



# NEWSLETTER

## 2002-2003



**Women's Development Centre**

61, Mulgampola Road, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Tel/ fax : +94 81 2234511, Email : wdc@slt.lk, Web : www.womendev.org

- WDC representation
- Prog Highlights
  
- Coordinator's message
- Crisis Intervention
- Haragama Centre
- Counselling
- Peer counselling
- Student counselling
- Resource Centre
- Staff Training (resource development)
- Workshop - Women, Media, Peace & Reconciliation
- Workshop on creative writing
- Community Development
- Case studies
  - School programme
  - ILO school programme
  - Aids prevention programme
- Food & Nutrition
- Kantha Mela (Main Prog. + forums)
- Network
  - Vavuniya Branch
- CBR
- Exposure trip
- Volunteers
  
- Acknowledgements - Donors

## Programme Highlights

**2002** ←

<b>May</b>	<b>24<sup>th</sup></b>	• Matale Naula – Health programme
<b>June</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	• Vavuniya Branch Office Opening
<b>June</b>	<b>14<sup>th</sup></b>	• CBR Sports Meet
<b>June</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup></b>	• HCWF Leaders' Training – Haragama
<b>July</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup></b>	• CBR Training
<b>July</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup></b>	• Puppetry Workshop
<b>Sep.</b>	<b>16<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup></b>	• Media Workshop – Colombo
<b>Sep.</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> -22<sup>nd</sup></b>	• Children's Club – Gurudeniya
<b>Nov.</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup></b>	• Media Workshop – follow-up programme

**2003** →

<b>Jan.</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup></b>	• Staff Training
<b>Jan.</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup></b>	• Staff Trip to Vavuniya
<b>Feb.</b>	<b>31<sup>st</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> Mar.</b>	• Network
<b>Mar.</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	• Vavuniya – Women's Day Programme
<b>Mar.</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	• Batticaloa - Women's Day Programme
<b>Mar.</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup></b>	• Pathahewaheta - Women's Day Programme
<b>Mar.</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup></b>	• Hanguranketha - Women's Day Programme
<b>Mar.</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup></b>	• Hill Country - Women's Day Programme
<b>Apr.</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	• Akkaraipattu - Women's Day Programme
<b>Apr.</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	• Rajarata - Women's Day Programme

<b>WDC</b>  <b>R E P R E S E N T A T I O N S</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>National Christian Council (NCC) Development Committee</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Human Rights Commission</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Non Formal Education – Central Province Monitoring Committee</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Child Rights Committee (NGO) Central Province</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>National Child Protection Authority Central Province</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Early Childhood Development Committee Central Province</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Steering Committee on Disability Ministry of Social Services- Central Province</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Prison Welfare Board Kandy</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regional Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NGO Networks</b> <i>Women's NGO Forum on Beijing Plantation NGO Forum NGO Network on Child Rights</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>WDC Networks</b> <i>Hill Country Women's Forum – Kandy Rajarata Women's Forum – Kekirawa Women' Development Forum – Batticaloa Hanguranketha Women's Forum Women' Development Foundation – Akkaraipattu WDC – Vavuniya/ Vanni Women's Forum</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Asia Network Asia Network Women in Communication (ANWIC) South Asia CBR Network</i></li> </ul>

## Greetings

*To all of you who are a part of WDC's success and development. We truly appreciate your contribution, in helping to visualize our vision and objectives. I am honoured to present you with this Newsletter, an accolade to all your encouraging efforts.*

*Last year, our thoughts were focussed on peace, as the long civil war that was a burden to Sri Lanka was coming to an end. It is still the same. Though nothing has been finalized, we hope that peace will be a reality. Considerable progress has occurred during this year. Even though, the government and LTTE are still considering 'pros and cons' of the peace process, the people at grassroots are really enjoying the lull in the tense atmosphere. People are happy to travel without having to linger and be hassled at barriers. The WDC staff visited the sacred places in Jaffna, an experience they recount with all their friends.*

*Members from all foras attended the Women's Day celebrations in Vavuniya. We needed eight buses to accommodate the enthusiastic women. I can still hear the laughter and feel their joy. To me it was like the falling of the Berlin Wall, the removal of barriers and free movement. I think these women would do anything to prevent the situation being repeated. For the staff in the Network, a tour by bus to the North and East is something they would not have dreamt a year ago.*

*Our work in Vavuniya has increased and we look towards more work during the next year. It has been a satisfying year, full of challenges. Our work has been greatly appreciated by donors and government departments.*

*We are grateful to you for your support and encouragement which has helped us to achieve this status. New opportunities are opening up but we are cautious in accepting more work.*

**from  
the  
Coordinator**

*The WDC's main aim was to find out what is needed to fully empower a woman and I think we are very close to achieving this goal.*

*Thank you for being with us and sharing our vision.  
God bless you.*

**Pearl**

# Crisis Intervention

government agencies both national and international have visited our centre with view to establish shelters in different parts of the country. The proof of the pudding they say us in the eating; maybe it is good!!

We've been working in this area for over 15 years and are now able to understand the method and manner to deal with victims of violence in order to support them, though not always successfully. The government and non

We provide the following services		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community Integration Programme</li> <li>▪ Mother &amp; Child Clinic</li> <li>▪ Post Office</li> <li>▪ Shop</li> <li>▪ Life Skills</li> </ul>	Residential Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Skills Training</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counselling</li> <li>▪ Job Placement</li> <li>▪ Occupational therapy</li> <li>▪ Education</li> <li>▪ Awareness raising</li> <li>▪ Medical</li> </ul>

The problem of violence has to be taken on a national level as most people do not understand or don't want to accept this problem or find solutions. NGO networks are male dominated and, do not wish to go deep in to this subject or even admit that the situation is serious.

It needs	Awareness Raising at
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School level</li> <li>▪ Community level</li> <li>▪ Police, Probation &amp; Government</li> <li>▪ Judiciary</li> <li>▪ Political</li> </ul>

In addition, we need changes not only in the penal code but also in implementation of the law. In the present system, victims are dealt with move severely than the accused or perpetrator.

Instances of incest are increasing as mothers are being encouraged to go overseas as migrant workers to earn foreign exchange. Those who embark on such assignments should make proper arrangements for the safety and education of their children.

One case that we handled was of a young girl, who as a baby was left in the care of relatives. They did not send her to school but had handed over the girl for domestic services when she was quiet young. She could not even remember her mother as she was too small when the mother left. She only had a photograph. The mother came this year and we encouraged her to stay. It was a great joy to the daughter to see her mother for the first time. However, it was with much reluctance that she left as the mother had not only a house for them to live

but was also married. We encouraged the girl to go with the assurance that she can come back if she does have a problem.

We have accommodated children as young as 6 and 7 years who have been sexually abused by family members while the mother was abroad. Some of those mothers have come back without any money, damaged and unfit for life.

We should pay attention to the feasibility of women going away without making suitable arrangements. Can the lost childhood and youth be compensated by the money and goods earned abroad? This situation is true even in the North East. I feel that we should give this matter similar importance that we give to preventing the war. Let us hope for a united Sri Lanka where women and children are safe and free to live and move about fearlessly.



Our centre provides shelter for women and children subjected to abuse of many forms; sexual, physical or mental, as well as victims of violence. Even though there are many instances of domestic violence in our country, very few attempt to find solutions as most women are bound by traditions. They resolve to suffer in silence. At times, we accommodate women/children with neurological and mental illnesses.

Our clients can be categorised into; married/ unmarried women, unmarried pregnant mothers, juveniles, mothers with young

children, unmarried mothers, mental patients, destitute (rejected or stranded by family)

#### ▪ Single Mothers

Some clients are prepared to bring up the child but prefer to let the child grow in an institution, and later take them over once the mother is properly re-established in society. Such mothers are allowed to breast feed the baby for 3 months being at the shelter. Their relatives object to these mothers rejoining the families but WDC develops a relationship with them, as a result their attitudes change and agree to accept them.

Another group comprise mothers who do not want to accept the child and offer them to institutions (children's homes) via the Probation Services. The mothers re-enter the society. Several other clients rejoin their families, workplaces or secure employment elsewhere, maintaining secrecy of their pregnancy/childbirth.

