights is a women's collective comprising members with disabilities under the leadership of Nisha Sharif -an organisation which evolved from WDC's activities of awareness building among women on transitional justice, peace and reconciliation. Presently engaged in educating others on gender equality, disability rights, the organisation's work is gaining ground reaching out to various groups of women.

Dwelling in possibility

47 year-old Nisha Sharif is an inspiring individual who has surmounted all hurdles in life to be an influential advocate on what she believes in.



Physically challenged due to a damage caused on her spinal cord, her childhood in a family from a poor socio-economic background was far from pleasant. Not accepted within her community and society at large due to her dependence on crutches, Nisha was secluded within the house for her protection, hidden away from social stigma and negative attitudes of people. Nisha's younger brother and two older sisters had the opportunity for education and are currently employed, married and living with their families. Her father's influence to believe in herself eventually prompted her to educate herself and find a steady means of employment. Challenging the social stigma at a young age she proved to her family, and community that she had abilities. Her mother was reluctant in supporting her pursuits fearing the discrimination and harassment Nisha would encounter.

She was prompted to learn to read and write at the age of 17, after she realised she could not reply to letters sent by a friend. She required the assistance of her two sisters but her ideas were not written to her liking – making her realise that she needed to be literate and independent. Nisha acquired the help of her parents and sisters in learning to read and write in Sinhala. Relentlessly she practiced her reading using newspapers and other reading material available to her. Finally when she was ready to follow a course in self-employment at the age of 19, her parents were still hesitant to let her leave the comfort of her home. Yet, Nisha's determination led her to appear at the interview and be selected for the course in watch repairing. Today, she runs a modest watch/clock repair shop at the heart of Kandy city where she employs another physically challenged individual as her protégé.

Being introduced to WDC Nisha acquired knowledge and awareness on various topics and was trained as an Equality Trainer (ET) advocating towards gender equality, disability rights promoting reconciliation. She currently helps conduct awareness programmes within her community as well as neighbouring areas promoting attitudinal changes in social stigma and disability as well as gender issues. Her involvement in WDC's initiative on the peace and reconciliation process has spurred her insight on how she can contribute towards its promotion, being a physically challenged woman. She is now a role model within her community and mediates necessary action towards community issues relating to ethnic and religious conflicts promoting inclusion and respect of other cultures and religions.

Today, her pursuits have become a source of strength to her family.

