

## **VACD Australia Chairman's Annual Report to the VACD Boards** **2017/2018**

**” Although the world is full of suffering,  
It is full also of the overcoming of it”**

**- Helen Keller -**

Dear VACD family and colleagues,

### **OUR VISION, MISSION & VALUES**

#### **Our Goal?**

VACD's goal is to enrich the lives of children with disabilities in some of the poorest provinces of Sri Lanka by alleviating the challenges relating to their physical and intellectual impairments by providing them with suitable skills, facilities and infrastructure that will help them lead independent, productive and fulfilling lives.

#### **What we do?**

To help these children achieve their aspirations and potential, we provide their parents with training and guidance to endure with the challenges of caring for their children. Our VACD centre is designed to provide the children with disabilities with special education, life skills, vocational skills, computer literacy, as well as music and dance training. VACD also sponsors and equips health clinics at local hospitals to facilitate regular check-ups, therapy and rehabilitation services. This enables the children to become valuable citizens and be accepted by their local communities.

#### **How we achieve our mission?**

To accomplish this mission; we establish VACD centres and engage with local communities, religious groups, businesses, government and medical authorities and through discussion, awareness programs and workshops strive to eliminate poverty, myths, ignorance, discrimination, social isolation, vilification, incest and sexual abuse etc. while promulgating and encouraging communities to value, uphold and respect the rights of children with disabilities.

## **OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

### **Wheelchair Camp**

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017 Dr Gopi Kumar Kitnasamy (Chartered Physiotherapist at Durdans Hospital Colombo & Founder of Cerebral Palsy Lanka Foundation) and his team of 9 specialists in physiotherapy, speech therapy, parental care of children with disabilities especially in feeding, sleep and posture, conducted a Wheelchair Camp at the Bandarawela Town Hall. 300 carers and children with disabilities attended, and were provided with training for the carers, while the children were assessed, treated and where suitable given free wheelchairs.



### **Establishment of VACD USA**

VACD USA was established with a team of experienced and dedicated members. The link to the VACD USA webpage is: <https://vacdusa.org/>

### **Celebration of UN's International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017 a crowd of nearly 300 VACD families, friends and supporters, for the first time ever marched through the Bandarawela city centre led by the school band from Seevali Navodya Maha Vidyalaya, Bandarawela to mark the above, and to highlight and raise public awareness of the plight of children with disabilities in the region and the need for local community love, compassion and support.



## **VACD FINANCIALS:**

### **VACD Financials & Administrative Expenses:**

The financial position of VACD improved significantly as at end of the financial year 2017/18 primarily due to donations received for our outreach/expansion programs. The mix between sponsorship funds and donated funds improved from 53% in donations, 46% towards EAP & 1% Misc. during the 2016/17 financial year to 65% in donations, 34% towards EAP & 1% Misc. as at the end of the 2017/18 financial year. The VACD financial position as it stands now provides a 2-year known expenditure cover that is recommended by the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC) to be held in reserve by charities such as ours.

Administrative expenses at our Bandarawela centre have since been reduced significantly to an all-time low as follows: 2015/2016 - 13%, 2016/2017 - 9% & 2017/2018 - 3% due to the diligence and painstaking efforts of the new VACD Sri Lanka leadership team to eliminate unproductive expenses.

The 2017/18 financials can be found via the following link on the VACD webpage:

[http://vacd.org.au/images/Docs/VACD%20Ltd%20Financial%20Statement%20for%20FY%202017 2018.pdf](http://vacd.org.au/images/Docs/VACD%20Ltd%20Financial%20Statement%20for%20FY%202017%202018.pdf)

### **HOW WE USED OUR FUNDS:**

- Ensuring that promising VACD registered children or their siblings who were in danger of missing out on schooling due to financial constraints continued with their education by giving them allowances for educational expenses under the Educational Assistance Program (EAP);
- Providing life skills training, computer literacy training, music and dance training, training in craft work, providing opportunities for physical, social interaction and medical and health attention to our VACD registered children;
- Funding travel and accommodation expenses for children needing attention in specialist hospitals outside the local areas and for hearing and optical aids etc.;
- Facilitating instructions in crafts and leadership skills to parents of VACD children;
- Providing employment at the VACD centre for two teachers, office administrator, music and dance instructor, craft instructor and caretaker;
- Providing nutritious meals to children who attend the centre in Bandarawela;
- Providing suitable premises to house the centre for daily activities of the children;
- Hosting and organising the Wheelchair Camp, Procession to mark the UN's International Day of Persons with Disabilities and cultural, religious and social events for the VACD children and their families;

