



Sewalanka
FOUNDATION

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Newsletter

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Sharing Art, Sharing Cultures

In August, 24 aspiring artists from across Sri Lanka experienced a unique opportunity to sharpen their craft with two renowned artists from Thailand.

The candidates, selected by a fine arts lecturer at the University of Peradeniya, were the cream of the crop among 60 applicants. From August 1 to 31, they participated in a workshop led by Hongjorn Sa-ne-ngam-jaroen and Bhanuwat Jittivuthikarn at Sewalanka Foundation's Islander Center.

The Shrine Room Painting Workshop was designed to help new artists learn more about the business and the creative process of art. The interactive, multi-media workshop incorporated discussions, lectures and hands-on work. "The lectures and discussions during the first half of the workshop are intended to get the artists thinking and inspired for the individual project portion," said the

workshop leaders. In all, 20 lectures covering such diverse topics as the history of modern Asian art, globalisation and its impact on art, and art and social change were held.

While many people view art simply as a creative pastime, successful professional artists must combine talent with a range of promotional skills. This workshop included group activities designed to teach and build the artists' skills in such areas as preparing for exhibitions, photographically documenting their artwork, working on collaborative projects and preparing grant and scholarship applications.

The final portion of the workshop was hands-on work, in which the artists experimented with a range of media and artistic genres, from clay and acrylic paints to learning life drawing and building installations from found objects. In the evenings, popular films and

documentaries about art and artists were shown. By the end of the program the students had each produced new finished work. A number of these works were displayed at a one-day exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Colombo in December.

Bhanuwat Jittivuthikarn received his Bachelor of Creative Arts in visual and media art from the University of Melbourne and a concurrent Diploma in Arts from the same institution. His art has been featured at numerous exhibitions in Thailand and Australia and his films have been featured at festivals around Asia. He won the 2005 Young Thai Artist Award Jury Prize in Photography and has received numerous arts awards from the University of Melbourne.

Hongjorn Sa-ne-ngam-jaroen is self-taught, having shown a passion for art at a young age. Since studying picture drawing in 1977, Mr. Sa-ne-ngam-jaroen has been working as a professional artist for 30 years. He has been a curator with the Bangkok Art Gallery and his work has been commissioned on multiple occasions by royal families and political leaders in Malaysia and Thailand.

Set against the backdrop of the Islander Centre, where inspiration abounds in the natural beauty, the budding artists received a holistic view of what it takes to be successful in this vocation. By encouraging less experienced artists to test boundaries and look at their craft in new ways, we are inspiring a new generation of artistic talent to benefit everyone.



Above > New artists watch as the Thai instructors demonstrate a drawing technique.

Continued Development In Vavuniya

Sewalanka, with partners Welthungerhilfe and the European Union (EU) launched a program in Sri Lanka's north to reduce poverty among war-affected families and assure participatory development. This EU-funded project targets 14 villages in Vavuniya, nine in Mannar and seven in Anuradhapura, with 4,451 families participating in total.

The EU has funded a series of similar development projects, this being the third of its kind in the north. The project began in October 2007 and will last a period of 30 months.

As part of our goal to empower community-based organizations, Sewalanka has been developing the capacity of local CBOs to ensure increased community participation in common activities and to help improve each other's lives. In Sooduventhapilavu village, our joint project revived a women's rural development society that had been inactive for quite some time. Our field team worked extensively to mobilize the community and provided training on leadership, maintenance of records, books of accounts and recording meeting minutes.

As part of the project, Sewalanka staff also conducted training on conflict resolution, savings promotion and small credit activities from savings. Since working with Sewalanka and WHH, members of the women's society have become leaders in the village. They readily contribute to the development of their village and now participate in common

activities. The society holds monthly meetings and members regularly pay back the credits drawn from the society. Savings promotion among members has increased.

We also linked the CBOs to government and service providers to access services for their membership. The farmer companies established through Sewalanka's initiation provide many services to the farmers, ranging from production to marketing, which ensure that farm products fetch better prices. The CBOs in the villages have links with village-level farmer committees and work reciprocally for the common benefit of the people.

