



Oru Paanai

Feeding hungry children in Sri Lanka



News from Oru Paanai
Issue 3: December 2013

It gives us great pleasure to touch base with you, the well-wishers and supporters of Oru Paanai once again, in this third issue of our Newsletter. We hope to provide you with an update on where we are now with our humanitarian mission, and also share with you some of our concerns about the future.

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

Five years have elapsed since Oru Paanai (OP) was launched in October 2008, and it is perhaps a time for reflection on our achievements and future direction of travel. At the time of OP's launch, northeast Sri Lanka was in the throes of civil war, and the consequent devastation wrought on the civilian population in the area impacted most severely on the very young. A desperate appeal made by

the heads of schools in the region for help in feeding the starving children in their schools resulted in the launch of Oru Paanai.

At the time of its launch, we were helping to feed 8,000 children every school day. Over the past five years, the numbers we feed have grown exponentially, and at present we help 43,000 children in 311 schools. The increase in numbers was partly due to more schools becoming aware of our existence and appealing to us for help with feeding children in their schools as well. Equally, it is a reflection of the situation on the ground not improving in any significant way in this period.

We do not highlight these figures as some kind of badge of honour, but simply to underline the fact that there is a continuing and increasing need



for OP to sustain its activities for the foreseeable future.

The outcome of OP's activities in the past five years ...

In reflecting on activities, it is appropriate to pose a question about the outcome of OP's activities. The feedback from the heads of schools in the region is indeed very positive. The children's attendance in these schools has improved hugely; their performance in their studies also reflects their improved state of health; and above all, we have helped to give them hope and put a smile on their faces.

With all the help we have got from all of you, we have given them hope – hope that there IS a future for them. All our efforts in these five years have undoubtedly been productive as far as helping to alleviate poverty in the northeast is concerned - to put in succinctly, we have indeed made a difference.

The need for OP's help still exists ...

We must also address the question of how much longer OP will need to exist. The civil war ended in May 2009, and we had all been hopeful that in a period of two or three years the economic situation in the region would have improved, with peace prevailing there. Sadly, we have to admit that this has not happened. In the words of Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who visited the northeast in August 2013, *'the war may be over, but the suffering goes on ..'*. The prevailing atmosphere is one of an uneasy peace, and whilst the infrastructure like roads, electricity and water have been developed, the



economic situation has barely improved.

Another UN official who visited the northeast described the region as suffering from growing food insecurity and indebtedness. Put simply, poverty and hunger still reign supreme in the northeast. The parents of the children in these areas continue to struggle to find gainful employment, the farmers are still not able to till their lands properly due to access problems and the fishermen still struggle to go to sea due to many different factors – in brief, many parts of the northeast are still mired in dire poverty.

The election of the Northern Provincial Council resulted in great optimism amongst the local population, but the Council has struggled to get any funds to develop

the area as they are engaged in a political struggle with the government. While the willingness to help is there in the Council, they have very little scope to do so given the current constraints. In summary, there is little hope for an improvement of the situation in the near future and the need for organisations like OP to continue their activities will be there for a little while longer at least.

The struggle to raise funds ...

While we have been helped in our fundraising efforts by hundreds of people in the UK and SriLanka in the main, not forgetting Australia, Canada and the USA, we have to

concede that fundraising for SriLankan charities has become much more difficult in recent months. A degree of compassion fatigue has set in, and also there is some complacency about the situation in the northeast, particularly with the election of a TNA dominated Northern Provincial Council.

We have been struggling to recruit new regular donors and selling tickets for fundraisers has not been easy in the recent past. As we have to raise about £60,000 each year to keep the food programme going at the current level, the task ahead seems very daunting. However, when we



consider the degree of malnutrition and hunger prevailing in our land of origin, we are determined that OP must continue to do all we can to keep going. We find encouragement in the words of Nelson Mandela: *'it always seems impossible until it is done'*. When we have been in a similar state of despair in the past, some funding has suddenly come our way from unexpected sources, and we carry on in the hope that someone somewhere will ride to our rescue this time as well. We also plan to therefore redouble our fundraising efforts, and continue in the hope that it will all work out in the end. May we end by wishing you a great New Year.



Oru Paanai

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OP FUNDRAISERS IN 2013

Salangai Oli – 2013

The organisers of Salangai Oli, a charity dance event held once every three years, which raises funds for SriLankan charities like Manitha Neyam and Orphans Trust, very kindly included Oru Paanai as one of the charities they donated funds to this year. This dance performance, organised by Uma Chandratheva, a leading teacher of Bharatha Natyam in the London Tamil Centre, was staged in Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth on the 6th of

Visit
www.orupaandai.org.uk
for the latest news,
event information and details on
how to make donations

April 2013. The large audience enjoyed the excellent performance presented by Mrs. Chandratheva's pupils, and Dr. Sriskantharajah made a short presentation on OP's activities. A sum of £2,300 was donated to OP, for which we are extremely grateful, particularly as it came as a welcome surprise to us.

