

2021 - 2022

Bridging Lanka **Annual** **Report**

Caring in turbulent times





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our mission

Connecting hearts across divides

Bridging ethnic, religious and geographic divides through people-inspired action

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message from the chairperson

The world has changed significantly over the past two years, especially for Sri Lanka. On the back of 2018 protests in Digana, Easter bombings in 2019, lock downs during Covid in 2020/2021, came political unrest and economic collapse in 2022. We can hardly imagine the difficulties and challenges that have impacted the lives of people living in Mannar – food shortages, inflation, loss of employment and reduced access to education.

For Bridging Lanka this meant a reduced visitation to the Donkey Clinic and Education Centre in Thailankudiyiruppu (and subsequent loss of revenue) and fewer customers coming to Café Arokkiya in Adampan. The *Towards Religious Harmony* project (Digana based reconciliation between Buddhists and Muslims) and *Moulavis in Leadership* workshops were postponed frequently and indefinitely.

Our Executive Director, Jeremy Liyanage, and the hard-working Bridging Lanka team have adapted and found ways to cope during these difficult times. As a result, Bridging Lanka helped hundreds of families to survive through food production and dry food distribution. Construction of the Hendro Centre continued and plans were prepared for the new pre-school centre. Programs were developed in response to growing problems faced by young people, parents and families. While other NGOs and businesses reduced staff numbers, Bridging Lanka retained and supported our valued staff members.

Intensive nurturing of young people as part of the *Fighting Fit* program (funding from the Australian Government) and opening of gyms have responded to increased youth alienation and accompanying drug uptake. The *Little Trees Nurture* is planned as a new preschool to support and influence parents and children at an early age. The *Home-Street-School* program started at the request of the Zonal Director of Education to reduce non-attendance at the primary level and is proving an effective program supporting students, parents and teachers.

At the Australian end, our supporters and donors continued to provide funding for programs in Mannar and we have seen growth in regular donors. For the twelve months ending 30 June 2022, Bridging Lanka received \$133,248 through general donations, specific campaigns and monthly donations. We raised \$31,307 through fund raising events which have been super-charged through the efforts of Lara and Terence Jeyaretnam. Lara and Terence have brought their organisational skills and creativity to connect Bridging Lanka with a broader network of interested individuals and companies.

A special thanks to Lindy Drew-Tsang, a much-loved Director and supporter of Bridging Lanka, who resigned from the Australian Board this year. Lindy and her friend Sandy continue to fund raise and have gone full throttle into jam production to support us. Thanks also to our Australian Board Directors who provide the direction and compassion needed to keep us going – Shyama Fuad, Siraj Perera, Lara Jeyaretnam and Praba Ponnuthurai.

Steve Dunn (Chairperson) on behalf of the Australian Board of Bridging Lanka



vision

A unified, peaceful and prosperous
Sri Lankan community both
'in country' and abroad

mission

Connecting hearts across divides

Bridging ethnic, religious and
geographic divides through
people-inspired action

objectives

1. To respond to social, economic and environmental issues in the lagging regions of Sri Lanka
2. To act as a credible link between Sri Lankans abroad and nation-building opportunities in Sri Lanka
3. To work towards improved relations through constructive engagement between overseas Sri Lankans and the Government and polity of Sri Lanka
4. To explore a Sri Lankan approach to diversity management that affirms the notion of a religious and ethnically-cohesive nation
5. To pursue the relief of poverty, suffering, sickness, disability, helplessness and distress.

principles

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 and present 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, environmental and economic life of the nation.

where we stand

2021 marked the continuation of the Covid-19 nightmare with its rolling and unpredictable lockdowns and measures that further 'separated' humanity.

The impacts on Bridging Lanka and its work were legion. Although we already functioned with agility and could move with flexibility and speed when contextual factors demanded greater responsiveness, planning was no longer possible as official one week lockdowns morphed into two, three or more weeks.

With great difficulty we managed to secure Covid passes which allowed us out of office and home confines to undertake limited emergency activity, such as distributing dry food rations to hundreds of struggling families across Mannar or rescuing injured donkeys. Our plans and projects floated in limbo and trans-district travel was prohibited.

We had a dance trying to implement major projects like our Fighting Fit initiative for 'at risk' youth funded by a Direct Aid Program grant from the Australian Government. We would have to wait patiently until a lockdown was lifted before pouncing onto small, unpredictable and opportunistic spaces to kick start many desperately needed activities.



Between months of lockdowns there was only a day or two to buy food rations or sip a cuppa at a tea shop. Local businesses thought that plastic sheeting could save them from contracting the virus so encased shop areas with this protective talisman. Living and working in an office for days on end was tiresome.

To counteract this, our young men who work and reside in the office were given challenges – each to create a motivational presentation delivered to the team at 5:00pm every working day; some were to renovate a kitchen from scratch and hence learn carpentry, painting and masonry skills; others to master the fineries of good cooking, and all to develop their own approach to spirituality – meditation, praying, writing reflectively, reading; and of course to continue with their work in preparation for a post-lockdown re-emergence.



In Giving We Receive

Local people continued to do it tough. The most affected were the 'day labourers' who rely on meagre daily wages to even have one meal a day. The village head from Santhipuram, an impoverished urban village, confirmed 35 families in dire straits. Our staff purchased and packaged the dry food packs and distributed them. A similar response was undertaken in Kopewatte, a poor rural village in Kandy District. Our staff were deriving meaning from this activity as their hearts were touched.



Playing Hunger Games

As the lockdowns dragged on steep price hikes for basic food items and also its unavailability mostly impacted the poor. Big-hearted Chavez from Dubai, sponsored dry food rations for 21 families facing hunger. He arranged for Cargill's Food City to deliver the double packs and the staff of the Donkey Clinic distributed the parcels to widow-headed families and those with disabilities.



Fuelling Discontent

In early 2022, Sri Lanka plunged into crisis. Macro-economic issues such as rapidly depleting foreign reserves and mounting foreign debt were suffocating the nation. The crunch was being felt at the micro level - empty shelves at retail outlets with chronic shortages of all stock. The result has been unpredictable daily increases in prices, loss of employment and thus fall in household income, wide spread poverty and conditions of near-starvation. Not even kerosene or gas to cook with! In the past starvation was an exceptional event in Sri Lanka, which now threatens to become the norm.

Sri Lanka's internet freedom declined from the period of June 2021 onwards due to Government attempts to repress online activities related to protests around the economic crisis.

sustainable livelihoods

An estimated 225 million people lost their jobs globally in 2020 due to COVID-19 (ILO), Sri Lanka's labour market was also severely affected with 150,000 people losing jobs and the quality of available jobs deteriorating. The most affected were young people, low skilled individuals, and males, while large numbers of women left the labour market altogether. Although Café Arokkiya fared badly with rolling closures; the young women's merchandising business at the Donkey Clinic struggling and the young people's One-stop-tradies-shop operation delayed, creative contingency plans saved the day and jobs.

Café Arokkiya



A Game Changer

During the 2021 Covid period we had female workers coming and going. Although we continued to pay modest wages and provide regular dry food rations, the urgency was to find any employment that would bring in extra badly needed income. Losing trained and experienced workers was costly in many ways. Ten women had regular work during this period.

Lifting our Game

Between Covid closures we ensured the culinary skills of Café Arokkiya's women remained sharp. One Sunday we had a 'cook off' with a difference. Each woman was assigned a list of items to prepare. These dishes would have to pass a taste test at the end of the day. Bridging Lanka staff Rojan and Kumanan led by Grace Jeyamalar, a previous BL manager, documented each step of the women's cooking process so as to create recipes which could then be improved upon.



At the end of the session the many dishes were systematically reviewed and each given a score by both the women and Bridging Lanka staff. Quickly it was realised who were the better cooks as they continued getting the higher scores. Management decisions were then made about who would be best placed to cook breakfasts or lunches and prepare juices or short eats.





Back to the Future

How lofty ideals can collapse! We had the noble intention of creating a commercial café and kitchen to support widows and other vulnerable women in securing a livelihood for them in Adampan, one of the most war-affected areas of Mannar District. Through Café Arokkiya we hoped to cater for the growing tourist market that sought nutritious traditional cuisine, a higher standard of cleanliness and a relaxed space.

We were well on our way to meeting such expectations when the Easter bombings and pandemic struck, decimating tourist numbers. Then the foreign exchange crisis and the collapse of global and national supply chains meant we couldn't even replenish our gas cylinders. So what to do? The women have now returned to war-time practices of cooking on open wood fires; the collection and chopping of wood part of their daily grind.



Back on Track

With the engagement of our newest café manager, Siminthini, our woes of the past few years are receding. For the first time we have a manager who is totally dedicated to her work at Café Arokkiya. Her sense of ownership, capacity for hard work and determination to make the café a success is a winner. Bridging Lanka's principle of rewarding good performance is working to her advantage, earning her regular pay rises without having to request them.