Through this project we have carried out awareness programs on gender and health, and are improving the infrastructure of the villages. Rames, one of the participants, has a family of eight. They were displaced in 1990 due to the ongoing conflict and resettled in their village in 1996. During this time, they led a hand-to-mouth life in a refugee welfare centre. Rames could not earn a regular income and struggled to support the daily needs of his seven children and his wife.

Sanitation was one of the pressing issues the family faced once they resettled in their village. The family home didn't have a toilet and the family members were forced to go to jungles and bushes. Sewalanka took up the issue and worked with Rames to construct a water seal toilet. He and his family are now very happy in their home.

Including Rames, 75 families who had similar issues with their homes were given toilets through this Sewalanka program. Some of the beneficiaries also got involved with Sewalanka to improve hygiene habits in the community.

The EU-funded project serves to strengthen societies and family incomes. Other activities include technical training in agricultural and non-farming vocations, clean environment campaigns, community exchange programs, networking and rapport building with extension agencies and between CBOs, and programs focused on peace building. The project will continue into 2010, improving lives in the district until its completion.



Above > Sewalanka worked with the community to construct water seal toilets.



Above > A meeting of members of a CBO that has received capacity building support through the EU-funded

Preserving our Coasts

Sri Lanka's coastal zone is one of the country's most dazzling features and contributes significantly to Sri Lanka's overall productivity. However, our coastal zone, like that of most developing countries, is under tremendous pressure. Coastal and marine resources have been over-exploited and over-developed and the integrity of the ecosystems has been significantly compromised.

Sewalanka's Coastal Resources Management and Mangrove Restoration training workshop was designed to address these issues with sustainable solutions. For this program, Sewalanka brought together Sri Lanka's foremost authorities on coastal and mangrove management. Lecturers from various universities, the Turtle Conservation Project, YMCA Sri

Lanka and ECOT contributed to the program.

The 10-day training session involved 25 participants from districts along Sri Lanka's west, south and east coasts. Each person had previous direct involvement in conservation activities. The workshop provided an opportunity to learn from experts in the field of conservation and restoration and to interact and share experiences with individuals doing similar work in other regions of the island.

In addition to increasing awareness about coastal resource sensitivities, the workshop objectives were to impart knowledge about and provide experience with mangrove restoration and sustainable coastal resource management techniques. The program included theoretical

classroom sessions as well as practical field excursions.

"We started with an overview of the coastal zone and its defining features. We followed that with sessions on coral reefs, mangroves, turtle preservation, animals and birds of the wet zones, mapping and other relevant topics," says Upul Jayathilake of Sewalanka Foundation. During the field portion of the workshop, participants took boats out to see coral reefs, learn about the species associated with the reefs and to see and understand the impact of environmental pollution on the reefs. They also watched sea turtles laying eggs and watched the turtle conservation process. Bird watching, lagoon and sand dune exploration and mangrove planting were all part of the program.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants made proposals for coastal restoration projects in their districts. "The proposals suited the conditions in each district and considered projects that could be implemented with few resources," says Mr. Jayathilake.

"Each proposal was reviewed by the group, who suggested changes to make them easily implemented and sustainable." Replanting mangroves, increasing fish populations and educating local community members were some elements of the various proposals. The training received positive evaluations from participants. For future training sessions, we will incorporate more group activities, visual aids and field trips.



Above > Participants in the Coastal Resource and Mangrove Restoration program take a glass-bottom boat out to inspect the coral reefs and then learn more about reef damage from a workshop leader.

Building Solid Foundations

Brick is one of the oldest, most enduring and least expensive building materials in the world. Bricks are popularly used for construction in Sri Lanka because they can be made with very little technology and natural materials that are readily available around the island.

To make the bricks, skilled labourers in Sri Lanka select and dig up mud that is high in clay content, which is ideal for brick making. Bricks need to be uniform in size for construction purposes, so the mud is packed into wooden moulds in the shape of a box. The mud moulds are then left to dry in the sun for one day. Once the mud blocks have dried, they are stacked in a storage hut leaving space for air to pass between them. Paddy waste is sprinkled on and around the bricks and then set on fire. The firing process, which can take up to four days in the dry season and a week during rainy season, hardens the mud and turns it into bricks that are ready to use.