Women as leaders with or without disabilities

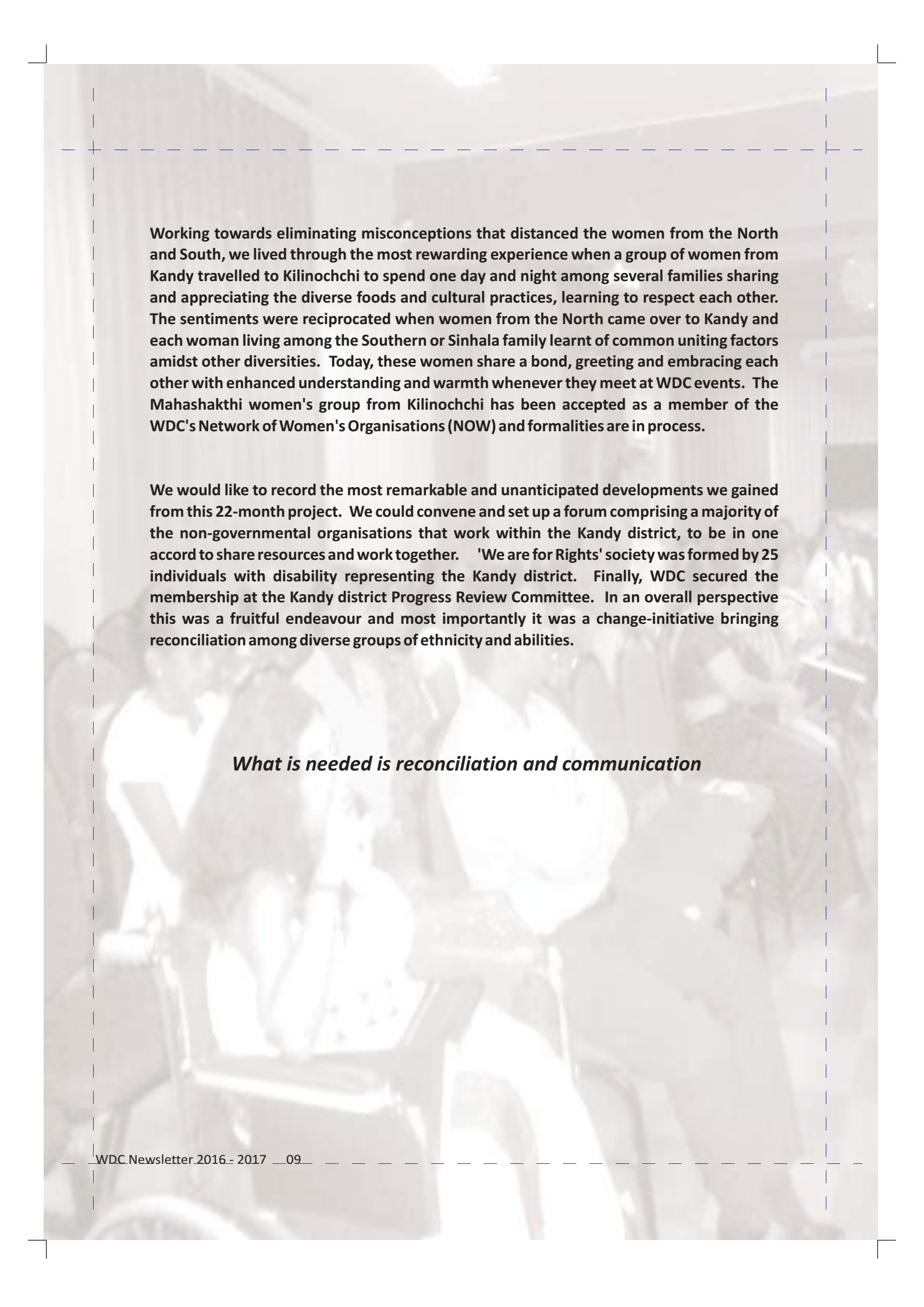


In any situation of conflict, the most vulnerable and affected are women. In our experience we realize that a woman with disability is victimized twice over and the issue becomes more complicated. The absence of positive attitudes of the so called 'developed' or 'civilised' society can be attributed as a root cause for this dilemma.

Hence, we embarked on an exploratory project partnering with Handicap International (HI) and International Centre for Ethnic studies (ICES) on issues that affect women with disabilities, stepping into action for 22 months, to make a social change in the spheres of disability, gender issues, equality and reconciliation within the district of Kandy. Conducting a barrier assessment by talking to 250 women, we encountered issues of discrimination in obtaining bank loans for self-employment or insurance policies concerning women with disability. Legal documents needed a proxy signatory and decision-making was not possible even within the family where a father, brother or son would decide for her. In cases of abuse and rights violations, the police would at most times not pay attention to a woman with disability and disregard complaints in sign language or in braille form.

Based on these findings, we initiated training for 25 persons comprising individuals with and without disability, where 24 of them were females and one was a male. Equipped as Equality Trainers (ET) the group received tutoring on the Right to Information (RTI) Act, co-existence and how to deliver a message

to the community. Empowered with adequate knowledge, the members of the ET group moved into women's groups in the grassroots creating awareness, developing attitudes and skills. Women with disabilities were incorporated into women's groups of the Kandurata (hill-country) Women's Forum. Subsequently, the ET group continued the awareness raising activity among government officials, youth groups and other organisations that work with persons with disabilities. A manual of instructions cum guidebook was prepared in Sinhala, Tamil and Braille medium. A report was prepared on problems faced by the women with disabilities which were highlighted through their own grievances. Taking up issues contained in this report at a roundtable discussion with state and non-state actors initially at district level and later at national level platform, the ET group encountered resistance from the officials but were not to be deterred. Creating an enabling environment to discuss causes/issues of division with religious leaders, officials and the community, the group was further strengthened to reach its goal of alerting the national policy makers and the minister in charge to focus attention towards these matters.



Working towards eliminating misconceptions that distanced the women from the North and South, we lived through the most rewarding experience when a group of women from Kandy travelled to Kilinochchi to spend one day and night among several families sharing and appreciating the diverse foods and cultural practices, learning to respect each other. The sentiments were reciprocated when women from the North came over to Kandy and each woman living among the Southern or Sinhala family learnt of common uniting factors amidst other diversities. Today, these women share a bond, greeting and embracing each other with enhanced understanding and warmth whenever they meet at WDC events. The Mahashakthi women's group from Kilinochchi has been accepted as a member of the WDC's Network of Women's Organisations (NOW) and formalities are in process.

We would like to record the most remarkable and unanticipated developments we gained from this 22-month project. We could convene and set up a forum comprising a majority of the non-governmental organisations that work within the Kandy district, to be in one accord to share resources and work together. 'We are for Rights' society was formed by 25 individuals with disability representing the Kandy district. Finally, WDC secured the membership at the Kandy district Progress Review Committee. In an overall perspective this was a fruitful endeavour and most importantly it was a change-initiative bringing reconciliation among diverse groups of ethnicity and abilities.

What is needed is reconciliation and communication

WOMEN FOR ENVIRONMENT PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

When deciding upon a theme for this year's Women's Day programme we presented an opportunity for women leaders of the NOW to list out the most pressing issues prevalent within society. The two main topics that stood out were climate change and peace and reconciliation, moving towards a united Sri Lanka.

It is in this context that, the NOW selected the theme 'Women for Environment, Peace and Reconciliation' to celebrate International Women's Day in 2017. On the 30th and 31st of March, approximately 400 women from the North, East, North central, and Central provinces representing diverse ethnic backgrounds and spiritual beliefs, assembled to share their experiences on this theme. A highlight of this event was the participation of women from formerly war-ridden Kilinochchi and Mannar. Coming together on one platform depicting a Sri Lankan identity was an achievement for the women of the North and south. Radiating unity through diversity of food, participants could appreciate and relish a variety of preparations never tasted before.

The exhibition and trade fair did not only showcase eco-friendly products but also the variety of colours, designs and creativity unique to different regions of the country. Contributing to a zero-garbage concept at the event, the women returned home with the determination of promoting peace and environmental protection within their communities.

The active participation of women with disabilities at this event denoted their ability to contribute towards their families and community and to the country's development process. It was emphasised to the political dignitaries present at the occasion that it is vital to remove restrictive environments, which suppress the optimum utilisation of these women's abilities expeditiously.



