

# Bridging Lanka Report

October 2014 to January, 2015

## Leading stories....

The Popes' visit – a special blessing for our women's catering company

A raised footpath saves primary school students from wading through floods to go to the toilet

The link being made between residents encroaching Mannar's ponds and increasing flood levels



The Pope waves to hundreds of thousands of devotees at the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu, Mannar

'Never a dull moment in paradise' as friend and colleague, Myrna Setunga, often states. During our last three months in Sri Lanka we have endured a clampdown on foreigners who had to get Ministry of Defence approval to travel to the north, survived a presidential election which was anticipated to be menacing but proved to be peaceful and profoundly game-changing, and were caught up in the on-and-off-and-on again visit by the esteemed pontiff who was greeted with spectacular warmth by southerners and northerners alike.

In spite of a shrinking humanitarian space during the previous eighteen months and a glaring suspicion of any NGO type activity, Bridging Lanka's work has endured and progressed in Mannar District. Urban improvements, the laying of important building blocks for a new tourism industry and the improved fortunes of our catering company run by war widows are some of the highlights.

Most especially, an eight month gruelling process to register Bridging Lanka in Sri Lanka and to open a proper Sri Lankan-based bank account, has finally ended in success. In exchange for us having to submit regular reports to the Government Agent we are now included in the official committees and conversations that impact on the district.

## Rollercoaster Context



### Game Changer

On 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015, an extraordinary presidential election, largely unmarred by violence, saw the changing of the political guard. A fortnight before the election a Maithripala Sirisena rally attracted thousands in Mannar with no inducements apart from the hope of regime change.

Here was a Sinhalese politician, speaking in Sinhala from the ruling party being heralded as messiah by the largely Tamil and Muslim populations here. 'My3' was responsible for creating palpable euphoria and a rare sense of hope for people who imagined that things could only get worse.



### Hope of Enduring Change

In a short time 'change' is the name of the game. The Northern Governor has been replaced by a former Commissioner of the Lessons Learnt & Reconciliation Commission, the need for Ministry of defence approval for foreigners to travel to the north has been lifted, journalists have been encouraged to write critical pieces about the government in the hope that leaders can change their ways, the National Secretariat of NGOs and the Urban development Authority have been moved from the Ministry of Defence, military numbers are being reduced in the north, the promise of Tamil political opponents being released from custody, the welcoming of NGOs to help in ongoing rebuilding and the return of refugees from India are only some of the changes that are taking place.

Exciting and significant times that could not have been imagined a month before. This paves the way for genuine reconciliation, the righting of past wrongs and finally the move towards political solutions.

### Registration – Finally Done and Dusted

After a gruelling 8 months of trying to register Bridging Lanka in Sri Lanka – it finally happened! Suspicion of all foreigners (including me) had led to draconian procedures that resembled 'wading through treacle'. At last Bridging Lanka (Guarantee) Limited has legitimacy in Sri Lanka.

We are hoping for a more conducive climate for our operations. Underlying all we do is the hope of reconciliation. Our approach of creating opportunities for interaction over the long term among 'enemies' and those in conflict, is not easy but yielding 'moments of reconciliation' - an incremental journey.





# Bridging Lanka Staff in Mannar



## Meet our Wonderful Staff Team

Bridging Lanka is constantly being accused of doing too much and biting off more than we can chew. True ... but we have a gorgeous and diverse staff team who are committed to change, and we all do it on the smell of an oily rag.

Our approach is based on community development principles: broad based participation, legitimizing people's involvement irrespective of their group characteristics, addressing structural disadvantage and pursuing balanced development - through affirming social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, and personal and spiritual development.

We are far from perfect with personal foibles and so much to learn, but our efforts are sincere. Come meet members of the Bridging Lanka team and see what they have achieved during the past three months:



**Karnan** – Tourism strategy, Business programs



**Sinclair** – Urban development, community & government negotiations, Volunteers



**Kelvin** – Office administration, donkey projects, MM Trust, Volunteer program

**Quily** – English programs, MM Trust, Language Perfect



**Robin** – Livelihood programs, donkey projects, MM Trust



**Grace** – Finance, English programs



**James** – Urban development, MM Trust, government negotiations, Tourism strategy



## Women & Community Development

In a predominantly male domain, women-affirmative initiatives are sorely needed. Currently our primary focus is on war widows. In response to pleas by local people as well as Commissioners of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission to help war widows, we have established a rice, flour and spice mill, and more recently, a trial catering company.

Widows in general have a low status as social standing is derived from the husband, who is now deceased. They are looked down upon by society, surviving on negligible financial and social support. A number derive their income by being 'comfort women' and are as a result even more socially ostracized.

