



STORIES TO INSPIRE

"Stories of the Fifteen Finalists of V Awards"

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International Year of Volunteers
10th anniversary
2011

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Published by: IYV+10 National Steering Committee, Sri Lanka

Edited by: UN Volunteers, Sri Lanka

Designed and Printed by: Karunaratne & Sons (Pvt) Ltd.

To order a copy please email at unv.com.lk@undp.org

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ISBN: 978-955-0901-00-5

“Stories to Inspire” Project Team

Project Concept

Fadhil Bakeer Markar

Project Support

Natal Donnaloia

Sharmalee Jayasinghe

Creative Contribution

Kumara Geekiyanage

Chamara Upul Kumara

Special Thanks

IYV+10 National Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Prof. Siri Hettige (Head of Sociology Department, University of Colombo)

Mr. Kirby de Lanerolle (Advisor to Minister of Social Services)

IYV+10 National Steering Committee

Honourable Judges

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Ms. Sunethra Bandaranaike (Founder, Sunera Foundation)

Mr. Dougals Keh (Country Director, UNDP)

Mr. Saharan Abdul (Zam Gems)

Mr. Didula Bogahakumbura (V Awards Production Team)

Mr. Susantha Senaviratne (V Awards Production Team)

News 1st Team & MTV Production Team

Karunaratne & Sons (Pvt) Ltd.

Project Manager

Varuna Ponnampereuma

Research and Writing Team

Bill Ranatunga (Lead Writer)

Varuna Ponnampereuma (Lead Writer)

Swairee Rupasinghe (Lead Writer)

Nishu Sonali Hassim

Sadhani Rajapakse

Shenoza Feroze

Senel Wanniarachchi

Madhubhashini Rathnayaka

Hakeem Nizar

Duvindi Illankoon

Editors

Bhagya Ratnayake (Lead Editor)

Madushala Senaratne

Venushka Gammampila

Administrative Support Team

Manoli De Silva

Avanti Weerakoon

Muradh Mohideen

Volunteering Matters

Volunteerism is a source of community strength, resilience, solidarity and social cohesion. It can bring positive social change by fostering respect for diversity, equality and the participation of all. It is among society's most vital assets.

Ban Ki-moon

Secretary - General, United Nations

Volunteering occurs in every society in the world. The terms which define it and the forms of its expression may vary in different languages and cultures, but the values which drive it are common and universal: a desire to contribute to the common good, out of free will and in a spirit of solidarity, without expectation of material reward.

Helen Clark

Administrator, United Nations Development Programme

In order to live up to its full potential, volunteerism's true dimensions and values need to be generally acknowledged as an essential component for the sustainable and equitable progress of communities and nations.

Flavia Pansieri

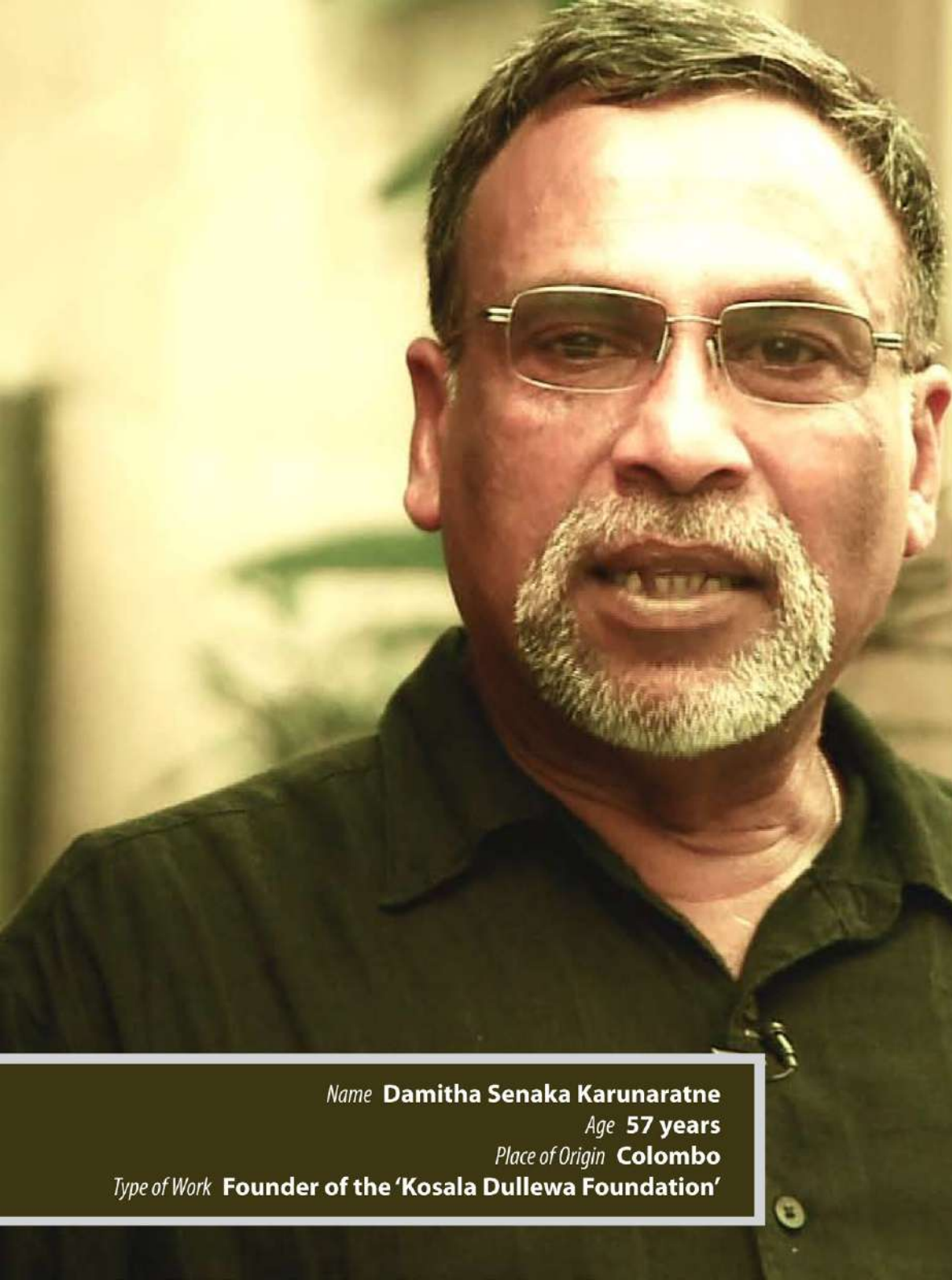
Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers

Introduction

V Awards is a joint venture of the National Steering Committee for the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10) in Sri Lanka and News 1st. It is a sincere effort to say 'thank you' to individuals who selflessly and with great dedication contribute to the Sri Lankan society.