OP Sports Club vs Yarl Cricket Club
Cricket Match 2013

This annual fundraiser match was played on 8th June at the West Harrow Cricket grounds. The match

was won by Yarl Cricket Club this year, but OP Sports Club are planning to wrest the Daniel Muthuveloe Trophy back in 2014! About 90 well wishers who attended the event enjoyed a sumptuous meal provided by Ruby Caterers and the music organised by DJ A. Bremakumar. A tidy sum of £545 was raised for OP on the day. We wish to thank Mr. M. Mahendran of Yarl Cricket Club once again for organising the match .

Keyboard Concerts: November 2013

Prof. Swaminathan , the indefatigable fundraiser for OP, once again stepped up to the plate to organise two concerts in support of OP. A very versatile young artiste from Madras, K. Sankaranayanan, enthralled audiences in London and Birmingham,

with his virtuoso performance on the keyboard. Although the audiences were small, those present appreciated his superb performances greatly. As many well wishers donated to the event, even though they could not attend, a large sum of over £6,000 was raised for OP from these concerts. We thank Prof. Swami and his family, and the young artiste from South India, for this tremendous help to OP. Events such as this concert form the backbone of OP's funding at present. We must also thank the anonymous donor who very kindly bore the travel expenses of the artiste and his father.

Canberra Chips in Again

A group of OP supporters in Canberra, led by Mr. C. Kumaranayakam, once again made two sizeable contributions at 6 monthly intervals directly to the OP



SriLanka funds this year. The Canberra Tamil Centre also sent a contribution to OP Sri Lanka earlier this year. The OP Committee wishes to place on record it's deep gratitude to this band of supporters and the Canberra Tamil Centre, for providing continued support to OP for the past several years.

It is thanks to such regular contributions that Oru Paanai has been able to continue to function over the past five years at its present level.

A Himalayan Trek

Prof. Swami and Dr. Ambikapathy, who along with several of their family members, climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro three years ago to raise funds for OP, were at it again in July 2013. The two of them, along with eight others, undertook a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, and once again generously requested that

sponsorship monies be donated to OP.

We wish to thank all ten of them for their kind gesture. It is indeed in the highest tradition of raising funds by personal sacrifice and endeavour.

Canada to the Fore

A group of SriLankan expatriates in Canada recently held a fundraising party, entitled Cooking for a Cause, in Toronto, to learn culinary skills as well as collect funds for Oru Paanai. The event was hosted by Maithri Perera, who conducted the cookery demonstration himself. A pot of money was collected and handed over to Mr. Skandakumar, the head of OP Srilanka in December.

The staging of this event demonstrates how the hapless plight of the children in the northeast has cut across the racial divide and appealed to all SriLankans, irrespective of race or religion.



shared heritage humble beginnings

a sense of communal responsibility in sharing life's most basic need - food - our food, from OUR PANAAI (pot), with those who are less fortunate

Running at Night for OP

One of OP's supporters, who wishes to remain anonymous, ran the Energiser 5K run on the 13th of April 2013 to raise funds for OP. This resulted in raising £6,300 for OP, from donations from many generous supporters, in addition to one huge donation of £ 5,000 from one donor who also wishes to remain anonymous. It is these kinds of selfless donations which give us hope that OP can continue its activities with confidence.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all our donors, regular and occasional, for the help you continue to give Oru Paanai. OP exists only because of your help. We must thank the following supporters who have assisted us greatly in the past year - Mrs. Kamala Swaminathan (Radlett) , Dr & Mrs. Narayanaswamy (Manchester), and Mr. S. Yogarajah (Watford). We hope that all of you will continue to extend your support to OP in 2014 and beyond.



OP EDUCATION

OP education was launched 3 years ago with the intention of helping to provide remedial classes in the Wannai as well as in Batticaloa. Groups like Mahatheva Padippaham, a group of University students in Vavuniya and a group in Batticaloa, were all engaged in providing remedial classes for students who, as a result of the prolonged war, had fallen far behind in their studies, and were supported by OP in the past two years. Their tireless efforts have been rewarded by the academic successes of these students. OP Education provided support to all these groups in the belief that the rebuilding of a nation depends largely on revitalising educational activities.

This year, due to financial constraints, we are able to provide support only to the Batticaloa group. We have encouraged the setting up of a local group, OP Batticaloa, led by local civic leaders, to do fundraising for this charity in Batticaloa, and OP Education has pledged to provide a fixed sum each year to help this group.

An inaugural meeting of OP Batticaloa was held on 16th of December 2013, and Dr. Muthuveloe and Mr. Skandakumar attended the meeting on behalf of OP. A committee was elected with Dr. Thirukumaran as Chairman. We hope that the new committee will play an active role in providing remedial education classes in Batticaloa.

Feeding the hungry is a greater work than raising the dead.

Chrysostom, St. John

A. D. 349 - 407

Archbishop of Constantinople

OP KAITHADY

OP Kaithady, which functions as a self funding subsidiary of Oru Paanai, has continued to help in the development of the Nuffield School for the Deaf and Blind in Kaithady. This school, which was established in 1956 with 18 students, now has 184 children, and is functioning well once again, having been closed temporarily in the latter part of the civil war.