#### ▪ Child mothers

This group of clients are cared for until their baby is born, and the baby handed over to a home with the mediation of Courts or Probation Services.

#### ▪ Socialisation of clients following residential care/ rehabilitation

The client is distraught and lacks aim or a goal in life when referred to our care. Our initial task is to provide shelter and security, and thereafter, gain their confidence and help build their self-esteem. In our conversations with them, we are able to categorise them according to their needs, and provide services as appropriate.

We gather information about the client's personal background by;

- Familiarising with them individually, visiting their homes
- Acquainting ourselves with the Probation Officers, Police or Courts, Parents, relative or Guardians
- We help the residents to maintain a relationship with their family via relatives who can be trusted

The girls are reintroduced to their families if accepted and if the situation is suitable. Otherwise, the girls remain at our shelter and attend school again or referred to vocational/skills training. Subsequently if they are suitable, they are encouraged to join their families or be re-established in society.

#### ▪ Family disputes and violence

Women and children of conflict-ridden homes are referred to us. The clients are helped to maintain a link with their families, and provided vocational training, skills development, and introduced to self employment in order to establish economic stability. They are counselled and in most instances encouraged to reconcile through mediation of a family member. WDC maintains connections with the clients after reuniting with the family in order to monitor their welfare.

#### ▪ Adults, Youth and Children traumatised from abuse/ violence (not pregnant)

The adults are educated of vulnerable situations and are advised on how to protect themselves from abusive situations and not be victimized again.

Some victims are long term residents, because their insecure family situations do not permit them to rejoin their families. In such instances, they are provided with appropriate services; such as, school education, vocational/ self employment or receive orientation /awareness ; group activities, to develop healthy relationships, good habits, discipline, cookery, housekeeping, rights education, courtesy, animal husbandry, home gardening, etc.

#### Reasons Clients leave the shelter

- Rejoin their parents /families
- Regain acceptance among relatives
- Taken over by guardians
- Reunite with their husbands
- Secure employment independently
- Transferred to other homes/ institutions
- Given in marriage

**\*\* Engage in employment while residing**

All residents are provided with a bank savings account. National Identity cards are obtained for everyone above 16 years of age. Residents who have been placed in employment are briefed on handling finances, saving etc. Legal assistance is also provided to clients on individual requirements.

Girls without relatives or guardians who have grown up at our centre from childhood are found marriage partners. The arrangements are carried out with the coordination of the Probation Services. Annually, a significant number of clients are reintroduced to society after being in our care.

#### Malini Tennakoon

*The needs are urgent and have to be attended to immediately but we find that the funder agencies have a bureaucratic approach and do not understand the need or the urgency. A woman or child who has faced violence needs immediate attention and WDC's limited resources are stretched. Women's issues though spoken about widely are not a priority with agencies that would rather fund a short-term project with publicity than a long-term issue based programme.*

*We are grateful to institutional co-funders who have helped to build our capacity and infrastructure facilities to help us to work in long-term intervention and prevention of violence against women and children.*

#### RESIDENTS AT CRISIS CENTRES as at Sep. 2002

	Women	Children
Remaining from the previous year	47	47
New admissions	37	28
Re-admitted	-	01
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>76</b>
Resettled/left	27	28
Leaving without informing	03	02
Finding employment	03	-
Settled with parents/relations	13	14
Referred to state institutions	08	12
Referred to children's homes	-	-
Adopted through probation	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
Remaining		

# counselling

Science and technology have proved and offered many a solution to situations in material development from creation to this new millennium. Yet, in relation to this ascend in development, the personal, spiritual and moral problems of human life has risen too.

Psychologists have observations and theories that a person is made good or evil within the mother's womb. We humans have been loved or rejected from our infancy and are products of those persons who either cared for us or neglected us. The roots of a problematic life originate in ones family. This deteriorating family unit has affected men, women and youth.

We cannot indicate one reason for these problems; they can be caused by husband, wife, parents, children, relatives or social surroundings. For instance, a woman is in a dilemma due to her husband's warped sexual behaviour, and now it poses a danger to her 10-year-old daughter. The daughter detests living with the father.

I wish to share the essence of a poem I read in my school days..

*A newly married man keeps remembering the mocking remarks made by his friends about his wife... when he lies beside her... tormented by this.. that night he looks at her in the light of the bottle lamp... her slender eyes.. hair spread on the pillow.. radiance of beauty.. he resolves in his mind ;what the friends say are untrue... "she's pretty" he murmurs to himself, and lies beside her...*

(This portrays true love)

And in another situation, a husband is unable to live happily with his wife and children, due to problems caused by his mother and siblings. The wife and children live separately in her family home. Although he made attempts to live in his in-law's house, his mother prevents him from doing so. His psychiatrist recommends that he should live with his wife and children in order to deal with his mental stress but parents of both spouses have become a hindrance.

Of the youth that come to us for counselling, most are young girls who have suffered sexual abuse either by force or by misunderstood preferences. A majority of these girls are from disunited families, or lack the affection and guidance of parents or relatives.

A very depressing feature in most clients, especially women, is that they hesitate to speak out their problems, in order to maintain the family status of self-respect. If a mother of a family succumbs to such situations, invariably the children too face similar pressures.

**She needs a mother...**



*What is their future ?*



**There is still opportunity  
for fun and laughter**





## Workshop on Creative Writing



Children selected from  
10 schools participated  
in the workshop



These situations establish the need for counselling in today's society. A sincere, unbiased listener can help relieve a client's burden and the listener should intelligently reassure the anxious person. The client needs to be treated with respect. The counsellor's tact will help the client to reveal the true situation without reservations. The aim of the counsellor is not to carry the client's burden but to assist or guide in solving ones problems or making right decisions. This can be achieved by being genuinely friendly and concerned.



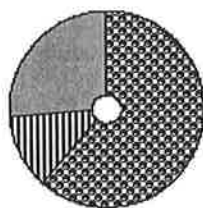
What one needs today is to live with a free mind, more than many accomplishments. To live with a free mind, one needs love.

Science cannot intervene with the love shared by a husband and wife. True love does not notice shortcomings.

Love and respect within the family blended with understanding has the strength to resolve any conflict. Love must be experienced within the walls of a home before reaching into society. Let us strive to make a better world beginning with our family.

### **Maddumage**

**No. of Clients  
who visit the Counselling Centre  
data - (3 month period)**



-  **Family Problems**
-  **Seeking Employment**
-  **Other**

# Peer Counselling

## for students

WDC conducted a pilot programme in 5 selected schools. The aim was to train grade 9 (nine ) students as peer counsellors. The reason for this was because we realized that children found it easier to confide in their friends, and it is often through them that they come to the teacher. Hence, we decided to select 5 Schools in Kandy, so that the children could be trained to help their peers. In selecting the schools, we included private schools so that we could really assess the progress of the project. The trainees are being monitored every month for 6 months before starting the next programme.

It was encouraging to note that one of the schools (Trinity College) had subsequently conducted a training course for peer groups in their school, and also established a Student Counsellors Association, which is functioning successfully. We are happy that this could be a role model for schools all over Sri Lanka.

We are glad that the Education Department too has included Peer Counselling in their new curriculum.

# STUDENT COUNSELLORS

Today in this competitive world, we find that people face many frustrations. This has spread to every walk of life, especially family life, as mothers go out of home for employment. The children have to face numerous problems. Mothers are forced to go in search of work to meet their financial needs. This has resulted in the children being neglected, and their needs and problems being increased.

The worst problem is when mothers seek work in foreign countries, leaving the children in the care of grandparents or relatives who do not know the problems the children have to face. Some children even have to face cruelty and sexual harassment, at times leading to suicide, as they have no one to confide in.

