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Ocean Stars Trust



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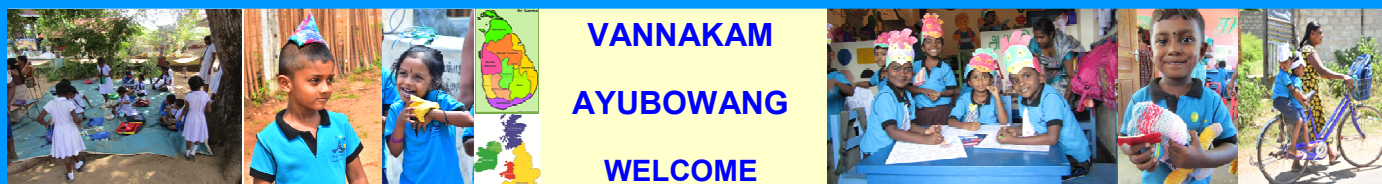


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ESTABLISHED JANUARY 2005

Newsletter 28: DECEMBER 2018



LATEST NEWS

- Avonbourne Trust from Bournemouth completes their first trip to Sri Lanka with 11 volunteers.
- A total of 105 volunteers travel to Sri Lanka in 2018 with Ocean Stars to visit our projects.
- Two new preschools opened in Poonakary and Chenkalady.
- Two new sewing projects opened in Karavetty and Yatiyanthota.
- Teacher training for all island teachers held for the first time in Batticaloa in October 2018.
- Ailidh Watson starts as Ocean Stars intern in September 2018.

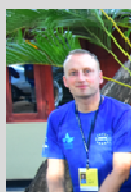
CURRENT WISH LIST

- Sponsor a child for £15 per month and transform the life of a child and family.
- Sponsor a preschool for £1400 per annum and transform the lives of children in rural communities
- Sponsor a teacher for £25 a month and give hope and employment to a rural fam-

"Teach Sri Lanka" begins partnership with OST, and sponsors Naripulthotam preschool, near Batticaloa.



OST Trustee, Revd Dan Haylett, reflects on his visits to Sri Lanka in 2018.



Welcome to this latest edition of the Ocean Stars Trust Newsletter. We want to thank you for your continued interest and valued support for this wonderful charity. Because of you our work in Sri Lanka continues to grow and develop in new and exciting ways. Thank you for your generosity of time and money and for your ongoing commitment.

This year I have had the privilege of making two visits to Sri Lanka. I've seen at first hand how your money is being spent and the impact that Ocean Stars continues to have on so many lives across the island. There are so many highlights from this last year, but here are just a few:

- The opening of a new preschool in Kilinochchi in July.
- The development of a comprehensive socio-economic study helping us really understand the communities we are working amongst in Sri Lanka. Plans laid for a pilot study to monitor the development of children in their time in OST preschools.
- A new replacement preschool building in Chenkalady opened in October.
- The first gathering of teachers from all our preschools across the island for teacher training in October. One teacher gave thanks for this opportunity as the first training she had received in 32 years of teaching. More sewing projects set up alongside several preschools, empowering communities.
- New links continue to be made – the first visit of Avonbourne School in July, and new partnerships built between UK and Sri Lankan Preschools and Churches.



This year the focus of Ocean Stars has been and continues to be on ensuring we have the ongoing capacity to support all the good work that has been started down the years. We are proud to be working in communities across Sri Lanka as we continue to journey towards becoming an all-island NGO. We can only do this by relying on your generous gifts and by depending heavily on our wonderful team of staff in Sri Lanka. Together we are making a huge difference to so many lives and communities.

As we thank you for your support for Ocean Stars Trust may we also take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Christmas with every Blessing for the New Year ahead.

GRACE CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

2005

2018



Ocean Stars supported Grace Children's Home in Vavuniya from March 2005 to January 2016, when founder Mrs Nadarajah died and the home was taken over by the local government. The boys of the home who grew up with Ocean Stars still keep in touch and meet up with UK volunteers during their October trip



to Sri Lanka. They invite us to one of their homes and treat the OST group to a banquet of curries. The 8 boys who we met with this year are all in full-time employment, happy, and have a close bond with each other. They talk about how Ocean Stars played a huge part in their childhood, and how the love, support and kindness of UK volunteers sustained them through dark and difficult times during the war. They still regard Ocean Stars as their great support network.