Reflecting & Planning

The Kunchukulam guys gathered for some serious planning of their One-Stop-Tradies-Shop. Why did they think it was a good idea? Answers included, more chance of getting a good income, there is a need for a coordinated tradies outfit with skills in carpentry, welding, wiring, etc; easier to get larger contracts this way. Combined, the group had the following trade skills: carpentry, welding, wiring (electrical), plumbing, level sheet installation (ceilings), aluminium works, painting, mechanics and electronics.

Tools were also purchased post haste. Due to the financial crisis in Sri Lanka and the stopping of imports, all prices including those for tools were rising every week. The first lot of purchases included a bench drill, cut-off machine, welding plant, pipe cutter, ring spanner set, box spanner set, chain wrench, rivet gun, drill bit set, screw driver set and other items. Much gratitude to Steve Dunn and his friends for enabling the purchase of a starter kit of tools



Tradies One-Stop-Shop

In remote Kunchukulam where the youth jobless rate stands at 49%, unemployed young men have been gathering at our Youth Empowerment Hub. Together they have embarked on welding, mechanic work on motorbikes and three wheelers, the painting of vehicle parts and carpentry jobs, as well as volunteering in working bees to clean up overgrown road ways. These are healthy activities without alcohol (as during Covid all liquor outlets are shut!).



Covid Delivers Dividends

The Australian Government awarded us a Covid related grant to reduce the impacts of the pandemic through: (a) undertaking research into what were local people's views about Covid and the issues they faced; (b) identifying how we could help the more vulnerable face Covid with greater resilience, and (c) attracting more volunteers to Bridging Lanka given overseas travel restrictions.

With regards to local people's Covid views and issues, we'd already run several focus group discussions with parents, interviews with selected individuals and more recently with doctors and media personnel from Colombo. In addition we commenced a merchandising business for vulnerable young women and a carpentry skills development initiative for 'early' school leavers.



Upskilling in Carpentry

The young men soon picked up the finer points of carpentry and mason work. They built cupboards, book cases and even totally renovated a kitchen! Tools were purchased through the Covid grant.





Another Widow Protected

A warm-hearted woman in Melbourne, Mrs Regis, wanted to reach out to a widow in poverty-stricken Santhipuram to help her establish a chicken business. The widow is confined to her ramshackled hut and compound as her ailing incontinent mother needs 24 hour care. The purchase of 15 free-range chickens and a chicken coop has set up Mary Janet to have a reliable monthly income from the sale of eggs. Finally chicken feed and water containers were negotiated the best price for packs of disposable nappies for Mary Janet's incontinent mother was secured.



Our micro social enterprise, Donkey Clinic Merchandising is progressing well with three young women sewing tourist oriented souvenirs including tote bags, cushion covers, tea towels and puppets, all with a donkey theme. Their roles include cloth cutting, sewing and hand stitching as well as purchasing, sales and record keeping. In spite of a drop in tourist numbers, the business earned an income of Rs 224,150 (AU\$ 1,494) which is a decent amount for a micro entity.



This year Bridging Lanka invested less into the various livelihoods as some of the businesses are moving toward being self-sustainable – which is good news indeed.

holistic education

A big casualty of Covid was education. Across Sri Lanka 4 million students skipped school. In Mannar the truancy rate was high and zoom learning was considered a failure. In 2021 schools operated for only 71 days out of a regular 200. 2002 was even worse as the economic crisis started to bite. Drug barons easily grabbed alienated youngsters. Although most of Bridging Lanka's education activities were affected badly, in late 2021 our English, donkey assisted therapy and vocational education plans got the green light. Plans for a preschool are on the drawing board.

Donkey Assisted Therapy

There is a new excitement among our young DAT participants. While some of the young people are grooming, feeding and leading the donkeys in the arena, others are engaged in newly introduced complementary 'therapies' like drawing, 'hand to eye coordination' ballgames and of course, dancing. These have created a joyful and energetic space.

As Hindhujan, the new DAT coordinator, loves to dance, it is only natural that he will encourage others to dance too. The youngsters' shyness quickly turns to letting their hair down and having a good time. One guy, Godwin, in particular, goes crazy and his dance moves become infectious to the others.

Love is being shared around – first with the donkeys, then with their fellow comrades. They are so happy to dance with their friends and also visitors to the centre. Even with total strangers the youngsters demonstrated confidence and warmth.

They have grown so much. We remember how frightened of donkeys some of them were in the beginning. Not anymore! They are self-assured in handling donkeys and also show care for each other.

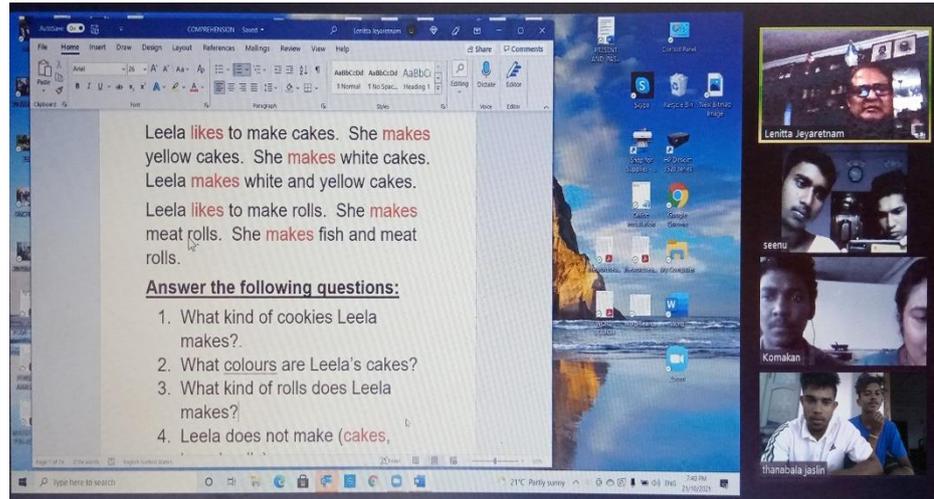
Christian previously attended Donkey Assisted Therapy (DAT) sessions but very infrequently. He used to be violent towards the donkeys, separated himself from both donkeys and other youngsters and struggled to communicate with them. His general habit was to loiter at the Mannar markets where he soon adopted inappropriate 'street' behaviours and language. These behaviours were brought to DAT sessions.

After more consistent attendance at DAT we started to see significant changes in his behaviour. His anger levels and violence reduced. He is now kind toward the donkeys, coining nicknames for them and highly cooperative and friendly towards teachers and the other participants. The magic of donkey therapy continues...



English as a Foreign Language

Dr Jeyaretnam with a heart of gold and an impressive array of skills and experiences which he is sharing with us in Mannar. Domiciled in Melbourne, for two days each week the good doctor conducts English classes for our Tamil speaking staff and other young people, introducing them to the English language, its grammar and expression. The surprising thing is that the level of commitment to and attendance at the good doctor's classes has been unprecedented. Much gratitude to Dr Jeyaretnam, another member of Sri Lanka's diaspora, playing an essential role in the lives of young people in Sri Lanka.



A Cognitive Workout

Regarded as one of the best teachers in Mannar, Paul Raj runs weekly English language classes for local Ordinary and Advanced Level students from the study room at Café Arokkiya, Adampan. Paulraj has developed a nine module English program including basic English knowledge, foundation to English grammar and practice sessions with native English speakers. Before the lockdowns Paulraj was teaching how to form dialogue using the 'if' clause, book or newspaper reading and creating common conversations.

On Again Off Again

For most of 2021, the Donkey Assisted Therapy program for differently abled young people was in abeyance due to rolling lockdowns and school closures.

Finally with getting a green light, the director of the Mannar Association for the Rehabilitation of Differently Abled People (MARDAP) thought a visit to the Donkey Clinic & Education Centre would reacquaint the youngsters with our friendly donkeys.

Boy did they have a ball! The donkey connection was soon warmly kindled but the highlight was the wild dancing that Hindhujan initiated. They just wouldn't stop dancing!

Unfortunately factors beyond our control led to the discontinuation of the DAT program for some weeks as heavy rains flooded Mannar and most of the youngsters' homes.



Home-Street-School Nexus



Primary School Challenge

Being aware of Bridging Lanka's Fighting Fit program, the Mannar Zonal Director of Education asked us to support a dedicated principal of the Santhipuram primary school. The principal had tried

several strategies to improve the learning opportunities of her students but was despondent at her failures. The two hour conversation with us highlighted a litany of woes.

They included significant truancy, dysfunctional home life of poor female headed households, domestic violence, fathers in prison or unemployed, parents soliciting the help of children in packaging drugs for sale, and parents not supportive of their children's education because they were largely uneducated themselves.

At our behest, the principal agreed to run a trial focused on the families of the children in Grade three - 14 students in all.

We discussed an intensive response involving visiting each household, understanding the families' circumstances at depth, developing specific responses as well as working closely with each of the 14 students.



Understanding the Home-Street-School Nexus

Our quest is to better understand the contexts of home, street and school, the threads that link them and its impact on impressionable children.

These undercurrents are being manifested in a serious fall in school attendance, families facing collapse, few positive role models for growing children and ultimately the creation of the conditions for a child's failed future. As the school principal said

about a grade 2 boy, that he can't read a book but can give a good explanation of how to pack and sell drugs.