*In the past few years, the officers of the Women's Development Centre who work among women have noticed these problems. As a means of providing solutions, the Women's Development Centre has set up a Counselling Centre. Further, they have extended this concept to schools, where student groups help to counsel their schoolmates who face such situations.*



For the first time in Sri Lanka, six schools have been selected in the Kandy District and thirty-two children have been trained as student counsellors. We have seen the success of this system. The student counsellors requested for refresher/awareness sessions on a regular basis. Therefore, they meet once a month for discussions and additional knowledge on the subject. They share their experiences and discuss problems they encounter when handling their school peers. These student counsellors have also been taken to Counselling Centres outside school where they meet persons who have various psychological problems. They spent two days involving themselves in various activities. They were sensitive and got an understanding of human problems and situations. We are pleased to observe that children who were shy and reserved at the initial training sessions, have formed groups and developed their leadership skills, expression of ideas etc. The school authorities have commended these children's role in the respective schools. The fundamental message we grasp from these discussions is that children throughout the society are burdened today because they do not receive love, recognition, appreciation at home or school.

**Indika Abeysekera**



The main focus of the resource centre is empowerment of women through dissemination of information and knowledge. We believe that this information is vital to women in the society in their daily lives, to face challenges in of economic, social and political spheres.

This information is also an asset to the future planning and improvement of the centre. Further, as a mother a woman whose awareness is rich and developed will improve the quality of her family life and the society as well.

The 'Kantha' magazine (women) published quarterly, is an effort in this direction, and we expect the grass root level women and children to be educated and be informed of their needs and capabilities.

The April edition focused on Elimination of Child Labour, while the August edition was on Women's participation in the peace process.

This magazine is distributed to women's groups at grass roots level, NGOs, schools, government organisations etc. Although women in the villages have enriching experiences and information they have not developed the skills in reading and writing. Hence, this is also to encourage them in this activity. The centre acts as a library for researchers and students; it also collects and compiles newspaper articles on subjects such as abuse of women and children, health, environment etc. for the benefit of readers.

We involve our centre in media activities. One such instance was the puppetry workshop and training programme which was initiated as an alternative media focus. The participants presented a puppet show displaying the skills they had acquired at the workshop. A follow-up of the puppetry workshop was conducted to review the participants work.

In November 2002 we conducted a residential workshop on Women, Media, Peace and Reconciliation. Media personnel of the main stream and other women media activists participated in this workshop. The role of women in the peace process, the media depiction of the women in the war situation, and impact of war on women and the lives of common man was taken up for discussion. A follow-up was conducted after three months when opportunities were widened for inter relations among media personnel and activists.

Further, the resource was actively involved in the peer counselling programme conducted by WDC. This programme was successful and the importance of sharing knowledge and experience among children was evident.

We are engaged in conducting a survey and analysis of our clients at the Haragama Crisis Centre, 1995-2001). In addition, an appraisal or evaluation is being conducted on the people's views of women's participation and contribution in the peace process (with the assistance of the Curtin University volunteers). The survey covers people of various communities and regions.

*Indika Abeysekara*



**Sybil Wettasinghe - one of Sri Lanka's most  
eminent authors of children's books  
and Emma White a lecturer  
from Curtin University - Australia**



**Anoma Rajakaruna - an award  
winning television/ film personality  
at the media workshop**



**SECRETARY -  
MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS (CENTRAL PROVINCE)  
BEING WELCOMED  
AT THE HILL COUNTRY FORUM - KANTHA MELA**



**Taking books  
For their school resource centre**



**Loading the equipment  
for the libraries and counselling centres  
in schools**

## Workshop on Women, Media, Peace and Reconciliation

This workshop on Women, Media, Peace and Reconciliation was held in Colombo from 22-24 November 2002 conducted by the Women Development Centre, Kandy sponsored by the World Association of Christian Communication. Majority Women media personnel and women network leaders working with the Women's Development Centre participated. The programme was conducted in Sinhala with translation provided in Tamil medium.

The civil war raged for 20 years between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. Now they seek a political solution to iron out the major differences that has an ethnic dimension. However, the impact of war was felt not only by the government and the LTTE.

The total nation suffered as a result of the war. The war created an irreversible nature to the socio-economic and political lives of people in Sri Lanka.

Peace means different things to different people. For those who have lived in welfare camps being moved from one to another, with little freedom of movement, battling to earn a living amidst many odds, peace means living without fear, freedom to move about without being subjected to harassment at check-points or within family, send their children to school under stable condition as well as with substantial means of income and stability where they can go back to their own villages and start life again side-by-side with other ethnic groups inter-depending on one another.

All in all, the war has left a challenging position for women. The women in the North survived the many traumas of war and the aftermath and the women in the south who had to solve problems arising as a result of either being wives, mothers or daughters of soldiers in the army. The women serving either as government soldiers or as LTTE cadres were another group. Women wished for peace so that their families would be safe. Women have peace rallies both in the north and south, and rallies against children being conscripted in war. There have been Women

lead NGOs who have been quietly campaigning to create better understanding within various ethnic communities of north and south. However, in official peace negotiations, women remain invisible.

The media had failed to portray human life. The role that the media played was in providing the nation with number of killings on both sides or of artillery used or lost. If the media had played its rightful role, the hatred between the various communities would not have been sharpened, as it exists now.

Due to this situation Women's Development Centre (WDC) decided to facilitate a workshop on 'Women, Media, Peace and Reconciliation'. WDC being a member of Asian Women Network in Communication (ANWIC) made it possible to decide on this theme. We therefore appreciate the facilitation process of ANWIC in obtaining necessary funding from World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) for the workshop held in November 2002.

Ms. Anoma Rajakaruna, the key resource person introduced the objectives of the workshop while Ms. Annie Kurian facilitated to even out the expectations of participants as well as 'getting to know each other'.

Introducing WDC and its role in the peace process, Ms. Pearl Stephen said that WDC is happy to have organised this workshop. For WDC, the workshop had a special significance, because, we believe in the gigantic role the media can play in the issue of peace.

**Overall Objective:**

Media personnel from both mainstream and alternative media to share information with sensitivity towards the peace process, paying attention to the role they played in the past and the important role that they bear towards reconciliation of the nation.

**Specific Objectives:**

- Identify the different dimensions of impact of war on women
- Analyze information that the public receive in the recent times regarding peace, reconciliation and other ethnic issues and its possible impact on different ethnic communities
- Analyze how the role of women in peace and reconciliation are portrayed through media
- Identify the positive and the developmental role the media could play in the reconciliation process
- Identify the role the women's group can play to utilize media to promote peace.
- Discussion on an action plan and follow-up activities

**The expectations:**

The participants expressed the following expectations from the workshop:

- Acquire knowledge related to workshop objectives
- Share experiences
- Develop a network with practitioners
- Find out the role of media to support who are in forefront of peace & reconciliation
- Develop a media network
- To become sensitive on how to use media in the peace process
- Identify the role and limitation of women in the peace process
- Develop knowledge and skill in conflict resolution



Minister of Rehabilitation  
at the  
Media Workshop

Participants at  
the Workshop  
on  
Women, Media and Reconciliation



A NETWORK MEETING



**Vavuniya**  
**A dance presentation**  
**by the Sinhala girls**



**Young drummers**  
**of the Hanguranketha youth group**  
**Welcoming the guests**



**RAJARATA FORUM**  
**YOUNG GIRLS SINGING**  
**A SONG OF WELCOME**

## Workshop on Creative Writing

*The workshop was held in February 2003, at the Haragama Centre of the Women's Development Centre.*

The specific objective of this exercise was to help children cultivate creative thinking and writing, thereby guiding them to make the world a beautiful place to live in.

With the advent of television, children have gradually drifted away from reading, creative thinking and writing. Children are being enforced to grapple with competitive exams such as Grade 5 scholarship and are losing their childhood, with less time to play in their own imaginative world. The participants were selected from our children's clubs (schools and village level).

Our resource person was the Ms. Sybil Wettasinghe. She is a world renowned author of children's books with her own imaginative childlike paintings. She has over 50 years experience winning awards in our own country and abroad, with her Sinhala books being translated into almost 13 different languages.

Ms. Wettasinghe spoke of her childhood and said that these fantasies embedded in her mind was a source of ideas and knowledge in her literary life. She highlighted this to illustrate that to be creative one needed to draw on one's experiences. She illuminated morals and lessons from many of her books.