SPONSORSHIP CHANGES AND ENRICHES LIVES



JO BARTON, OCEAN STARS SPONSOR PROGRAMME MANAGER

Sponsorship is an incredibly rewarding experience and really does make a difference.

About 150 children are sponsored through Ocean Stars Trust. The money is spent on educational materials (e.g. pens/pencils/notebooks) and can also contribute towards extra tuition or transport. These children come from some of the poorest and most remote communities in Sri Lanka and it makes an enormous difference to their lives. In addition to the educational benefits it also helps to put food on the table for these families. In Batticaloa we have sponsored over 75 children since the scheme began in 2005. During this time we have also been supporting a school in Vellaimanal (Trincomalee). We are currently sponsoring approximately 100 children there. This area is very remote and was badly affected by both the Tsunami and the Civil War. Our team of UK volunteers visit both Batticaloa and Trinco during their October visit every year and meet up with many of our sponsor families. This visit always provides great excitement for the children and their families. Many of our sponsors communicate regularly with their sponsor child by post, and some sponsors have been able to meet up with their child in Sri Lanka. This always proves to be an emotional and rewarding experience. In addition to child sponsorship it is also possible to sponsor a preschool teacher. We currently pay the wages for over 30 teachers at our preschools. They are all very dedicated and often work in very difficult circumstances with very few resources.

The cost:

£15 per month for child sponsorship

£25 per month for teacher sponsorship

Please sign up and make a difference!!

Jo Barton

Sponsorship Manager, Ocean Stars Trust

Debbie and Steve, Child Sponsors since 2005, reflect on visiting their sponsor child for the first time in July 2018

Whilst volunteering for Ocean Stars this past summer, we (my husband Steve and I) had the amazing privilege of visiting Suhila, the girl we had sponsored since 2005. We first saw her in the school we were teaching in and had not recognised the shyly smiling young woman as she participated in the lessons given by Avonbourne



Trust's students. As we were leaving, the same young woman sat beside us and it was then that we learned who she was and that we would 'drop in' to her family home as a prequel to a longer visit a week later.

The welcome we were given, both then and later, humbled us. The smiles from all as her mother, father, aunt and siblings bustled into the courtyard to 'see us' made us realise what a huge difference the sponsorship had made to Suhila. She was now 17 and was making preparations to study further at the university where she hoped to train as a doctor. The family were eager that we heard about how she had benefitted from the education she had had. They also wanted to know as much as they could about us! We left having been plied with gifts and promises of a return visit which we duly did a week later.

The next visit had us treated like royalty! A huge feast awaited us and then later we were taken to meet Suhila's grandparents. The family heard me comment on the beauty and colour of the saris women wore and immediately I found myself dressed in a gorgeous yellow and gold sari (courtesy of Suhila's mother) and photographed with all family members!

The visit will stay forever in my memory. The warmth and generosity of this family whom we had connected with (thanks to OST), all those years ago still warms my heart as I write this on a gloomy autumn day. We will return and I hope we will again be able to see Suhila. Debbie Godfrey-Phaure

Karen Watson, Child Sponsor since 2005, reflects on meeting up with Mussaram

Trincomalee, and what was expected to be a genteel arts and crafts session with a smallish group of primary school girls, somehow turned into a swarm of children, with 50 boys eager to play in the baking heat.

Surprise 2 came 3 hours later, when we were rewarded by a most superb lunch by our kind hosts. As I sat recovering from the morning's exertion, Dilanee called me over to introduce another member of the Ocean Stars family. Except this young man wasn't just any member, he was the young child I had sponsored all those years ago and who was now standing with his mother who was beaming broadly. I managed to tell his mum how I had his photo next to my children's on my board at work, although he had clearly changed since those days. The 3 of us had fun sharing photos on our phones - that technology may have its critics, but it really comes in useful as a communication aide!