What to do? We don't know but we have commenced a social experiment to find out what strategies may work to reduce truancy, increase a love of learning and create a more positive home environment for a child's positive development.



Getting under a Community's Skin

The Home-Street-School program has three components: (a) a weekly children-based activity, (b) a family research component and (c) the Better Parenting workshops.

To more comprehensively understand the blocks to learning experienced by primary students in Santhipuram, we are visiting each family and spending many hours getting under the skin of their situations – and this has been most revealing!

The level of dysfunction in most households gives us clues as to why there is so little focus on their children's education.



The Honesty of Women

The mothers of the grade three students were open and frank with us. Most faced compounding problems because of their drunk and abusive husbands. They said that if this issue was absent, they could cope with the other complexities.

Upon hearing that, how could we walk away after the gauntlet had been thrown down? It got us thinking that the next phase of this project had to address the issue of hardened men.

Being Watched

At the heart of their woes is a toxic mix of low educational achievement, unemployment and poverty. These factors force families into illegal endeavours, police attention, jail terms, and family violence fuelled by alcohol and drugs – all observed by impressionable minds.



Home-Street-School



1. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Develops rapport, shows care, engenders a love of learning

2. HOUSEHOLD VISITS

Identifies pressure points, street views, insights into interventions



3. BETTER PARENTING

Develops parenting skills, provides support to tackling difficult issues



'Little Trees Nurtury' Preschool

A famous proverb goes, "Train up a child in the way he or she should go: and when old, they will not depart from it."

In order to lay a positive foundation for children's lives in Mannar, early intervention is crucial. We know that the brain develops 90% during the first five years of life so we're starting there - by creating a preschool with a difference.

The preschool will give young children the best chance of laying down nourishing roots in their formative years. The preschool is situated at the intersection of Muslim, Catholic, and Hindu villages. It aims to nurture children's minds, bodies, and souls, instilling self-confidence, cultivating ethics, feeding their curiosity and above all, encouraging a love of learning.

Our motivation is to ensure child development that embraces altruism, self-esteem, civic mindedness and creative learning in a child. Our expectation is that children will also develop coping strategies and resilience to harmful habits.



A meeting with the Early Childhood Education Officer from the Divisional Secretariat helped us to understand the regulations and requirements of government.



Focus group discussions were held with parents of young children to gain their views and recommendations about local preschools



As the preschool will be built in Puthukkudiyiruppu, a Muslim village, a meeting with mosque committee members whole-heartedly supported the preschool proposal



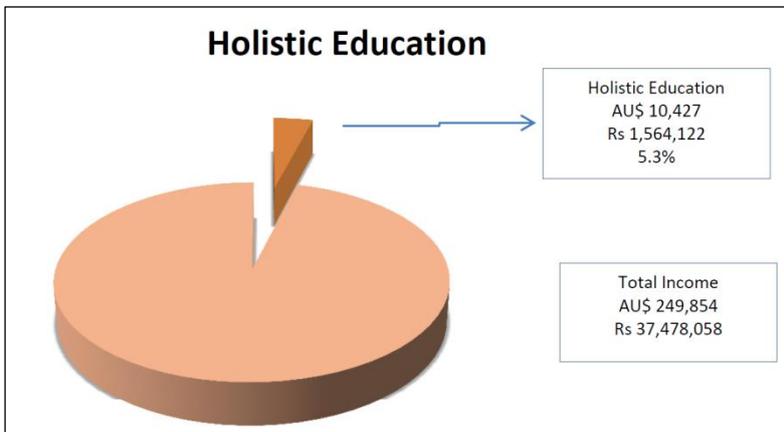
Interviews for preschool teachers were held with several applicants and four suitable ones were selected



Seema Omar from Colombo conducted five days of training for the proposed preschool teachers and others on how to engage deeply with children.



Preschool teacher training options were explored in Jaffna through the Aaruthal Preschool Centre



environmental health

2021-22 held its unique challenges for Bridging Lanka – the fight to save Mannar from mineral sand mining; increasing rates of chronic kidney disease caused by agro-chemicals polluting ground water supplies; the social, health and economic fallout of both Covid and the recent economic crisis; dangerous levels of food insecurity; the livelihoods of fisher folk and agriculturalists bearing the brunt of newly installed wind turbines. This project blocked many of the natural water channels to the sea, and the whiffing of turbine blades adversely affected fish numbers. The result has been widespread flooding of thousands of houses, destruction of agriculture, drops in fish catches leading to loss of income and poverty, and the threat of this being an annual event.

Reversing Chronic Kidney Disease



Hundreds of local farming families from the three villages commenced drinking safe water free of poisonous substances. In time we will appreciate the health results!

ஆரோக்கியமான குடிநீர்
உங்கள் குடும்பத்தை பாதுகாத்துக்கொள்ளுங்கள்

பெரியகுக்குள கிராமத்தில் புகழும் நீரில் விஷத்தன்மையுள்ள கரைக உலோகங்கள் பல்வகும், விவசாய இரசாயனங்கடும் நீருடன் கலந்திருப்பது பரிசேதனை மூலம் கண்டறியப்பட்டுள்ளது. இது மிக ஆபத்தானதும் காலப்போக்கில் சிறுநீரகம் தொடர்பான நோய்களையும் ஏற்படுத்துகிறது.

பாதுகாப்பான RO நீரைப் பெறும்படி
Rs. 2.5/Ltr

தங்கள் முதல் குடியிறு: am to am
pm to pm

Endurance Wins Out

The arduous journey to address chronic kidney disease of multi-factorial origin (CKD-mfo) – the supply of safe drinking water to the farming community of Kunchukulam – is now complete. A reliable and non-toxic water source was essential to curb the spread of CKD-mfo caused by agro chemicals reacting with the heavy metal soils of the area and thus poisoning ground water supplies.

A project that should have taken a mere six months took a staggering 33 months of roller-coaster activity! It started with the research phase conducted in Kunchukulam by David Singleton (Gold Coast, Australia).

While researching the level of local interest in organic cultivation, David discovered that many were suffering from chronic kidney disease due to agro-chemical poisoned water.





Jan Gillies & David Singleton in Mannar, January, 2019. Two years later after dozens of community meetings, government negotiations over land and buildings and technical discussions with numerous RO manufacturers, the RO dream became a reality



Jan organised an enchanting “Evening of Jazz’ fundraiser for the Reverse Osmosis plant in Brisbane and raised a staggering \$7,000



Keeping Hospital Patients Safe

The director of the Mannar General Hospital asked Bridging Lanka if we could fund a Reverse Osmosis water filtration plant for both patients and staff as mains water was not safe to drink.

After discussing the water capacity needed, the location and installation details, miraculously, a donor from Colombo, Roshan Sembacuttiaratchy, an admirer of Bridging Lanka’s work, donated the machine!

The machine produces 1,200-1,400 litres of safe drinking water each day. The RO plant is now conveniently located near major patient wards including those for pregnant mothers.

Bridging Lanka officer, Jerad Anton, undertook all plumbing and electrical work while the Blue Water crew installed the system. He also trained a maintenance crew from the hospital to maintain the machine and change filters and membranes when needed. He also monitors the operation twice a month.



Committed to Organics



‘Organic’ Uptake Growing

From big resistance to organic farming to now embracing it, our organic project in Kunchukulam is moving forward successfully. Many more farmers are changing to organic cultivation as a result of our instruction and some recent government rules about stopping the use of agro-chemical products. . A total 65 families in Kunchukulam have gone organic and developed their own compost pits. 10 families have introduced honey boxes. Bridging Lanka is supporting 48 of those families in their organic cultivation venture.



Great Return

Currently the average income from 1 kilo of turkeyberry is Rs 200 and from one plant a farmer can earn Rs 250. Women are hired to harvest the berries and earn Rs 25 from each plant so they are very happy. The net profit from a plant is Rs 160 per month. If a farmer has 100 plants s/he will earn Rs 14,000 a month – which is great for very little work.



Organic Turkeyberries a Winner

Successive and successful organic turkeyberry harvests in Kunchukulam where chronic kidney disease has reared its ugly head, is spear-heading a new drive for organic cultivation.

The month to month increase in take home income by existing turkeyberry farmers has prompted many more to seriously consider this healthy and income generating option.

From 13 farmers last year to an additional 35 this year from Kunchukulam, Periyamurippu and Thailankudiyiruppu, the project is going well. In response to a big demand from them, we supplied an additional 5,000 plants to 35 new farmers.

Last year we provided the inputs with payment due only after they sold their crop. This time they put their money up front. In total we now have 48 active turkeyberry farmers with an anticipated harvest of 1,000 kg weekly!

To Market to Market

Alhathir, Manager of the Donkey Clinic and avid organic cultivation promoter found a new market for the tibattu (turkeyberry) yield from Thailankudiyiruppu farmers. At the Dambulla Markets, the largest in Sri Lanka, he sold hundreds of kilos of turkeyberries. Alas, the previously super deal with Cargill’s Food City that was buying our turkeyberries at good prices every fortnight, collapsed when the Covid lockdowns took hold.