She called upon the children to relate their childhood experiences that had made an impact in their lives. Initially, though the children were hesitant in expressing themselves, gradually each one shared their experiences. The children were asked to write these into stories and later illustrate them in pictures or paintings. The material was supplied.

Ms. Wettasinghe collected all their creations selected a few exemplary stories and discussed them.

On the second day, she followed the same method of getting the children to share their experiences.

Some presented even two or three situations. Most of these stories were unique to each child's village background and upbringing. Some recited poems, sang songs and traditional rhythmic poems.

When requested to write on an imaginative topic (pencil), children responded successfully to this assignment. Each presentation varied from another, and was of good quality.

One called the pencil a designer, another mentioned that it gave protection, a helper and one said that the pencil was a most valuable object to be purchased cheaply.

Later in the day the children were assigned to paint on a theme of their choice, with the material being provided. After they finished, each one was called to explain their creation.

The children were thankful to the Women's Development Centre for providing them an excellent opportunity to develop their skills and talents. Some of them had already decided to pursue a career in writing or painting.



WDC's Community Dev. Unit works with women and children at grassroots level. The CD programmes play a major role in the WDC's activities to prevent violence against women and children and to disseminate its vision and objectives to the community.

In this cause, various and diverse activities have been outlined and coordinated by WDC to serve the community. The Networking Programme reaches out to women; island wide, the School and Environment Programme focuses on children, the Community Health Programme educates and creates awareness among the village community on health and nutrition, the Resource Centre endeavours

to encourage a creative (intellectual) study of society and promote dialogue within the community.

The activities of our women's forums are designed to train the skills of women, in order to empower them to identify the role of women, their rights and duties in this present socio-economic scenario.

The Children's Programme aims to establish the role of a child in the adult world, promote the rights of a child, personality building and moral values. A child who is a member of the children's clubs in the schools or village or in the environment groups is able to forge ahead in life with personality.

I consider it a privilege to be able to serve at WDC, contributing to these programmes, which empower women and children.

The expertise and skills I acquired at the Women's Studies Training Programme has been a source of knowledge and foundation for me in the implementation of the Community Dev. Programmes. This Training Programme was held at the Ecumenical Centre for Dialogue, Colombo, from February 1<sup>st</sup> to April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003. This was conducted by the Pakistan Institute for Women's Studies in association with the Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka.

The objective of the Training Course was to create awareness among the participants about the status

of women in the regional, social, economical and political settings of South Asia, and also to engage in discussion, with an analytical view of the different situations.

The participants were women officers working in Women's Organisations, from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Thus, there was an enriching exchange of ideas and experience of the status of women, in the cultural, social and political backdrop of these countries.

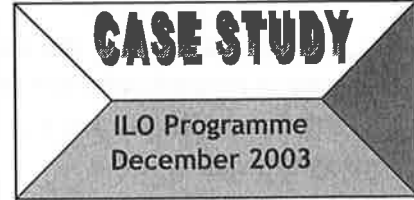
In addition, an investigative approach was adopted in discussing male chauvinism, theoretical views of its existence and the revival movement, which emerged in the 1960s.

The discussions focussed on these views and ideas, with regard to the status of women in these countries as of today, looking for solutions and the implementation of these decisions.

I look forward to apply these experiences in the future programmes and activities of WDC, as relevant.

**Chandratilaka**

**This programme focused on the prevention of Child Labour, and one of the highlights was the distribution of schoolbooks and uniforms to children. This was conducted at the WDC premises in Kandy.**



Thakshila Vidyalaya (school) is located in the small village of Mahaiyawa, in Kandy. Children from this school also recipients of this programme. Gayathri studies in Thakshila school in Year 6 class. Gayathri is one of 3 siblings whose mother is employed overseas. Their father has abandoned them. Only 2 children attend school while the other is dropout. Although they receive these requisites for school, these children never appear to use them. They wear dirty uniforms. On inquiring into the matter from the grandmother and the principal of the school, it was revealed that, their father grabs these material from them and sells them for his liquor and narcotics.



This father appeared on one such day of distribution at the WDC. He was intoxicated and we refused to handover any material to him because usually it is taken over by the grandmother.

This is just one case study. Most of the women we work with are desperately poor and need assistance to survive. The WDC is trying to help them in alternate income generation skills and opportunities. We also provide assistance in order to help children to attend school regularly. Although school books and material for uniforms are supplied by the government they need money for other stationery such as, exercise books, pens, pencils, instrument boxes, colours etc. We also help them in tailoring their uniforms and on certain occasions, even bus fares which is issued through our school support programmes.

He returned another day in a sober mood, and I (Thilaka Nandani) took the opportunity to advice him about his behaviour. He then admitted that he sells the children's schoolbooks etc. for his illicit purposes. And went on to explain how his wife went overseas when the youngest girl was 3 years old, and has not sent any financial assistance for the family. She is supposed to have returned to SL and apparently married again living in Colombo. He claims that he became alcoholic and drug addict due to the loneliness and frustrating situation. After being reprimanded and counselled on this matter, he realised the damage he has done to his children, and in an emotional state, he agreed to change his behaviour and lifestyle. He requested us to handover the school material to the children's grandmother. A day later, the grandmother came over to do so. She also said that she concealed the truth about her son-in-law, fearing that the children will not receive their school assistance.

**Tilaka**

Our activities of the School create a rapport with the staff. The children are keenly involved in the environment programmes and the children's clubs. In September 2003, WDC Camp, where children from these schools and villages gathered. The participants were very enthusiastic about this new experience. They shared their ideas and problems, setting aside barriers and differences, creating a very lively and cheerful atmosphere.



Programme have helped WDC and students of these schools. involved in the environment children's clubs. In conducted a Children's from these schools and villages gathered. The enthusiastic about this new experience. They shared their ideas and problems, setting aside barriers and differences, creating a very lively and cheerful atmosphere.

Amidst this excitement, our attention was drawn to a young boy named Ruwan, who is a Year 10 student of Sithumina School. He preferred to spend his time alone, in a dejected mood. He purposely shunned attention. Observing this mysterious behaviour, we tried to befriend him and he began to speak out about himself and his family.

Ruwan and his sister lived with their parents. He loved to play and enjoy himself. His father was more loving and concerned towards Ruwan's sister. He always tried to find fault with Ruwan for no reason. However pleasingly Ruwan behaved his father was never satisfied. He even deprived Ruwan of schoolbooks and other basics but pampered the sister. This ill treatment made Ruwan recoil within him. He was living under severe mental pressure. In the course of conversation, Ruwan hardly mentioned his mother, and in a vague tone, he wondered if this father was his biological father.

Ruwan emphasised his feelings in the group discussions and art sessions, depicting unbiased and equal affection or parental love.

We made inquiries about Ruwan even after the Children's Camp concluded. The Principal of his school too endorsed these observations. She also mentioned that Ruwan despised girls and harassed his female classmates and schoolmates. She referred to conversations she has had with Ruwan's mother, and said that his father was not alive. His mother had acknowledged that this was Ruwan's father and he even harassed Ruwan while being bed ridden before his demise. His mother too had devoted more attention to the sister, and when the Principal inquired about this, she had mentioned that because the girl was attractive she needed protection and care.

Ruwan still suffered from his father's indifference although he was not alive. We referred Ruwan to the school counselling unit, and advised the teacher in charge to involve Ruwan in the activities of the school and the children's club. We hope that this will help to revive Ruwan's spirit.

### **School Programme Unit**

## AIDS – Prevention Programme

A few months ago, WDC together with the AIDS Prevention Unit of the Katugastota Hospital, launched an awareness programme for sex workers. Our mission is to educate them on how to protect themselves from contracting AIDS while seeking to earn a livelihood.

### Objectives

✧	Improving the health conditions of the women engaged in this profession
✧	Liberating their children from this situation
✧	Assisting the children to continue their school life and education
✧	Increasing their literacy rate
✧	Increasing awareness and educating those women who engage in this profession in secrecy or undercover
✧	Introducing them to self employment schemes or IGPs for a healthier livelihood as an alternative

In order to achieve these aims we meet with these groups monthly. The cordial relationship and conversations have helped them to gain confidence in us.