Unlocking potentials of Women in Tourism

The tourism industry has been developing at a high rate in the past few years, becoming the largest foreign exchange earner in Sri Lanka, and creating many jobs for Sri Lankans. However, the majority of the jobs in this industry are taken up by men due to cultural affiliations regarding females working in the tourism industry. To address this, The WDC with the support of World University Services Canada (WUSC) created the Women in Tourism (WIT) project. The project is not only in the central province but is further extended to the North and South. The overall mission is to eradicate misconceptions and negative stigma, mainly among seniors and community leaders, and to create more professional opportunities for women in the tourism sector.

During the past few months, some of our stakeholders have been the Kandy Hoteliers Association (KHA), the Sri Lanka Institution of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM), job banks, the Chamber of entrepreneurs in Kandy, and the Kandy Women's Chamber of Commerce. Of course, the key stakeholder and main supporter of the project has been WDC due to their high dedication for women's development.



We have partnered with both a government and private job bank. The private job bank has dedicated activities solely for the WIT project; they contact potential applicants through forums, schools, national youth councils, leaflets, media, and word of mouth. The job banks have helped us come closer to our goal by helping to create valuable connections and providing resources for women to use to find jobs in tourism. With the KHA, the project has worked to develop gender sensitive HR guidelines in recruitment and retention of women. The hotels have also agreed to become a close network for WIT project, and have worked to create awareness on jobs in tourism, and have categorized vacancies for women to apply. With SLITHM, we have formulated awareness programs at grassroots levels. They are very pleased with our project and have begun offering scholarships to underprivileged women, as well as to women

who are already in the sector. This has helped pave the way for their career advancement. WDC's strong network and women's forums have been a major asset for the project because through them we have implemented a grassroots approach that allows us to work with local communities. In partnership, WUSC and WDC, have facilitated many awareness programs for various communities around the province. The commitment to end violence against women has also been a guiding factor in our project because it is economic empowerment which



will give women the means to raise themselves out of violent situations. We aim to connect women to work opportunities in the tourism industry, as well as provide training on how to manage homestay businesses – all the while addressing cultural connotations surrounding the industry.

One of the main focuses of the WIT project is the Sancharika radio show broadcast on Kandurata FM every Sunday morning from 7:30- 8:00 AM. The radio programme raises awareness on jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry. The show also addresses the challenges and benefits of working in the tourism industry. We often bring in role models to the show for them to discuss how they have overcome barriers that they might have faced in reaching their success. The radio program is recorded by engaging WDC forums in their own communities. The show has actually been quite successful with sometimes up to 20 listeners calling in to answer our questions.

In the coming months we hope to solidify our community partnerships and ultimately, create more work opportunities for women in the tourism sector by connecting women to potential employers, running training programs, and eradicating negative stigma, creating more opportunity for women and most of all reducing foreign migration and creating opportunity within the country, to minimise violence against women and children (VAWC) issues due to women migration, which is a burning issue at present.

SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

RESOURCE CENTRE FOR WOMEN

The Resource centre serves as a catalyst for effective communication between WDC, its beneficiaries, and partners. Based on the organizational theory of change approach of Knowledge, Action, and Influence the unit provides various awareness programmes and capacity building through the resource centre.

This year, in a phase where WDC aims to be a Sri Lankan role model on mobilising women, the resource centre had the responsibility of preparing and advancing towards a supportive structure, further strengthening its resource pool and meeting the requests of various state and non-state organisations through providing resource services. Awareness building on gender, addressing gender-based violence, inclusion of UNCRPD in WDC activities addressing rights of persons with disabilities, child rights, peace and reconciliation, transitional justice and right to information (RTI) are some of the areas identified for development effectiveness and becoming the change agent offering state departments, officers of the police in-service training unit, school teachers, and women's groups (CBO's/NGO's) associated with WDC.

The WDC resource centre also assisted many law undergraduates of department of Social Sciences, at the University of Peradeniya in research studies on social development and gender-based violence as well as many groups of overseas students researching gender-based violence. Since its inception the resource centre has developed throughout the years into being a well sort out research hub not only within the Kandy district but also around the country as well as overseas. The resource centre will continue to grow and enrich communities with the knowledge and experiences shared by the dedicated and skilled staff of the WDC.

Sthree: A Women's Initiative



Economic productivity or potential is a vital factor linked to gender and gender based violence. To be involved in decision-making beginning from home, one has to be knowledgeable, skilful and economically secure. WDC's Sthree social enterprise aims to strengthen the economic possibilities for women. Moving beyond economic gains the enterprise also strategizes to promote peace and reconciliation through the exchange of marketable products of women from North and South. Focused on enhancing quality and standards, creativity as well as sales promotion, several workshops and programmes were conducted for small/medium scale (SME's) women entrepreneurs during the year.

Initiating women's involvement in tourism, WDC is moving ahead to promote quality products and services, local market and attract visitors to Sri Lanka. A fully equipped open kitchen with the support of Planeterra-Canada has been set up at Sthree, for women to prepare traditional Sri Lankan food along with Kavili (sweetmeats) to expose our visitors to the authentic flavours of Sri Lankan cuisine. WDC envisages a great opportunity for women to exhibit their wonderful skills and, showcase the products of hard working entrepreneurs.



More women will be identified in the future, to provide equal opportunities, setting a benchmark for our younger generation to follow the footsteps of those who want to break the barriers, and are bold enough to pursue their passions, making the most of their skills and talents while creating an equal and inclusive society,

I met Soysa on my first week in Kandy. From the moment I saw her, I knew her to be a woman of strength and love. Her talent in the art of beeralu (Sri Lankan lace making) is displayed all over her home; decorated with samples, materials, awards, and photographs. She is a leader in her field and in her community, in the way that she is always eager to share her knowledge and skills with other entrepreneurs.

