

## **VACD Australia CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL 2020/2021 REPORT to the VACD Australia Board & Fellows**

Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to present to you the annual report of our mission for the period July 2020 to June 2021. This report is of particular significance to all of us given that in five months from today, we will celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of VACD that was launched to uplift, assist, support, and rehabilitate children with congenital impairments and their families in Sri Lanka.

Let us, as a group of likeminded philanthropists remind ourselves of the true meaning and spirit of altruism as we approach this significant milestone in our journey.

### **The beginning of altruism**

Altruism is defined as the belief in or practice of selfless concern for the wellbeing of others, and is a behaviour motivated by a desire to benefit someone other than oneself for that other person's sake. It is bound up in becoming and being civilized, which anthropologist Margaret Mead identifies as the point at which altruism was born.

Years ago, Margaret Mead was asked by a student as to what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks, or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. She said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thigh bone) that had broken and then healed. She explained that in the animal kingdom if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the waterhole or hunt for food. No animal survives a broken leg long enough

for the bone to heal. However, a broken femur that had healed found at an ancient archaeological site was evidence that someone had taken the time to stay with the one who fell, had bound up the wound, had carried the person to safety and had tended the person through recovery. “Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization commenced” Mead said.

“We are at our best when we serve others with true love, compassion, dedication, and selflessness”.

### **The birth of VACD**

Back in mid-2011 while on an official visit to Sri Lanka my country of birth, I felt compelled to visit my birthplace and my alma mater St. Joseph’s College, Bandarawela. The then Vice Principal Mr. Sujeewa Abeynayaka took me on a tour of the college and to a room full of children with disabilities who had no specialist teacher, no rehabilitation program, no medical attention, and no structure to their day’s activities. In response to a plea to ‘do something’ for these children, Volunteers to Assist Children with Disabilities (VACD) was established on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2011 with 16 children suffering from congenital impairments thanks to the professional guidance, and encouragement by Dr. Kumudini Cooray – Consultant Paediatrician Base Hospital, Diyatalawa and support from the Old Boys of St Joseph’s college in Bandarawela.

Nearly 10 years later we carry on the legacy of truly enhancing the lives of children with congenital impairments in one of the most disadvantaged and impoverished provinces in Sri Lanka: Uva Province. Today, we have over 350 registered children and two VACD centres that function to capacity to serve some of them, with the third centre to be established very soon.

### **The mission of VACD is to:**

- Assist children with disabilities to achieve their dreams and aspirations by arranging rehabilitation programs, teaching life skills, numeracy & literacy, providing vocational, computer literacy, music, sports, and dance coaching, and ensuring optimal quality of life by providing regular health check-ups, physical exercise, nutritious meals, and a stable, safe, and secure space to learn, grow and socialise at our centres.
- Uplift economic, vocational, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of the lives of these children and their families in order to provide them

with an opportunity to escape the endless and vicious cycle of poverty, depression, and hopelessness.

- Help these children to be independent, useful, and valuable members of the wider community and enable them to have more rewarding, fruitful, meaningful, and fulfilling lives.
- Cultivate partnerships with individuals, other institutions both private and government to develop symbiotic relationships to gain maximum advantage for all concerned.
- Coach family members of these children and the broader community about congenital disabilities through workshops, seminars, and public events, in order to safeguard and guarantee that the rights of children with disabilities are upheld and respected which eventually would result in the eradication of rampant discrimination, community myths, superstition, social ostracism, incest, emotional and physical abuse etc.

**Recapping our Projects & programs that were designed to achieve our mission:**

- Opening VACD centres at Bandarawela and Badulla where children with disabilities gather daily to receive training in life skills, basic numeracy and literacy, music, dance, sports, medical check-ups from visiting Paediatricians and a nutritious meal.
- Children or siblings of children registered with VACD who attend mainstream schools who display an aptitude for learning being identified and given a monthly allowance to meet their educational needs under our Educational Assistance Program (EAP), thereby ensuring they persevere with their education and provide income support and stability to their families later in life.
- Families who struggle to cope financially being identified and given a monthly allowance to meet their living, medical and other expenses under our Family Assistance Program (FAP)
- Coordinating regular visits to our centres by Consultant Paediatricians to examine our children and meet with their parents. Ad hoc financial assistance is given for those requiring specialist medical attention or equipment.
- Facilitating nutritious meals to be prepared by staff and volunteer parents and served to the children daily, sometimes their only substantial meal for the day.

- Conducting annual wheelchair clinics in collaboration with our partner Dr Gopi Kitnasamy from the MJF Charitable Foundation, where children are assessed for suitability and gifted wheelchairs, physiotherapy sessions being performed on children requiring it, and parents being coached on best rehabilitation and care practices. Offering dental and optical services at these camps to children and their families.
- Recruiting and training specialist teachers to care for our VACD children with love, compassion, and commitment.