We met 23 year old 'Chitra' (*pseudonym*) at these meetings. She is an HIV infected person and had been infected while being employed as a housemaid in the Middle East.

Her mother is old and feeble having brought up the children after being widowed at a young age. Her elder brother who is married has shirked his responsibilities towards the family. She has two sisters. One is blind and older than 'Chitra'. The younger sister has abandoned her school education due to poverty. The pathetic family background and responsibilities compelled her to secure employment in the Middle East. While at her employer's she has been abused without her knowledge.

After 2 years, she returned to SL to her mother and sisters, repaired their rented house, and decided to be reemployed in the ME. It was at the medical examination required for overseas employment that Chitra was diagnosed as HIV positive. This revelation has made her search for greener pastures, a dream.



She has even considered suicide because she could not provide for her mother, blind sister and educate the younger sister. She visited the hospital for treatment secretly. The medical staff at the clinic have been compassionate and referred Chitra to us at WDC.

Our Coordinator considerably offered WDC assistance to Chitra. We had a tough task in convincing her to come over to our office. With much assurance she agreed, and met our Chairperson together with coordinator of this programme and Nursing Officer of WDC.

Initially Chitra was offered financial assistance to sustain her family's existence. She used a neighbour's machine to stitch garments from remnant material, which the younger sister collects from textile shops. Although we suggested that she follows the sewing course conducted by WDC, she has learnt the basics of sewing from a neighbour due to transport difficulties. Later, we encouraged her sewing project by donating a sewing machine. Our Coordinator instructed us to deliver the sewing machine at Chitra's home because of her financial constraints for transport.

**D Ruwanpathirana**  
(SP. Gr. Nursing Officer)

Besides, she had to embark on this project immediately to avoid her mother and sisters persuading Chitra to find employment in the Middle East once again. It was an effort to keep her health condition a secret from her family and neighbours.

On our follow-up visits, we learnt that Chitra and her younger sister have their own sewing business. Now that Chitra has overcome her fight for existence, she has to solve the problem of their rented house. The landlord has offered an ultimatum to leave the house or buy it immediately, which is impossible at present. If not solved, this problem will pose more challenges for survival, and may shatter a young and progressive life.



Batticaloa

Mobile awareness raising campaign

Arranging the Kandurata  
Stall at Vavuniya



'Rabana'  
the most popular item at all festivals





Special group of temple  
dancers resting near army



Older participants  
Amazed at the change in the country  
- Vavuniya Women's Festival -



Young and hopeful  
- looking forward to a bright



## FOOD & NUTRITION COOKERY

Happiness and contentment was written on their faces, on the day these students completed the training course in April 2003. Each one displayed the items of food prepared on their own at home.

This was proof that they had mastered the techniques that were demonstrated in the class, during the past five months. As a gesture of gratitude, they invited the staff of WDC to savour their preparations.

A few trainees paid tribute to the lessons they had learnt on nutrition; especially when planning and preparing the daily meals, for their families. They mentioned that they would not incur very high expenses during the Sinhala & Tamil New Year to be celebrated in a few days' time, because usually they buy many sweetmeats from the shop due to the lack of knowledge in preparing but now they were confident of preparing them at home, as well as tasty festive meals.

The duration of the course is five months. We conduct two training courses for the year, with one class per week. The participants are mothers and young women especially school leavers and those who expect to venture into self employment in the field of food preparation or preservation.

I met an elderly lady at a grocery store specializing in selling cake ingredients etc. A former student of the WDC cookery class had accompanied her to the store. This lady said "I have learnt a lot from your pupil", and I was delighted to note that our trainees share their knowledge with others.



### The specific objectives of this course are;

- To enlighten young mothers and young women on the need for better nutrition which will motivate them to plan, prepare and serve nutritious and economical meals for the family
- To encourage home food productions of nutritionally essential food; especially the leafy vegetables which could be used in all three meals in different forms
- To develop skills in making food items for sale to improve family income or to reduce family expenditure on purchasing certain food items

Besides cookery demonstrations, I educate them about food and nutrition as follows.

- Food, its value and functions in the body
- Nutrients, their sources and uses in the body
- Malnutrition and vulnerable groups affected by malnutrition
- Effects of malnutrition on vulnerable groups

- Causes of malnutrition and prevention
- The 3 food groups and how to plan family meals
- Nutrition for pregnancy and nursing mothers
- Nutritious food for infants and preschool children

To make the lessons more interesting and effective we use simple visual aids and demonstrate one-pot meals for the infant and preschool child. Furthermore, the trainees were briefed on the relationship of proper food preparation to nutrient conservation desirable cooking practices and tips on food economy and food stuff. They were given lessons and practical classes in food preparation and preservation.

In May 2003, we registered a group of 30 trainees. There are 7 undergraduates and 1 nurse. Seventeen of them are unmarried, and mothers.

In 2003, we started cookery lessons at the Haragama Crisis Centre, once a week. Mothers and young girls at the centre seem to be very interested in the programme. When time permits I brief the mothers on the importance of breast feeding of their babies and also weaning foods.

Anita assists me at the WDC sessions and Priyanka helps me at the Crisis Centre. I am happy to mention that their able assistance helps me to execute the programme successfully.

***Kumari Dissanayake***

# Kantha Mela

## International Women's Day

Vavuniya 2003

There is an atmosphere of festivity in the month of March at WDC! Especially this year, people felt free to travel because the road to the North had been opened after

the signing of the MOU. WDC had opened a branch office in Vavuniya to cater to the people in the Vavuniya District. It was decided that the main Women's Day Celebrations would be held in Vavuniya. Many of the women in the forums had not gone beyond Anuradhapura, and they all wanted to attend the celebrations, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. Programme planning spanned two months and was an activity for the NGO consortium. Part of the programme cost was undertaken by the UNDP, who also provided T-shirts for 'all'. The major part of the expenses was borne by WDC. It was fortunate that we had a large budget for this programme so that we could accommodate all who wished to participate in this event.

Although the 'peace process' has commenced, there are many issues that need to be addressed. The WDC has no affiliation to any political party and work only with women. To avoid problems we decided not to hoist either the Sri Lankan or LTTE flag but only the WDC flag. This part of the ceremony was held at the WDC office before the procession lead by the women workers on bicycles, moved to the Urban Council Hall where the celebration was held. Participants from other forums gathered at the clock tower with their banners and joined the procession wearing T-shirts given by UNDP.

This was the first time a large Women's Day programme was being held in Vavuniya, and the girls' schools wanted to participate. As a result, the Vavuniya group of the procession was lead by the school bands. It was a very colourful procession. Special cultural dances, which were unique to the North and India was a treat to the people from the South who had never seen them before! The Tamil musicians and 'horse dances' and 'kalagam' added colour and dignity to the Tamils who so far have been treated as a minority. The women from the forums appreciated and marvelled at the performance of the Tamil groups.



The forum groups from Batticaloa, Akkaraipattu, Kekirawa, Hanguranketha Hill Country and WDC had come in 8 buses, carrying fifty to sixty women in

each bus. For most of them, this was their first visit to Vavuniya, and maybe the last. The local people watched the procession in amazement, as they had never seen a large group of over 2000 women of diverse cultures, costumes and colours, in one place!! The WDC and forum section of the procession was lead by the Rajarata dancers. It really was a show of strength that these grassroots women came in their numbers to demonstrate their solidarity with the women of Vavuniya. It was also interesting to note that a large number of men joined the programme. While the long procession was coming into the grounds, the women from the Hill Country Forum played the 'rabana', a traditional drum, which is used to announce a joyous occasion. It was new to Vavuniya and many people stopped on the road to watch!

An exhibition was also scheduled after the programme. The crowd was so large that a part of the participants was inside the hall while the rest were outside in the grounds. Hence, it was not possible to follow the programme as planned. The WDC expected a sale and exhibition of products made by women but the Vavuniya Consortium misunderstood this idea and had stalls depicting the work done in the North. It was interesting to meet the only woman de-miner in Sri Lanka. She was invited to inaugurate the exhibition. One of the day's events was to honour 4 women from the different communities who had achieved something. We decided to honour the woman de-miner as she was a woman of achievement.

