



Improving Wellbeing of Children of Post-War Sri Lanka Through Psychosocial Activities

Background

Sri Lanka has been mired in a civil war for over three decades where a separatist militant organization fought to create an independent Tamil state in the north and the east of the island. For over 25 years, the insurgency caused significant hardships for the population, environment and the economy of the country, and created an invisible divide amongst the main two ethnic groups of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

During this period, the areas of North and East were isolated due to the on-going military and terrorist activities, where development was hampered and people were not able to lead normal lives, especially during the final years of battle. With the defeat of the terrorist group in May 2009, Sri Lanka has got the opportunity to rebuild and heal the nation once and for all and herald a new era of peace and development for the future generations.

With the people who were displaced during the war, now being resettled expeditiously in their original homelands in the Northern and North Eastern Provinces, the people have an opportunity re-start life anew. However, special attention must be paid to the children, who are today, victims of war they have known no other life, nor experienced the freedom and innocence of childhood. They were born in war, lived all their lives in the midst of war and have known mostly fear and terror.

These children are our future and if their hearts and minds are not healed, Sri Lanka will have a generation of battled scarred children, whose worlds will never integrate with rest and continue as an invisible divide in building a united Sri Lanka and achieving lasting peace.

Objective

To improve overall wellbeing of the children in post-war Sri Lanka, supporting them in the process of resettlement, readjustment and realignment to society and self, through psychosocial activities

Promoting mental health and wellbeing in an individual will enhance:

- happiness
- self-esteem
- capacity to learn
- ability to form loving, supportive relationships
- emotional resilience
- a sense of belonging to the community
- physical wellbeing, and productivity

Proof of Concept

The project is proposed, based on the effects and transformations seen as a result of sustained psychosocial activities carried out with the children who were Internally Displaced and were residing at the Relief villages set up in Menik Farm, Cheddikulam since May 2009. Having recognized the dire need to address the mental health of children who have been subject to trauma of witnessing and being a part of the internal conflict and the harrowing experiences they faced in the final stages of the war, many psychosocial activities were undertaken to provide a relief to these children during their stay at the welfare villages.



In conjunction with the Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition and its Disaster Preparedness & Response Unit and Health Coordinating Office at Menik Farm, Cheddikulam, and the generous sponsorship and funding from Action & Care Trust, Back To Life (CSR Arm of NKAR Travels & Tours) being the principal sponsor, the following activities were undertaken at the IDP welfare villages since August 2009 to date :

Importance of focusing on children during Re-settlement process

The current safe environment in the welfare villages have provided them with a sense of security with the basic needs being met by the government. However the uncertainties and fears faced by a child during the resettlement process is natural and needs to be recognized, since :

Resettling in a village which has very little support systems in place and with limited infrastructure and sources of livelihood, is not conducive in providing the children a sense of security and is once again, a very disturbing experience

Going back to their original homes could also be evoking painful memories of the circumstances in which they left and could be returning to a shell of a home or no home at all and have to rebuild their homes from nothing

Many would be coming back minus some family members who have died in the war. In many instances this would be the bread-winner (father) or elder brothers who would have provided them with a sense of security

Children have not been going to regular school in the past 1-2 years and are not used to sitting in a class room for many hours and concentrating on studies as normal children would do.

Children would be experiencing difficulty in responding to disciplined and structured environment. Therefore, it is important and essential that the parents and community leaders understands and empathize with the children who are returning to the community and to schools and provide the necessary guidance and support in this difficult period of transition Therefore, the project proposes to carry out psychosocial activities targeted at children who are being resettled in the North and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka by setting up Psychosocial Centres in villages, providing them an environment to play, recreate and learn and to bring back little bit of their lost childhood and support them through the resettlement process.

School Based Psychosocial Activities

In an environment, where the basic infrastructures are not fully in place yet, the school is an ideal location for these psychosocial activities to be based within, since the support structure of resources and physical infrastructure is available and functional.

A school can be their anchor during this difficult period and provide them the necessary supporting environment to re-settle and re-adjust their lives & provide them the sense of security which is essential.

Locations for Psychosocial Centres

The locations for such Psychosocial Centres are carefully evaluated, to ensure availability of basic infrastructure and resources, to sustain and carry out programmes for the community of children.

Assessment of locations are done on a continuous basis, to set up such centres in villages, where the development efforts would take longer to reach and in the interim, provide children with a centre for recreating and thereby achieve a significant difference in their lives immediately.

