



CAL NEWSLETTER

"A future of well-being, value and equality for every child, everywhere."

Transforming Lives

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Feature Column



Head of People and Culture



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Championing Women

Championing the cause and rights of women is one of CAL's core values. CAL is committed to ensuring that women are protected, given a voice and empowered to transform their own lives and communities in which they live. Advocating the cause of women is purposefully weaved into CAL's strategies and initiatives. At every CDC awareness programme, skill trainings, sanitary napkin distributions, protection efforts, counseling and various other initiatives are carried out for the purpose of defending and empowering women.

CAL has also made it a priority within its organizational structure to exemplify and demonstrate its commitment towards the cause of women. Intentionally creating a family-friendly work culture, CAL's employees are qualified to thrive in both family and professional responsibilities. CAL has adopted Work-Life Balance initiatives and policies that empower women in the organization to excel in their roles as mothers and wives, while contributing positively towards the betterment of society through their professional aspirations.

From making provision for female staff members to take no-pay breaks for extended periods of time, to offering flexible working hours, work-from-home privileges (whenever necessary), and to offering up to 84 days of parental leave for mothers, CAL has determined to be an exemplary standard of empowering women to succeed. CAL also offers free counseling services to ensure that women in the organization cope well in the midst of their numerous commitments. Change of job roles, workplaces and responsibilities are also accommodated to maintain work-life balance for its staff members.

Mrs. Menoiji Kalupahana, Head of People & Culture at CAL, shares her experience of how CAL's family-centric structure has enabled her to thrive:

"Working with CAL has been an incredibly empowering experience for me as a working mother. When I first joined the organization, I was concerned about balancing my career aspirations with my responsibilities at home. However, CAL's supportive work culture and family-friendly policies have made it possible for me to successfully manage both aspects of my life.

One of the most significant ways in which CAL has supported me as a working mother is through its flexible work arrangements. The option to work remotely and adjust my schedule as needed has been invaluable in allowing me to attend school events, doctor's appointments and other family commitments without sacrificing my professional responsibilities. This flexibility has not only reduced my stress levels but has also enabled me to be present and actively get involved in my child's life. Knowing that CAL values my role as a mother and offers resources to support me in that role has been incredibly reassuring.

Overall, working with CAL has not only empowered me to pursue my professional goals but has also enabled me to thrive as a mother. I am grateful for the support and opportunities provided by CAL, which have allowed me to successfully navigate the challenges of balancing work and family life while flourishing in both domains."

1.

HOPE GARDEN PROJECT



In response to the economic crisis that shook Sri Lanka with its ripple effects in 2022, CAL was determined to create sustainable avenues for the provision of healthy and nourishing meals to the children in our care. With the timely support of KidzNet Asia, a longstanding partner of CAL, the Hope Garden Project was launched, with the aim of establishing vegetable gardens at every Child Development Centre that would sustainably supply our children with nourishing fresh produce.

The Hope Garden project became not only a means of nourishment, but also an avenue through which children, families and whole communities could take ownership and responsibility to maintain healthy and sustainable food resources. With the joint partnership of the children at our CDCs, parents and members of the community, these vegetable gardens are being cultivated. Fruits and vegetables such as tapioca, broad beans, sweet potato, banana and brinjal were planted and every garden was painstakingly tended.

Poultry rearing projects were also established at two of our CDCs and their surrounding communities. Chickens, ducks and guinea fowl were purchased and bred which, in turn, yielded a supply of meat and organic eggs that are being served to the children at our Centres.

At our Batticaloa CDC alone, 47kgs of vegetables were harvested over a period. The vegetables were incorporated into meals that children were served with, and excess vegetables were then sold to the members of the community, generating a profit of Rs. 10,500, which was greatly celebrated by the staff and children at the Centre.

The Hope Garden Project has since grown and evolved, impacting not only our children, but also the communities, meeting some of CAL's primary targets - health & nutrition, community ownership and sustainable practices.



2.