The exhibition had stalls from the WDC vocational training centre. The Kandy forum members too had stalls and were able to sell their products.

Batticaloa, Rajarata and Kandy forums performed different items. There were several items from the Vavuniya group.

### **Batticaloa, 10<sup>th</sup> March**

The programme in Batticaloa, was planned very well. The procession was led by women in trishaws relaying problems faced by women in society through an amplifier (loudspeaker).



It was a manageable crowd and all forums participated. The members of the network were welcomed traditionally by a 'pottu' and the atmosphere was very friendly. The main Women's Day programme last year was held in Batticaloa. It is pleasing to note that Batticaloa has matured, able to plan and carry on their activities.

**Patha Hewaheta**  
15<sup>th</sup> March 2003

*This was the first time they decided to conduct a Women's Day celebration, which was held at the Haragama Training Centre.*

*It was a simple programme where the priests from the area had been invited to talk to the women. There were other special guests from the Provincial Council. This programme was purely the forum members' effort. The event was followed by a sale. The group consists of both Sinhala and Tamil speaking women. Members of the Hill Country and Hanguranketha forums participated in the programme.*

**Hanguranketha**  
22nd March 2003

*They conducted the Women's Day celebrations for the first time, they had made an effort to involve the entire community in the programme*

*Hanguranketha is steeped in history, with rich cultural traditions. It is also where the Tooth Relic was kept earlier. Several artistes of the silver screen hail from this part of the country. Therefore, it was a surprise to view so many dance forms we did not know existed in this region.*



**Hill Country Forum, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2003**

*The programme was held at the Kandyan Arts & Cultural Centre. Representatives from all other forums participated in the event. The chief guest was the Director of the Women's Bureau. Each group from the national network performed various items. The special feature was the participation of all the clients of the Crisis Centre. They too performed, and the dance group was thrilled to dance in their new costumes. Until now, they always borrowed costumes from the Kekirawa dancing class.*

### ***Rajarata, 6th April***

*The programme was held at the Cultural Centre. The Rajarata groups performed several cultural items. The Rajarata women are very tough and active. They honoured an enterprising young woman who has only one hand. She sews and runs a tailoring shop, employing 3 others. She seemed so accomplished and confident, a challenge to other women. The programme was followed by an exhibition of work done by the women.*

### ***WDF - Akkaraipattu 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003***

*The venue for their Women's Day programme was the Cultural Centre at Akkaraipattu. Here too all other forums were represented.*

*Some items presented and performances were of very good standard.*

*The experience of participating at each other's programmes was interesting and also tiring. We have been travelling around from the first weekend of March till the first weekend of April. It was a very rich experience.*

*This will not be done next year, as we will not have the finances for such an elaborate series of programmes. Next year, we hope to have the main programme or celebrations in Kandy where all forums would participate, and the forum groups will organise their own local programmes.*



# National Women's Network

We have had several meetings of the Network and conducted programmes on Trust Building, Conflict Resolution, Leadership, Suicides, Reporting etc: This year each forum had their own Women's Day Celebrations which was attended by the other forum members.

The main focus for 2003/4 is on food security as there are warnings of severe drought and food shortage in the future. The World Food Programme is promoting special projects on Food Security. The WDC decided to have a programme with this aim to ensure food security by researching into cultural and traditional food practices. With this objective in mind, we decided to conduct the quarterly meetings of the network as 'mini food fairs' starting with the Kandy forum. This group produced about 30 varieties of dishes prepared with fruits, cereals, vegetables and edible leaves.



Items like avacado, custard apple, that are normally eaten when ripe were tastily cooked. The idea is that you look for palatable and tasty ways of cooking, so that you can eat the same vegetable everyday without monotony. This programme was a success, and we look forward to three other 'mini food fairs' culminating in a Food Fair and Exhibition in March 2004.

For the past two years the WDC was engaged in a variety of activities through networking. Factors that prompted the WDC to enter into networking enhance and strengthen the concept are a) Prevention of violence against women and children b) Safeguard their rights c) Improve their living standards d) Team up with Tamil/ Muslim / Sinhala women together from different districts and together promote peace activities. Under this foundation, fora from Kandy Hanguranketha, Rajarata, Batticaloa, Akkaraipattu, Vauuniya network as partners.

It is noteworthy that women and children of different ethnic, religion and cultural background network in all activities and special functions. The celebration of International Women's Day is one such instance. Hidden talents of many women were evidenced in these celebrations. This in itself was a unique experience and a special lesson.

Over 600 women from different districts and divisions, crossing ethnic, religious and language barriers, participate in activities portraying their skills in social and cultural presentations and receive awards and certificates. This is an exemplary feature. Another highlight was, how they crossed age gaps through mothers and daughters on equal basis; took part in many events and brought honour to the occasion. In all these networking events the focus was on awareness building among the public. Through street dramas and puppetry training workshop etc. trainer training was done to bring out the concerns of

With regards to the media of 'street drama', it is noted that where backward communities live; especially villages in the Akkaraipattu area the street drama concept has helped them to identify the nature and remedy to their own problems.

### Network 2002 - 2003

conflict resolution  
and protection of  
child-rights,  
violation

of rights etc.

WDC recently conducted a networking evaluation and it was satisfying to note that profitable results have been achieved through the networking activities. We noted that through their Networking activities especially Akkaraipattu and Batticaloa fora have resolved conflict situations in their own office and family, It is evident that following this success, others who have problems of conflict- both women and families have begun to come to the centre and avail themselves of the conflict resolution practical solutions. The fora continue to impart awareness and methods of resolving conflicts and safeguarding child rights, to parents, teachers, school children and children's groups etc.

Through the network, fora leaders are able to observe that parents treat their children with love and concern and responsibility. Even teachers have been helped to guide their children/ students with love and concern.

## National Women's Network





PARTICIPATING TO MARK  
WORLD AIDS DAY



Staff Trip  
to Vavuniya

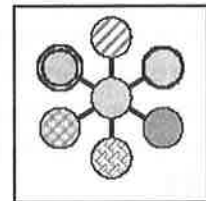


Through this the society outside is shown the inner problems in a vivid manner. In these areas the success of the street drama reformation is very evident.

Through training in project planning and writing, the network fora are also enabled to look away from the WDC for their funding needs, approach other funding agencies.

They have forwarded their project proposals to OXFAM and Care International for necessary funding, for example these network fora who receive training have written to OXFAM on the Action Programme called "Let us put away violence against women" seeking financial assistance and have been assured of funds from Oxfam. This is a considerable victory for the network. The Vavuniya WDC has provided project training to all the groups working with them. And these groups have written project proposals and submitted for funding. We consider these as a leap-forward by the people.

We cannot forget Ms. Annie Kurian who has worked with these groups (Network) as a resource person.



In April 2004, Network fora have planned to conduct a "Food Trade Fair" in the city of Kandy. Through this it is aimed to present and promote a) Clustering of culture b) Unity c) business acumen in women etc.

These women want to prove that the world food shortage problem can be overcome by women through sharing of knowledge, experimentation; in food preparation/preservation etc. We are thankful to Mrs. Pearl Stephen, the founder Coordinator of the WDC for her ready counselling and directions at all times. I am firm in my conviction that in the near future women from every part of this island will join hands and interact in these development and peace efforts without ethnic, religious or language differences.

**V. Shiyamala**

### **WDF Batticaloa Work Plan 2003**

The self employment scheme for war widows has proved to be effective. The loans given to them for home garden cultivation, and through their own initiatives on other income generation, the beneficiaries have been able to earn sufficiently and save 20% of their income, which is significant. They are able to support their children in

school for education, and other facilities. Where a 100% of the loan repayment has been possible, they are enlisted in a revolving loan fund.