School Based Psychosocial Activities

Target Group

A typical school in North /East Sri Lanka has a student population of approx 500-2000, ages between 5-18 years in Grades 1 - 13

Psychosocial Activities to be carried out a psychosocial centre would address following activities in a conducive environment :

- o Arts and Crafts
- o Reading - Library of books in Tamil and English
- o Sports - Volleyball, football, Badminton, Cricket
- o Music Musical Instruments
- o Play items - Toys and play items
- o Recreational - TV/ DVD player and movie library (comedies/cartoons & educational movies)
- o Games board games & others

The centre would be opened from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm and on weekends as well, as an oasis for children to enjoy and recreate in a carefree atmosphere. After school hours and on weekends, a typical programme would consist of a fixed time-table for certain activities such as singing/dancing/drama, art and craft lessons, etc., whilst the centre would also be an open space for children to drop in and spend time reading, playing or simply watching TV or a movie.

Management of the Psychosocial Centre

The responsibility for management of the centre rests with the Principal of the school, with the support and facilitation by the Zonal Education Director. The school will provide teachers to manage the centre on roster, in drawing up programmes for various activities and to ensure proper care and maintenance of the centre.

The programmes are drawn up and monitored by the school administration and implemented by teacher/s in charge of the centre. The equipment will be handed over with an inventory list and regular stock taking to be carried out by the school

Completed Projects in resettled areas

Happiness Centre at Mallavi Central College - Psychosocial Centre & Computer Room



The first Psychosocial centre at Mallavi, (population 7500) in the AGA Division of Thunukkai, District of Mullaitivu in the Northern Province, was declared open at the Mallavi Central College on 31st January 2010 and dedicated to the children of Mallavi. The school has currently 1000 children registered and attending school from grade 1-13 (age group 5-18)

Typical Equipment/Material in a Psychosocial Centre

Each centre is fully equipped with a library of books in English and Tamil for all age groups, arts and craft material, play items, games, musical instruments, TV and DVD with an extensive library of educational movies suitable for children, sports equipment and other material. The Computer Room is currently provided with 2 computers for teaching basic computing and will be later enhanced with 2 more computers and internet connectivity.

PSYCHOSOCIAL CENTRE EQUIPMENT					
Item No	Bill No	Description	Qty	Unit Rate	Total
EDUCATIONAL TOYS					
	1	Kids Kraft - Tickel Road Colombo 8			
1		Picture B Sample	1		1,000.00
2		Big knob Puzzle	1		600.00
3		Shape Puzzle	1		450.00
4		Varnis Number b	1		600.00
5		Farm Puzzle	1		500.00
6		Threading Lathe	1		1,200.00
7		Bread Cut-up	1		750.00
8		Veg Cut-up	1		750.00
9		Rolling Pin	1		400.00
10		Fruit Cut-up	1		750.00
11		Ball Sorter	1		450.00
12		Shape B	1		850.00
		Total			8,300.00
	2	DVDs			
13		English DVDs - learn english & cart	25	160.00	4,000.00
14		Tamil DVDs - comedies & education	20	150.00	3,000.00
		Total			7,000.00
	4	Chands_ Sports goods			
15		Volly Ball Net	1		700.00
16		Badminton Net	1		400.00
17		Tenicord Ring	1		130.00
18		Flying Disc	1		250.00
19		Volly Ball	1		875.00
20		Foot Ball	1		875.00
21		Wicket Set	1		750.00
		Total			3,980.00
PLAY ITEMS					
	5	Lumala - Kids play items			
		Montessori teaching aids	10	mixed	15,000.00
30		Building Blocks	1	955.00	955.00
31		Building Blocks	1	780.00	780.00
38		Carrom Board	1	1,840.00	1,840.00
39		Dham Board	1	470.00	470.00
		Total			19,045.00
	6	Arpico - Misc items			
		Educational toys			6,748.00
86		Basins for toys	2	461.18	922.35
87		Waste Papers Basket	2	258.87	517.73
		Total			8,188.08
MUSIC CENTRE					
	7	Matthews Harmonium - Welikada plaza			
		Flutes	6	100.00	810.00