Our strategy is to create income generation initiatives so that these women can derive a daily income. None of our projects are straightforward as these women are under stress. Our projects are in their infancy and so we cannot guarantee a good monthly return at this stage. These women then have a precarious life balancing working at the mill or catering company, finding casual work in the paddy fields and tending to hearth and home.

We also involve women in our committees, projects and decision making processes. Our approach transcends gender and caste barriers and creates the conditions for women to play even more prominent and valued roles, thus slowly emerging from the shadows of their male counterparts. Other initiatives include women's sport and the establishment of other micro businesses.

### 'Manna' Women's Catering Company

The war widows' food company is progressing well with some big orders coming in. As a result the women are starting to earn more regular income.

We are negotiating with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) who will provide additional training for the women.

Bridging Lanka worker, Robin, and the Women's Development Officer (WDO) from the Manthai West Secretariat have made concerted efforts to help make this business a profitable concern.





## A Blessing – Pope’s Visit to Madhu

On 14th January, the Pope visited Madhu Church in Mannar District. Our staff negotiated with the church for our women to cater for the Pope’s guests. It was their largest job to date and a scary proposition. Thousands of meals were prepared to the satisfaction of the consumers using very basic facilities.

The Pope was a hit bringing a plea for trans-ethnic and religious trust and understanding. Over 600,000 people gathered in the jungle sanctuary to pay homage to a leader that even the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists admire.



Cooking for priests, seminarians and other Papal visitors



Parcelling meals for Elephant House staff



Crowds gather to catch a glimpse of the Pope at the Our Lady of Madhu Shrine



### 'Rice to Riches' mill

In December we provided a loan of Rs 100,000 to purchase paddy for milling because of the two year drought and hence a much lower paddy yield.

The mill continues to function well but under capacity due to the drought that saw only 20% of the crop planted. With recent rains we are hoping for a turnaround in fortunes.

UNDP visited the rice mill and was impressed by the facility. UNDP has agreed to provide par-boiling training and equipment for 20 workers.

Robin continues to have a close and constructive relationship with the management team.

<http://bridginglanka.org/project-community.html>



Paddy ready for milling

Rice mill committee meeting



### Sports for Women

The males of Mannar are well catered for when it comes to sport. However there are few opportunities for women and girls to engage in, let alone excel, in sports.

Local young women have asked for a badminton court and equipment for starters.

Graham Burgdorf, volunteer from Brisbane, has done a plan and costing for the court which will be built by the local Women's Rural Development Society volunteers under the supervision of the Mannarin Marumalarchi Trust's urban improvements committee.



The young women vote unanimously for a badminton court





Students at the after-school English program with Coordinator, Quily, and volunteer, Aneil from Canada

A primary focus within the Education for All strategy in Mannar has been the promotion of English as the link language between Tamil and Sinhalese communities, a growing prerequisite for tertiary study and a pathway to national and global opportunity. However, there are major challenges for teachers, students and educational institutions in achieving English language competency.

Teachers stated they lacked confidence to teach English due to their own limited ability and were discouraged by their failure to enthuse learning. Students were largely unaware of the importance of English as a gateway to future educational and vocational success and saw it as merely a 'hoop' to jump through to pass final exams.

Students were critical of their teachers' inability to build rapport and use engaging teaching methods and culminating in a "can't learn" attitude. Both government and private educational providers bemoaned not having access to suitably qualified teachers of English. The acute shortage had a direct bearing on students' learning.

Bridging Lanka volunteers from countries as far flung as Australia, Vietnam, Estonia, Canada and Germany have been involved in the development of English language programs to address these issues. A research report with recommendations has recently been completed and provides a blueprint for Mannar-appropriate solutions.



### After-school English Language Program

The session was attracting about three students each day. Thanks to the drive and inspiration of Aneil Rajaram, volunteer from Canada and the dedication of Quily, one of our Bridging Lanka staff, about 15 to 20 now turn up.

The program is stimulating and varied and the result has been a growing confidence and ability of otherwise shy students to speak and write English.



## Researching better ways forward

The research report, *Making the Grade*, offers valuable data about the challenges of English language learning and teaching in Mannar District. The report was finalised in November and will inform the upcoming *Education for All Strategy*.

Huyen Lai, a volunteer from Vietnam and Grace Pathmaraj from Mannar undertook this piece of research.

## English Conversation Circles

English conversation circles for interested adults are also giving local professionals, including a number of teachers, a chance to talk English and increase vocabulary, language skills and confidence.

Participants are always eager for native English speakers to join them as it both stimulates their interest and exposes them to other worldviews. A wide range of topics are discussed.