## **Education Assistance Program – (EAP):**

<b>VACD- Educational Assistance Program (EAP) Quarterly Statistics &amp; Analysis - 2018</b>								
Class/Grade	Male	Female	Total	Number Showing Good Progress	Number Showing Steady Progress	Number Not showing Progress	Comments and Observations	Action Plan
3	0	1	1	1	0	0	Good progress	—
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—
6	1	3	4	2	2	0	Good & Steady Progress	2 require supervision
7	4	4	8	2	6	0	Good & Steady Progress	6 require supervision
8	4	1	5	1	4	0	Good & Steady Progress	4 require supervision
9	3	2	5	2	2	1	Good & Steady Progress	2 require supervision & 1 needs monitoring
10	6	3	9	3	4	2	Good & Steady Progress	4 require supervision & 2 need monitoring
11	6	5	11	2	7	2	Good & Steady Progress	7 require supervision & 2 need monitoring
12	3	3	6	6	0	0	Good progress	—
13	2	1	3	2	1	0	Good & Steady Progress	one needs supervision
Higher Education	2	2	4	4	0	0	Good progress	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>		

The total number of children receiving EAP sponsorship assistance at the time of reporting were 56 with total sponsorships numbering 79. The number of EAP recipients has declined as children over the age of 18 have since left our fold but will be replaced by new recipients once potential candidates are carefully and diligently vetted and chosen by our leadership team and the VACD parents' committee.

## **NEW INITIATIVES**

### **Family Assistance Program (FAP)**

As some VACD families requested financial assistance because they are overwhelmed with their struggle to make ends meet, we decided to implement this program under which a sponsor may pay \$20 per month which will be paid directly into the beneficiary family's bank account. VACD's executive team in Sri Lanka and the parents' Finance & Budgeting Committee will vet each request for assistance to ensure only those families below a pre-determined income will be entitled to receive this allowance. Mrs. Preethi De Silva (AuSLMAT) was the first sponsor under this initiative.

### **Opening new VACD centres:**

The present VACD centre in Bandarawela will be re-located by late February 2019 when the current 3-year lease runs out. The leadership team in Sri Lanka are looking for a suitable building to house our centre that will be named "Sir Robert Clark Centre for Children with Disabilities" in recognition and appreciation of the significant financial and moral support given to us by his son Mr. William. R.H. Clark, since the inception of VACD.

The local leadership team are also looking to rent/lease suitable property to establish the next VACD centre in the township of Welimada as early as possible because there are a significant number of known children with disabilities in that region. This centre will be

named “Dora Jean Centre for Children with Disabilities” in recognition of the substantial financial support and guidance provided to VACD by Mr. Greg Fendler – VACD Board member and his family and Mr. Frank Fendler – VACD USA Board member for his counselling and guidance since the inception of VACD. Ms Dora Jean is the younger sibling of Mr. Greg Fendler.

Once the Welimada centre is fully established and functioning well, we will concentrate our efforts towards opening a centre in the township of Badulla.

### **COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP NEWS:**

#### **Cerebral Palsy Lanka Foundation:**

Dr Gopi Kumar Kitnasamy - (Chartered Physiotherapist Durdans Hospital Colombo & Founder Cerebral Palsy Lanka Foundation – CPLF) and VACD have formed a collaborative partnership whereby the team from CPLF will conduct homebased physiotherapy and education programs for our parents on a regular basis in Bandarawela. The establishment of this partnership with CPLF, who share our mission and vision is a great benefit to us, our children and their families.

<http://www.vacd.org.au/index.php/partners/cerebral-palsy-lanka-foundation/>

#### **Foundation of Goodness (FoG):**

FoG has established their 10<sup>th</sup> Village Heartbeat Centre in Bandarawela (photographs below), where VACD will send eligible and suitable parents and children to follow vocational training in a variety of skills while FoG will refer any children with disabilities that they encounter to VACD.