My Adventures at WDC

Reflections of a Volunteer

Two bus rides away situated in the hills of Ampitiya, resides my favourite place in the whole country: WDC's Vocational Training Centre. As I walk up the hill, I know that I am one gate away from smiles and laughs that warm my heart just like a triple chocolate cookie does back home in Montreal. I find 25 women working hard around the wood-fire outside, learning to make candles of all shapes and colours. While at the top room, there are 8 youth from VTC practicing their table service skills in preparation for the Sthree café.

These are only a few inspirational stories of the people that WDC helps. And it continues to fuel my motivation to make a difference and help people.

So far this past year, Sthree has been undergoing a lot of different changes. WDC has welcomed new entrepreneurs as well as re-discovered existing entrepreneurs within the network who display considerable skills and talent.

Additionally, with the help of Peter Fuller's donation, WDC was able to give Sthree a well-deserved fresh coat of paint. WDC has also received funding through Planeterra to open up Sthree café, where WDC's forum women can utilize their cooking skills to celebrate healthy, local traditional Sri Lankan food with visitors and locals of Kandy. In August, WDC offered a four part capacity building training workshop, where their entrepreneurs learnt about self-assessment, idea-generation, business management, colour and design principles. And recently, WDC hosted a candle-making workshop in partnership with Candle House Ceylon, where 25 women learned to produce handmade candles and how to market their products. In the future, WDC hopes to continue working with more talented women and disabled individuals. Sthree is proud and grateful to provide a place where women and persons with disability can find the support to follow their passion and strive for economic equality and empowerment.

A FITTING TRIBUTE



In remembrance and appreciation of services rendered by our late founder Mrs. Pearl Stephen the WDC staff dedicated a whole week of charity work and community service on the days leading to Founder's day, observed on the 31st of July.

It is customary to give alms as an act of virtue on behalf of family members who have gone before us. In keeping with this tradition the WDC staff carried out various activities in honour of our founder during their own spare lunch time. Through raising funds internally, the staff provided food and refreshment to outdoor patients, undergoing dialysis, at the Nephrology – Dialysis and Kidney Transplant Units of the General Hospital Kandy on the 25th and 27th of July. In addition through the acquired funds, a much needed water filter/dispenser was donated to the District Hospital in Marassana. These activities brought much joy and fulfilment to the staff, as they were able to pay a fitting tribute to a matriarch who dedicated her life to providing service to the less fortunate.

Prior to the Thanksgiving service a Shramadana was held at the WDC headquarters, where all staff rendered their support in cleaning every corner of the WDC building and helped adorn it with beautiful flowers in preparation of the service. Led by Rev. Saman Perera, the service consisted of special items and tributes made in remembrance of Mrs. Pearl Stephen. A year of passing on was observed, in thanksgiving for the life and work of Late Rev. George Stephen whose partnership and mission inspired those at WDC. A sense of accomplishment prevailed in the atmosphere as the staff shared a moment of fellowship with the guests, including family and friends of Mrs. Pearl Stephen and Rev. George Stephen.

Having initiated the **Pearl Stephen Memorial Trust Fund** in 2016, the WDC, was pleased with the progress and performance of **Harsha**, a deserving student, who could continue his tertiary education from 2015-2017. The scholarship recipient for 2017 is **Virajini**, a student from Nugawela Central College who amidst severe financial hardship obtained excellent results at her GCE Ordinary Level examination. Virajini plans on pursuing the stream of Agricultural Science for her Advanced Level.

Rasika, who received a Braille slate from WDC nearly 10 years prior and referred to the School for the Blind in Ratmalana, has qualified to study for the GCE Advanced Level examination at her new school - Dullewa, Vidyalaya in Matale. A Voice-recorder granted by the fund, secured her right to study in Braille in a regular school. These scholarships were presented at the Thanksgiving Service on 31st July.



KIRIMETIYAWATTE *A Community Energised*

The establishment of the Super Kids Nursery (the village's first Tamil medium pre-school) has contributed very much to early childhood development efforts in the village. Currently 10 children attend the pre-school, of which 04, having completed one year of education, have been successfully enrolled into grade 1 at the Kirimetiya Tamil College and the Thalatuoya Central College in 2018. The two young teachers capacitated through training have successfully managed to run the preschool, provide proper education to the young children and gained the trust of the parents and guardians. Today these two young women are considered leaders within their community and have been empowered to tackle issues confidently.



The community of Kirimetiya has been an all-round winner with many feats achieved within this past two years.

The children's club has also been very active at Kirimetiya and the young members are enthusiastic to learn new ideas and be involved in various activities. The modest library consisting of donated books and literature established within the preschool premises has proven to be effective in WDC's efforts to sustain the students in secondary education, building personality and leadership skills amongst the youngsters. WDC's holistic approach towards the children did not stop with education, but incorporated monitoring of nutrition, primary healthcare and environmental sustainability.

Acquiring the land from the state, to construct the preschool building was such a collective accomplishment. Pressurizing for infrastructure development, the community group succeeded in securing allocated state funds, initiating the reconstruction of the neglected access road to the village.