## Online Language Perfect

Meetings were held with the Provincial English Support Centre and local schools to promote an online English program.

Through the efforts of Ellen Dunn from Melbourne, Bridging Lanka was given 500 licences and \$1,500 from Education Perfect (a New Zealand-based company) to set up this online language resource. A coordinator has just been engaged for this purpose.



Deep in conversation – using English

**VOLUNTEER in  
SRI LANKA**

- Are you an experienced and dedicated **ESL teacher** with or without formal qualifications?
- Would you like an exceptional experience as a volunteer ESL teacher in Sri Lanka, supporting a local ESL project in a Tamil community?

The ESL project is based in Mannar Town on Mannar Island, on the northwest coast of Sri Lanka. Volunteers will be supporting local ESL teachers to build confidence, broaden professional language teaching techniques, and improve English competence. All volunteers need to be able to pay all their own travel and accommodation/food expenses.

Diaspora Lanka, an Australian charity committed to a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka, is looking for experienced ESL teachers who would like to spend a minimum of three or four weeks in a Tamil community where English language skills, for both young people and adults, are seen as a way to assist the town to recover from the devastating effects of the recent civil war.

For anyone who would like to learn more about this opportunity, please contact Margaret Bornhorst on 0409 062 610 or [margaret@mbcross-cultural.com.au](mailto:margaret@mbcross-cultural.com.au)

## Experienced ESL teachers

We are looking for experienced ESL teachers who would like to spend a minimum of three or four weeks in a Tamil community where English language skills, for both young people and adults, are seen as a way to assist the town to recover from the devastating effects of the recent civil war. For anyone who would like to learn more about this opportunity.

The ESL project is based in Mannar Town on Mannar Island, on the northwest coast of Sri Lanka. Volunteers will be supporting local ESL teachers to build confidence, broaden professional language teaching techniques, and improve English competence.

Experienced ESL teachers with or without formal qualifications to help young people develop a firm foundation for the future.

Contact Margaret Bornhorst on +61 (0) 409 062 610 or email [margaret@mbcross-cultural.com.au](mailto:margaret@mbcross-cultural.com.au)

More.... <http://bridginglanka.org/volunteer.html>



## Urban Improvement

### Santhipuram Housing & Drainage

Saya Lorback, volunteer engineer from Melbourne spent five weeks re-engaging with and coordinating the Santhipuram project.

Positive discussions were held with the Director, Disaster Management Centre, who encouraged us to submit an application for funds to the Sri Lankan government for detailed design and construction of the drainage works there.



The challenges of going to the toilet

### Raised Walkway for Students

The wet season and the ensuing floods displaced thousands of people. Santhipuram Primary School students were also affected as they had to wade through flood waters and mud to reach the toilets.

We embarked on an ambitious project of constructing a raised 100 metre walkway from the school building to the outside toilets in the midst of rain and flooding waters.

Saya and Graham, volunteers from Australia, coordinated the work under trying conditions. The bulk of the labour was provided by volunteers of the Rural Development Society with daily site visits by Graham. The walkway was completed ready for students to use in the new year.



Dawn to dusk efforts to beat the rain



Completed walkway



Graham and best friend, Jebanesan



Form work completed



## Mannarin Marumalarchi Town Planning Subcommittee

This active MM subcommittee meets regularly to address current urban development issues.

A member, Mr Subamalai, was our advisor on the school walkway, badminton court and children's park projects. Saya, BL volunteer laid the groundwork for these projects and Graham continued the work.

Of great concern to the committee is also the encroachment and filling of kulams (ponds) that are resulting in increased levels of flooding in Mannar town. Nedun Kulam has been earmarked by UNOPS for rehabilitation.



## Proposed Children's Park at Santhipuram

Currently design work for a children's park is underway. Even parts of the proposed site go underwater so special consideration must be given to drainage.

There are few facilities, let alone ones for recreation, for children in this poorer area of Mannar. Santhipuram residents prioritised a children's park as a badly needed addition.

Rebecca, our Landscape Architect in Melbourne has been the virtual support to Saya and Graham on this project. Hopefully this park will be constructed during our next visit in 2015.

Bridging Lanka is seeking the following volunteers for the next May to August visit - landscape architects, hydraulic engineers, building and construction professionals, communications and graphics specialists, urban designers and those experienced in community engagement.



Site of the children's park with the challenge of annual flooding



Village consultations with Rural Development Society members



## Environmental Care



Saya and Graham meet with UNOPS Country Director and Engineer



Once a large kulam, now largely filled and the cause of flooding



Houses built in the kulam are disrupting UNOPS drainage work

## Saving Mannar from Flooding

The recent heavy rains and the return of the traditional wet season was a potent reminder that the flooding of Mannar is growing worse and causing much human misery with the displacement of thousands of families.