Securing Future Food Sources

Through the kind donations of a small group of ardent supporters in Australia and Singapore, Bridging Lanka has purchased one acre of land adjacent to the Hendro Animal Rescue Centre (HARC) site in Olaithoduwai. It is 200 metres from our Donkey Clinic.

The deed was signed, sealed and delivered. The reasons for the purchase are two-fold. As the land is planted out with coconut and moringa (murunga) trees, this would contribute toward food security in these unpredictable times as we plant more organic fruit and vegetables; also as a possible future office and accommodation space for Bridging Lanka as rentals in Mannar Town have increased sharply.



Stop Mining Mannar!



A Premature Win

The news of 24th April, 2021 gave us cause for celebration. After a year of fighting Titanium Sands Ltd (TSL), an Australian mining company, and their Sri Lankan subsidiaries, their 8 mineral sand mining exploration licenses issued by the Geological Survey & Mines Bureau (GSMB) for Mannar had been withdrawn with immediate effect.

We'd like to believe that a year of protest commencing in 2020 with widespread protests and awareness raising campaigns in Mannar, online petitions and even action by the Greens in the Australian parliament contributed to GSMB's decision. It was a well-deserved reprieve but we suspected it wouldn't last! The win was too easy.



Feigning Ignorance?

Bridging Lanka prepared a paper to update the Mannar's Government Agent, Divisional Secretary and Director of Planning on what was transpiring under their watch, highlighting the three priority areas targeted for mining. They were unaware that exploration had recommenced. How could this be?

An initial meeting was held with the Mannar Citizens Committee and a Right to Information (RTI) application

submitted to the Geological Survey & Mines Bureau asking probing questions about this latest round of activity by a foreign mining company. No response. A second RTI submission met the same fate.

Through their local partners, TSI is illegally trespassing on private property without landowner permission to drill holes to 12 metres – well below what is permitted by Sri Lankan law.

Decision Overturned

Sadly, come December we were informed that The Geological Survey & Mines Bureau (GSMB) mysteriously reissued all exploration licences with the Ministry of Environment encouraging Titanium Sands Ltd to submit a mining licence? How many 'pieces of silver' were involved in this alleged transaction? The tractors laden with air core drills hit the gravel paths of Mannar Island, heralding the return of the ilmenite sand exploration operation.





Irrefutable and Irreversible Destruction

Proposed ilmenite sand mining on much of Mannar Island would devastate this pristine environment forever, cause irreversible sea water intrusion with the subsequent devastation of plant, sea, bird and animal life and contamination of ground water supplies, making life untenable for tens of thousands of the Island’s residents.

Public Awareness

The hard work of alerting the residents of Mannar to this catastrophe continues with public awareness meetings in proposed mining areas. Meetings were held with Catholic and Muslim clergy and civil society groups in Thalvupadu, Keeri, Pesalai and Talaimannar.



Not in Mannar!

Bridging Lanka was invited by the Mannar Citizens’ Committee to present Mannar’s position on mineral sand mining to the Country Representative of Titanium Sands Ltd, Saliya Galagoda. Galagoda has ownership rights to five Sri Lankan companies issued with exploration licences for Mannar Island and adjacent coastal areas by GSMB.

Mannar’s resounding message was a strong opposition to any mineral sand mining . Galagoda’s list of ‘benefits’ failed to sway the crowd. Attendees included members of the Institute of Engineers, Catholic Diocese, Mannar Citizens’ Committee, Non-Governmental Organisations, Fisheries, religious clerics, private land owners, Mannar Pradeshiya Sabha and the Urban Council.



Surge of Public Protest

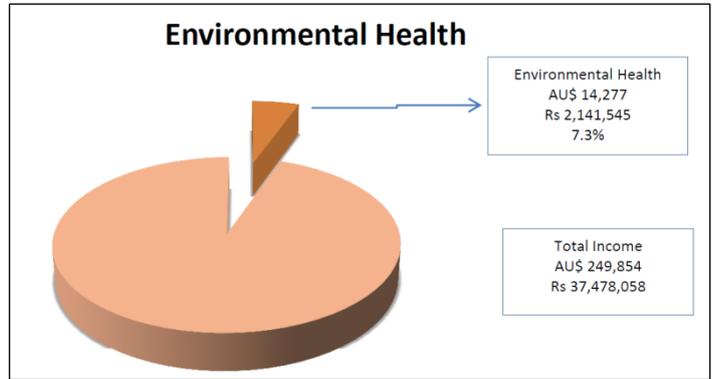
The Mannar Citizens’ Committee and Bridging Lanka met to plan a response to the resumption of TSL’s mining plans. A second public protest attracted large crowds. We designed and printed large banners, erecting them in prominent locations across Mannar Island. A few survived. Most have vanished. We have our suspects! There are some unscrupulous local residents who are aiding and abetting the mining companies and are being paid handsomely for their efforts.





Communities Fight Back

Secretive exploratory drilling by Titanium Sands Ltd (TSL) local operators, some at midnight, has continued since early January, 2022. Once the greater public were made aware of TSL's plans, spontaneous protests erupted in many parts of Mannar. Fresh drilling was met with fierce opposition as residents clashed with mining personnel and police. At some sites the imposters were driven out.



urban improvement

Due to Covid, little activity was attempted in this sector. Bridging Lanka monitored the devastating effects of local flooding caused by the new wind power facility. We miss our annual contingent of urban planning volunteers from Australia!



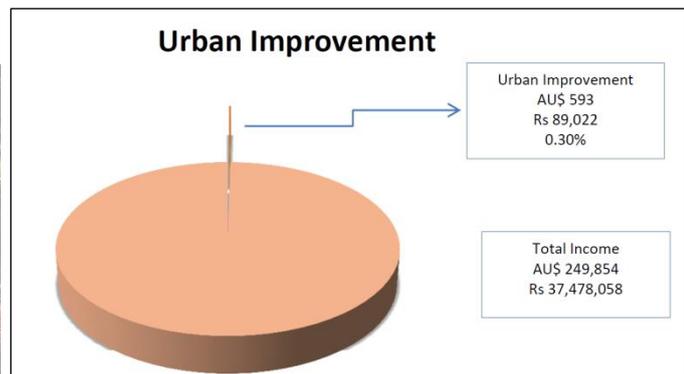
Wind Turbines' Unintended Consequences

Ignorance of local factors can have devastating effects. The engineers behind the multi-million dollar wind turbine project on Mannar Island to generate electricity for the national grid, have caused havoc.



They didn't factor in that their road construction would block many of the 14 natural outlets for heavy run-off during the wet season to flow to the sea. The result was devastating floods with thousands of houses and hundreds of acres of cultivation under water for weeks.

There was little government relief. Bridging Lanka staff visited the affected sites, provided funds for earthworks to divert flood waters and explored options for advocacy.



social cohesion

Apart from our daily 'bridging' of the issues that divide us in Mannar, a major thrust has been to bridge the growing divides between Sinhala Buddhist and Muslim communities both in hot spots like Digana in Kandy District and nationally. Our work this year was severely thwarted by Covid restrictions.



Moulavis in Leadership

An integral part of the *Towards Religious Harmony* project, developed in the aftermath of the Digana upheaval between Buddhists and Muslim, was the *Moulavis in Leadership* training workshops – 20 in all.

We'd already made inroads into the local Buddhist communities to persuade a deeper understanding and respect of their Muslim brethren.

Through *Moulavis in Leadership* we aimed to help Muslim clerics reinterpret the Qur'an for modern times and also assist Sri Lanka's Muslim population to recognise the legitimate issues that the Sinhalese harboured against them.



Towards Religious Harmony



The material was written by Dave Andrews from Brisbane and put through its paces by Islamic scholars in Brisbane, the Department of Muslim Religious & Cultural Affairs and the All Ceylon Jamayyathul Ulama in Sri Lanka.

Although finalised with an additional two modules focusing on Islam and animals and Islam and music, plans to conduct the sessions have been thwarted by events beyond our control, mainly the unpredictable Covid restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021 and the constant postponement of the workshops.

A final review of the *Moulavis in Leadership* modules was undertaken before the proposed rollout across Sri Lanka. Hosted by the Director, Department of Muslim & Cultural Affairs, M. Ashraf, the inspirational zoom exchange shaped the material to be more palatable to Sri Lankan Moulavis.

Dave Andrews from Brisbane, Sheik Nuruddeen Lemu and team from the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, and Dr Adis Duderija from Griffith University, Brisbane, joined representatives of Muslim institutions in Sri Lanka to finalise the content.