Ananda, a brickmaker from the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka's Southern province, has been making mud bricks for five years. His village is well known for producing this construction material and Ananda, a father of two, learned his trade while working for another brick manufacturer in the area. One day, he decided that he wanted to set up his own brick-making business, but he was unable to make many bricks each month because he only had one hut in which to fire the bricks and his unit costs were much higher than other established brickmakers.

Fortunately, Ananda was a member of a CBO that is affiliated with Sewalanka Foundation. Through Sewa Finance's microfinance activities with his CBO, Ananda was able to get a Rs. 10,000 loan from the CBO. Over the past year, he has steadily grown his business with the support of Sewalanka and Sewa Finance.

Before getting his loan, Ananda faced several challenges. He was unable to pay for the paddy waste he needed to fire the bricks and would have to order the supply on credit. Using credit meant he was charged at a higher rate than if he paid cash. He also had to rent a tractor to transport the paddy waste—an additional cost that affected his bottom line. His storage hut had a wicker roof, which both let in rain and frequently burnt during the drying process. Ananda incurred extra cost regularly repairing the hut.



Above > Ananda from the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka is seen here manufacturing bricks. He was able to setup his own brick-making business with the aid of Sewa Finance.

With his Sewa Finance loan Ananda was able to pay for the paddy waste up front. He also bought a small amount of paddy land, which generates income from rice production and provides a great deal of the waste he needs. Recently, he took out a second Rs. 40,000 loan with his CBO, which enabled him to expand his business further. He has bought a tractor, which has reduced his transportation costs and he has built a metal roof for his hut, which remains intact during the firing process and keeps his product dry.

Ananda currently makes 12,000 bricks a month and is able to employ one staff. His bricks sell for Rs. 42,000 bringing in a net income of Rs. 25,000. The regular income has meant both his children can go to school. Because the demand for his bricks is still larger than his supply, he is keen to expand his business further and hire a second employee.

Developing Women's Potential

Shakthi Thiva is a women's society in Matara in southeast Sri Lanka. Its members are small-business women whose activities range from weaving mats to making spices for sale at local markets. Once as large as 112 members, Shakthi Thiva has settled into an 80-member-strong group whose members support one another to improve their economic situation.

Sewalanka works with the CBO to encourage social mobilization, provide instruction on livelihood activities and support the women to start and improve their businesses. "Our CBO takes a lead role in all the large functions happening with the community," says Ashanthi, a teacher who is treasurer of the CBO. "We organize temple activities together and help each other."

The CBO is also involved in a Sewalanka home gardening project in the region and participates in training programs offered by Sewalanka Foundation.

For most of the members, the profits from their businesses serve as a secondary income for their household. Renuka is a retired principal. She got a loan from the CBO through Sewalanka's microfinance arm, Sewa Finance. Now she makes spices. With the loan, she was able to buy in bulk and then grind and repackage the spices for sale in her community.

With a loan of Rs. 20,000, Ashanthi bought the materials to make tables and benches. Now she is running a small school and has made her initial investment back through tuition.

Giranthi, a mushroom cultivator, runs her business with her husband. They used the loan that they received from the CBO and Sewa Finance to purchase fungus. They grow their mushrooms on two shady plots, which each hold approximately 500 packets' worth of mushrooms. She and her husband go door to door to sell the packets for Rs. 35 each. Customers also come to them. The business sells everything it grows and is ripe for expansion.

The picture has not always been rosy for some of the small-business operators though. Several of the women have been making coir and cloth mats for years, which they sold to traders who came to the region. Since the tsunami however, the number of traders has dropped noticeably. "We sell door to door within the community a lot of the time now," says one mat maker. There is a limited market in their village and when they do sell to traders, they don't always get a fair price for their work. Once the women began operating as a CBO, the president started to look for outside markets and now sends the bulk of their products outside the community.

After meetings between Sewa Finance staff, Sewalanka staff and the women of Shakthi Thiva, opportunities to improve the women's businesses emerged. Sewalanka will continue to work with them to facilitate access to larger markets for their goods, to provide additional business training and to encourage product diversification.