SPORTS @ CAL

CAL is committed to the development of the whole child. CAL seeks out varied strategies to fulfill its mission to educate, nourish and protect children.

Organized sport has many physical, developmental, psychological and social benefits for children. Engaging in sports and recreational activities also helps children learn to control their emotions and channel negative feelings in a positive way, enabling them to build resilience and self-confidence.



The right to play and recreation is also included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, further solidifying CAL's commitment to providing facilities and opportunities for our children to engage in sports and recreational activities at our Centres.

Currently, CAL offers a selection of programs in which our children can participate. These include training on Cricket, Karate, Chess, Badminton, Swimming and Cycling.

Since launching our sports and recreational initiatives, we have received positive and encouraging responses from the children at our Centres. We have observed our young ones enthusiastically engage in activities. Our initiatives have enabled us to identify the skills, potential and leadership capacities that many of our children possess. Charting the progress of several children who have continuously excelled in their sports, we have provided opportunities for them to train with district-level sports clubs.

Sports and recreation activities have become an innovative means of "Transforming Lives" at CAL.

3.

IT @ CAL

CAL is committed to preparing children and youth to thrive in an increasingly tech-driven world.

Children from street-connected communities have little or no access to facilities and opportunities to engage with technology, leaving them ill-equipped to confront and meet the technological demands of the world around them. CAL recognizes that at present day, the ICT knowledge largely contributes towards securing gainful employment, which further contributes towards the breaking of poverty cycles that many of our children contend with.

As such, we have made it a priority to provide children with access to IT facilities and the necessary skills to engage with technology.



Children at a number of our CDCs are provided with Information & Communication Technology (ICT) classes, equipping them with basic computer skills. As part of our Youth Skills programme, the youth at our Centres are also offered courses that provide certification in computer studies, boosting their competency and contributing towards wider and increasingly positive career options.

Over the last 6 months, 32 youth completed basic IT courses, graduating with certificates of achievement. 4 of our centres offer full-fledged IT Laboratories with multiple computer terminals and IT Education instructors to equip our children with essential tech skills.

“I love coming to the centre because I get to learn ICT here, which I am not taught at my school,” quipped Thusharan*, a Grade 6 student from the Kandy CDC.

CAL is continually committed to “Transforming Lives”, offering resources and employable education to nurture future-ready citizens.



*name has been changed for privacy

4.

LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

CAL is committed to raising up leaders who are equipped with the expertise, character and knowledge to lead well, creating positive change in society. As part of its leadership-training initiatives, 30 children and youth at the Colombo CDC, aged between 13 years and 19 years, embarked on a 4-day leadership training programme.

Conducted by one of CAL's volunteers, this programme was launched with three specific goals: introducing leadership skills, emphasizing teamwork and personality development. The interactive and game-based schedule also served as an attractive and engaging means through which participants could explore and pick up essential leadership skills.

At the end of the 4-day training, the CDC's staff remarked on witnessing significant progress in the participants of the programme. They highlighted a heightened sense of discipline, compliance and collaboration among the participants. The CDC's staff also identified specific individuals who possessed outstanding leadership qualities and others who revealed hidden skills, talents, interests and abilities during the course of the programme.

Initiatives such as these, transform perspectives and mindsets, paving the way for the transforming of lives.



5.

MOBILE SCHOOL

Educating children goes beyond the confines of a school. We have realized that, for children belonging to street-connected communities, education often has to be presented in diverse forms, adapting to the circumstances and infrastructure that these children live within.

The Mobile School programme has enabled CAL to achieve its mission to educate children by offering a non-formal and exclusive means of learning outside of the traditional classroom. The Mobile School programme, founded in 2002 in Belgium, is a learning experience that is powered by a 6-meter long, 2-sided blackboard box on 4 wheels, with expandable tables on which educational boards can be attached. The 300+ educational boards utilized with this tool include activities on subjects such as literacy, mathematics, health education and emotional intelligence.

In 2019, the Mobile School programme, with its flexible and mobile equipment, was launched in Sri Lanka by CAL, taking learning into the most rural and poverty-stricken communities in Kandy, where there are high incidences of school drop outs, drug addiction and illiteracy.