Youth Nation Digana



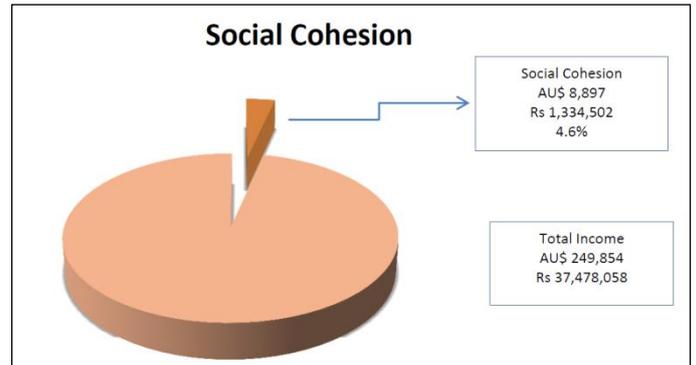
A new Youth Development Officer, Shamini, a female and Christian, was appointed. She had a heart for the community, the poor, for interfaith connection and to see young people reach their God-given potential. Shamini also attracted Sinhalese and Tamil youngsters to the group.

Due to constraints few activities were possible, bar the distribution of dry food rations. The surprised looks on the faces of struggling Buddhist and Hindu neighbours when the Muslim youth handed them food ration packs was some evidence that the breaking down of communal suspicion was underway in a small way.

Quest to Heal Divisions

The Youth Nation Digana group of mainly Muslim young people have had its ups and downs. Two previous groupings disbanded due to constant Central Intelligence Department surveillance of its members, and now on our third iteration.

Bridging Lanka staff used to pay fortnightly visits to the Digana group in Kandy District. Alas due to rolling lockdowns and severe travel restrictions on inter-district travel, visits were too spasmodic to offer effective support.



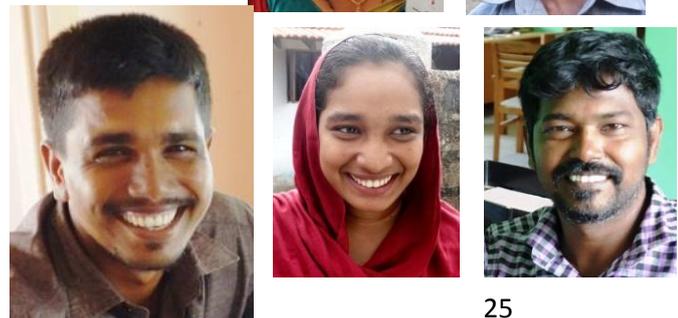
animal welfare

Our historically strong animal welfare work hit a wobble this year, shifting from a financially sustainable operation supported by sponsors and many tourists, to a struggling one. After nine years of solid commitment toward the care of our feral donkeys and street dogs, our major donor could not offer us ongoing funds. This came at a particular challenging time.

Donkey Welfare – An Overview

In spite of the withdrawal of financial support for animal welfare work, Bridging Lanka and its many supporters are ‘holding the can’ until we find alternative funds. It couldn’t have come at a worse time in the wake of Covid’s decimation of tourism and the economic collapse of the country.

As there are separate reports for our donkey welfare operations, here, we will only provide an overview of the achievements of Alhathir and Raseefa, joint Donkey Clinic & Education Centre managers and their dedicated staff team.





Care Takes Many Forms

This year, 111 donkeys were rescued by our Donkey Rescue team and treated by our vet, Dr Vincent, assisted by our two donkey welfare officers, Ainkaran and Gadhafi.

The donkeys presented with an array of mild to very serious conditions, some fatal – injuries from road and train accidents and other forms of human cruelty – neck injury, broken legs, gaping leg wounds, hoofs caught in tin cans, severed hoofs, paralysis, deceased foetuses, wounds to the neck, tail and stomach, difficult in delivery, epilepsy, maggot infested wounds, blindness, even injury from explosives.



Eating Green

It was Dr Ramesh from the Donkey Sanctuary India who always encouraged us to feed donkeys as much green fodder as possible. This was always difficult because of the desert-like conditions on Mannar Island. But over the last three years Alhathir has made a concerted effort to grow more and more Co4 grass.

This year we fed the donkeys 9,051 kg of Co4 grass, a very high yielding grass with an average protein content ranging from 8% to 11%. This is augmented by rice bran (2,803 kg), corn (4,110 kg) and chickpeas, other grass, fruit and vegetables. The total of feed excluding the Co4 grass amounted to Rs. 819,534 or AU\$ 5,613.

Tourist Numbers Down

Tourist numbers were slightly better than the previous year when the ravages of Covid were felt even more extremely. Foreign tourist numbers were negligible this year and this hurt our revenue base and our ability to sustain the centre. Fortunately visitors from across Sri Lanka grabbed the chance to travel between lockdowns so somewhat made up for a lost tourist trade. In all 880 locals visited the donkey clinic compared with a mere 45 overseas tourists. In pre-Covid times, this cohort was a substantial number.





Staff Roles & Responsibilities

Our dedicated vet, Dr Vincent made a total of 113 essential visits to the donkey clinic to treat injured donkeys. Dr Vincent also spends his time with the on the job training of our two donkey welfare officers.

Our welfare officers undertake daily welfare checks, donkey grooming and feeding, farriering,

bathing, cleaning of donkey rooms and grounds, daily administering of medicines and treatments, deworming, donkey rescue missions, daily reporting, grass planting and harvesting, among many other maintenance tasks.

Our administrative staff – Raseefa and Vijitha oversee our tourism arm, delivering presentations,

acting as tour guides, providing refreshments, servicing our accommodation facility, selling tickets, receipting donations, doing the finances, keeping visitor records and writing donkey sponsorship and monthly reports. They also run IT, English and Sinhala classes for local children.

Hendro Animal Rescue Centre



Inching Closer to Completion

The sterilisation and rabies vaccination of thousands of Mannar's street dogs have been delayed for several reasons. An unexpected deluge, the worst since 1958, flooded the area.

Building construction was delayed for three whole months until the waters subsided. The kennel buildings at the Hendro Animal Rescue Centre (HARC) are nearing completion. They can hold a total of 28 dogs.

Also, Covid restrictions affected the transportation of goods resulting in huge delays in building materials for the cages.

Animal Aid Abroad and Sylvia Bettison-Heinrich and sister have contributed funds toward this initiative. A significant amount is also being contributed by Bridging Lanka supporters to keep Mannar's dogs and residents rabies free and safe.

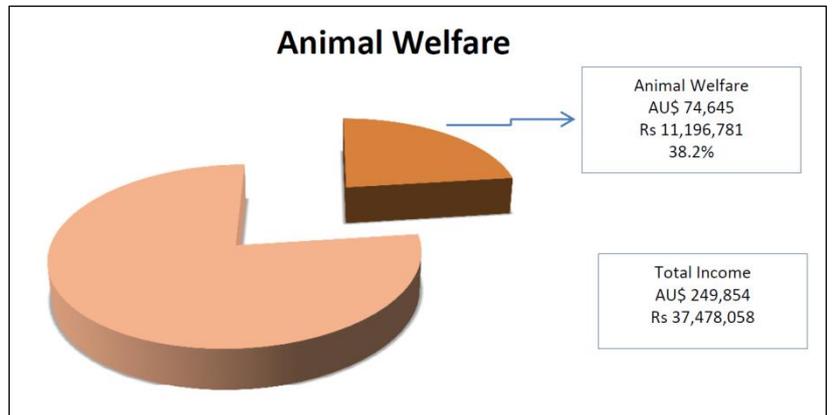




Big Thanks to our Donkey Sponsors

We are most grateful to the many kind people who sponsor our donkeys – 23 in all! Sponsorship covers the cost of food, veterinary treatment and medicines. Without your support we would have to shut up shop. Some of our longest supporters started way back in 2015 including Zofia & Murray Felton, Lencie Harding, Helen Gibbs, Eve Smith, Jenny Winton and Paul Yates.

Our sponsored donkeys were named by their sponsors to remind them of a loved one, a people of interest or even the name of their school - Agatha, Banjo, Benji, Delilah, Elvis, Oly, Greame, Jame, Joy, Josh, Kavi, Kelvin, Matilda, Melita, Musaeus, Puddy Girl, Renaldo, Salvatore, Theodora, Maria, Saya, Alex and Evelyn.



responsible tourism

Three years ago, the number of tourists was down 18% following the Easter bombings of April 2019. The coronavirus pandemic that followed in 2020 was particularly bad. Arrivals fell drastically and there were no signs of recovery until November 2021, when the government removed all quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated tourists, encouraging tourism once more. Bridging Lanka fared badly in attracting volun-tourists but come February 2022 things started to change...

Volun-Tourism

Volunteer Drought Broken

After three long years of almost no volunteers, 7 volunteers parachuted into Mannar and Bridging Lanka in early 2022. Jonny & Gaby (UK) came for a month to work on Bridging Lanka's website and Café Arokkiya improvements.

Then three Colombo-ites descended on Mannar... Seema Omar undertook intensive preschool teaching workshops for a week; Dhivya Sivanesan and her illustrious team introduced us to Gua Sha, a traditional Chinese healing method that just requires a spoon, and Sanchitha Wickremesooriya was an 'all-rounder' filling the gaps in all of our projects, helping wherever needed.

Finally James (UK) and Liza (Netherlands) focused on donkey welfare. These have turned out to be some of the hardest working volunteers we've had. In a short period of time they achieved much! There were lots of fun times as well.