Above > Women from the Shakthi Thiva CBO display some of the woven mats they have made for sale.

Encouraging New Vocations

With funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, Sewalanka Foundation and project partner Canadian Hunger Foundation (CHF) have opened four Rural Vocational Training Centers in the past year. "Vocational training not only increases opportunities for unemployed youth, it is also instrumental in expanding income generating opportunities for adults," says Mr. Jagath, Program Director for the Towards Sustainable Livelihoods project in Galle district.

The vocational centers are just one aspect of this multi-year project, which focuses on helping people from some of Sri Lanka's poorest communities to move from poverty to sustainable income generation. Located in Kobeituduwa, Matiwala, Talpe and Karandugoda,

the vocational training centers have become important assets for the villages and their people. Each center includes computer banks and facilities to support a range of livelihood programs, from carpentry to sewing. Experienced trainers developed the curriculum according to the Ministry of Vocational Training's rules and regulations and Sewalanka's senior officers from the Galle district regularly visit and supervise the Training Centers' activities.

During the vocational centers' season, three information technology courses and one carpentry course are offered, as well as masonry, motor mechanics, computing and sewing classes. "Nearly 200 participants were awarded certificates in September of this year," says Mr. Jagath. "Once the courses are completed,

we guide the students to register with the government job bank, Jobs Net, and also link them with the CHA job bank," he adds.

In November, Sewalanka organized a two-day marketing fair where the students displayed and sold their products. The fair attracted 500 visitors. There is a lot of talent out there in the small communities. The biggest problem is marketing," says Ajith Tennakoon, Sewalanka District Director for the south. "We're trying to connect the producers with buyers and teach them how to get raw materials and produce things inexpensively.

In this phase the main focus of the centers is to train youth to be eligible for jobs. In the longer term, the intention is for the centers to become village hubs.

"We've built the centers where they can be easily accessible," says Mr. Jagath. "Soon they will become a place where villagers can get information they need in their day-to-day lives. We hope to turn these vocational centers into Rural Knowledge Centers that offer essential community services such as a library, a games area for children, photocopying and telephone services.

The centers will also continue offering vocational support, including CV preparation services for youth and business plan support for entrepreneurs.



Above > After six months of training, a group of craftsmen and women displayed and sold their wares at a Sewalanka-organized marketing fair.

Farming for a Brighter Future

Towards Sustainable Livelihoods, a joint project between Sewalanka Foundation and CHF, is a long-range project focused on the most disadvantaged communities in Sri Lanka. Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, the project's staff work directly with families in the country's east and south to assess their personal assets, discuss livelihood activities, identify opportunities to improve their financial situation and then provide the start-up materials, tools and guidance to help them move forward sustainably.

Poopalapillai is a 65-year-old grandmother. She lives with her daughter Sivarasa, her son-in-law and the couple's two young children in Trincomalee. In 1990, the family fled for their lives after fighting in Sri Lanka's conflict descended on their village. They ended up in a welfare camp where they stayed for seven years.

After spending the next nine years in an LTTE-controlled area, they were uprooted again in 2006 to

Kinniya. Facilitated by Sewalanka staff, the family was able to join the local community groups and societies. When Sewalanka and CHF approached the community with the Towards Sustainable Livelihoods project, Poopalapillai requested support to start a poultry farming business. She and her daughter would manage the business while Sivarasa's husband worked outside the home.

Together, Sewalanka staff and the two women determined that they could support as many as 50 birds on their start-up poultry farm. We provided 25 broiler birds and feed bags for one month to get the business going. The poultry farm now brings in Rs. 4,800 net profit to the family each month. The women's next step is to buy more broiler birds and to share their experience and knowledge with other group members.

Towards Sustainable Livelihoods has also provided much-needed infrastructure for families in regions where there was none. Noordeen Rizwan lives with his

wife and son in a small hut with no toilet in the fallow lands of Kinniya. Their land has no well for drinking water and is too small to use for paddy. Because of the lack of water, home gardening activities could not be pursued.