Julie Clark, Child Sponsor since 2017, reflects on meeting up with Rimsha

When I arranged to sponsor a child earlier this year, I asked if there was a girl of a similar age to my daughter Ruby who is 8. Rimsha is 7. Ruby's request when I went to Sri Lanka for the second time was to make sure I met Rimsha! I was so pleased when we arrived at the primary school in Trinco to recognise Rimsha from the photos we had received. It was so much fun spending a morning with all the children in Trinco but my highlight, later in the day, was when Rimsha came along with her family. I gave her the gift and card that Ruby had sent and she had beautiful handmade flowers and a card and gifts for Ruby too. I showed Rimsha, her Mum and her brother photos of Ruby and her sister and chatted for a little while using my very limited Tamil words and simple English. It was lovely to make that connection. When I got home, Ruby was delighted to see photos of me meeting Rimsha. She loved being able to take the card to school to show her friends too. Ruby is already talking about what she can make for Dilanee to take to Rimsha in January and she can't wait to go to Sri Lanka with Ocean Stars and meet Rimsha in person!



KALLADY SPONSORSHIP SCHEME

56 Children are currently being sponsored by in our Kallady sponsor scheme. Kallady is a part of Batticaloa. We have 8 children from very disadvantaged and poor families waiting to be sponsored. If you would like to make a difference to a child and family then please consider sponsorship.



Teacher sponsorship from £25 a month. Sponsor a teacher and transform 50 children's preschool education.

80 Preschool teachers, Preschool bureau staff and Ocean Stars local staff and UK volunteers attend teacher training event organized by OST UK.



During our volunteer week in Batticaloa all the talk was about the teacher training day on Friday 26 October. This is the one day in the year when our teachers get together to network, meet up with UK volunteers who they have worked with during the week, and gain some new skills. For the first time ever this event was opened to our all-island teachers. The Team from our Yatiyanthota preschool spent 10 hours, and the team from Kilinochchi spent 8 hours travelling to Batticaloa for the event. For many of our non-Batti teachers this was a first trip away from their families and there was great excitement as they checked into their hotel the night before the training day. A preschool consultant from Colombo, Preneetha Tissera, and

Managers from the regional preschool bureaux also attended the event. Kayalvily, an inspector from the Manmunai preschool bureau, commented "This was an incredibly effective training day. I am so proud to be part of the Ocean Stars training day. The service you provide for the benefit of our children is very much appreciated and valued by all of us at the bureau. We do not have the funds to provide resources for preschools in the way that you do. Thank you so much Ocean Stars."

The morning begins at 8.30 am with and a full programme is organised. There are 3 workshops, a circle time activity, songs, certificates presented to all participants and resources distributed to all our preschools. Following a request by several teachers the theme of our Training Day this year was based on the use of Mega Bloks to support the development of Mathematical and Communication and Language skills.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a great BIG thank you to Heatherside Infant School, Crookham Junior School, Crookham Infant School, Elvetham Primary school, Fleet Methodist Church members as well all our Ocean Stars friends who responded to our appeal for Mega bricks and resources. Around 4,000 Mega Bloks made their way to Sri Lanka with our 40 volunteers this October!! The joy and smiles on the teachers' faces when they were told they will be receiving mega bricks to take away to their preschools was an incredible sight. The ongoing work with the mega bricks will be monitored by our ground staff as well as staff at the bureau.



A workshop on learning to use MegaBloks as a tool to support the development of sorting and pattern skills.



Teachers learn to use Mega Bloks to support the development of colour recognition and addition skills.



A week later 800 children across Sri Lanka enjoy playing with Mega Bloks!!



Teachers from preschools selected for our pilot study on childhood development.



July 2018 Avonbourne, Team 2 Volunteers, Beyond Boundaries Team, local school students and staff meet to launch Ocean Stars week in Sri Lanka.

"Thank you Avonbourne for visiting our school. To see the Sri Lanka students dancing with the English students, playing games, having fun, smiling and laughing makes me feel very very happy. The students will study better when they feel happy". *Principal, Kallady Veloor School.*

October 2018 Calthorpe Park School and Team 2 Volunteers, Beyond Boundaries staff, local school students and staff, translators and helpers, Ocean Stars Lanka staff meet to launch Ocean Stars week in Sri Lanka.