### **How we funded all our projects & programs and VACD 2020/2021 Financials**

Donors from all walks of life consisting of friends, family, ex-colleagues made it possible for VACD to finance projects and programs.

A small proportion of donations consist of those made through online donation platforms such as Good Company and Good2Give, where salary sacrifice payments are matched by employers.

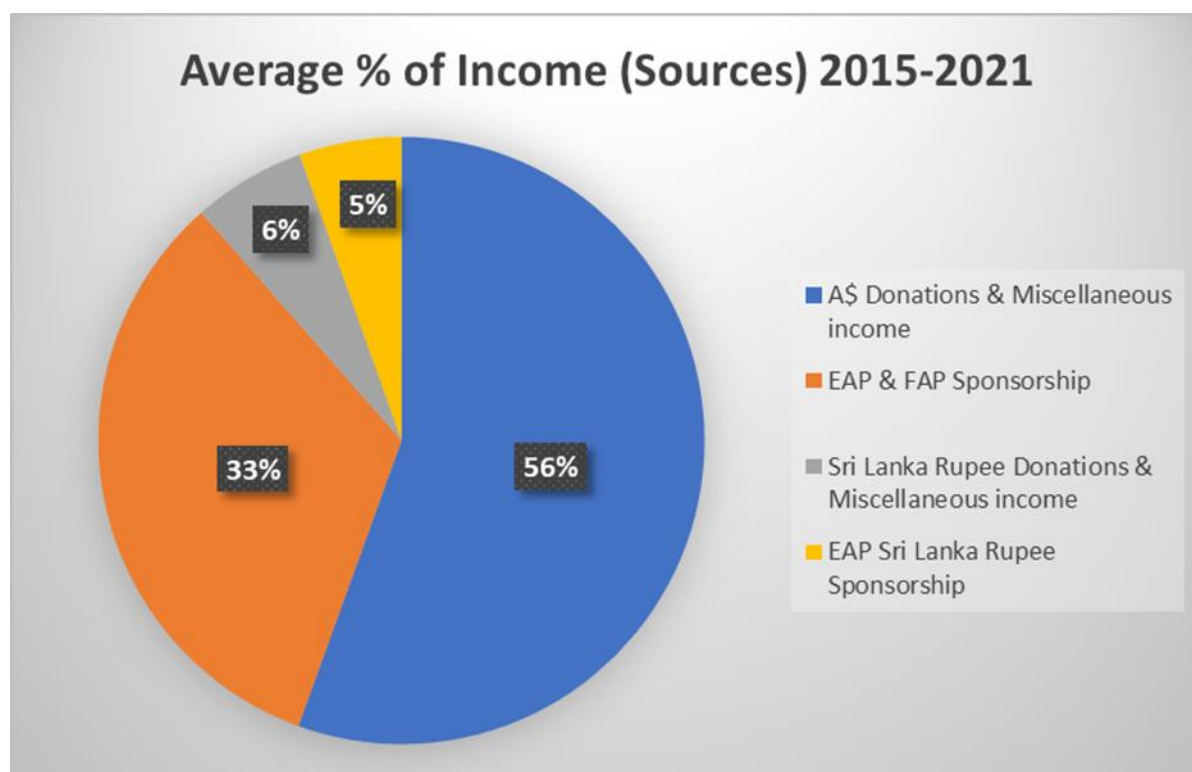
Of the monthly donations received, a significant part of it is made up of sponsors who make regular monthly donations under our EAP & FAP initiatives that are in turn paid out directly by us to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. Donations are also made specifically towards our Nutrition Program.

In response to an appeal to help finance an upgrade of the Bandarawela Hospital to help cope with the COVID pandemic, a special Board resolution was passed to fundraise for this purpose as it would have a direct positive impact on our focus beneficiaries. This appeal made in May/June 2021 met its target within a fortnight through multiple sources of global support including the donation of expensive medical equipment. We raised nearly A\$7000 towards this project. A sharp rise in donations this year is partially attributable to funds raised for the Bandarawela hospital project along with a modest rise in regular donations.

While SL Rupee donations and sponsorships have remained at previous levels, a few Australian Dollar EAP and FAP sponsors have since discontinued their sponsorships.