Rizwan earns Rs. 4,000 a month as a labourer, not enough to meet the family's needs for food, medicine and other daily requirements. "[To get medicine] I go to the Kinniya Town. I borrow a bicycle from the neighbours," he says. Rizwan's son has been admitted to pre-school and before Towards Sustainable Livelihoods began, Rizwan worried about affording his education.

After discussions with Sewalanka staff, Rizwan identified goat rearing as a livelihood he would like to pursue. Through the project, he received six goats, which he describes as a great asset to his family. He hopes to breed them to multiply the herd and profit from selling the animals. In addition to goats, Sewalanka and CHF built a common well next to his house, which will enable the family to begin a home garden and sell the produce at the local market.

Sewalanka staff provide hands-on support and guidance to all of the participants in Towards Sustainable Livelihood. The project also includes numerous training workshops to support people like Rizwan and Poopalapillai to run and expand their businesses successfully. Having taken part in several of these training sessions, Rizwan is optimistic about his and his family's future. "Insha Allah, I can achieve my future aspirations," he says.



About > Noordeen Rizwan lives with his wife and son in front of the family home. The Towards Sustainable Livelihoods project built him a well and has provided start-up assets for the family to run a goat-rearing farm.

Ampara Business Survey

Sewalanka's micro-finance arm, Sewa Finance, has been offering enterprise loans to individuals and businesses in the Ampara district for more than a year. Sewa Finance has issued more than 90 loans in the region.

Enterprise loans are intended to support small businesses to get off the ground or improve their performance. To assess the impact of its existing enterprise loan products, Sewa Finance recently conducted a survey of the Ampara businesses. The information gathered from the survey will inform the launch of new products for this region and others, and will enable Sewa Finance in the future to adapt existing products to better serve its customers.

Of the 90 loan holders who received the survey, a spectacular 83% – or 75 people – completed and returned it. They provided very interesting information on who is using the products and the loans' effectiveness.

According to the responses, there is great variety in the types of businesses that have received loans. The most common enterprise, at 33%, was grocery stores. The next biggest category was companies supplying building materials (11%), and furniture makers and communication centres were the third most popular at 9% each.

Most of the loans were between Rs. 100,000 and Rs. 200,000 for an average loan of amount of Rs. 120,333. The loans were used for many purposes but the business owners commonly spent some or all of the money on stock and

materials. Tools and machinery for new buildings and refurbishment were also cited.

Unlike Sewa Finance's CBO lending portfolio, in which the majority of loan recipients are female small business owners, the vast majority of enterprise loan recipients are men (79%), indicating a gender reversal in ownership as business size increases. Sewa Finance plans to do more research on this issue and will seek methods to achieve greater balance in the enterprise loan portfolio.

Of the 72 respondents who answered a question about employees, approximately half employed people and an impressive 33% of businesses stated that they had been able to employ extra people as a result of the loan.

The survey also revealed a flaw in our loan approval process. Despite procedures stipulating that individuals obtaining a loan should be a member of a CBO, 69% of respondents stated that they were not a member of a CBO. This may be an area for further investigation since CBO membership does not seem to have influenced the recipient's ability to repay the loan.

Although not verified, based on the 63 responses to a question about business performance, enterprise loan recipients' sales increased on average by Rs. 50,444 per month, equivalent to a 29% rise. Average monthly profits were up by Rs. 6,633, or 51%. Following this, not surprisingly, 90% of businesses

stated that the number of customers they had served had increased.

We asked the business owners to rate Sewa Finance, from 1 to 5, on the ease and length of loan process, support from their field officer and the repayment schedule. We received very impressive results in this area with average scores from 4.35 to 4.77 out of 5. One business owner who recycled tyres said that he could now send his children to school and his family was building their own home.

Most respondents stated that the loan has meant an expansion of their business, an increase in their income and/or greater financial stability for their family.

Sewa Finance followed this survey with focus groups in autumn asking targeted questions to gain a more detailed picture about the impact the loans have had, the precise training that would help then as business owners and to give these customers an opportunity to give us their ideas for new products. New products may include different sized loans, term lengths and repayment schedules, as well as loans for working capital, capital expenditures and seasonal expenses.