In 2022, the Mobile School shifted to Nuwara Eliya, targeting estate sector communities. Records indicate that approximately 4% of the child population in these communities do not attend school and about 27% are irregular attendees. Consequently, these children, who often have illiterate parents, underperform in government examinations.

Since its inception in Sri Lanka, the impact of the Mobile School has been massive, reaching 4150 children in 5 districts.

Currently, the Mobile School operates in 2 areas of Nuwara Eliya, reaching a total of 223 children, aged between 2 years and 17 years.

Over the first quarter of 2024, Satellite Centres were also established to further boost the impact of the Mobile School programme. Satellite Centres reach children who do not have access to our Child Development Centres, exclusively offering primary and essential services to the neediest children who face threats that compromise their well-being. These include children in need of support to continue their education, as well as those who are malnourished or suffering from various illnesses. Currently, 209 children have been registered at Satellite Centres.



The Mobile School programme, aided by Satellite Centres, has been a resounding success, drawing both school-going children and school drop outs. Every session has become a space not just for learning, but of instilling good habits, discipline and also a space to play and have fun together.

Over the year 2023, 1541 children were impacted by the Mobile School in 6 different locations. The Mobile School programme is set to expand its reach in the coming year, taking education to the most unreached areas and “Transforming lives”.

Here is the account of Guna*, who has been impacted by the Mobile School:

Guna, exhibiting signs of having special needs, was also a slow learner and, consequently, dropped out of school. However, his keen interest in Mathematics and proficiency in managing Mobile School activities caused him to stand out among other children in the programme. In the absence of formal education, Guna spent his days either working in a small vegetable plot belonging to his family or selling vegetables along the Kandy-Nuwara Eliya road.

At one of the Mobile School sessions, the CAL team observed Guna being bullied by other boys, threatening him and pressuring him to give them the money he had earned. Further investigation into the situation revealed that these older boys were constantly bullying and extorting money from Guna to support their unhealthy habits. The CAL team intervened swiftly, getting in touch with the Principal of the school which Guna had previously attended. Highlighting the risk of abuse, exploitation and drug exposure that Guna was facing, we collaborated with the school Principal and re-enrolled Guna into the school, thus removing Guna from a highly vulnerable and toxic environment.

Guna is thankful for the CAL team’s efforts not only to educate, but also to create a safe environment in which children can thrive. The CAL team is persistently defending the rights of children to education, health and protection.





6.

TEP

CAL is driven to creating a sustainable change and provide solutions to the challenges that plague low-income communities in Sri Lanka. Teacher shortages in rural education zones have become an urgent issue with both short and long-term consequences. The Teacher Education Programme (TEP) was envisioned as a sustainable answer to alleviate and, over time, eradicate teacher shortages. This vision-driven programme would equip young adults with the passion, knowledge and skills they would require to not only meet the demands of the situation, but also to transform school learning cultures that would impact whole communities.

Currently, 9 dedicated and talented young adults have been selected as recipients of the programme after a rigorous selection process. These young women and man are currently undergoing intensive training which will refine their perspectives on education inequities and equip them with the capacity to identify solutions that will create sustainable change.



The TEP enlightens its participants on education inequity and the intersectional factors that contribute towards these inequities. The programme also highlights the need for adopting effective teaching strategies that would appeal to all learners and the importance of holistic teaching methods. The TEP also empowers its participants to explore their self-identity and their roles as teachers & leaders.

Participants of the TEP have responded with passion and resolve. Through a broader understanding that they have gained of the crisis and its effect on their communities, they are determined to be trained not just as teachers and educators but also as agents of change and transformation.





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The Impact of Donations

Your donation gives our children hope for the future by ensuring that their nutritional and health requirements are met and their primary and higher educational journeys are supported. It also enables protection from violence and abuse and the empowerment of girls & women. Children are the starting point in breaking the cycle of poverty and your donation will help make this a reality.

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