		Harmonicas	4	200.00	800.00
		Triangle	3	275.00	825.00
		Maracas	3	290.00	870.00
		Pantheru(tambourines)	4	375.00	1,500.00
		Rabans (8") - drums	4	225.00	900.00
		Dolky (large drum)	1	2,100.00	2,100.00
		Thalampata (cymbals -small)	4	135.00	540.00
					8,345.00
		Serpina - double reed harmonium	1	14,000.00	14,000.00
		Thabla Pair	1		6,500.00
		Thabla Rings - Pair	1		750.00
		Total items for Mannar			29,595.00
Toys & decorative Items					
	10	House of Fashion			
		Items as per bill			6,205.00
	13	Extension cords	1		1,050.00
LIBRARY					
	14	Sarasavi Book Shop - Nugegoda			
		assorted english books from ages 5-18 -			9,307.00
		Poobalasingham - Wellawatte			
		assorted Tamil Books from ages 5-18-			9,000.00
		Total for books			18,307.00
ARTS & CRAFTS /STATIONERY					
		Art material/ paper etc -	100 pax		16,000.00
		Colour Products Ltd - crayons 24 col	100 packs	104.72	10,472.00
MUSIC CORNER					
	16	Singer - special discount obtained from Singer Thurstan Road			
		Singer 29" Colour TV	1	64,995.00	46,900.00
		singer DVD	1	9,999.00	6,100.00
		Phillips Audio CD player	1	23500.00	13900
					66,900.00
					95,912.08
PLAY GROUND EQUIPMENT					
		Seesaw 4 seater	1	2E+04	20,000.00
		2 seater swing	1	17,000	17,000.00
		Slide	1	17,000	17,000.00
		Climbing frame	1	19,500	19,500.00
		Per centre			268,542.08
		Coordination & implementation costs		20,000	288,542.1

Renovation costs per centre approx

Rs. 680,000.00

Total equipment & school materials listed above approx

Rs. 290,000.00

Total per center

Rs. 970,000.00

4 centres planned for 2011 August/September

Rs.3,880,000.00

Proposal for a Psychosocial Centre at :

- 1. Silawatte Tamil Vidyalayam - Silawatte Mullativu - 300 students up to grade 11**
- 2. Roman Catholic Tamil Mixed School -
Mulliyaveli - Mullatuvi - 300 students up to grade 11**
- 3. Kachchilaimadu Government Tamil Mixed School, Oddusudan Kachchilaimadu GTMS is located in Oddusudan, in Mullaitivu District, close to Puthukudyirippu. Kachchilaimadu GTMS has been in existence since 1934 and has a student population of approx 500.**
- 4. Thunukkai division - Thanduwan GTMS**

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an important component to ensure that the psychosocial activities are being systematically carried out and the desired outcomes are achieved. The evaluation of the Process and Impact will be based on Key Performance Indicators as given below :

Key Performance Indicators for Impact Evaluation :

- 1. Survey -** We propose to carry out a survey of the children mental status at the outset at time of setting up the centre. A questionnaire will be carefully crafted with the support of a child psychologist in order to draw out their inner thoughts and status of mind, within sample groups across all age groups between ages of 5-18 years. This will be followed up with a further questionnaire at the end of a 6-8 month period and the responses assessed in comparison to the initial survey. Through this process a fair assessment of the impact of psychosocial activities on the children could be arrived at.
- 2. Feedback from Teachers -** In parallel we propose to obtain feed back from the teachers on their assessment of the progress and improvement in basic skills, responsiveness and behavioural patterns of children Resources for M&E - Since this project is mooted and facilitated by Ms. Manori - monitoring and evaluation will be carried out by them, under the guidance of Senior Lecturers at Faculty of Psychology. Further, monthly visits to the centers by Ms Unambuwe will be undertaken to ensure the programmes are being conducted satisfactorily and to supervise the maintenance of the centres.

Conclusion

We firmly believe that this type of psychosocial activities would play a pivotal role in supporting the children to overcome any latent effects of their past experiences and provide them the opportunity to express themselves in different ways and to break down mental barriers which may inhibit the natural growth of a healthy mind.

Other Psychosocial Centres opened in 2010



Opened on 9th May 2010 - Sponsored by Sri Lanka Army (Wanni Command)

Killinochchi MV, Killinochchi, Northern Province
Opened on 12th July 2010 📅 Sponsored by Medical Aid To Sri Lanka (U K)



Nedunkerny MV, Vavuniya
Opened on 7th August 2010 📷

Sponsored by - Sri Lanka Army (Wanni Command) & Action & Care Trust, Sri Lanka



Illuppukadvai GTMS, Mannar

Opened on 30th October 2010 Sponsored by Action & Care Trust

Pooneryn Maha Vidyalaya

Opened in February 2011 Sponsored by the Conscious Action Network together with the Action & Care Trust



Donations/Funding for this schools programme can be made directly to:

Action & Care Trust

NDB Bank, Sri Lanka

Account No: 100001018418 SWIFT Code: NDBSLKLX

Branch Address: No. 103A, Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7