Established in November 2010 to provide leadership and coordination to promote, recognize, facilitate and network for Volunteerism, the IYV+10 National Steering Committee embarked on the V Awards journey in June 2011. A novel concept to Sri Lanka, V Awards wants to honour and salute individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to society and identify role models and heroes who can inspire a nation to volunteer for social causes. Endorsed by the Sri Lankan cricketers Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardena and many more key figures, V Awards brought volunteers from all parts of the country and from all sections of the community onto one platform. After nominations were called, the V Awards Secretariat received over 450 applications from all around the country, representing the full diversity of the nation.

"Stories to Inspire" contains the efforts and achievements of the fifteen impartially selected V Awards finalists, solemnly recognized at the live broadcasted "Grand Finale 2011". This is our attempt to bring to light the stories of these amazing role models, whom we can emulate to become active agents of change for peace and development. Be it a village farmer distributing traditional medicine to his community, a brother trying to spread the knowledge and skills he acquired in helping his autistic sibling, or the founder of a rural suicide prevention programme; we hope their and all the other stories in this book will inspire each and every one of you and touch many hearts across Sri Lanka, encouraging you to volunteer and help build a society that cares for others.



Name **Damitha Senaka Karunaratne**

Age **57 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'Kosala Dullewa Foundation'**

Mr. Damitha Senaka Karunaratne

There are many reasons for a person to follow a certain course of action. But more often than not the reason lies within us. It is close to our hearts, and we do what we do because it makes sense to us.

For Damitha Senaka Karunaratne, that reason came when his sister gave birth to a wonderful child, Kosala, who was born with special needs. Having spent the better part of his life observing and being delighted by his nephew, Damitha had a vision of reaching out to children with special needs across the island, spreading the same joy, zest and hope for life that his nephew possessed. Thus he took the first steps to start an organization that is synonymous today with catering for people with special needs in Sri Lanka – the Kosala Dullewa Foundation for Children with Special Needs (KDF). The organisation strives to educate the communities these children live in; change society's attitudes towards people living with mental and physical disabilities; and empower children

to work towards independently contributing to their society. Since leading the organisation as President of the Board of Trustees, Damitha has lobbied and achieved recognition for KDF under the Parliamentary Act No:39 of 2009.

KDF is in the process of finalizing the compilation of a national database of children with special needs containing detailed information about each case; a resource that organisations providing social services will be easily able to refer to. KDF also conducts a number of free classes aimed at children with special needs in music, dance, art, drama, handicraft, sewing, speech, English and practical life skills on a regular basis.

Damitha was the first to honour 'World Down's Syndrome Day' in Sri Lanka in the national level through special commemorative events that have taken place annually since 2007. These all-day festivals, at prominent venues such as Viharamahadevi Park

and Royal College, Navarangahala, are attended by children with special needs from across the island and their families. The events usually consist of a walk with over one thousand family members of people living with Down's Syndrome and their supporters; a variety show with performances by the children; free access to a team of over fifty on site specialist medical clinics, ranging from optometrists to occupational therapists; and an additional support team of professional counselors and lawyers who provide advice to the parents, guardians and caregivers of children with special needs.

Support for families and guardians is a significant component that Damitha and KDF place great importance on. They often provide training programmes for parents and staff in areas such as motivation and counseling. They have conducted regular day-long workshops to provide an opportunity for over two hundred participants to share and discuss specialist issues related to raising children with special needs in an open forum attended by professional advisors. To inspire them to realize their children's potential Damitha and KDF have also sponsored an opportunity for parents and guardians to meet

Ms. Megan McCormick, an American born with Down's Syndrome who has completed her degree and is training to become an occupational therapist.

Damitha has always encouraged children with special needs to participate in activities alongside other children through sports, arts and performance art. To work towards achieving this objective KDF produced and staged a drama called 'Sihina Mal Dangakari' at the British School Auditorium in 2008 and sponsored the cricket uniforms for the Special Olympics International Cricket Cup in Mumbai in 2006.

Under the watchful guidance and able leadership of Damitha, KDF has been sustaining a mission to assist underprivileged children with different physical and mental disabilities, irrespective of their caste, creed, nationality or religion, to become citizens who can contribute positively to society. He has been the leading force behind the aforementioned initiatives as well as many more, all conducted without the expectation of accolades or recognition; a true volunteer.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"

Dr. Gamini Goonetilleke

This is a world full of people for whom a profession is a way of making money; a mere occupation that keeps their personal goals alive. People whose priorities are climbing up the corporate ladder and reinvesting all their savings; people to whom profit maximization play a major role in decision-making. So it is indeed

very rare to meet a person who goes beyond their call of duty and willingly goes the extra mile just to see a smile on someone's face.

Dr. Gamini Goonetilleke is one such personality. Humble, compassionate and dedicated to his service as a professional in the medical field, he

is an empathetic human being who does his best to help every individual who comes to him for relief.

Affectionately referred to as 'GG', Dr. Goonetilleke is a leading expert on treating diseases of the upper digestive tract. His consistent record in the successful treatment for corrosive narrowing of the gullet attracts many such patients to him from various parts of the country. This condition is mostly caused by the ingestion of corrosive acid as part of an abortive suicide attempt and sometimes cancer. These patients, most of the time, are the poorest of the poor from rural areas, depressed and abandoned by their families due to their condition. By the time they reach Dr. Goonetilleke, they are frequently malnourished, with tubes implanted into their stomach through which they are to feed themselves. For these patients the problem has been complicated by treatment elsewhere and is in a critical condition battling with life.

Dr. Goonetilleke's voluntary work starts with treating these patients free of charge, even when this calls for complicated operations that can require six to eight hours of nonstop surgery. Technically his services should end there, however this noble being goes further, paying for his patients'

post-operative ICU stay, which on average comes to around one hundred thousand rupees. Needless to say, this is an unimaginable amount for these people. This has been achieved through the 'Gamini's Fund' which he has established for the benefit of the sick and needy coming for treatment in his surgical unit.