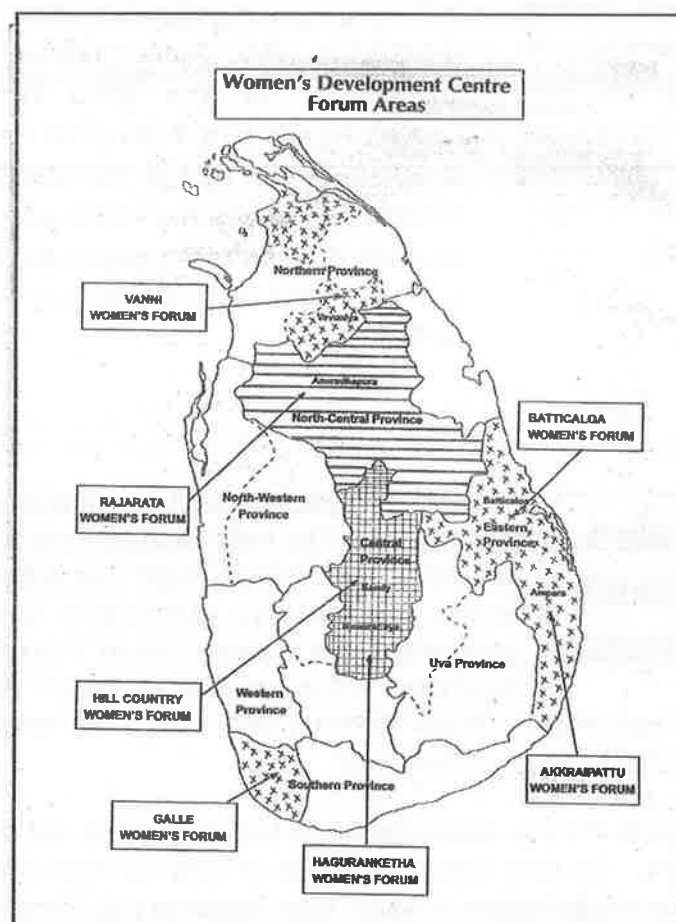
Other small loans given to the poor women for micro business, poultry and such other, have been settled upto 50%. We have noted remarkable efforts for improvement. We have conducted seminars for the prevention of liquor; improvement of public health; meeting with children who were not attending schools, and instilled urgency to send them to school.

We conduct seminars and classes enlighten them on child abuse and advise to safeguard their children. In women-headed families we help the women to strengthen their status within the community in war situations and other problems. These activities are carried out through the network once in three months.

For those who have been affected by domestic violence, we conduct support classes, with the help of the Grama Sevaka; Divisional Secretary and other officials in order to prevent such problems. On suggestions and requests of the community we have helped form a 'peoples committee' of 11 people and executive committee of 5 people to facilitate these items of work.

We have commenced this work in three villages. Following this, field officers visit families daily and collect family news and requests and, convey them to us for necessary action.

We have lately taken steps to collect contributions in 24 villages of Vavuna island area and collected a small portion of the collection. We have selected widows taking steps to programme under the World Food Foundation. We have also taken steps to encourage saving schemes in Naavakuda and Eechchantheevu villages. Further, we are conducting agricultural classes in their areas.



## **WDC Vavuniya Branch**

*The work in Vavuniya is developing speedily. We have about 26 people actively working on different programmes. The need in Vavuniya is immense especially in the area of violence against women and children.*

*The situation of internally displaced persons who are still in welfare institutions is pathetic. They have been living in these camps for several years; for the children who were born here, it is the only home they know. There is a lot of sexual abuse, alcoholism, wife battering etc. in these centres. They need counselling and guidance to improve their lives. The WDC is working closely with the UNHCR and has established two (2) drop-in centres in the camp precincts and one centre at the WDC office in Vavuniya. Our community workers who work in the welfare units and among the village community refer traumatised persons to the drop-in centres.*

*There is a need for residential care; we have identified a suitable location and are awaiting funds to build a shelter. At present, the clients are transported to Haragama which is not very practical, due to the distance.*

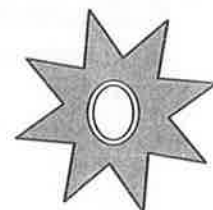
*The needs are urgent and have to be attended to immediately but we find that the funder agencies have a bureaucratic approach and do not understand the need or the urgency. A woman or child who has faced violence needs immediate attention and WDC's limited resources are stretched. Women's issues though spoken about widely are not a priority with agencies that would rather fund a short-term project with publicity than a long-term issue based programme.*

*We are grateful to institutional co-funders who have helped to build our capacity and infrastructure facilities to help us to work in long-term intervention and prevention of violence against women and children.*

Our staff officers are trained in their respective fields of work. They participate in various training programmes and workshops throughout the year, thereby strengthening their knowledge and enhancing their expertise which is an asset to WDC.

Participation in training programmes during March 2002 to March 2003

Training programmes	No. of Officers
<b>1.Training of trainers (TOT) workshops</b>	
➤ Child Rights	
➤ Leadership Building	07
➤ Local Competitive Advantage	01
➤ Monitoring and Presentation	02
<b>2.Training workshop on</b>	
➤ Organizational Development	WDC Staff 30
➤ Prevention or Trafficking	01
➤ Good Governance and Peace	03
➤ Women Media and Peace Reconciliation	07
➤ Preparation of Project Proposals and Logical Frame Work approach	02
➤ Good Policy and Practice	02
➤ Conflict Resolution	07
➤ Good Governance and Gender Budget Analysis	01
➤ Research training workshop for young social scientists	01
➤ Research and Data Analysis	03
➤ Web designing	01
➤ Creative writing	04
➤ Puppetry workshop	02
	01
<b>3.Training Course</b>	
Certificate Course on Women's studies	01
Psychotherapy and Counselling Diploma Course	03
	02



# Volunteers

Hello! and thank you for inviting me to contribute to your annual newsletter. I am a social worker from Perth Western Australia and also work at Curtin University of Technology in the Department of Social Work & Social Policy. Since coming to The Women's Development Centre (WDC) I have written several funding submissions, participated and co-facilitated workshops and programs and commenced an evaluation for WDC pouching on organizational structure with Annie Kurien, Deputy Co-coordinator WDC. I have also been very busy meeting new people and making friends!

**Emma White speaks of  
her experiences at WDC**

When I arrived in February and was introduced to the staff and clients of WDC I was overwhelmed by their commitment, hard work and creative spirit. Staying at Haragama with Pearl Stephens, Coordinator of WDC, I experienced a wonderful few months of hospitality, friendship and endless discussion on women's work for independence, women's struggles and hopes in Sri Lanka and discussed, at length, the development and work of WDC. It was a wonderful introduction and orientation to Sri Lanka and my time with WDC. This time at Haragama was also characterized by the Crisis Centre, and the young women and children that fill its walls with laughter, fears and struggles and above all strength and spirit. The young women and children shared meals, bus rides, talked, laughed and played volleyball with me for which I was grateful and enjoyed these times immensely. I think the women and children at Haragama Crisis Centre are some of the most amazingly generous, strong and spirited people that I have met in Sri Lanka and have watched them inspire those who have the privilege to meet them during my time here.

I have also experienced and observed the skill and conviction held by those at WDC who develop and implement the core programs of the Centre's work. For example; school programs, health programs, resource centre programs and media and peace programs. Outcomes of these programs have reached many communities throughout Sri Lanka and often address the needs of the most marginalized in the community with restricted budgets and minimal community support. The program's emphasis on awareness raising, education, social and economic development, empowerment, collective action, participation and program evaluation creates and recreates opportunities for long term and sustainable change for women and communities in Sri Lanka. It has been a most inspiring orientation to the work of WDC, having had the opportunity to become more familiar with the individual



programs throughout this time. I look forward to working more closely with these project groups in the coming months.

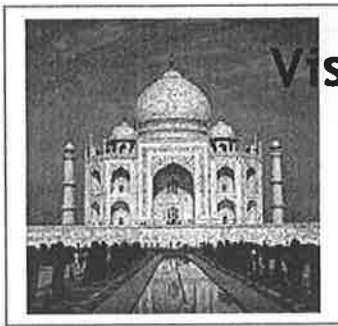
The month of March was an amazing experience. Women's Day Celebrations which are generally finished in one day in my home town of Perth, Australia continued throughout March and into the early part of April. I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in five out of six Kantha Mella Programs (Women's Day Celebrations) which took me to many different locations of Sri Lanka as far north as Vavuniya and far East as Batticaloa. The strength and energy of the National Network program was evident at all these celebrations as women of all ages embrace each others' language, skills and social, economic and political differences. The programs were filled with song dance, debate and speakers addressing the issues of violence, gender roles and women's position in the peace process.