WDC's longstanding involvement in reintegration of children with disabilities identified the need of Kalaichelvi, a 28 year old girl with speech and hearing impairment. Looking to unleash her potential WDC introduced her to vocational training at the VTC in Ampitiya. Developing her skills in crafts she also had the opportunity to assist the Sahana Hostel staff in caring for the children. Kalaichelvi who was a reclusive individual while at home in Kirimetiya has transformed into a lively outgoing personality.

The women participating at the WDC's Avurudu festival (National New Year) in Kandy city, being the first group in its history, to represent Kirimetiya out of their geographical boundaries, have been able to elevate their status within the community, through knowledge of rights, and leadership skills.

The cordiality among the staff and this young woman paved the way for her to find a life partner – a friend of the woodwork instructor at the VTC.

The regular attention of the state officials of the Thalatu-oya Divisional Secretariat mediated by WDC is a significant feature where Kirimetiya is the buzzword and has become the model for mobilised communities. Remarkably, men and women of Kirimetiya sensitised by WDC on rights, health and gender issues, lobbied for their rights, accessing resources through the local authorities in several instances.



"I am truly honoured to work alongside such dedicated and passionate individuals at WDC. The staff work tirelessly to ensure the projects deliver the best possible outcomes for the communities. Their passion, energy and drive constantly inspires me.

Our working partnership is very much a two-way relationship; I have learnt so much from them. Sustainability and the community's best interests are at the heart of everything they do. They are not afraid of challenges and work with the community to

produce innovative and sustainable solutions.

The progress that WDC

has facilitated in Kirimetiawatte over the past year has been amazing. For example, a key issue identified by the community was the limited access and opportunity to education for the children. WDC have worked with the community to establish structures

such as the Children's Club, reading Clubs and the development of a new pre-school – the super kid's nursery. They have worked with two inspirational young women from the village Subadhini and Suganya, who are completing their teacher training studies and teaching ten children at the new nursery school set up in the village. I have seen first-hand how WDC has worked to empower and support Subadhini and Suganya, to become respected and successful development champions in the community.

Through the work of WDC, the community have grown in confidence and ability to work together cohesively to drive needed improvements in their village. Speaking directly with members of the community I have heard how families have been empowered to improve health, social, economic and environmental outcomes in the village through

various trainings, counselling, meetings and workshops facilitated by WDC.

The respect and trust shown by the community towards WDC is a credit to the work carried out by the staff. WDC takes the time to stop and listen to the community, working with individuals to really understand the issues and working in partnership with them to create sustainable community based solutions. As a result, this village is moving from a fragmented, isolated, disempowered status to a confident, articulate, cohesive, organized

community. I am very excited for the future of this project.

I am extremely grateful to all the staff that work from our partners at WDC and cannot thank them enough for all the hard work they do for the communities. Thank you!"

A partner in our journey



Sally Chandler
Field Director - Shining Life Children's Trust



The Community Based Rehabilitation Programme or children with disabilities while increasing opportunities for social inclusion has strengthened itself as a resource provider in a range of spheres - training of volunteer workers, guiding parents in supportive rehabilitation and assisting students in research studies.

Community Based Rehabilitation

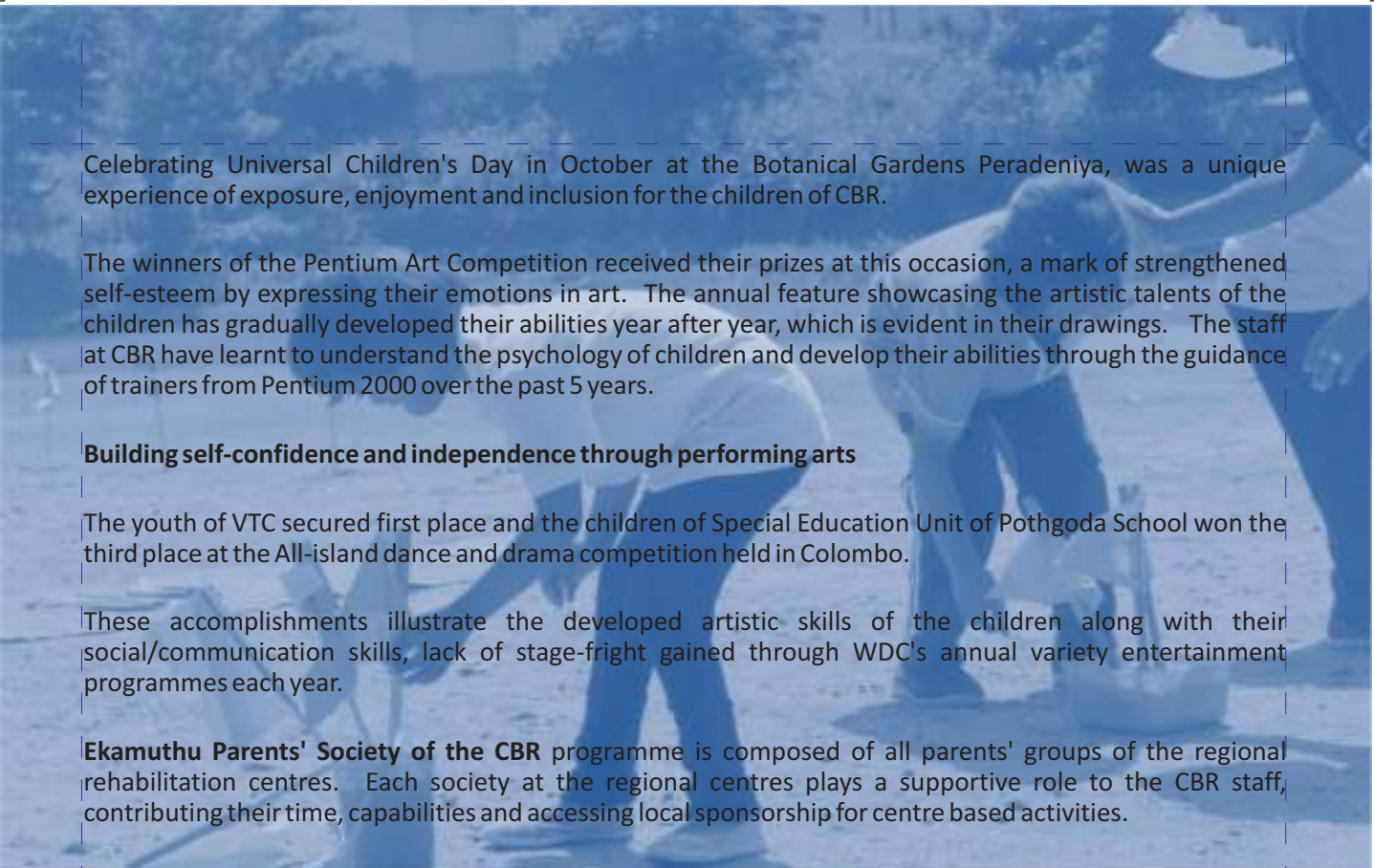
WDC's prime objective to uplift the quality of their lives through appropriate rehabilitation, education, and support for livelihood development through classroom activities with supportive structures, integrating parents' societies at the regional centres, and forming interactive links with the department of Education, Health (hospitals), Social Services as well as other like-minded organisations.