Apart from treating the patients completely free of charge, Dr. Goonetilleke takes the initiative to pay all their pre-operational requirements, such as their nutritional needs, drugs, laboratory tests and even transport costs. His genuine concern for these people reaches even further, and sees him using his personal connections to arrange gainful employment for them after rehabilitation. Most of these people start to carry out a desk job or even light labour, before moving on to get married and leading a happy family life. They even become the breadwinner in their household.

Dr. Goonetilleke has not only cured his patients, but has transformed them from self-pitying and helpless individuals to proud, independent and fully-fledged members of society. For the past eighteen years through his silent service Dr. Goonetilleke has brightened up over a hundred lives, looking only for personal satisfaction in return.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"

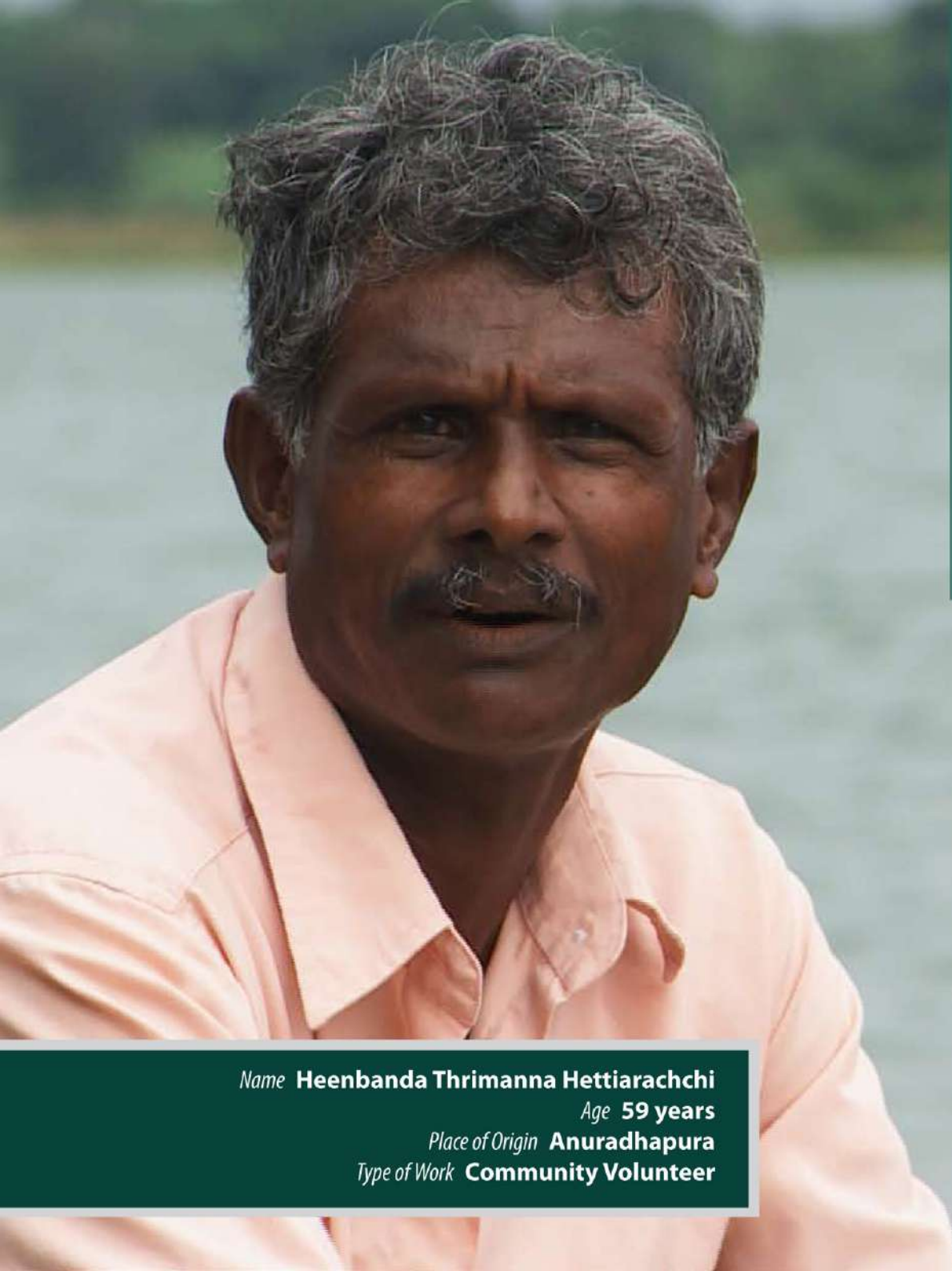


Name **Dr. Gamini Goonetilleke**

Age **63 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Medical Doctor**



Mr. Heenbanda Thrimanna Hettiarachchi

At one time or another in our lives we seek the presence of a guardian angel. We seek their assistance in instances where our lives are challenged with a physical injury or the loss of a loved one. Heenbanda, who is also very fondly known as 'KaluAiya', is one such guardian angel for the villagers of Kothmalpura, Thambuththegama, in Anuradhapura.

Heenbanda who is a farmer by profession has also been serving his community as a care provider in

Ayurvedic medicine preparation and special medical practices in the village of Kothmalpura, Thambuththegama in Anuradhapura. He has been fully engaged in these time-consuming activities, completely on a voluntary basis and of his own free will.

He is very skillful in identifying medicinal plants, concocting medicines and making preparations according to the advice given by Ayurvedic doctors in the area. He takes great interest and care as

he personally roams around the shrubberies and forests in the vicinity and seeks the required plants and herbs, and then prepares them for use as medication. His commitment to heal those with broken bones does not stop there; he visits each patient and helps with the application of the herbal concoctions as well. Heenbanda says that nothing gives him more pleasure than seeing his patients return to their normal state without any pain, bruise or fracture.

His commitment to healing people, and the humor he uses in doing so, accelerates the healing process for many of the villagers who seek his assistance. Though the cured patients try to offer him a fee for his services, he has always refused to take any sort of payment. He believes that he provides these services for the sake of humanity and he admits that he takes great pleasure in doing so. Heenbanda is also very keen on passing on his unique skills to the next generation to continue these services to his community.