As I reflect on my time in Sri Lanka and with WDC I am struck by the vulnerable social, economic and political position women in Sri Lanka occupy and feel saddened by the struggles ahead. I also think of all the women globally who face similar struggles and inequality and I am angered by the continued perpetuation of such abuse and injustice. As I reflect on the work of WDC and the committed women who 'make things happen' despite the economic, political and economic barriers I am certain that such injustices will not go unaddressed nor will the strength of sisterhood in the communities across the Nation be weakened and feel sure that the Vision and work of WDC will only strengthen with time.

I thank all those who have made my first four months in Sri Lanka a happy, safe and inspiring journey and look forward to the months ahead.

Best wishes!

**Emma**



## Visit to India

It was indeed an exciting and interesting visit. We visited several women's organizations which work in the sphere of empowering women.

The first visit was to HIV/AIDS project which works with sex workers. They had a group of sex workers who had been trained as peer counsellors working with several groups to prevent the spread of AIDS. India has the largest number of victims and there are several organizations working with victims, at different levels; in awareness raising, victim support, medical clinics and with families of sex workers to prevent children from following the mother's profession. This exposure has helped WDC to set up a similar programme in Kandy.

The next highlight of our visit was to AREDS, another organization working to empower women. They mobilize women into groups training them in various skills to help them in income generation activities. The women were involved in sewing garments, patchwork embroidery, flower making etc. The women contributed Rs.10/- a week as their savings and Rs.5/- monthly to the common fund of the group.

We also visited the 'Sthree Seva Mandir' which is the oldest women's organization that has a large network of women and outlets. They had weaving, handicrafts and also an engineering section. WDC groups have visited them during the past exposure visits.

We also visited some new programmes for the disabled. Victims of AIDS it was good and interesting experience to women in Tamil Nadu and interacted with them.

**Hema**

## Community Based Rehabilitation

### **PUNCHI SURANGANAWI** (*Little Fairy*)

Universal Children's Day observed on October 1<sup>st</sup> declared by the United Nations provides an opportunity to citizens of the world to focus on children.

Ulapane Centre managed by the CBR Unit of the Women's Development Centre, commemorated this special day. The aim of the programme was to offer children who did not have exposure to the world outside, a variation from the regular monotonous life and activities.

We organized an outing for our children to view the children's film 'Punchi Suranganawi' on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003. Sixteen (16) children along with their parents and two teachers went to the Midland Cinema in Nawalapitiya to view the film.

The children were very excited but calm and not distractive. Even the 3 children with behavioural impairments stayed calm and enjoyed the film. The parents too realized that these children needed such exposure since they have never been taken out to such places. The film had an essential message, in that giving attention to even a 'special' child could improve the child's behaviour and

thus produce a useful citizen to the society. This was an eye opener for the parents.

The expenses for travel and tickets to the cinema were borne by the parents. We are pleased that we were able to give these children the time of a lifetime as the children and their parents were thoroughly satisfied with this experience.

We also commemorated the 'Children's Day' at CBR centre Kandy at Deiyannawela Ground on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2002. All the disabled children were taken to the grounds.

There were several activities for these children including interaction, games, and other events. 57 children, 29 parents and 14 teachers participated in the programme. Gifts were distributed to the winners of the games and chocolates were distributed to every child. It also served as an awareness program for parents about the 'International Children's Day'.

## Poson Pilgrimage

The children of the Menikhinne CBR Centre participated in an outing to the Thapovana temple in Kandy and thereafter an excursion to the Udawattekele Forest Reserve. The objective of this tour was to introduce some variety to the regular solitaire routine activities of the children coming to the centre/school and to ease the burden on the families' financial difficulty and cultural restrictions.

Leaving the centre at 9.30 a. m. we reached the temple at 10.15 a.m. First, we worshipped at the temple then we trekked to the forest having obtained the necessary tickets.

Twelve children with one parent each along with four teachers formed the group.

When we had walked about 5 miles, we noticed colourful birds chirping on the trees, and a few varieties of primates. The children were able to identify certain trees, birds and plants. Children were delighted at the sight. We had our lunch in this natural surrounding and proceeded to the bus stand at about 2.00 p.m. Everyone enjoyed the change, although we walked 5 miles, none of us felt tired or exhausted.

## Familiarising customs and Integration of special needs children in schools

This programme was conducted with many objectives in mind. Introducing traditional customs, working together with normal children in a competitive situation and identifying the hidden talents of the children were some of them.

The parents took the responsibility of arranging to distribute small gifts and refreshments to the children. The primary school students from the nearby school also took part in the programme.

Twenty children from the CBR unit along with two from the integrated section and fourteen children with special needs joined thirty five normal children to participate in this event. Our objectives were achieved when we witnessed the children interact with each other without any discrimination whatsoever, with regard to the special needs children.

## CBR centre at Mailapitiya

The Samurdhi Officer of the Mailapitiya division of Patha Hewaheta Divisional Secretariat came across many disabled persons who needed help and guidance in the area. She requested the CBR workers of the Ududeniya centre to initiate a programme to rehabilitate and support the disabled persons in the Mailapitiya area. Following a discussion with the Samurdhi officers we obtained a list of all disabled persons already identified in the divisions for assessment.

Ms. Anoma presented this list to our Coordinator and requested that a clinic be conducted. The clinic was organised in August 2002, at the Mailapitiya school, to identify disabled persons and their needs. The Samurdhi officers made a great effort in conducting this clinic.

Forty two children and adults were identified and assessed on this day. Many children to be rehabilitated were selected and the Samurdhi officer agreed to assist us to set up a CBR centre. The premises was located and a new centre was inaugurated at a modest ceremony, with the participation of Divisional Secretary, Provincial Council MO, Principal of the school and Coordinator

and staff of WDC. The disabled persons and their families participated with enthusiasm and expectations in this new endeavour.

The children had 3 sessions a week, and were categorised into groups such as, hearing levels, intellectual capacities and other physical impairments. Five adults received physiotherapy at home. Field visits were conducted on Thursdays, which helped us to learn about their family and living conditions. Most children were from low income families who could not provide the with basic school work material.

Some children have been referred to various clinics at the hospital and to vocational training centres. Two adults referred to the Dept. of Social Services received housing grants, and another adult secured employment at a garment factory in the area. We record with pleasure the progress of this new CBR centre at Mailapitiya which is located in a remote area working under trying conditions.

## International Disabled Day



The CBR unit of Kandy Women's Development Centre organised a walk to commemorate the International Disabled Day in December 2002. The participants comprised 94 disabled children with 91 parents, 43 staff members along with 90 disabled persons from community centres. They carried banners and placards to educate the public as well as create awareness among them on disability and related issues. The Police assisted us with traffic arrangements. The participants were served with refreshments.

● Bread for the World	<b>Acknowledgements</b>
● Diakonia	
● Hivos	
● Kindernothilfe	
● Terre des Hommes	
● Church of Scotland	
● ILO	
● UNICEF	
● UNHCR	
● OXFAM (UK)	
● WACC	
● Ms. Helena and Ms. Jean	
● Save the Children Fund (UK)	
● Rev. Tony Foreman	
● Dept. of Non Formal Education	
● Dept. of Social Services	
● Ingrid Neuman	
● CARE	
● LINKS OVERSEAS	
● Dept. of Education	
● Dept. of Probation & Childcare	
● and many others who have helped us financially and in kind	

**COVER PAGE**

*A souvenir presented to WDC by Volunteers  
from Curtin University, Australia*







## Women's Development Centre

61, Mulgampola Road, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Tel/ fax : + 94 81 2234511, Email : wdc@slt.lk, Web : [www.womendev.org](http://www.womendev.org)