ABOUT SEWA FINANCE

Sewa Finance deals with low-income households to provide access to a range of high-quality financial services to develop their earning-power, their lives and communities. For more information visit the website at www.sewafinance.com

A Fresh (Food) Start

When the 2004 tsunami hit Sri Lanka, hundreds of fishing communities were destroyed. Many who now live in Galagodawatta in Galle were relocated to this little village from communities by the sea after their homes were destroyed. It is five kilometers inland—a distance that presents a challenge for community members who know no other living than off the sea.

Women like Chandini Rathna felt helpless in their new village and found it difficult to continue their livelihood so far from the sea. A new Sewalanka Foundation program is addressing this issue and others by teaching new skills to help participants build a sense of attachment to their community, increase income, improve health and provide food security.

The Home Gardening project, delivered in collaboration with the Salvation Army, involves 255 tsunami-affected relocated families that are living in permanent homes constructed by 12 donor agencies. Together, the two agencies have trained the families in organic

gardening and taught them principles for selling organic products in village markets. Sewalanka field staff coordinated and facilitated all of the gardening training, which was delivered by well-known agricultural specialists.

The gardening training covered a variety of topics to successfully grow organic vegetables and fruits. “We received comprehensive training on gardening, recycling, compost making, and health and nutrition from Sewalanka and Salvation Army Home Gardening program,” says Mrs. Rathna. “We can now provide our families’ daily need of vegetables without buying them. And they are healthier than regular vegetables because they are organic,” she adds.

After the morning classroom sessions, community participants spent the afternoon practicing organic methods on a group member’s garden plot. “Practical demonstration sessions in the field were very useful. Now we know how to choose the most appropriate area of the garden

and most appropriate vegetables/plants to grow. We also know how to prepare the garden bed and control pests,” says Mrs. Rathna.

Before this program, much of the Galagodawatta relocated land was unproductive. Today, backyard gardens are covered with healthy tomatoes and chilies. Organic gardening systems are helping to regenerate the land and raise the fortunes of these relocated families. The area has numerous composting sites, as well as some small-scale nurseries with new seedlings.

While home gardens are largely used by the families themselves, the Sewalanka program also included information about quality control for selling excess production at village markets. We also taught how to produce compost, a product that can be sold to other growers.

“I have grown many chilli plants since the home gardening program supported me. I sell the excess production to local villagers/ neighbours and people from neighbour villages come to buy dried chilli and organic fertilizer,” says Mrs. D.G. De Silva, who, along with her neighbours, produced her second harvest of organic vegetables and compost this September.

“In all, I have produced and sold 550 kilograms of organic fertilizer that is ready to use in other area gardens. We have been able to cut down 80% of our household expenditure by not buying vegetables from outside since we started own home garden.”

Mrs. De Silva is excited to continue. “I’m trying different types of vegetables to diversify the production. Look at these carrot plants and cabbages,” she says. “Normally they grow in the cold season upcountry. I have planted them successfully with what I learned from this program.”

Mr. Linton Silva is a fisherman who had a few boats before the tsunami. “I did not know anything about organic gardening because I am a fisherman,” says the 60-year-old. “But I’ll be having a good income this season. Now I am helping my neighbours and other group members on how to succeed from backyard gardening,” says Mr. Silva.

Another positive outcome of the project is how it has empowered women’s and civil society organizations. Sewalanka did mobilization training with more than 280 community members, supporting them to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities in their village. Then we worked with them to come up with potential solutions for the weaknesses and threats.

Recently the number of families permanently living in the village increased to more than 500. These recently resettled families are working with and learning

Right > Mrs. Rathna and her father show the plantains from their garden.

from the home gardening project’s first phase of families.

“We are so proud about where we are now in backyard gardening. We can share our knowledge and skills of organic gardening with new families,” says Mrs. Silva.



Mitsua Dake Shares Thoughts on Peace

Sewalanka Foundation recognizes that for peace to exist individuals must listen to and appreciate different viewpoints. As part of our peace-building activities, we seek the perspectives of leaders who believe in non-violent conflict resolution and who have unique experiences with peace issues.