Heenbanda is a proactive citizen in his community. Not only does he heal many villagers with much care and diligence, he also takes pleasure in assisting the villagers in their day-to-day lives. The villagers of Kothmalpura always seek the assistance of Heenbanda who is very skilled in preparation of 'pirithmandapa' – the enclosure where Buddhist priests sit when chanting pirith. He plays a crucial role in such village activities where he ensures that such events proceed flawlessly by taking initiative in all activities. This is a great strength for the hosts of the respective activities and Heenbanda is praised by his community for his hard work, commitment and dedication.

The fifty-eight-year-old is very well deserving of recognition for these invaluable services, visiting households and ensuring treatment and care is provided until the fractures and breakages are fully healed.



Name **Heenbanda Thrimanna Hettiarachchi**

Age **59 years**

Place of Origin **Anuradhapura**

Type of Work **Community Volunteer**



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Name **Dr. Kapila Kumara Gunawardena**

Age **57 years**

Place of Origin **Kandy**

Type of Work **Medical Doctor**

Dr. Kapila Kumara Gunawardena

Humanism is his religion. Humanity is his language. Mankind is his relation. Deshabandu Doctor Gurunayake Hitihamilage Kapila Kumara Gunawardena, hailed in Kandy as a great son of the soil, has vigorously continued his journey as a philanthropist during the past two decades.

As a gynecologist by profession, plenty of his time has been spent assisting people to harness their potential. At international level, his service was recognized with the award for the Young Gynecologist 1993 in Manila, marking a leap in his career. In 2005, a 'Deshabandu' award came his way – the utmost honor the President of Sri Lanka can give to a fellow citizen for their enormous contribution towards upgrading human life as a part of government responsibilities.

The Ankumbura, Anuradhapura, Ratnapura, Matale, Batticaloa, Peradeniya and Kandy hospitals received high quality status with the aid of Dr. Gunawardena. The fourth floor of the Asgiriya Monastery is also evidence of his open arms. The clinic sessions conducted by him for Tanthirimale's conflict-affected civilians, as well as the construction of agrarian wells and the donation of water motors for farmers with the help of the police and army, have helped to elevate their economies.

While serving his community as a volunteer, he very generously built a house for a disabled soldier. His other philanthropic activities include offering two thousand rupees worth of scholarships for three undergraduates. Dr. Gunawardena is also the patron of a monthly

scholarship of two thousand five hundred rupees granted to Bhikkus in the Buddhist and Pali University. Each month he donates five thousand rupees to the Presidents' Fund to be used for the Mahapola Scheme, which extends a helping hand to undergraduates. As a man of intellect, he had sponsored a multitude of education programmes. Building a library, a long-felt need for Chillaw Mugunuwatavana Primary School by providing twenty-five lakhs, is another major project he has finished.

As a recent middle income country striving towards development, public support is very much essential for Sri Lanka to further upgrade the standard of human lives. The generosity Dr. Gunawardena has displayed in improving the infrastructure of rural areas has the influence to change human lives. He has helped build hospitals for the betterment of destitute people; voluntarily worked towards the provision of medical facilities in conflict-affected areas; contributed towards education, which is key to human development; and provided support for the betterment of Buddha Shasana, which he believes that instills morals among the community.

Dr. Gunawardena was born in a small village and grew up a great philanthropist as a result of the lessons he learnt from parents and teachers. He believes that Buddhist teachings were the golden thread behind his generosity. He has treated patients from all walks of life. He has dedicated his life wholeheartedly to the elimination of maternal deaths in Sri Lanka by presiding over the Association of Gynecologists.

Bringing the character of Dr. Gunawardena into the limelight might not change his path, but it will inspire generations to come. Shedding off selfish attitudes and embracing the path of serving the community is always a Herculean task.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Ms. Kumarawathi Dharmarathne

Economic, cultural, social, religious and children's welfare in the rural village of Wanaraniya saw the bright light as they were touched by the helping hands of a volunteer who desires to serve others. Kumarawathi Dharmarathne has had a great impact on these villagers over many years and has uplifted their lives and livelihoods more than ever before.

She started her efforts by reactivating the women's welfare society in the village. Through this she has been able to gather women in the village to start effective projects such as getting equipment and necessary training to start their own businesses. These opportunities have given the villagers self-operated and sustainable livelihoods. Her efforts range from building houses

for widows in the village to finding donors to provide essential items and stationery for school children to continue their education.

Kumarawathi's volunteer efforts were not limited just to the welfare of women and children but were also for the whole village. She took the initiative with a few other villagers to provide sanitized water for drinking and household use. Through her leadership and guidance one hundred and seventy five houses in the village benefit from a use able water project that is self-sustainable. The project takes water from a natural waterfall in the area and is managed by trained villagers who carry out maintenance work and meter readings.

Willingness to give and share is one of the great qualities of Kumarawathi. She has constructed a building on her private property to conduct English language teaching and computer

skills training programmes for all, from little children to senior villagers.

Kumarawathi's vision for a better future for the next generation in the Wanaraniya village is envisioned through its web site. Through it, people can get involved and help residents in their efforts to overcome the hardships of life, by creating opportunities for sustainable living and by referring them to organisations where they can get the help they need.

Kumarawathi is a hero in the country because she is already a hero for the people in Wanaraniya village and a cherished treasure. She has enough to fill her own dinner table, but lives a happy life among her neighbors by sharing and serving them as her own family.



Name **Kumarawathi Dharmarathne**
Age **44 years**
Place of Origin **Matale**
Type of Work **Community Volunteer**



Name **Kushil Gunasekera**

Age **55 years**

Place of Origin **Seenigama**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'Foundation of Goodness'**

Mr. Kushil Gunasekera

Hailing from the small village of Seenigama in the Southern Province, Kushil became frustrated at the number of youth living in poverty in his village, unable to fulfill their potential. So in 1999 he set up the Foundation of Goodness (FOG), a small grass-roots charity that provided livelihood support from the grounds of his large ancestral home. There he provided English lessons, a computer room, infrastructure projects and even a tennis court, which lead FOG to become the heartbeat of the village.

Then a force far stronger than him shattered his accomplished dream. The 2004 tsunami that ravished most of the coastal regions of South-East Asia, washed away his work that had taken five years to build. Kushil himself ran to the hills to escape the fatal waves that took the lives of many in the village. When he returned he found his ancestral home in a state of ruin. However, undeterred, he used the site of the wreckage as the base

of the area's relief work. He was quick to organise the clearing of rubble, provide a maternity clinic and start the rebuilding.