What is not well known is the connection between the severe encroachment and filling of kulams (water bodies or large ponds) and the increased incidence of flooding.

There used to be 80 of these water retention bodies that absorbed the annual downpour. Now there are some 12 to 15 kulams of any significance and these too are being slowly filled to make way for expanding human settlements.

In partnership with the United Nations Office of Project Management (UNOPS), Bridging Lanka is launching a major campaign to make authorities and residents alike aware of the connection between the destruction of kulams and the increased flooding of Mannar.





### Surveying the Kulams (ponds) of Mannar

At the behest of the Government Agent, UNOPS, Bridging Lanka, the Mannar Urban Council and the Divisional Secretariat undertook a mapping exercise to identify and describe the kulams in Mannar town.

The process involved gathering information through field visits to the kulams, interviews with residents who had historical knowledge about the water bodies and discussions with officers from government agencies.

The findings were summarized in a quick reference table and augmented with photographs and maps which compared 2006 and 2014 kulam boundaries.

It is hoped that the report and recommendations will be taken seriously by the authorities and people of Mannar and that the ponds will be protected and rehabilitated.



Weekly, residents fill the kulams unaware of the impact



In this backyard, the only way to the toilet is on a raft



A pleasure working with Anuthasan, UNOPS engineer



### Mannar Drowning

As an effective way to influence the mindsets of Mannar residents to STOP FILLING THE KULAMS, Nishanthan and Prabakaran have been busy shooting and editing a short video, Mannar Drowning. If all the kulams are filled, you can say goodbye to Mannar urban area in the annual wet season!



## Donkey Welfare and Management

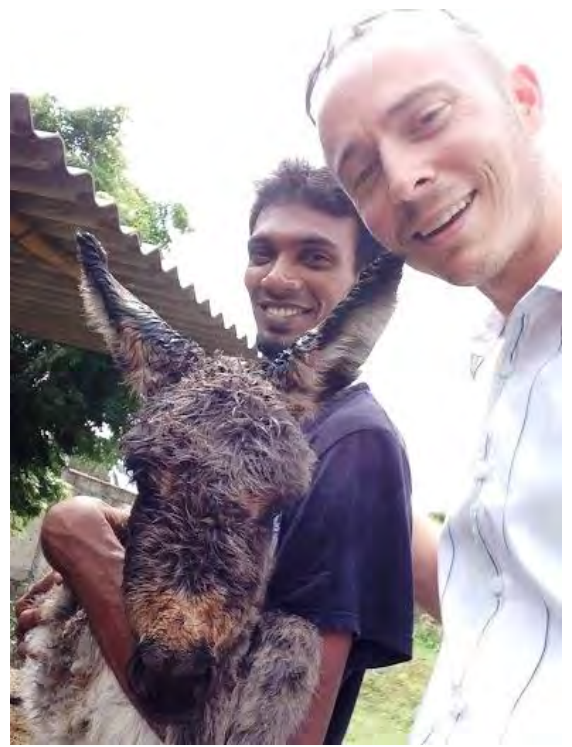
A society's level of consciousness is judged by how it treats its animals. Donkeys get 'short-shift' in Mannar and are regarded as useless and dangerous. Bridging Lanka has been working with a group of enlightened individuals and groups in Sri Lanka and abroad to change the fortunes of these amazing creatures.

One way to raise their profile and ensure their survival is to connect them to the donkeys to local environmental, social and economic arrangements. We want to use donkeys in the growing tourism sector, a labour for the salt, fishing and palmyrah industries, as the means of therapy for disabled children and a host of other uses.

Special thanks to Donkey Sanctuary UK and India for amazing support and training, to Animal Aid Abroad in Australia for their regular financial help and the dozens of volunteers from around the globe who are enamoured with and care for these lovable beasts.

We hope to establish a donkey clinic and community education centre this year and negotiate study and fieldwork placements for veterinary students from various universities.

More.... <http://bridginglanka.org/project-donkey.html>



Donkey coordinator, Kelvin and Paul (Melbourne)



[Donkey Orphanage & Clinic video](#)

### Everything's Pozible - new online donkey campaign

We are getting ready to mount a crowd-funding campaign through the Pozible platform.

Big thanks to Freeman Trebelcock who donated his time and expertise to shoot and edit the video. Funds raised will go towards the construction of the clinic (\$28,000). We will be seeking \$6,000 from the campaign.

Thanks too to Sophie and Saya from Melbourne and Viola from Germany who have been writing content for the site.