Scrape Me Heal Me

Gua Sha is an ancient Chinese therapy that requires a little know-how and a spoon! The Gua Sha technique is practised in many East-Asian countries as an effective treatment for ailments including colds, flu, pneumonia, asthma, neck, shoulder and back pain, and more.

Gua Sha also strengthens the immune system. The Gua Sha ‘practitioner’ (anyone, really) simply rubs oil on the skin and uses a smooth-edged tool, like a

spoon, to scrape the surface of the skin. This helps blood flow and lessens toxins in the body, thus promoting healing.

Thank you to another volunteer, Dhivya Sivanesan, from the Poornam Foundation for bringing two Gua Sha masters from Germany and Spain to train women, young people and even Muslim clerics in this therapy. The four workshops were well attended and many people’s painful conditions relieved.



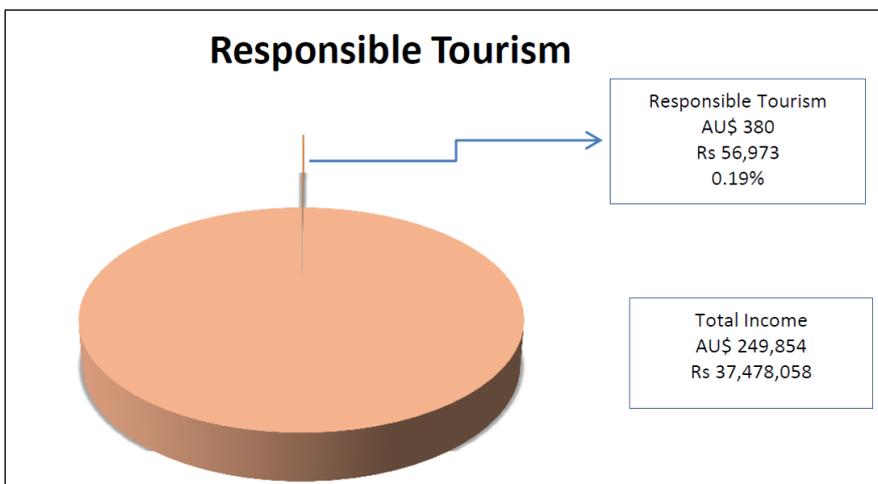
An Atypical Volunteer

Sanchitha from Colombo first approached us about volunteering with Bridging Lanka early last year. He needed time to wind up his life and retire from teaching before coming to Mannar – which he did by walking all the way from Colombo to Mannar!

Unlike the rest of us Sanchitha didn’t know the meaning of the word, ‘procrastination’ and commenced to do anything we asked at break-neck speed.

He also had ideas on how to improve the fortunes of Café Arokkiya. He started experimenting with new lines and introduced ‘Reba Choco’, a version of Sri Lanka’s famed chocolate biscuit pudding – with an almond twist! He also dabbled in fish pastries.

Sanchitha has helped increase donkey sponsorships and raised funds for our newest project, the Little Trees Nurture preschool.



nurturing youth

With almost a quarter of Sri Lanka's population aged 15 to 29 or 4.8 million, and few safety nets to catch the falling, a real generational collapse is emerging. In Mannar, feelings of alienation and despair propelled by the 'smart' phone's bewitching lure is leading to an addiction of distraction through social media, online gaming, early sexualisation, romantic liaisons, then drugs, violence and ultimately self harm. Bridging Lanka's aim is to 'hold' these youngsters through a turbulent time.



What was happening to compromise the health and wellbeing of a generation of young people in Mannar? How to combat rising levels of addiction among young people? Primary research conducted by Bridging Lanka revealed numerous contributing factors:

- Post-war rapid change from a controlled, curfewed and communication-restricted context to a relatively free, open society
- Introduction of mobile phone and internet in 2010
- Introduction of smart phones and an uncritical adoption of social media and its distractions
- Dysfunctional home life and negative older role models
- Multiple addictions – social media, alcohol, drugs, online games and pornography
- 'Futures paralysis' for school drop outs faced with unemployment
- Systematic village to village recruitment of drop outs by drug syndicates as users and sellers
- Exposure to anti-social visual stimuli – films and videos showing violence, glorifying drugs and alcohol, pornography, sexual aggression and humiliation of women

The impact is troubling for Mannar's young people: lack of life direction, escape into numerous addictions, depression and self-loathing, self-harm and suicide

Fighting Fit

A multi-layered approach was conceptualised and delivered starting with activity on the physical realm through the accredited training of young men to be **Fitness Trainers** and young women introduced to **Zumba Dance and Yoga**. Mental resilience was developed through a series of nine interactive workshops entitled, **Inner Gym Workout** and the training of young females and males with a helping outlook to develop basic counselling skills through **Peer Counselling** to support their peers and family members as they faced challenging life issues. The **Career Guidance** initiative helped to give some direction for their working lives. Finally a



Better Parenting series of workshops to improve the parent-child dynamic was developed and conducted. Fighting Fit was partially funded by an Australian Government Direct Aid Program grant.



1. Physical Fitness

Two Powerhouse gyms and fitness centres were established by Bridging Lanka. One in Adampan, a severely war-affected area which now had a growing drug problem. The other was in drug-free Kunchukulam with a large unemployed youth population. A gym in this remote area was a trial of a preventative measure. Local guys started to join the gym.



Gyms stimulate a Mindset Shift

The newly opened gym at Kunchukulam was attracting large numbers of youth from the area just before another lockdown kicked in. The focus among local lads was already starting to shift towards a healthy body through hard exercise. After their gym sessions these youngsters would get together at our Youth Empowerment Hub to eat, talk and sleep over camp-style – without the presence of alcohol.



Lockdowns Threaten the Gain

The ‘on again off again’ lockdowns have played havoc with our gym opening schedule. The Adampan gym recommenced business for a few weeks before another lockdown was announced. During that time we were flooded with guys wanting to work out – even some brave women! A new service – personalised sessions for busy professionals – was introduced only to be thwarted by another ten day lockdown. If only the government would give us advanced warning!



Gym Open Day

During Covid lockdown periods our Kunchukulam gym did exceptionally well. All liquor outlets were closed and the local lads decided to become healthy. Many camped at our Youth Empowerment Hub, jogged around the sports oval at 6am and then hit the gym. Once lockdowns and curfews were lifted, many had to leave the village for work. Attendance fell. So we planned a Gym Open Day to attract new customers. An exciting program of information, demonstrations, fitness competitions with prizes and healthy refreshments was a hit with the youngsters.

2. Inner Gym Workout

Kavivarman, our youth officer developed workshop materials and interactive exercises for young women and men that encourage healthy lifestyles, focusing on themes including limiting social media, sleeping well, eating nutritious food, limiting alcohol and drug intake, handling tough times and staying physically active. We started fielding requests from school principals and teachers, parents, youth groups and social welfare agencies.

Over 100 young people participated in the series. Already many young people have sought help with issues such as reducing screen time, stopping their consumption of drugs and alcohol, getting more sleep and dealing with anger. Two young people with alcohol and drug dependencies have opted to undertake our intensive nurturing 'live in' program and have since ceased consuming these substances.



Peer Counselling Legacy

A young woman who was feeling devastated by her boyfriend's unfaithful behaviour started to self-harm. Out of desperation she spoke to one of the peer counsellors who soon realised that she had a problem with releasing her emotions. Her only solution was to self-harm. The counsellor introduced her to more healthy ways of dealing with strong emotions, sharing more effective coping strategies. She put those strategies into practice and started to notice the difference.



3. Peer Counselling

Seventeen young females and males were trained in a nine session basic counselling skills course so they could 'walk beside' other youth who were facing difficult life issues and traumas.

Kumanan, the workshop content developer and facilitator, started presenting the series on three occasions, only to be thwarted by unpredictable lockdowns. The third attempt was a success, sandwiched narrowly between lockdowns.

The training was based on research conducted with young people, parents and welfare agency officers: police, mental health unit, court and school counsellors, drug & alcohol services.

The 17 peer counsellors now practise their skills and have even intervened successfully in suicide attempts. Many of them are also using the learning to understand their own emotions and deal with their own problems.



4. Career Guidance

As many young people are confused about their career path, we conducted information sessions for those who dropped out of school early. The sessions were run by the government's Job Centre and a local engineer. The program aimed to give youngsters a clear picture about how to prepare for

the world of work and also to identify their own capacity, talents, weaknesses and strengths. Feedback included, "Even if we didn't finish school we can learn vocational studies and get work"; "It helped me to think about the next steps in my life."