As the devastation gained recognition in the global news agenda, hundreds of volunteers and organisations flocked to Seenigama from around the world to find Kushil leading the initiative to rehabilitate the area. It was during the rebuilding, with a wealth of resources around him, that he saw the potential to recreate his former project. With the help of international funding he found an opportunity to pick up the shards of his dream to create something much stronger and more remarkable than before.

Kushil donated his ancestral home in 2005 to re-establish FOG and to provide a centre that would significantly improve the lives of people living in poverty in southern Sri Lanka, bridging the gap between rural and urban communities. He

later left his lucrative sugar business in 2008 to dedicate all his time to leading the foundation, purely on a voluntary basis.

Seven years on from the tsunami, Kushil's unprecedented work has taken a village from near annihilation to vibrant regeneration. With countless supporters donating to his work with confidence, the foundation offers thirty support areas to twenty five thousand people from forty five different villages every year. The offerings, all free of charge, have been designed to help villagers fight poverty through medical and dental care, business skills and employment opportunities, education, child development, women's empowerment, environmental awareness and sports.

There have been countless success stories in all areas of activities and the foundation has impressively contributed to the new generation of Sri Lankan sports stars, already producing a female cricketer, a netball player and a swimmer who have joined the island's respective national squads. Over the years Kushil has also gained support from high-profile and influential individuals, such as the cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan, a FOG brand ambassador and trustee, who also instigated the building of

one thousand new homes for those affected by the events of 2004.

Now Kushil is determined to replicate his work in Seenigama in the post-conflict Northern Province and he has already initiated projects at a community level through a series of essential monthly relief programmes. The Northern Empowerment Project provides an even bigger challenge than the South, with members of the community who have previously known nothing but distrust, conflict and gun-fire. In the face of these obstacles, Kushil's resolute leadership skills are now contributing to unifying a country, ensuring those living in poverty throughout Sri Lanka lead a better life.

Kushil Gunasekera is a man who has shown determination in the face of extreme devastation. He has devoted many years to selfless humanitarian deeds where his determination and his willingness to put personal interests on the back burner have been key attributes in his life as a volunteer.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Name **Lakshmi Ratnayeke**

Age **72 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Director of the 'Sumithrayo Rural Suicide Prevention Programme'**

Ms. Lakshmi Ratnayeke

The knowledge of the power of empathetic listening, and the loss of a dear friend who took his own life, prompted Lakshmi Ratnayeke to search for a way to help those in distress. In the early 1970s her genuine interest in the myriad of difficulties faced by people from all walks of life led her to Sumithrayo. From then on Lakshmi has become a cornerstone of the organisation, building not only the lives of the people in despair, but also the lives of those who volunteered to serve with her.

Lakshmi carries thirty three years of volunteerism experience with her in the field of suicide prevention. It is not an area that everyone can tackle but for someone with the qualities that Lakshmi possesses, the arduous task became – and to this day is – her life.

One of the key characteristics of a volunteer is selflessness and Lakshmi is an epitome of it. Even in ill health, she still travels twice a week to the most remote villages to be with the poorest of the poor in the country. Her constant presence and helping hand reminds them that they are never alone. Her visits to villages struck by the 2004 tsunami, helped prevent and almost eradicate suicide and suicidal tendencies from those who suffered great loss due to the raging waves of the seas. Lakshmi also initiated the Sumithrayo's Rural Programme in 1996 and presently she and her dedicated team work in over eighty villages in Sri Lanka.

Volunteerism is not only about learning how to help people in need. Instilling that knowledge in another generation of volunteers is also a vital part of it. Lakshmi's ability to

expertly guide and train hundreds of volunteers, both young and old, at Sumithrayo has created a network of individuals who emulate the qualities possessed by this amazing lady and strive to follow in her footsteps. The fact that she never forgets why she started her journey in the first place ensures Lakshmi's presence at the Sumithrayo Colombo Center almost daily, not only helping callers to cope with their feelings of loss and grief, but also getting the best out of each volunteer.

All the organisation's rural programmes are not just designed by her in collaboration with international advisors, but are also implemented and monitored by Lakshmi herself. She does not believe in directing from miles away, but instead goes to the grassroot level of people's problems, making them her own and ensuring that she becomes their family.

Volunteers are definite leaders and Lakshmi has proven this fact beyond a doubt. During her time at Sumithrayo, she was elected director of three of the Sumithrayo Centers, namely Kandy from 1972-1982, Colombo from 1990-1991 and Colombo South (Kohuwela) from 1992-1998. She was also responsible for opening nine of the eleven Sumithrayo Befriending

Centers around the country. Her Rural Suicide Prevention Programme functions through these centers and she continues to remain as its Director. Lakshmi was also Vice-Chairperson of Befrienders International, renamed Befrienders Worldwide, from 1990-1996. As well as being Sumithrayo's National Trainer to this day, she was also an international trainer from 1990-2007. She represented the Asia West Region on the International Board of Befrienders Worldwide from 1990 and resigned in 2007 due to ill health.

However, more than any of the accolades Lakshmi has received during her three decades as a volunteer her most valued achievement would be that she has been instrumental in changing so many lives. The Sumithrayo organisation has grown and spread its branches under her steady guidance and continues to help people cope with the feeling of dire distress that leads to them taking their own lives. Life is a gift in Lakshmi's eyes and her path to protecting that gift is a true volunteer's story.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"

Volunteers



Name **Malindu Udawatta**

Age **17 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Volunteer teacher**

Mr. Malindu Udawatta

Sri Lanka has been ravaged by more than three decades of conflict and no one has suffered more than the innocent children of the country. However, most people seem to consider only the children who came into direct contact with the conflict. Most people tend to forget that there were thousands of children who sat by their front doors waiting for a father or mother to come home. One of these children was Malindu Udawatta.

After having experienced seventeen long years of worry and fear for his father's safety, Malindu decided that he couldn't just sit around and wait. He needed to do something too. After completing his GCE O/L examination

in 2011, Malindu spent his vacation with his father in Killinochchi. His visits to the Killinochchi General Hospital and MahaVidyalaya, and the realization of the needs of the innocent people there who had no knowledge of the concepts of peace or freedom, planted a seed of volunteerism in Malindu's heart and he has not looked back since.