<http://www.vacd.org.au/index.php/partners/foundation-of-goodness/>





### **Australia Sri Lanka Medical Aid Team:**

Our collaborative partners the Australia Sri Lanka Medical Aid Team (AuSLMAT) completed their annual tour of Sri Lanka and made their first ever stopover in the Uva province visiting the Base hospitals of Diyatalawa and Bandarawela. Their tour report can be found on:

<https://auslmat.org/medical-missions/>



Pictured above from left: Mrs. Preethi de Silva - Diabetes Educator, Dr. Erosha Premaratne – Endocrinologist & General Physician, Dr. Amitha Sumanasekara – Assistant Secretary (Medical Services) Uva Provincial Ministry of Health, Dr. Quintus de Zylva – Cardiologist & President AuSLMAT and Dr. Leelananda Gallage – District Medical Officer Base Hospital Bandarawela. Centre: The new building at the base hospital Bandarawela and right: The present main building

### **AuSLMAT Visit to the VACD centre in Bandarawela:**

Mrs. Preethi de Silva – Diabetes Educator, Dr. Virginia De Vos – Psychiatrist and Ms. Genny Leeworthy – Banker visited the VACD centre in Bandarawela. Virginia and Genny had lived in the central hill's region of Sri Lanka, many years ago.



Left photo: Virginia, Mrs. Prabha Karunaratne (Deputy Chair VACD Sri Lanka) and Preethi. Centre photo: Preethi, Genny, Mr. Sujeewa Abeynayaka – Assistant Secretary VACD Sri Lanka, Virginia and Prabha. Right photo: Virginia, Prabha, Preethi, Genny and Sujeewa

### **AuSLMAT's initiative for the Base Hospital Bandarawela:**

AuSLMAT are working towards establishing a critically essential cardiac unit at the base hospital Bandarawela through an aid program made available by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

### **Methodist Church of Sri Lanka - MCSL:**

Our proposed collaborative partnership with the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka unfortunately did not come to fruition because we were unable to reach clear mutual consensus on the issue of VACD's monthly payment for the disused MCSL building (which VACD was intending to renovate and use to house a centre in Badulla) and the naming rights of the proposed VACD Badulla and Welimada centres. Irrespective of this outcome, we will continue to maintain cordial relations with the leadership of MCSL and hope that we could collaborate to reach our mutual goals under different circumstances sometime in the future.

### **VACD's VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Establish one in Welimada and the other in Badulla in keeping with VACD's mission to reach more children with disabilities in rural/remote areas;
- Organise vocational training for older VACD children, and suitable family members to receive training in hospitality and tourism through a program offered by Ataraxia Capital Partners, Colombo;
- Coordinate, organise and finance regular home-based therapy and rehabilitation programs for VACD children and their carers with the assistance of VACD collaborative partner Cerebral Palsy Lanka Foundation;
- Establish a Young VACD Group comprising of siblings and friends of VACD registered children who will be the leaders of our mission in the years ahead.

I wish to place on record my deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks for all the support, counselling and guidance given to me by my dynamic and ever dependable fellow VACD board members in Australia, USA and Sri Lanka and the advisory board members in the USA and Sri Lanka and for their limitless passion, drive and commitment towards our mission.

My sincere thanks to the large number of volunteers and staff at the VACD centre in Bandarawela, paediatric consultants, doctors and medical staff in the Uva region, collaborative partners, sponsors and supporters, Mr Ruvesh Viraj and his team at Litmus Communications for managing our webpage, Mr Victor Melder & Dr Harold Gunatillake for publishing regular VACD newsletters via their respective e-communication methods.

My special thanks for inspiration and strength given to me by my loving friends, former colleagues and family and most importantly, Yasmin my wife who as the administrative and communication secretary has devoted a lot of her time and energy to make our journey that began on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2011 a memorable and rewarding one.

The challenges and barriers that lay ahead of us can be overcome only with your continued support and guidance so that we fulfil our mission to make a real difference in the lives of the children with disabilities and their families we pledge to support and uplift.

Many thanks, best wishes and warm regards.

Yours in the service of those for whom we are the only hope.

Felix

***Felix Stephen***

*Chairman of the Board of Directors,*

***Volunteers to Assist Children with Disabilities Limited. Australia,  
& Member of the Advisory Boards of VACD USA & VACD Sri Lanka***

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12<sup>th</sup> September 2018