The enhanced understanding of parents, on disability, rehabilitation, and psychological needs of the child, has increased involvement and concern about their child's development and of their future. Close interaction of parents and teachers created an enabling environment to create future plans for individuals with special needs.

The participation of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities promoted inclusion, minimized physical deconditioning, optimised physical functioning, and enhanced overall well-being. The Edmund Silva

playground in Kandy was the venue for the CBR sports-meet which attracted passers-by where children were cheered on by parents and teachers - creating awareness among the public, about the abilities of these children.

The children and parents experienced spiritual inspiration in sharing of cultural and religious practices, participating in different religious festivals. A time for offering flowers, observing 'sil' (meditation) activities at their centres as well as other experiences of spiritual sentiments combined with joyous singing in colourful ambiances.



Celebrating Universal Children's Day in October at the Botanical Gardens Peradeniya, was a unique experience of exposure, enjoyment and inclusion for the children of CBR.

The winners of the Pentium Art Competition received their prizes at this occasion, a mark of strengthened self-esteem by expressing their emotions in art. The annual feature showcasing the artistic talents of the children has gradually developed their abilities year after year, which is evident in their drawings. The staff at CBR have learnt to understand the psychology of children and develop their abilities through the guidance of trainers from Pentium 2000 over the past 5 years.

Building self-confidence and independence through performing arts

The youth of VTC secured first place and the children of Special Education Unit of Pothgoda School won the third place at the All-island dance and drama competition held in Colombo.

These accomplishments illustrate the developed artistic skills of the children along with their social/communication skills, lack of stage-fright gained through WDC's annual variety entertainment programmes each year.

Ekamuthu Parents' Society of the CBR programme is composed of all parents' groups of the regional rehabilitation centres. Each society at the regional centres plays a supportive role to the CBR staff, contributing their time, capabilities and accessing local sponsorship for centre based activities.

CBR PROGRAMME REACHING OUT TO NEW LOCATIONS

The CBR programme forges ahead towards sustainability and strategic expansion geographically. Conducting (PRAs) - community participatory appraisals of needs in newly identified locations, WDC intends to expand the CBR programme in unreached DS divisions of Kandy district within the next three years. Although it is a formidable task, it has been managed satisfactorily by incorporating the WDC women's forums, capacities of the parents' society, community collectives and the community contribution in order that, WDC will not be a full-time implementer but a service provider. With persistence we have realized the goal and setup several community-owned centres and special units in schools which are operating successfully.

WDC strives to continue the programme of community-owned CBR centres amidst numerous challenges.



VTC – Creating a generation of leaders

The Vocational Training Centre managed by WDC is an establishment which ensures that persons with disabilities, particularly youth, are provided the necessary opportunity to develop their skills towards ensuring successful social integration.

16 youth participated at the district-wise sports festival while one young boy won 5th place in a 100m race at the National Sports Competitions. Two young boys and a girl from the VTC dance troupe received an opportunity of a lifetime to preform and represent the Kandy district at the National Dance Competition for youth with disabilities held at the Nelumpokuna auditorium in Colombo. Performing in the presence of a multitude of audience members with confidence, the youth from Ampitiya demonstrated sheer excellence in their dance skills.

During the Sinhala and Tamil New year celebrations in May the youth had the opportunity to celebrate with

students from 2 government schools as well as students from CBR centres. The youngsters delightfully mingled with others in traditional games and customs. This year presented an opportunity for our youth to become members of a registered club and thereby receive funds to completely refurbish their VTC playground, which was in a derelict state.

The annually sponsored sales stall offered by Kandy City Centre - KCC is a platform for the youth from VTC to exhibit their products of skills and awaken the public to their abilities. KCC's patronage for the past 7 years exemplifies the quality and finesse of the VTC products, which has been commended by the Sales Promotion Division of KCC.