"From March 2018 the students have been asking me when the Calthorpe Park students are coming back. The emotional welfare of our students increases following your visit, and exam results are better as a result."



Dan and Zeddie Follow-up Article - "100 days in Sri Lanka"



Reflecting now, a few months on from our [100 Days in Sri Lanka](#), I am both very pleased at the content we were able to produce and excited about how some of the recommendations are already shaping OST's decision-making.

It was a real privilege spending an extended period working and researching for OST. We felt ourselves in privileged positions because we were able to take a step back. Through collecting socio-economic data from each OST preschool, we were able to build a broader narrative about the communities and livelihoods in which OST comes into contact with. We were able to generate new stories and new insights from familiar places.

One of the most interesting findings more generally was the uniqueness of each preschool. Whether that be a majority of husbands working abroad in Kurumanvelly, or the local economy being reliant on brick-making in Kanchirankkuda, or that Thevilamunai is the most sparsely populated preschool with 89% children travelling at least 20 minutes to access the preschool. Across the 16 Eastern Province preschools, OST now has a rich dataset that has the power to tell new stories about the OST communities.

As researchers, there is always a nervousness about how receptive the organisation will be to the research you have conducted. Thankfully, the OST Trustees have been amazing in their support of our work and implementing some of the recommendations.

For example, one of our research projects focused on the existing practice of child assessment in OST preschools. Through speaking with preschool teachers, we discovered that there are currently no formal or consistent child assessment systems in place. Therefore, Trustees have given the go-ahead for a unique pilot child development programme. The CDP aims to address these issues by providing OST preschool teachers with a simple assessment tool in which they can formally record the knowledge and skills development of each preschool child during their two years at an OST preschool. The aim is that the child development programme will be rolled out to every OST preschool in the next three years.

This is a really new and exciting aspect to OST's work in Sri Lanka, as having a strong established community of preschools, provides scope for OST to start to focus on the curriculum, with the goal being to ensure that every child has the access to quality preschool education.

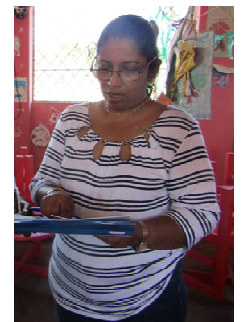
Zeddy and I very much began the process of research, impact measurement and monitoring and evaluation for OST, therefore there is still lots of work yet to do. We both hope to be back in Sri Lanka in 2019 to continue the various research projects we started. Our thanks go to the OST trustees for commissioning the work and for their ongoing support of our research projects. And Child Sponsors should be receiving further interesting information about their Sponsor Children!

Dan Bunter and Zeddie Keybett



Preneetha Tissera, Early Years Consultant and Educationist, spent 4 days with the Ocean Stars UK volunteers in October, and she reflects on what she observed:

"I want to commend you for the work you have done and continue to do with such love and exuberance. I was moved by how compassionate and genuinely concerned the UK students were for the Sri Lanka students they worked and mingled with in the secondary schools. I have no doubt that the young children they worked with would value and appreciate the opportunity and will rise above their own circumstances to reach out for their dreams confidently. The preschool teachers I met expressed their gratitude to Ocean Stars for the continuous support they have received from you over the years. In fact, one lady mentioned that they have gone from nothing to having what they have within the preschool today only because of Ocean Stars. It is now my fervent prayer and desire to see the Ocean Star Preschools become "Models schools" in the region where other preschool will be motivated to reach the same standards. You have played a pivotal role in this nation with your generosity and support close to a decade and in my opinion it's time to move to the next level."



Preneetha Tissera

Founder and Trustees of Ocean Stars Trust



From left to right: Dan: Trustee, Dilanee: Founder, Danny: Trustee, Maureen: Trustee and Chair, Jennie: Trustee, Jo: Trustee and Secretary, John: Trustee and Treasurer,