5. Intensive Nurturing

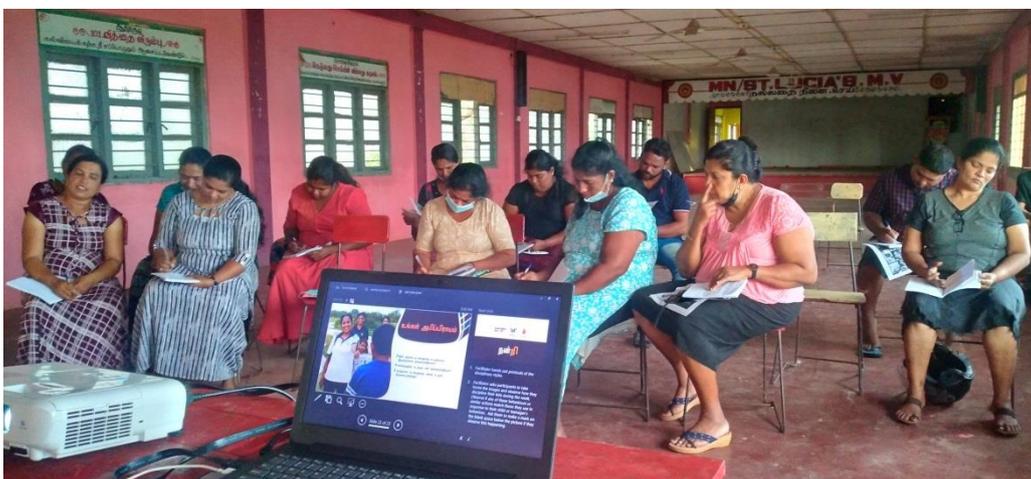
Retreating from ICE or heroin dependence is never easy. Our grand experiment, *Intensive Nurturing*, as part of our *Fighting Fit* program aimed to provide a ‘circuit-breaker’ for young people to reflect, regroup and reshape a life along a road much less travelled.

Youngsters who had failed in their education, had no job prospects and had turned to addictive substances to escape a bleak future, chose to join us in a shared-living arrangement. They wished for a healthier grip on life away from dependency on alcohol, drugs, violence and pornography.

Their personal efforts at change usually came to naught because of extreme peer pressure. However, with us, an alternative culture was nurtured which provided support and guidance to reform old habits.

Although always challenging with two steps forward and one step back, change in the right direction was occurring nevertheless.

Thanks for those who contributed to our *Touching Hearts-Lending Hands online campaign*, which subsidises some of the expenses of this deeply nurturing ‘rehabilitation’ model.



6. Better Parenting

Nurturing children is a parent’s most important role.

Unfortunately many parents in Mannar don’t know how to parent anymore. When asked, “Was it more difficult to raise kids during the war time or now?” parents resounded with a strong, “Now!”

In response Bridging Lanka developed its **Better Parenting** training program. The Initial sessions were developed by Judy Rafferty (Psychologist) and Lindy Drew-Tsang (Social Worker) from Brisbane.

Rojan, BL manager, agreed to deliver the material. He took time to absorb the material – many messages new to him –

and practised them on his kids. He also adjusted the material to be more relevant to the Mannar context. The *Better Parenting* workshops are now being run in different parts of Mannar.

With great enthusiasm and energy, parents, mainly mothers, have welcomed the material – most of it new to them. They started grappling with how to respond more effectively to their kids – reducing their reactions, especially anger, understanding a situation before judging quickly, focusing on the issue at hand and not referring to past incidents.

In Mannar the most common parenting style is authoritarian, accompanied by yelling, threatening, judging and followed by stern physical punishment. They were introduced to other parenting styles too – permissive, disengaged and supportive, with the latter the recommended style. Eyes were opened and an honest and supportive space was created.

Touching Hearts Lending Hands



Through the generous contributions of caring Australians via a crowdfunding campaign, *Touching Hearts & Lending Hands*, fifteen youngsters in challenging circumstances are being supported to achieve their life goals.

Funds cover their educational, living, medical and travel expenses.

One such young female is from a poor urban settlement in Mannar. When she was eight her father left, leaving her mother destitute as an abandoned widow having to take full responsibility for her two elder brothers, one a heroin addict, incontinent grandma and herself.

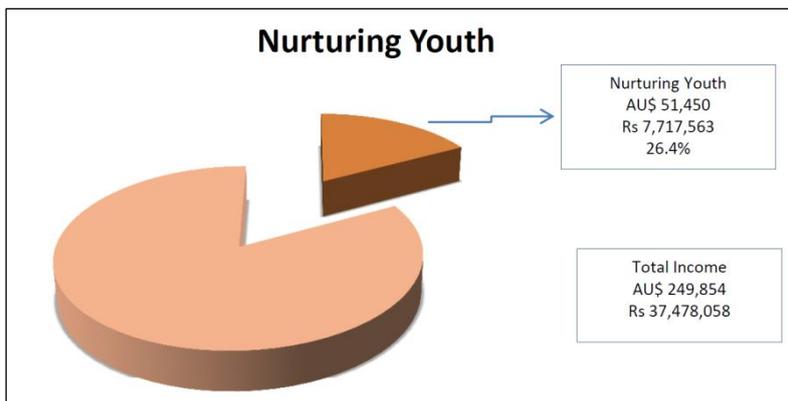
Now the young lady can afford to go to tuition classes and is obtaining high marks in her school subjects. This is all helping her to achieve her dream of being a policewoman. She is exuberantly thankful to Bridging Lanka director, Lara, and other supporters for enabling her family onto a much more even keel.

Eats & Beats

After a gap of two Covid years, the Eats & Beats program came back with force, combining live music by Mannar's youngsters and food from the Café Arokkiya kitchen.

In Adampan, where there are few recreational activities for teens apart from drug and alcohol parties, Eats & Beats was introduced as a drug free alternative that provided a platform to celebrate the musical talents of the younger generation. Eats & Beats was the brainchild of Kavi and assisted by Eric and Hindhujan.

Meals at the December event used up the last of the kitchen's gas supplies! Food for the Valentine's Day event was cooked on open fires!



Bridging lanka office



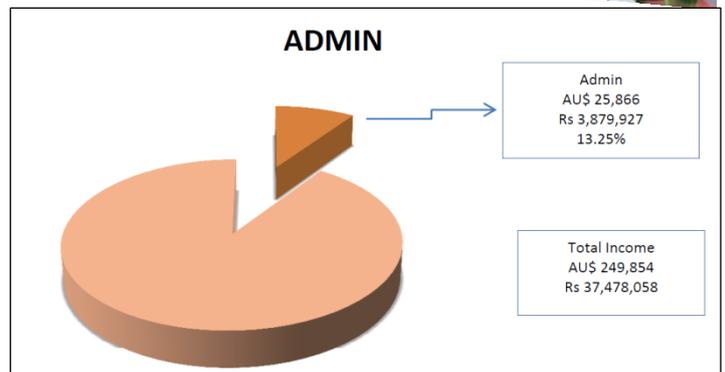
On the Move



Eight years of accumulated stuff as well as rubbish are not easy to move. Our plans to shift office over a period of days were thwarted by a sudden pronouncement of a Covid lockdown at 11pm on the very day of our moving. Not to be caught between two as now non-functioning offices, we decided to move heaven and earth to finish the relocation before the curfew hour.

This also had to factor in rain and floods, buying groceries for a week and spending hours in queues for even basic food items. It was utter chaos and mess but we met the deadline.

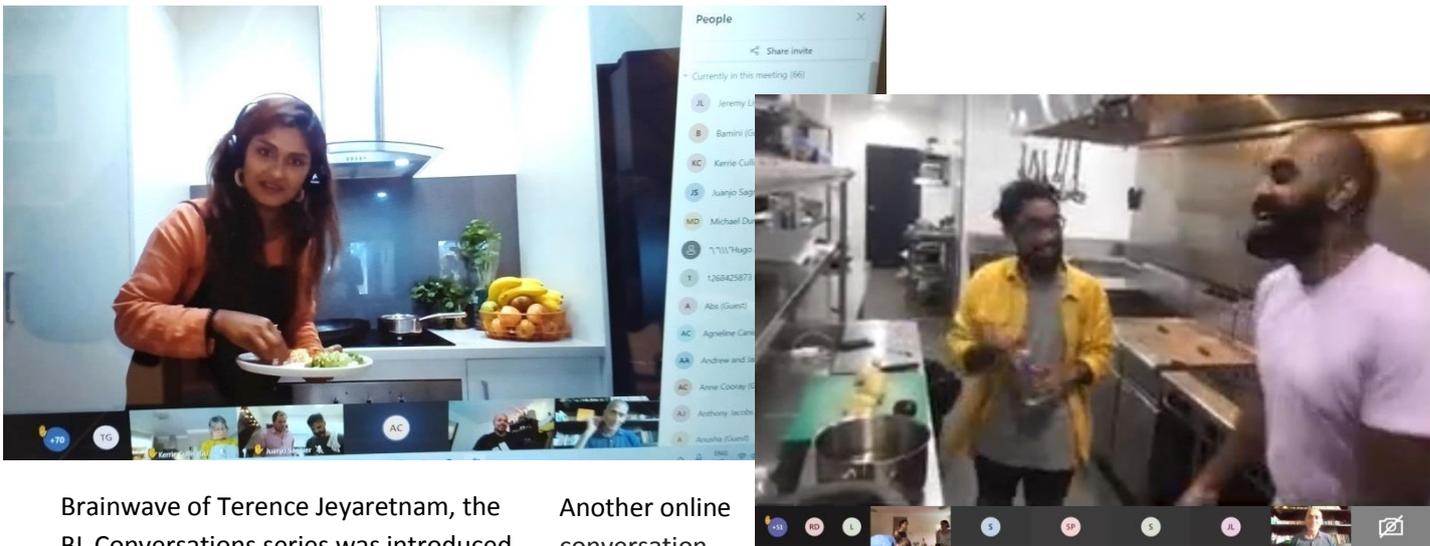
We were blessed to lease clean and well maintained premises with a wonderful landlord to boot! Mowleesan and Abs, our volunteer, were instrumental in the move.



australian directors' contribution

The Bridging Lanka directors in Australia work tirelessly to raise funds for our work in Sri Lanka. Without their constant efforts our work would grind to a halt! A particular big thanks to Steve Dunn, (chairman), Lara and Terence Jeyaretnam, (director and BL ambassador) and Lindy Drew-Tsang (director) supported by friend, Sandy Trenevski for creative income generating ideas and total dedication to the cause.