### Donkey Feeding Program

The daily feeding program continues unabated due to the great dedication of Robin, one of our staff. Significant amounts of food are being recycled daily from the garment factory as well as the vegetable vendors in town to feed the donkeys.







### Donkey Tender Loving Care

A host of volunteers have assisted Kelvin and Robin to feed, tame and groom the first batch of donkeys in our temporary sanctuary.

We've had Aneil from Canada, Paul and Sophie from Melbourne, Eero from Estonia, Chris and Graham from Brisbane, Viola from Germany and Emmanuel from Italy helping Kelvin tame and train the donkeys.

The habit of the donkeys running away from humans is slowly being transformed into them allowing us to hand feed, stroke and brush them.

Special thanks to our dear friend Dr Ramesh from Donkey Sanctuary India for sending us head collars and lead ropes to help with taming.



### Donkey Orphanage, Clinic & Community Education Centre

Architect, Mr Sumangala Jayatillaka, and his apprentice, Dimitri visited the one acre property situated in Puthukkudiyiruppu, Mannar Island, before starting design work on the facility.

Sumangala is undertaking this task pro bono and we are privileged to have such a renowned architect involved.

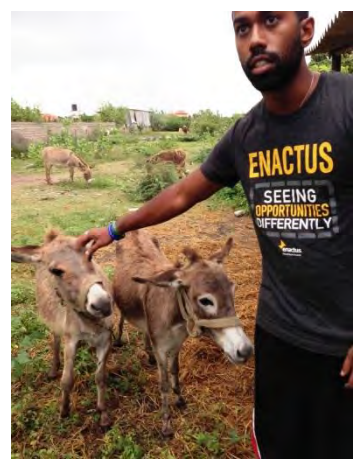
Vimal Soosaipillai, inspiring Mannar engineer and businessman and Bridging Lanka director visited Sumangala to review the draft building plans. Modifications are being made and the final plans will be issued soon.



One donkey in particular was Eero's fan for life



Sophie Dunn



Aneil Rajaram



### Funky Donkey T-shirts Hit the Streets

Sincere thanks to Maxim Garments of Ratmalana for producing the first batch of 200 Funky Donkey t-shirt. The eye-catching item by graphic designer, Sameera Rajapaksa, has proved popular. Proceeds from the sale of t-shirts go toward the construction costs of the donkey clinic facility.

Piirialu family in Estonia proudly sporting our t-shirts



## Sustainable Tourism



### Ahh! Mannar!

It's both daunting and exciting to be part of an initiative to establish Mannar as an alternative tourist destination in Sri Lanka.

While the emphasis in Sri Lankan tourism remains on attracting 5 star high spenders, our community tourism strategy aims to keep the control of this new industry in the hands of locals for local economic benefit with maximum backward integration.

Mannar needs to gear up for an influx of local and international tourists. With the new railway due to recommence by June of this year, we are unaware of any initiative taken to explore and strategize associated business opportunities.

Cultural and environmentally sensitive tourism will hopefully boost the local economy and provide badly needed employment opportunities in a new sector. Bridging Lanka is working closely with the Mannar Chamber of Commerce, International Finance Corporation and the Government Agent to institute Mannar District as an alternative tourism destination.



Meeting with Asela and Raja from IFC in Colombo

### Finally...IFC

After months of negotiations, Bridging Lanka is finally and officially registered with the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank Group.

We have been asked to submit proposals for a series of minor projects (below US\$5,000) to start the ball rolling. The procedure to be a major vendor is far more time consuming so we decided to start with smaller projects identified in our Mannar Community Tourism Strategy.





**Karnan and volunteers beautifying their beach**

## Cleaning Keeri Beach

This is another tourism project to improve Mannar's facilities for local and tourist enjoyment.

Again, defying the odds, Karnan has successfully negotiated for the Urban Council to designate a section of beach for tourism. He organised two syramadhanas (community working bees) to clean the polluted beach. The first was a six hour marathon and the second, a four hour event. Signboards and demarcation posts are currently being installed.



## Guesthouse Owners – getting serious about tourism development

A group of guesthouse owners meet regularly to discuss how they can improve their accommodation and services for tourists and also spear-head vital tourism infrastructure in Mannar.

BL staff person, Karnan Kanapathy has been dogged in his determination to facilitate this group of very busy entrepreneurs so that they grow both their own business and also establish the foundations for an effective tourism industry in Mannar.