“it is amazing that these youth have abilities to create such quality products.”

The recently launched Social Enterprise – Sthree Handicraft and Café created a platform for our VTC youth to acquire a means of employment within the hospitality industry. Altogether 12 youth have been trained on restaurant stewardship and will be working in rotation at the Sthree café. This initiative, supported by Planeterra Foundation together with G Adventures is a pioneering effort of WDC to secure the future of these youth where they will earn an allowance for their services, promoting economic sustainability. Their performance has been highly commended by their trainer who is encouraged by their capabilities and enthusiasm.

Considerably, the WDC Vocational Training Centre has achieved many feats throughout this year. It is important to note that the Sahana hostel at Ampitiya was awarded 3rd place for Best Residential Home for Children in 2017, by the Central provincial Department of Social Services. Serving 12 girls and 18 boys with residential and family care during the school term, WDC manages the Sahana hostel with community contributions.



Twinkle-eyed Kaushalya Ukwatte

Standing with hand outstretched to take the oath at the annual CBR sports-meet, Kaushalya in her late teens enjoys participating in these events. Sandya her mother, describes how her daughter picks



flowers from the garden to offer at the alter in their house, folds her washed clothes, and also helps to make 'roti' a local bread. Identified with Cerebral Palsy and severe spasticity in her infancy, Kaushalya's growth milestones were delayed. Sandya reminisces how she carried her baby of 1 year to a paediatric

clinic, with her little head hanging down and limbs with no movements. The paediatrician referred the baby to WDC, where she had therapeutic exercises to strengthen her neck and control her head. Since 2000, Sandya was diligent in bringing her baby for rehabilitation although she had deep anxiety about her life ahead.

She was guided by the staff to continue exercises at home, while she participated in a range of awareness sessions and clinics pertaining to overcoming a condition of disability. Sandya's expectations were kindled by the baby's improvement after sometime when Kaushalya's tiny limbs gradually improved and she could sit upright. "Amidst distressing domestic conditions my world and life revolved around my daughter and, her visible improvement encouraged me. "Today she can walk on her own, and her capacity to understand has increased remarkably", Sandya says with beaming eyes. Kaushalya, now 18 years and learning needlecraft, making rugs at the VTC, is full of smiles when mother describes about her "Kaushi likes to dress stylish clothes and matching accessories".



Kaushalya in the centre



FATHIMA SIHLA A star in Her family

Prancing about like a bird, 9 year old Fathima Sihla was thrilled to see her 'Susantha teacher', when she visited their house recently. "I could not contain my tears of joy", said Susantha seeing the child after 3 months (the centre was closed due to relocation)." Spontaneously hugging the teacher at the entrance Sihla stretched out her hand and tugged at Susantha saying "yang" (come in); and when they were inside the house she brought her biscuits. **Susantha recalls the day in 2013**, when the four year old girl was carried in to the Special Education Unit in her mother's arms, unable to raise her head. The medical records indicated Cerebral palsy, speech and development delay. On her visit to their house she noticed that, the child simply laid flat on the mat. She was severely undernourished. "Initially, I advised the mother how to prepare simple nutritious meals for the child, and helped with practical demonstrations at home" says Susantha continuing to explain that the child's level of nutrition improved within 6 months.

Thereafter, at the centre, the child had speech therapy, therapeutic physical exercises and activities to improve social skills. She was referred her to the ENT clinic, where a surgery was done to rectify the tongue-tie condition. Sihla started to sit upright without support, and then developed flexibility of her limbs, gradually walking with balance. The teacher encouraged her to join in play and group activities with the children in the mainstream primary classes. She developed her daily living activities fairly, eating on her own and dressing clothes. Now she speaks single words, walks about on her own. "She makes friends very quickly especially with her peers" says Susantha. When Fathima Sihla won first and second places in 2 competitions – threading beads, sorting coloured balls, at the annual CBR sports-meet the parents were delighted, the mother exclaimed with tears in her eyes "Is this a dream".

Braille

brings sight
to the people with low vision and blind

Literacy is the pathway to maximum independence and performance. The prospect to read and write is no different for a sighted or blind person. Braille has been internationally accepted as the official system of communication for the blind. Having signed the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Sri Lanka has introduced the recognition of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others worldwide. Braille provides the chance for equality that visually impaired individuals deserve.

WDC has been promoting and facilitating services to visually impaired adults, youth and children for a duration of 15 years. Ms. Bisomenike Grero is not only a Braille teacher but also an activist and a counsellor offering guidance on school education and employment. She speaks with a sense of fulfilment, recollecting the number of young lives that were changed for the better through WDC's facilitation in encouraging them towards self-reliance, empowering them to live a dignified life within society.

Saaratha who was featured in our Newsletter in 2016, gained admission to Dharmaraja College, a leading boys' school in Kandy, based on his excellent results at the Grade 5 Scholarship examination. Gaining ground in his academic pursuits has been possible through his learning of Braille. He is well recognised and accommodated by his peers and teachers. In September 2017, Saaratha was selected/nominated to represent Sri Lanka at the Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities in Asia 2017, which was held in Vietnam. The event was categorized in to four is meant for four - visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment (locomotor) and intellectual /development disorder between the ages of 13-19 years. Saaratha was the Sri Lankan nominee in the visual impairment category. Along with 3 other youth he travelled to Vietnam without his parents, denoting the confidence and independence he has gained within a short period.