Bridging Lanka Conversations



Brainwave of Terence Jeyaretnam, the BL Conversations series was introduced to raise funds when lockdowns were in full swing in Australia and face to face events had to be repeatedly postponed to kick things off, Minoli de Silva, a former Master Chef contestant and a passionate foodie guided us through a fusion dish, Dumplings a la Sri Lanka! Over 70 people cooked along with Minoli resulting in some top class efforts. The warm, delightful Minoli talked openly about her love of cooking, generational trauma, and her mother's influence on her as a chef...

Another online conversation while preparing Sri Lankan fare was compliments of Shaun Christie-David of *Colombo Social* and *Plate it Forward*, and popular young comedian, Suren Jayemanne. This was the second serving in an inspiring event of simultaneous fun, cooking together and helping struggling families in Sri Lanka. Together with the inaugural conversation with Minoli De Silva last month, \$6,540 was raised towards Bridging Lanka's essential work, thanks to some very generous people!



Sergio – A Real Influencer!

Final year student at Kedron High in Brisbane found a way to help Bridging Lanka. Sergio Sloss pitched the idea of supporting to us to the school-based Interact Club through a presentation. The vote was unanimous. They helped him to run a pancake and coke day at the school and raised \$1,000. Nundah Rotary soon found out about it and showed interested in supporting us too. After Sergio presented to Rotary, they offered to supply everything for a Sausage Sizzle at Bunnings, and another \$1,000 was raised.



Jammin' to the Rhythm of Love

Inspired by love, Lindy Drew-Tsang and good friend Sandy Trenevski launched our label, *Mellor House*, a not-for-profit raising funds, 100% of which goes directly to support Bridging Lanka's projects.

So far our all-natural products include maple macadamia nuts, marmalades, classic strawberry jam, mango and mango & passion fruit jams. We make the most of local produce from neighbours, friends and relatives, pleased to find a use for the seasonal glut. Recently a mother and daughter auctioned three bottles of mango jam for \$475! Thousands of dollars are rolling in through their 'much in demand' products.



Flavours of Lanka Dinners



Off Again On Again

How many times can a fundraiser be postponed? Planning for the Bridging Lanka Gala Dinners at Melbourne Docklands and Darling Harbour in Sydney spanned almost two years.

Covid 'lockdown unpredictability' was the spanner in the works. Within a couple of weeks of the initial promotion, the Melbourne event was sold out and over 200 paid upfront.

Sadly the dinners kept on being postponed due to Covid pronouncements until a window of opportunity finally arrived. Both events were well attended and the entertainment and food was amazing.

Sincere thanks especially to Lara and Terence Jeyaretnam, Lindy Drew-Tsang, Sandy Trenevski and the MAD COW group, supported by other Bridging Lanka directors.





We are indeed grateful to all who attended, for their generosity and enthusiasm and making the events a real success. We raised over \$31,000 from both the dinners, auctions and donations on the day.

With the two-year pandemic and current disastrous economic crisis in Sri Lanka, these fundraisers could not have come at a more crucial time. All proceeds went to help poor families and also to address youth alcohol and drug issues.



'Stop Them Going Under' Fundraiser

A crowdfunder to raise \$20,000 was launched to feed hundreds of desperate families in Mannar struggling to put food on the table. 2022 saw Sri Lanka facing its worst financial crisis since independence due to depleted foreign exchange reserves. No essential imports were coming into the country and many families were surviving on one meal a day. Priority was given to women-headed households, families with disabled members and those without jobs.

bridging lanka finances

Bridging Lanka (BL) is separately registered in Australia as a charity with the Australian Charities & Not-for-profit Commission, and in Sri Lanka as a volunteer social service organisation with the National Secretariat Non-Governmental Organisations.

BL Australia's financial year is July to June, while BL Sri Lanka's is April to March. Both BL Aust financial report and BL Sri Lanka's audited annual financial report are public documents on request.

In 2021-22 BL Australia transferred AU\$ 100,781 to BL Sri Lanka. BLSL also raised additional income of AU\$ 149,073 through grants from the Australian government and donations.

Overall, Bridging Lanka expended AU\$ 249,854 or SLR 37,478,058 on its district development work in Sri Lanka.

Financial Report (Summary) - Bridging Lanka Ltd Australia

The 2022 financial year ended with a surplus of \$62,620 after a donation to Bridging Lanka Sri Lanka of \$100,781. Cash at bank was \$78,609 with Sundry debtors of \$1,370, being donations made at 30 June but not banked until July 2022.

Income

Donations:

Total donations: \$133,248

- General and regular monthly donations \$80,691
- Chuffed - Touching Hearts, Lending Hands \$100
- Chuffed - Ahead - A Hard Year's Fight \$11,680
- Chuffed - Stop Them Going Under \$23,261
- Animal Aid Abroad / Donkey sponsors \$15,656
- Women's' Yoga & Dance \$1,860

Fundraising:

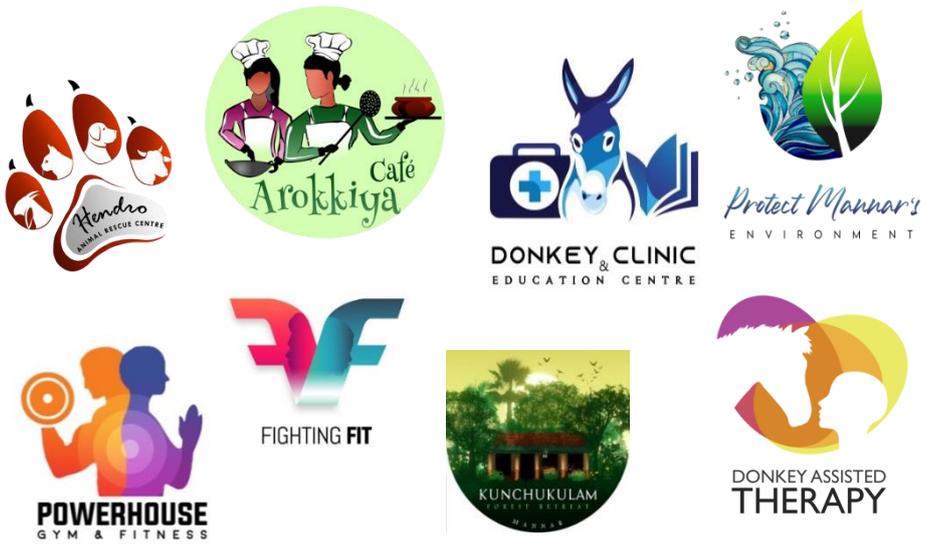
- Gala events - Sydney & Melbourne \$20,143
- Grant - Multicultural Festival & Events (net) \$980
- Golf Day \$323
- Raffle \$2,170
- Brisbane dinner \$1,151
- BL Conversations \$6,540

Sincere thanks to our accountant, Lynette Board, for her meticulous keeping of the Bridging Lanka financial records!

bridging lanka staff - a team effort



Bridging Lanka is proud to acknowledge the awesome graphic, video production and musical talents of Eric Fernando. Eric has shone a bright light on our work in Sri Lanka for which we are in grateful appreciation.



australian directors

Jane Hope,
Business Consultant



Prabakaran Ponnuthurai
Urban Planner



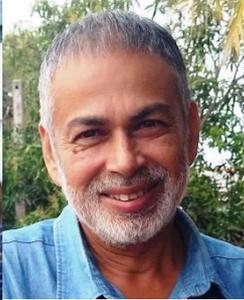
Siraj Perera
Civil Engineer



Shyama Fuad
Psychologist



Lindy Drew-Tsang
Diversity Manager



Jeremy Liyanage
Social Planner



Steve Dunn
Town Planner



Lara Jeyaretnam
Dentist

sri lankan directors



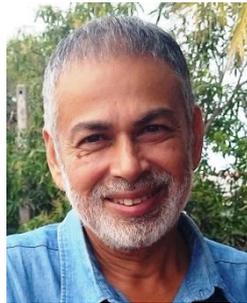
Visakha Tillekeratne
Development
Consultant &
Nutritionist



Tithira Perera
Business
Entrepreneur



Ranil Senanayake
Environmental
Consultant



Jeremy Liyanage
Social Planner

Caring in turbulent times 2021-22



Bridging Lanka Annual Report

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