Western Style Breakfast	Lunch or Dinner – Rice & Curry
Rs:250 all inclusive	Choice of one main curry
- Toast or noodles - Butter and jam - Cheese - Fried or boiled eggs - Fruit salad - Card (yoghurt) - Juice - Tea or coffee	- Vegetable Rs.200 - Fish Rs.250 - Chicken Rs.300 - Prawn Rs.350 - Cuttle fish (squid) Rs.350 - Crab Rs.350 - Beef Rs.250
	Please request mild, medium or hot curry with choice of white or red rice
<b>Sri Lankan Breakfast 1</b>	plus choice of three additional dishes (Vegetarian: choose four dishes from the options below)
Rs:250 all inclusive	- Dahi (fenil curry) - Britjal (egg plant) pahi - White curry; carrot, potato or bean - Fresh salad - Potato masala
- String hoppers - Coconut sambol - Sethi (coconut gravy) - Chicken or fish - Fruit salad - Card (yoghurt) - Tea or coffee	with choice of two accompaniments - Coconut sambol (chili base) - Pappadams - Lime pickle - Mango chutney - Scenti sambol (spicy onion relish)
<b>Sri Lankan Breakfast 2</b>	<b>Dessert sold separately</b>
Rs:250 all inclusive	- Seasonal fruits Rs.50 - Card Rs.50 - Ice cream Rs.40 - Caramel Rs.40 (limited availability)
- Idli - Vada - Coconut sambol - Sethi - Fruit salad - Card (yoghurt) - Tea or coffee	

## Menu Cards – making it easier for tourists

Foreign tourists are often bamboozled when their guesthouse asks them what they would like to eat. There is no tradition of menu cards in Mannar and many tourists have recommended their introduction.

Karnan has worked tirelessly with the guesthouse owners to develop a sample menu which is now being trialled at the Baobab Guesthouse.

**Baobab Guesthouse menu card**



## Business Development

### Starting Small

The revitalization of the existing commercial sector and the development of new enterprises, embracing technological advances and reviewing old ways of doing business are at the heart of kick-starting a stagnant local economy. In Mannar innovation is frowned upon until someone takes the risk and delivers success. Many then follow suit but this is exception rather than rule.

We are at the early stages of establishing or supporting more traditional small businesses, introducing the concept of business planning, exploring new markets and encouraging greater professionalism. We tried to introduce more innovative ideas but failed. We had to start with the prevailing business mindset, understand its dynamics, build trust, experiment with a modicum of innovation and wait our time.

We are hopeful that the next phase will involve establishing demonstration initiatives and boutique businesses which capitalize on Mannar's unique products, responding to changing demand, employing local people and stimulating the local economy.



### A Return to Sri Lanka and Fishing

The returned asylum seeker we are supporting to rebuild a livelihood has bought nets, an outboard motor and boat.

Anjelitto goes out to sea each day, his fortunes are on the rise and the business is providing employment for other locals.. Robin is supporting them as they establish the fishing business.

We are in constant touch with six of the nine returned asylum seekers we supported in Indonesia. They have become part of the Bridging Lanka family. We hope to launch a Pozible crowdfunding campaign to continue to support this and other businesses.





**CMV COMPUTER CENTER**  
 "Computerizing Mannar Villages"  
 Gnanamaniyar Street, Ward no.8, Pesalai  
 023 7911398 076 7366466  
 Our other services: PC Repairs, Networking, Cameras, Color printing, Mug printing, Banner printing, Scanning, Fax & emailing, Software CDs

**CMV - Giving Global & National Access**

Children and young people in more outlying areas can now become proficient in computers, online applications and English and Sinhala languages through two Computerizing Mannar Centres (CMV) – at Pesalai and Puthukkudiyiruppu. Bridging Lanka provides a salary component for the workers.

**HAMTHAAN COMPUTER CENTRE**  
 Computerizing Mannar Villages

**Computer Services**

- Laptop repairs
- Computer repairs
- CCTV camera fitting
- Computer parts
- Networking
- Website designing

**Our Services**

- Photocopying
- Colour printing
- Fax & email
- Album designing
- Typing
- Laminating

**Computer Courses**

- MS Office diploma
- Photoshop
- Tamil typing

**Special Classes**

- English (Grade 1 to O/L)
- Sinhala

Puthukkudiyiruppu, Mannar,  
 Mobile: 071 2635444, 023 2050937  
 Email: alhathir@gmail.com



**Sustaining a Social Enterprise**

Recently, THE CMV at Puthukkudiyiruppu introduced a commercial wing to its operation – Hamthaan Computer Centre. New photocopy machines, scanner and laminator through a Rs 200,000 (\$2k) loan from Bridging Lanka, together with offering computer sales and repairs, are already making a handsome profit for Al Hathir.