They say education bridges gaps between people and Malindu's efforts are a testament to this fact. He chose to spend his vacation teaching basic science, mathematics and English to grade seven students. More importantly he interacted positively with the children there, so as to instill a newfound sense of belief

in the Sinhala people after the conflict. Malindu also solicited donations from armed forces officials in the area and donated books to the school's library.

However, his quest to make a change did not end there. On returning to Colombo, he made contact with his friends and colleagues and was able to collect over six hundred library books, which were donated to the school in April 2011. Over one thousand exercise books, stationary items and over five hundred clothing items, soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes were donated to the Mahadeva Achrama Saiva Siruvar Children's Orphanage in August 2011. The children's home supports over two hundred and eighty children who have lost either one or both of their parents to the violence in their hometowns. The donations made by Malindu helped further educate these children who had lost everything including their innocence to the conflict.

Malindu's work does not only benefit the children in conflict-affected areas. He has now started extending his helping hand and generous heart to under-privileged children in Colombo as well. He currently volunteers to teach children English at the Sacred Heart for Little Hearts Church in

Rajagiriya and also provides guidance and counseling to children who come from troubled homes.

Coming from a military family, Malindu is also the Public Relations Officer of the 'Viru Daru', which is an organisation set up by children of army personnel to support other children whose parents lost their lives in the conflict. Malindu offers time, skills and money for this project too and is now hoping to take his efforts further by looking for large-scale sponsors to provide scholarships for children who lost parents in the conflict.

Having being gifted with the ability to learn and then transfer that knowledge to others, Malindu has used his skills selflessly and determinedly. His story is an inspiration to other youngsters who feel the need to make a change but either do not know how, or are too afraid to do so. Malindu has not only taught and bridged gaps but has also inspired people by his quest as 'The Boy Teacher'.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Mr . Palitha Gunasekera

By encouraging young women and children to engage in cricket, Mr. Palitha Gunasekera has been a huge inspiration to people in Sri Lanka and many have benefitted from his depth of experience and wisdom over the past decades.

With over four decades of cricketing experience with numerous teams at local and national level as a player, instructor, manager, captain, mentor

and coach, he has used the neutral grounds of the pitch to challenge his protégées to aim much higher than their means. Furthermore, as the world continues to move towards establishing gender equality, Palitha has dedicated his efforts to provide opportunities for talented girls from various rural areas of the country to engage in cricket, which is followed with the utmost passion and dedication by its people.

Through his charity organisation the PALINK School of Cricket, which he set up in 1998, Palitha has made it his mission to seek out talented young children from rural areas and guide them towards gaining recognition at both national and international level. In addition to providing his expertise as a professional coach completely free of charge, he has also sponsored a number of less advantaged players by supplying them with basic equipment such as bats, leather balls, pads and other material to nurture their talents.

While many of Palitha's prodigies have gone on to develop successful sports careers, others believe they have found a new confidence instilled in them that can apply beyond the boundaries of the cricket ground. The support he has shown has motivated many of these empowered young women from rural areas to attain jobs that they previously thought they could not have achieved.

As a result of his contributions and years of value based mentoring, over a dozen of Palitha's students have progressed to represent Sri Lanka at the highest national level. As one of them, his nominator had the privilege of being guided Palitha since 1998 and while under his mentorship, developed her career from a junior cricketer to leading the National Women's Cricket Team of Sri Lanka. She believes that she is a living testament as to why Palitha, who strides through invisible boundaries to fully expose the potential of Sri Lanka's most popular sport, deserves to be recognized as one of the nation's true heroes.



Name **Palitha Gunasekera**

Age **62 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'PALINK School of Sports'**



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Ms. Pearl Marrygold George Stephen

Pearl Stephen is the pioneer of the Women's Development Center in Mullgampola village in Kandy District. Her volunteer efforts over the last thirty years have changed the lives of women and children who have been abused and are living under hardships. She hasn't limited herself only to being a women's rights activist; she has also been a mentor for these women to become successful in their day-to-day lives. She has shared her knowledge and expertise with women living in rural areas around the country. Her vast experiences in strategic planning, problem solving and leadership are

among many things that have been taught by her.

As women's rights activist Pearl has united other interested groups to initiate many welfare activities for abused women from rural villages and women who work in estates. She also took initiatives to care for the children of these affected women. She also developed rehabilitation programs and other activities to protect them.

The situation in the country in early 1980s motivated Pearl to serve these innocent women who were helpless

and seeking someone's protection. She was able to start a protection center for sexually assaulted women and children in Kandy. This was the first of its kind in the country outside the city of Colombo.

As a societal need she saw the importance of taking action to protect children living on the streets. She has been able to become a foster mother to many children while sending them to school and being their guardian.

Her social work was spread through various areas of need. She didn't limit herself to just one area. Her helping hand has been a great asset at a time of much need to rescue and take care of people who were affected by the tsunami. She actively participated in relief efforts around Batticaloa district where she distributed various essential items to people. Pearl also took the initiative in renovating maternity wards in Kalmunai, and building houses in Pulmudai, Addalachchani and Kalmunai itself.

She has been a great influence in every circumstance that needed a helping hand. Pearl took a leading role in taking care of innocent civilians who were displaced by the conflict. Menik

Farm is one of the camps for displaced people where she distributed food while conducting counseling session to nourish their mental wellbeing. Her trilingual skills have helped her volunteer efforts to be effective and successful. During her time in Mannar and Killinochi district she did not forget to initiate her signature work of women's empowerment and child protection programmes.

Pearl's willingness to serve those in need and those facing difficult circumstance are the main reasons that have made her the volunteer she is. Her genuine personality has influenced everyone who comes into contact with her to do good for humanity. Her everlasting efforts to bring happiness into other people's lives have made her an outstanding heroine in the country.



Name **Pearl Marrygold George Stephen**

Age **73 years**

Place of Origin **Kandy**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'Women's Development Center in Mullgampola'**



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"

Mr. Sanmugam Senthurajah

Biographies of great personalities are read by many; inspire some, and are the motivation for action by a few. Sanmugam Senthurajah is one amongst these few, who made action plans from the inspirational stories he read and reread, with the sole objective of making a difference in the lives of those who needed it most. His many success stories colour his volunteer life with strength, courage, achievement and compassion, making it a story worth reading.