22 year-old visually impaired Maleesha, talks of his tormenting experiences during his school career and quest for higher education, where he was discriminated and isolated due of his disability. Through failing to obtain the expected results at the GCE Ordinary Level examination, and the anxiety of losing his sight gradually, Maleesha realised the need to adopt a new way of life in order to secure his rights. He decided to learn Braille. Joining WDC in mid-2017 and still at the elementary level, guided by his teacher cum counsellor, he has the determination to move forward and pursue his education and hopes to teach Braille to other youth who are socially challenged due to visual impairments.

Nine year old Razad is an endearing boy, who has been growing up with love and extreme protection from his family due to his blindness. His parents and older siblings who were concerned for his safety unintentionally overlooked his rights. Razad has not attended school at the appropriate age. Since being introduced to the WDC, Razad has learnt to step out of his comfort zones, under the care and guidance of Ms. Bisomenike, who is familiarising him to his environment through touch using different textures, surfaces, and other material, which helps him develop sensitivity in his fingertips. Improving his cognitive skills through sense of touch, Razad will be ready to learn Braille in the next few weeks along with his elementary school work.



JUST WHEN THE CATERPILLAR THOUGHT THE WORLD WAS OVER, IT BECAME A BUTTERFLY....

Entering our premises in Haragama, one would find groups of teenage girls occupied in a range of activities – gardening, needlework and other handcrafts or participating in recreational games or schoolwork. Smiling shyly, in fits of laughter or in a sombre mood each of these girls has a story behind their outward expressions. The Crisis Intervention Centre, the transitory home for girls children is considerably equipped with residential facilities, counselling and family care, medical treatment, and legal support, along with guidance for future livelihoods and more importantly an enabling safe environment. We are thankful for all the (short-term) help and assistance rendered to us in improving much needed infrastructure facilities which relieved us of a segment of operational costs, and to well-wishers for now and again sponsoring meals and basic needs of the residents.

At the onset, our doors were open to girls or women survivors of all forms of abuse as the 'centre' was the epitome of WDC's prime concern – gender based violence against women. Through the years, there has been a decrease in numbers of women subjected to domestic violence, which is controlled by tighter legislations through the DV act, more public awareness, stigma or economic alternatives for support. In the recent past, most of the residents were younger, ranging from 13-18 years of age, and mainly referred by the Department of Probation and Childcare, courts, CSOs or police, keeping the head count on the rise. Limited residential space and inadequate funding due to lack of global/national priority towards this matter, compelled us to narrow down our criteria mainly to sexually abused or vulnerable to abuse girls. Our records, indicate that increased referrals at the shelter are girls from the plantation areas and disadvantaged families especially due to lack of parental protection, caused by the increase in mothers seeking migrant employment to ease economic burdens, leaving children in the care of negligent or abusive family members, or most cases a known person.

Focusing our attention on a holistic development, we facilitate education in state schools within the locality, and provide literacy facilities at the centre for school drop-outs and others who have not had formal education. We focus on their best interests, reproductive health and rights, ethics and values, as well as activities for building self-esteem and leadership. The emotional ties and relationships between the child and her parents or family are fostered through scheduled visits by closest family members to the centre where options for family counselling are also enabled.

Reintegration is a challenge for us as they have no option but to return to the same area where they came from. A few of them have opted to move on pursuing their dreams. Nevertheless, many of them face the possibility of encountering the perpetrators or stigmatisation, and lose prospects, giving them little or no options but to get married or work in apparel factories – a vulnerable environment, which is a cause for concern. WDC's remedial plans for follow up, to establish supportive structures such as creating safety mechanisms 'safety nets' through its Network of Women's Forums and, financial sustenance to motivate entrepreneurial development, job placement.

Hopeful to receive appropriate funding for the outlined plans, we have initiated preliminary activities to prepare the girls for re-integration, by involving them in enterprising endeavours, to learn and acquire new skills and to develop a strong work ethic. The production unit at the 'centre' motivates the girls to work competitively in a team to reach targets, and train as potential women entrepreneurs. The sales outlet of the emerging 'Sthree' social enterprise both managed by WDC, offer them chance to interact with society – gaining real world experience. The most recent prospects are in the hospitality industry where there is a broad category of fields on offer, and performance-oriented possibilities to rise up in rank. Breaking barriers of cultural and social challenges, we intend to energise the girls to step in, where very few women embark upon, by applying their skills and talents, leading to economic empowerment and stability.



Graphic Impressions 2017





**Strengthening our initiatives for equal opportunities and
inclusion of socially challenged groups
within society**

**WDC
sincerely appreciates your patronage**

**Sharing our interest towards the well-being
of women and children
We thank all other organisations, social groups
and individuals
for your sponsorship and contributions**



Sthree Cafe

Welcome to Sthree Cafe: a traditional Sri Lankan Kitchen that feeds your body, heart and soul. Warm, spicy, sweet and powerful are words that describe not only Sri Lankan women but also the island's unique cuisine.

Sthree Cafe is an initiative by the Women's Development Centre, a nonprofit with over 30 years experience working with women in Sri Lanka. By eating here today you are supporting meaningful programs, including:



Vocational Training Centre for youth with disabilities



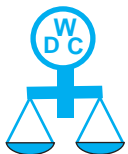
National Women's forum



Shelter for Women



Community Based Rehabilitation Program



The Women's Development Centre

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A Women's Initiative