

Colombo, Summer 2011

Dear all,

Ayubowan! Thank you once again for your continued support of Shining Life Children's Trust. The gratitude and sincere thanks expressed by members of the communities we work in is testament to the impact that your donations make to the communities we work with in rural Sri Lanka.



In our project in Galewala with the Human Development Foundation (HDF) the women enjoyed the recent training to help them generate more income. They have been able to use this, coupled with the micro-finance project implemented by SLCT and HDF, to establish small businesses. Malkanthi (the HDF Co-ordinator) and I are currently drafting a business proposal for a community IT Centre and Outlet to improve IT knowledge of young people in the community. IT skills are just as important in Sri Lanka in helping people to improve their incomes!

The Women's Development Centre (WDC) and I are finishing off the project proposal for our new two-and-a-half year in the Kandy District. The planned activities and project objectives are innovative and we hope will make a lasting and sustainable difference in the community. As I have been in Sri Lanka for the duration of the pilot six month project and the drafting and negotiation of the two-and-a-half year project I am very excited about this project. Since working with the WDC I have been impressed by their professionalism and have a growing affection for their staff and respect for Ms Pearl Stephen, who is the founder and CEO of the WDC. The WDC team are shown on the right.



Unfortunately things have not been not going so well on our project on the tea plantation in Rikiiligaskada. The relationship between the NGO we work with (HCCWF) and the managers of Rahatungoda Estate has broken down, causing the project to be delayed. It looks like the problem can be solved with the help of another implementing agency. I cannot hide my frustration at all these delays but unfortunately despite the official line by government and the media here, it can still be very hard to implement positive change due to the bureaucracy and political interest in some issues (especially in the tea estates). This, for me, emphasises the importance of our work here and why – even though the majority of NGOs no longer work in the Kandy District – our presence can improve the opportunities of communities and empower those disenfranchised by the political system.

On a more positive note, I have been continuing my Sinhala lessons and am now competent if not fluent. It is a shame here that not many Expats learn the local language but I feel I benefit from being able to tell tuk-tuk drivers that 'Mama tourist kenak nemmail' which means 'I am not a tourist!' I have been playing for the expat football team (the Colombo Lions) which is a fun way of meeting people and exercising. However, losing to the Japanese Expat team and drawing with the Koreans due to a

controversial penalty on Sunday, was less fun. I also played my first game for the Expat rugby team (bizarrely called 'The Puffins'), although playing in 36 degree heat and 86% humidity took some of the joy out of the game.

Last month Shining Life moved its base in Sri Lanka from Dehiwala to Colombo 5 (Kalinga Place) which has made travel to and from the projects much easier. For example, returning from a project visit (6 hours from Pettah to Colombo) used to take an additional 1–2 hours depending on the traffic – with the roads in Colombo it would normally be two. This journey now only takes 10–5 minutes. I do miss the late night egg kottu roti which I could normally procure from slightly 'dodgy' and unclean places for an incredibly cheap price and I was more of a novelty in Dehiwala than I am in Colombo 5. There are few Westerners in Dehiwala and even fewer who used to run twice a day through the streets of Dehiwala dodging traffic, pedestrians and the staring of the locals!

Not to be outdone by the UK and the extended holiday enjoyed there during the Royal Wedding, Sri Lanka has also been enjoying a raft of holidays over the last month or so. Sinhala New Year (Avuradha) officially consisted of two days off but unofficially stretched to at least a week and a couple of weeks later Sri Lanka was celebrating Vesak (Vesak is a three day holiday encompassing Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death). Unfortunately I was unable to see the majority of the decorations and festivities due to a heavy workload but even a casual look out of my window showed streets bedecked with lanterns and fairy lights.



Subha Vesak (Happy Vesak) and Alut Subha Avuradha (Happy New Year)!

John