**IT Platform - running independently**

IT Platform now runs independently of Bridging Lanka. A decreasing level of financial support over almost three years has resulted in ITP standing on its own feet. ITP continues to attract new contacts from local institutions, government and even the military.

Bridging Lanka is currently assisting with introducing the MYOB accounting package to improve ITP's financial recording and procedures. Through skype and email, Jane Hope from Sydney is coordinating that support. First we need to train Aloy and Kelvin in the MYOB package. More... <http://bridginglanka.org/project-business.html>

**Kamal chats with Brian and Renuka about future plans**





## Special meetings



High Commission officers, Dunstan and Edward in Mannar



Initiatives of Change member, Dr Jehan Perera

### Australian High Commission

The High Commissioner, Her Excellency Robyn Mudie was brought up to date with the achievements and challenges of Bridging Lanka's operation.

A team of senior advisors from the high commission visited us in Mannar to see first-hand aspects of our operation. They made recommendations regarding which bucket of DFAT funds to pursue for particular projects.

### Life Matters in Mannar

Two gatherings were held with members of lofC Sri Lanka to negotiate the conducting of a *Life Matters* workshop in Mannar that links personal morality and ethics with world-changing efforts based on Gandhi's dictum, "be the change you want to see in the world." Now lofC Australia and Sri Lanka are on board. Discussion centred on the shape of the program, funding and logistics.



### Transformed Life

After two years, Benil's life is going from strength to strength. Through Adib (volunteer from Brisbane), Bridging Lanka bought a laptop so that Benil could write and publish his poetry.

Benil, a paraplegic who had serious health issues which threatened his life, has emerged into the light. He is happily married, drives a tuk tuk and is the district trainer for other paraplegians on how to better use their wheelchairs and avoid debilitating bed sores. Benil has also published books of poetry!

### to support our work ...

1. **Online contribution** - [www.bridginglanka.org](http://www.bridginglanka.org) then to the "Donate" page and "donate"

2. **Simple donation by bank transfer**

**Account name:** Bridging Lanka Ltd; **Bank:** Commonwealth; **BSB:** 063 010; **Ac no:** 1183 7067

**Reference:** your name

After the transfer, email Stanley Stork (Treasurer) at [swkrots@dodo.com.au](mailto:swkrots@dodo.com.au) informing him of the donation, your name and postal address and a receipt will be posted to you.



## Trip to Trinco



### Overcoming Tensions Within

In response to divisive issues among the staff team, the first task on arrival at Mannar was to organise a team building weekend. In just a couple of days Saya and Aneil (volunteers from Melbourne and Calgary) assisted me to put together a program.

A two and a half day intensive with our staff was held in Trincomalee and I am grateful that we have emerged a stronger team. Each team member gave amazing commitment and concentration, exploring each other's strengths as well as the frustration each causes the team.

A platform for greater honesty and giving robust feedback in a caring and constructive way was established.





## Volunteers to Mannar



**Aneil RajaRAAM**

One of our most dynamic volunteers, from Calgary, Canada. Self-directed and inspirational, Aneil turned round our after-school English program with Quily, undertook baseline research into guesthouses with Karnan and daily committed donkey feeding and taming work with Robin and Kelvin. The challenge is how to find funds to employ him full time! His only failure? Not convincing Kelvin to go to the gym.



**Saya Lorback**

Once was not enough. Saya, engineer from Melbourne returned a second time to Mannar. As the human glue that sticks all things together, Saya continued to deliver on her challenging urban improvement work in Santhipuram. She laid the foundations for the raised walkway at the flooded primary school and wrote funding application to Disaster Management. She will be sorely missed.



**Dr Paul Yates**

Paul is a genuine soul who fitted right in and was loved by all. As Paul is a consultant geriatrician with the Departments of Nuclear Medicine and Aged Care Services, Austin Health, and specialises in ageing and dementia, he conducted preliminary research into issues of ageing in Mannar. Paul also helped with the after school English program and donkey feeding tasks. Always helpful...easy to get along with!



**Graham Burgdorf**

Brisbane-based and former manager, parks and open space for local government, Graham, battled the elements both natural and cultural to supervise the construction of a 100 metre raised walkway at a local primary school. Graham was our modern-day Moses parting the flooded grounds to reach his goal. Graham also helped out with our English programs, donkey initiatives and project documentation.



**Eero Piirisalu**

Following in the tradition of volunteers from Estonia, Eero joined us for two months. Eero forged a close affinity with the local donkeys and some would even follow him around. Eero's major contribution was mapping the kulams (water bodies) in Mannar as an advocacy tool to convince government to protect the remaining kulams from encroachment otherwise more flooding in Mannar would occur in the future.