Born in the district of Jaffna in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, Sanmugam Senthurajah has

dedicated himself to upgrading the lives of those left poor and vulnerable by the conflict in Sri Lanka. As the President of the foundation, he is responsible for the installation of eighteen branches of the foundation, which has helped to reach those in need.

Senthurajah saw the need for long-term projects and worked passionately towards empowering women and uplifting their leadership skills. He also focused on child education and economic plans as a way of providing stability to those who were truly in need.

Furthermore, as the founder of the SWOAD (Social Welfare Organisation Ampara District) in Akkaraipattu, he tirelessly worked towards reducing fraudulent activities and thereby improving the quality of life, especially in the provincial divisions of Kalmunai, Karaithivu, Samanthurai, Navethanveli, Thirukkivil Dhamana and Potuvil.

With the collaboration of welfare organizations, Senthurajah has been able to support people to get back on their feet, despite the many difficulties faced by them due to the conflict. As a result of his efforts, the financial savings of many have increased considerably from about twenty five rupees per month to around one thousand rupees per month.

Apart from creating financially stable and empowering people, he also believed in releasing people from the difficult mind-set they were prone to be in, due to the hardships thrown at them. Hence, he encouraged and facilitated many leisure time activities such as reading, gardening and community gatherings as part of a balanced life.

Bringing out the true sense of empowering women, the Founders

of WDF (Women Development Organisation), AWF (Affect Women Forum), Ampara District NGO Consortium, SOND (Social Organisations Networking for Development), many youth clubs, clubs for children and senior citizen societies are proud creations of Senthurajah's guidance. These self-operating and self-financing organizations have currently merged their efforts in uplifting the lives of people, adding meaning to Senthurajah's efforts and inspiring many more.

Senthurajah even reaches out to international donors, making them a part of his noble cause and taking his work to greater heights. However, he believes that none of this would have been possible if not for the dedicated staff that has helped him throughout the past twenty five years. He believes himself to be blessed to have those who are equally committed to make his visions a reality.



Name **Sanmugam Senthurajah**

Age **56 years**

Place of Origin **Ampara**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'Mahashakthi Foundation'**



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Name **Sharmini Perera**

Age **48 years**

Place of Origin **Kandy**

Type of Work **Founder of the 'Home of Hope'**

Ms. Sharmini Perera

She was close to tears seeing the innocent orphan children affected by the three decades of conflict. She wanted to console them. She wanted to protect them. This clemency made her a mother to over one hundred and sixty children. Sharmini Perera, making a reality of the concept 'Develop the Child', built 'Home of Hope'.

The aftermath of the conflict made Sharmini think of the children who were left destitute when they lost their parents and she decided her life was not to be wasted on the petty things but to invest in helping those in need.

On the 19th of June 2001, based in the ancient city of Kandy, she initiated her efforts by taking care of nineteen children from the Eastern

province, with the intention of helping children of those who were affected by the conflict. Furthermore, Sharmini extended her protection and care to children who were victims of abuse and abduction or had been disowned by their families. Now there are eighty three children at the 'Home of Hope'.

Sharmini's experience in helping her father, who worked in the office of an orphanage, made her a sensitive caretaker. She saw how the orphan children were rejected by orphanages because of the limited space available and wanted to take them under her warm wings.

There are many specialties in the 'Home of Hope'; the children receive vocational training in making batik, handloom weaving, sewing

using a machine and carpentry. The IT facilities provided at the 'Home of Hope', together with National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) provide the children with an opportunity to obtain NAITA Computer Driving License of Sri Lanka.

It is not only the education that makes these children strong, but also their artistic talents, which are awakened as Sharmini makes them into balanced people who are ready to step into the wide world. With the assistance of a music instructor, the children are now able to play music instruments such as the guitar, organ, violin and drums, and an auditorium constructed in 2005 has given them a way to become performers with much self-esteem. The library, which opened in 2008, contains about one thousand five hundred books, which helps broaden the knowledge of children.

It is proven that Sharmini's mission is unstoppable. She and her husband initiated a transit home for children who need special attention when they were deserted, abused sexually, physically and then found by the authorities or the police. The couple discussed these problems with the authorities. These children are

usually placed in police remand until they appear before the courts; and are again placed in police remand until the authorities find a suitable institution to place them or until the case is concluded. Sharmini wanted to provide them with a comfortable place to stay until they find a more permanent place to live.

Over eighty children have gone out from 'Home of Hope' with big hopes after they were equipped with job skills and the potential to start their own business. Sharmini's true spirit of volunteerism and her motherly love towards the children has turned them into beautiful personalities with self-worth, confidence and dignity.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Dr. Sinniah Thevananthan

Inspired by his desire to find a ‘cure’ for the condition that his brother had suffered from since they were children, it was Dr. Sinniah Thevananthan’s destiny to become a doctor to treat children affected by Autism. His background was moulded by an understanding of the needs and abilities of his brother. He empathized with the difficulties faced by his own parents and many

others who did not have access to the correct advice to help their Autistic children. In a society in which children with any form of disability are often shunned away into the darkness. Dr. Thevananthan has provided true light to children with Autism to heal them through the enhancement of their own abilities and strengths.

Dr. Thevananthan set up the ‘Osilmo Special Education and Research Center’ in Boralesgamuwa in 2009 as a residential care-giving facility to support Autistic children to lead a normal life. Parents who had previously endured immense mental trauma without a clear solution, found the care provided by Dr. Thevanandan and his team of specialists a sheer relief. The center also aims to educate the media, pre-schools, and schools, as well as society at large about Autism.

After retiring from Government service, Dr. Thevananthan worked tirelessly to set up this centre with an expert group of therapists. He does not believe in medication being the cure, instead he believes in therapy and rehabilitation methods. His support and kindness has no racial or religious preferences. Whether sufferers are Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher or Malay, they all receive the same standard of care from the centre. The centre does not have a geographical preference either, as he has helped children in need from not only from Colombo and suburbs, but also from areas such as Jaffna, Kandy, Chilaw, Kurunegala, Thirukkivil, Trincomalee and Akkaraipattu.

One of the centre’s greatest achievements is when a child with Autism who has received treatment from Osilmo is accepted as a ‘normal’ student in the education system and has the opportunity to learn and work together with other children in his or her age group. This is a right of a child that Dr. Thevananthan and his team work tirelessly to ensure. Dr. Thevananthan also believes in working closely with parents of a child with Autism to ensure they can meet the challenge of developing his or her abilities.