OP Kaithady helped in the reestablishment of the school, initially with the provision of equipment from hospitals in the UK, and also with helping to organise the visits to the school by Anne East, a Special Needs teacher from the UK, who has done a tremendous job of training the teachers in the school over the past 4 years. Dr. Ranjit Thambyrajah, an ENT surgeon from the UK, played a pivotal role in initiating the provision of equipment and the organising of training for the Nuffield school.

OP Kaithady conducted two camps in the school in February 2012 and June 2013, during which 84 children were fitted with programmed digital hearing aids provided by Mr. Tony Sirimanne from Great Ormond Street, with software being provided by Dr. Deutram Thambapillai, another Audiology consultant from the UK.

The report from the teachers in the school is that it has made a tremendous difference to these children's lives. In October 2013, Anne along with Liz Barton and Vasuki Rajasingham, made another visit to Kaithady and provided further

teacher training and conducted workshops for a large number of teachers. OP Kaithady, along with other charities in the UK, provided financial support for this visit.

A comprehensive plan for establishing a state of the art Audiology Unit, has been drawn up by Mr. Padman Ratnesar, and it is hoped that support would be forthcoming from a number of national and international groups for this project.

OP Kaithady also plans to be associated actively with this worthy project.

OP FORTHCOMING EVENTS ***Yarl CC vs OP Sports Club***

The date and venue for this year's match will be on the website soon. Please do come along and enjoy the cricket, music and food, while helping to raise funds for OP.

Cultural Event in Ruislip ***21st June 2014***

The group of OP supporters, who organised the very first OP fundraiser in June 2009 in the Winston Churchill Hall in Ruislip, at which a number of highly talented youngsters



The school

showcased their talent, are planning to stage 'An Evening of Carnatic Entertainment with Bharathanatyam' at the same venue – Winston Churchill Hall in Pinn Way, Ruislip on the 21st of June 2014. Those of you who attended the performance in 2009 will recall that the performances were of a very high standard, which was enjoyed hugely by the large audience present. The funds raised this year will be shared between Oru Paanai and CANE. Please put the date in your diary as it promises to be another high quality show, not forgetting the fact that it will also raise funds for two very deserving causes.

OP FINANCES

OP's accounts are audited every year by A.G. Sarma & Co., Chartered Accountants in Sri Lanka and by Crompton & Co. Chartered Accountants, Coventry UK, and are submitted to the authorities in Sri Lanka and to the Charity Commission in the UK. If any donor wishes to have sight of them, we will be happy to send them a summary of our accounts for 2013.

OP's outgoings for the Food Programme are at present £60,000 per year, a considerable increase on the previous year. We receive a regular income of £1,000 per month from our regular donors, which along with contributions from friends who donate on an annual basis, amounts to around £15,000 per annum.

Fundraising events, and generous one off donations from friends, provide the balance needed to meet our budget. Meeting our target for raising sufficient

funds to maintain our feeding programme still remains undoubtedly a challenging task.

AND FINALLY, AN APPEAL ...

As we have highlighted above, the abject poverty that prevailed in northeast Sri Lanka which impacted most on the vulnerable children, has not been alleviated. Visiting UN officials have seen for themselves the dreadful situation and drawn attention to it in their reports. We in OP have to redouble our efforts to maintain the level of support we currently provide to these impoverished children, the innocent victims of a prolonged war and a neglectful government which has other priorities. Those of us who have some attachment to our homeland cannot afford to ignore the plight of these hapless children.

While we are certain that all of you help other equally deserving charities working to improve the lives of our less well off compatriots in Sri Lanka, we wish to make a fervent appeal for help from you. When there are little children at the point of starvation, we cannot walk on by, turning a blind eye to their plight. If we do not receive more support from more caring people, we will regretfully have to curtail the number of schools we support, painful as it will be.

We hope that you will join us in collecting more sorely needed funds. Some of the ways in which you can help are:

- Regular donors can increase their monthly donations. Those who



donate £10 per month may wish to consider increasing their donations by at least £5 per month.

- Any wellwishers who are not regular donors yet, may wish to start contributing on a monthly basis. Direct debit forms are available on the OP Website for downloading. If you have any difficulty in downloading it, please contact our Treasurer, Dr. Rajakumaran, on nada.raj@btinternet.com, for a form.
- If you are organising a charity coffee morning or dosai dinner, please consider OP as a possible recipient.
- If any friend / relative is looking for a charity to donate to, in lieu of receiving presents for a special birthday or anniversary, please suggest OP.

- If any youngster is looking for a charity to donate to, when running a marathon or half marathon , please put forward the name of OP.
- You may wish to emulate the actions of the charity One Child Foundation, which has adopted schools in the Kayts region from July 2013, and pays for the feeding programme in those schools, under the aegis of Oru Paanai.
- Please put your thinking caps on and think of other original ways of raising funds for us.

We would gladly receive any sum, large or small. On behalf of the children in northeast Sri Lanka, we wish to say thank you very much and God bless you.

OP Committee