**Sophie Dunn and Viola Weber**

Friends from childhood, Sophie from Melbourne and Viola from Germany as final year medical students participated in field clinics in outlying areas of Mannar with Lanka Population Services and also delivered health workshops for seminarian. They assisted with a crowd funding campaign to raise funds for the donkey clinic, groomed and tamed donkeys and also played a major role in the English language program.



## Visitors to Mannar



### Mario Mendonca & Christine Faughn

Bridging Lanka's likely new treasurer, Mario, from Melbourne, has been asking lots of questions and even came to Mannar to check us out! He brought his sister from the US with him.

Mario visited our rice mill, IT Platform, came to our office, was introduced to our staff and was taken on a tour of some of the areas in which we work.



### Chris Gibbins

Chris from Brisbane spent a week with us during the new year season. He too checked out our operation and joined us in Arippu for the annual Kooddanchoru (batch-mate gathering over food) celebration. Chris also befriended the donkeys and fed and groomed them.



### Tracy De Cotta

Tracy from La Trobe University in Melbourne came to explore possible study areas for her Master's degree in urban planning. She joined Sumangala and Dimitri on a tour of our projects and work sites including kulams and donkey sanctuary.



### Renuka Sananayake & Brian Jegan

It was a boost having Renu, Brian and their nephew visit us in Mannar. They were the bearers of gifts and carted 200 donkey t-shirts all the way from Colombo. They joined us for a staff meeting and then a tour of Mannar.





**Vision** - A unified, peaceful and prosperous Sri Lankan community both in Sri Lanka and abroad.

**Mission** – To connect expatriate and ‘in country’ Sri Lankans by harnessing the expertise and resources of one for the benefit of the other - through livelihood support, business development, community advocacy, urban planning and social cohesion initiatives.

### Values

- **Open hearted** – a global and united diaspora, demonstrating their heart connection to Sri Lanka by working for the peace and prosperity of the country
- **Reconciled** – an acknowledgement of the collective pain, dispossession and trauma caused by past conflicts and a commitment to journeying together
- **Cohesive** – the right of every Sri Lankan citizen, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion, to enjoy equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the social, cultural and economic life of the nation.

### Strategic objectives

- **Leadership** – act as a credible link between the diaspora and communities in Sri Lanka
- **Governance** – ensure organisational integrity in processes and systems
- **Inquiry** – explore a constructive role for the diaspora in post-conflict Sri Lanka
- **Action** – undertake specific actions in response to identified issues in Sri Lanka and Australia
- **Outreach** – collaborate with global diaspora networks committed to a better Sri Lanka.

### Core principles

- **Constructive** – as Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and Sinhala people we play a positive role in post-conflict Sri Lanka recognising that all parties are part of the solution
- **Place-based** – coordinated, area-based and multi-stakeholder approach that uplifts a district through harnessing skills, experience and resources of private, public and voluntary sectors
- **Relationally interlinked** - recognising that the trajectories of people both in Sri Lanka and in diaspora communities are inextricably linked
- **Actively involved** – that 'hands on' participation through local projects, knowledge transfers, exposure visits and reconciliation initiatives will nurture closer ties
- **Critically informed** – that proper analysis leads to a deeper understanding and truth, discouraging black and white understandings of complex issues.

**Bridging Lanka Ltd** is a not-for-profit company **ABN:** 92 146 209 297 **ACN:** 146 209 207

**Address:** Ross House, Level 4, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Vic 3000

**Tel Oz:** +61 403 694 132 **Tel SL:** +94 771 023 981

**E:** [director@bridginglanka.org](mailto:director@bridginglanka.org) **W:** [www.bridginglanka.org](http://www.bridginglanka.org) **FB:** Bridging Lanka

**Get involved in Sri Lanka** - development projects, business advice and planning, volunteering, proposal writing, government negotiations, skills development, English language teaching

**Get involved in Oz** – communications, dialogue discussions, project management, organisational development, fundraising, committee roles (advocacy, PR, finance, web, admin, strategic planning)

### Contacts

- Jeremy Liyanage, Director **M:** 0403 694 132 **E:** [jeremy.liyanage@gmail.com](mailto:jeremy.liyanage@gmail.com)
- Prabakaran Ponnuthurai, Director **M:** 0469 846 026 **E:** [ponnuthuraip@yahoo.com](mailto:ponnuthuraip@yahoo.com)
- Steve Dunn, Director **Mobile:** 0417 382 740 **E:** [stevefdunn@bigpond.com](mailto:stevefdunn@bigpond.com)
- Parathithasan Shelliah, Director **M:** 0411 864 554