Dr. Thevananthan calls for the support of the Government, private organizations and all other stakeholders to continue to support the large number of children in need. His efforts need to be recognized and appreciated by the larger society, especially his efforts to ensure children with Autism are able to enjoy the same rights, freedom and opportunities that other children enjoy.



Name **Dr. Sinniah Thevananthan**
Age **40 years**
Place of Origin **Colombo**
Type of Work **Founder of the ‘Osilmo Special Education and Research Center for autistic children’**



Ms. Srimathie Chandralatha Munasinghe

Srimathie Chandralatha Munasinghe is a classic personification of true selflessness and commitment to the wellbeing of the society. Her story is an embodiment of the immense potential each of us carries to cause positive change in our respective communities.

For over thirty one years Srimathie has shaped the lives of hundreds of youngsters as a teacher in Sinhala

language and Sinhala literature at the Government School in Halawatha and Gothami Vidyalaya in Colombo. Even after her retirement, she continued to teach 'Sinhala and Sinhala Literature' to students in a small room at her home. Srimathie conducted these classes completely free of charge. In a world that upholds materialistic values, and in which money is the norm that defines success in life, Srimathi voluntarily engaged in this

social service for over fourteen years; expecting absolutely nothing in return.

She is a classic illustration of how one can engage in social service at whatever age, in whatever area one is interested in. Srimathie welcomed any student to her class irrespective of their social status. Her students now hold various high-level positions, not only in Sri Lanka, but also abroad. They have immense respect and gratitude to her for her invaluable service and inspiration.

It is said that the best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book. Srimathie's teaching was never limited to the curriculum. She also shaped the lives of her students with invaluable advices on leading a successful life and being a good citizen.

Srimathie believed that as a product of the system of free education she is in debt to the country. Conducting these classes free of charge was her way of repaying this debt. Regardless of all other difficulties and shattered hopes, 'Srimathie Miss' only made one promise to her students: that she will

cover the syllabus before the end of the year. Each year, she kept her word. This was perhaps the reason behind the continuous growth of the number of her students. Her knowledge of her subject is vast and her style of teaching is unique: she continues to teach her students with the love and warmth of a mother.

She differentiated her sessions from the tuition classes, which are proliferating in all parts of the island. As opposed to these classes, which have become a profitable business models, the driving forces behind her efforts were her passion for teaching and the selflessness she has when it comes to helping children who are struggling with the subject.

Srimathie needs to be recognized for the humanitarian she is. Her lifelong commitment embodies an individual citizen's potential to act as a catalyst for development. Her legacy is one that will inspire generations of students, teachers and society at large; it shows that ordinary people can make extraordinary contributions to the society, when they remain true to themselves.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"



Name **Srimathie Chandralatha Munasinghe**

Age **65 years**

Place of Origin **Colombo**

Type of Work **Voluntary teacher**



Mr. Mohammed Ismail Udhuma Lebbaai

Udhuma Lebbaai has been a pillar of strength to the people of Akkaraipattu. He has dedicated his time and life to the needy and poor of his community.

His volunteer work takes on colorful variations as he continues his volunteerism in different areas. For instance when, due to unavoidable circumstances, five hundred and seventy one people in the Akkaraipattu area lost their lands, Udhuma Lebbaai was the first person to find alternative lands for these displaced people. He likewise helped twelve people gain and secure their employment status, which was lost

as a result of them being unable to communicate in Sinhala. He has helped contribute spectacles, grinders and bicycles to the people in the area. In uplifting the lives of those who are self-employed, he donated one hundred sewing machines to such individuals. Steps towards improving the villages in Akkaraipattu and Kalmunai were taken through many shramadhana initiatives. Furthermore, he organised a medical clinic for the community with the aid of the Health Department and has also helped raise funds for the Batticaloa hospital. If any people were affected by the natural disasters, he facilitated and assisted them.

While Udhuma Lebbaai has taken effective measures in assisting the elders of the community, he has also ensured that the young people are given due attention, so that they are groomed to become the leading youth of the island's next generation. He provided stationary and bags to one thousand school students and scholarships to students who were keen to further their education. For these contributions he has been repeatedly honoured and respected by many school principals. The title 'Sevai Tharagai' was bestowed upon Udhuma Lebbaai by the 'National Artists Academy Akkaraipattu Sri Lanka' for his dedication to the performance of literature. He was appreciated by the divisional cultural secretariat of Akkaraipattu because he has lent a hand to the writers in publishing their books.

His way of helping farmers in the area has been successful in showing them the need for an insurance policy and the benefits of pension schemes. He has been awarded a certificate of appreciation by the Agricultural and Agrarian Insurance Board in recognition of this service.

Former President of the Grahamodiah Council and the present General Secretary of the Coastal Gramasevaka Officers Association, from which he was awarded the Gramasevaka Officer award in year 2000, Udhuma Lebbaai is committed to the well-being and the upbringing of the society. He is the National Vice President of MLYM (Muslim League Youth Front) and the director of the All Island YMMA (Young Men's Muslim Association). The YMMA honoured his dedication and service in the national level as the best director in the years 2002, 2003 & 2004 and he was also honoured by its president of Batticaloa District. As an assistant commissioner of Akkaraipattu and Kalmunai District Scout Association, Udhuma Lebbaai is appreciated by the Sri Lanka Scout Association for his long, continuous service.

Udhuma Lebbaai's inspiring volunteer work authenticates him as an extraordinary individual, a forward-looking person dedicated towards assisting his people and uplifting the community.



"STORIES TO INSPIRE"

Name **Mohammed Ismail Udhuma Lebbaai**

Age **61 years**

Place of Origin **Akkaraipaththu**

Type of Work **Community Volunteer**

Contributing to Volunteerism in Sri Lanka



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V Awards Secretariat

C/O UN Volunteers

202-204 Bauddhaloka Mawatha

Colombo 07

Sri Lanka.

Tel +94 (0) 71 6556556

Email info@vawards.lk

Web www.vawards.lk
www.iyv10srilanka.com



Printed by Karunaratne & Sons (Pvt) Ltd. on FSC certified paper with using VOC free
non toxic vegetable oil based ink. (www.karusons.com)

IYV+10 National Steering Committee Publication
Printed in Sri Lanka
January 2012

ISBN 978-955-0901-00-5



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