In mid-August, Mr. Mitsua Dake visited Sri Lanka on invitation from our organization. Mr. Dake is a lecturer at the Faculty of Intercultural Relations at Ryukoku University in Japan. On this, his third visit to Sri Lanka, he gave a presentation to Sewalanka staff at our organization’s headquarters.

During his speech to approximately 40 staff, he shared his personal story, his view of Japan’s history with peace and violence and

offered words of support to Sewalanka staff. He noted similarities between his childhood home of Nagasaki and towns in Sri Lanka. “When I was a child, the community had a common value and supported each other, especially after World War II. We had a shared value that we don’t have as much now. I see that shared value still in Sri Lanka.”

He compared his initial impression of Sri Lanka in 1998 with his subsequent visits. “Now, even though the situation has gone back again, I can see more hope that I couldn’t see then. I am confident after knowing Sewalanka that change will come true.”

Mr. Dake talked about how Japan’s Article 9, which denounces war, requires a

constant commitment. “I feel the people of Sri Lanka must continuously practise the idea of peace,” he commented. “Don’t expect other people will have the same values as you. To be good friends, you have to experience conflict. Through conflict you will understand each other better.”

He left the staff with the words of ancient Japanese prince Shotoku. “We are all ordinary men. We make mistakes. Let us control ourselves and not be resentful when others disagree with us. We’re both human beings and we’re not always perfect. We may not always keep the ceasefire but if we admit that we are ordinary men, we can share the deeper wisdom that will help us all get what we want.”



Above > Mr. Linton Silva, a former fisherman, now spends most of his time with his new garden and green vegetables.

World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day, on October 10, 2008, is observed to promote mental health advocacy and educate the public. This year, Sewalanka Foundation's psychosocial district staff held celebrations of World Mental Health Day in various ways.

The Our Home psychosocial centre in Galle collaborated with three other organisations—the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, Creative Actions and LC, an organization that works with people with disabilities—to organize an awareness program a local police station.

Another event featured consultant psychiatrist Dr. Neil

Fernando, 10 other doctors and 50 nurses from the Angoda Mental Hospital, who provided counselling and prescriptions for people experiencing mental health issues.

Sewalanka organize another program at a nearby school, presented by a health education officer to raise awareness about mental health issues. We also coordinated home visits by doctors and nurses for people living with mental health problems who are either not aware of their problems or hiding because of the stigma it carries.

The Hambantota Our Home staff held two programs assisted

by the Tangalle Ministry of Health and Navajeewana. At the first, 50 people who are overcoming their mental health challenges participated in a discussion of how to deal with life after mental illness. The second programme, at the National Vocational Training Centre in Mirichchiwila, dealt with the same topic also how to maintain good mental health.

In Ampara and Trincomalee, Our Home centres held smaller awareness programs. In Batticaloa, staff handed out questionnaires through doctors and mental health workers to assess awareness of mental health issues and resources for support.

Maha Sanga Bestows Honorary Peace Awards

In collaboration with Maha Sanga, the International Engaged Buddhist - Sri Lanka and Sewalanka Foundation recently recognized the valuable service of Professors Sulak Sivaraksha from Thailand and Dharmachari Lokamithra from India with honorary awards. The two men's actions have had a positive impact on views about peace all around the world.

Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha conferred the honorary awards for the men's outstanding

services rendered to nurture Buddha Sasana worldwide. The elaborate ceremony was held at Bandaranaike International Memorial Conference Centre in Colombo in November 29, 2008. The invited guests were from all walks of life and represented various religious beliefs.

Professors Sivaraksha and Lokamithra continue their efforts towards peace among religions, aspiring for a culture of non-violence with a respect for life. They desire a society that includes solidarity and a just

economic order, tolerance and a life of truthfulness and the principles of equal rights and partnership between men and women. Maha Sanga considered these ideals when conferring these awards.

The organizers recognize individuals who are passionate about non-violent change and development. We honour these two men, who create dialogue and look beyond barriers such as culture, religion and ethnicity to promote co-existence through diversity.



Sewalanka Foundation

Post Box No.3 , Colombo Road, Boralesgamuwa
p: +94 (0)11 2545 362-4 | f: +94 (0)11 2545 166
e: headquarters@sewalanka.org | w: www.sewalanka.org

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