**INCOME & INFLOWS: 2015 to 2021:**

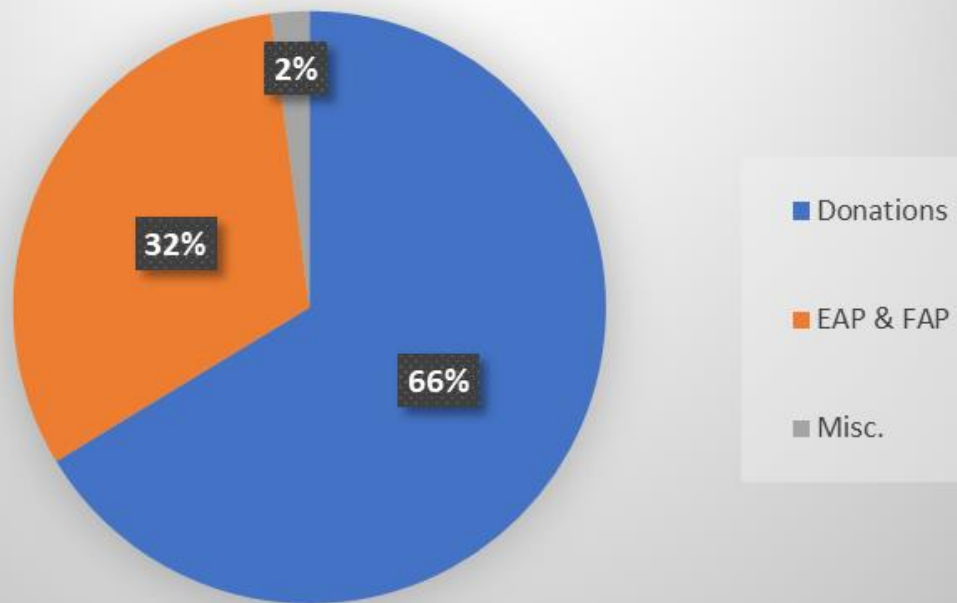
<b>INCOME - 2015 to 2021</b>	<b>Average</b>
A\$ Donations & Miscellaneous income	<b>56%</b>
EAP & FAP Sponsorship	<b>33%</b>
Sri Lanka Rupee Donations & Miscellaneous income	<b>6%</b>
EAP Sri Lanka Rupee Sponsorship	<b>5%</b>



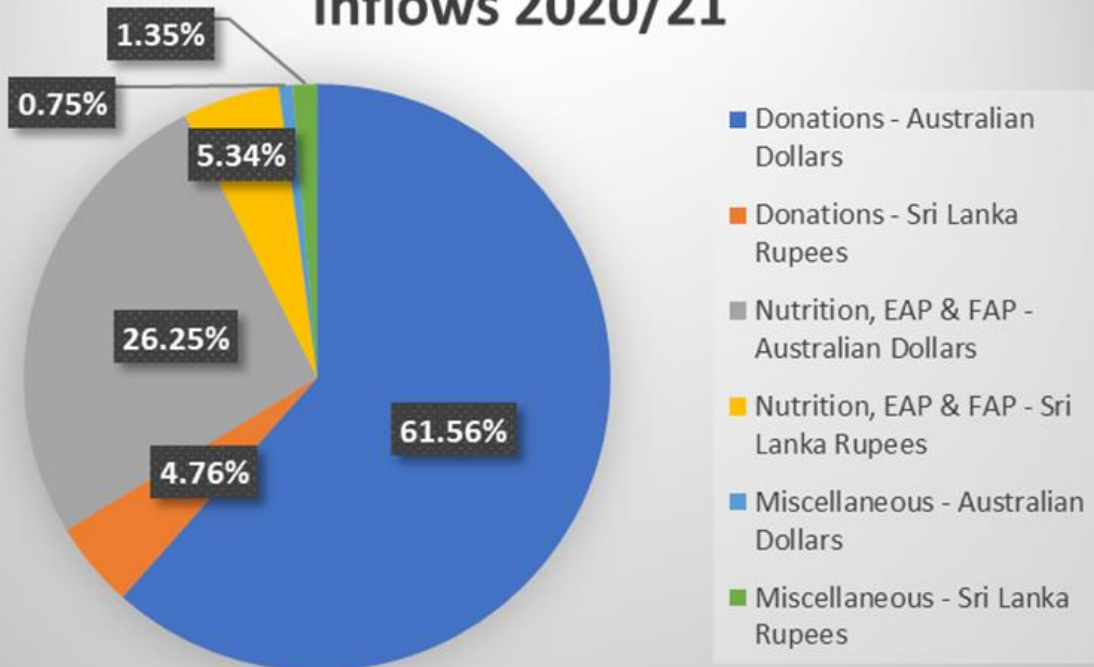
**INCOME & INFLOWS: 2020 / 2021**

<b>INCOME - 2020/2021</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>A\$ Donations &amp; Miscellaneous income</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>EAP &amp; FAP Sponsorship</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Sri Lanka Rupee Donations &amp; Miscellaneous income</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>EAP Sri Lanka Rupee Sponsorship</b>	<b>5%</b>

## Income Analysis 2020/21



## Inflows 2020/21



## EXPENDITURE & DEPLOYMENT OF FUNDS : 2015 to 2021

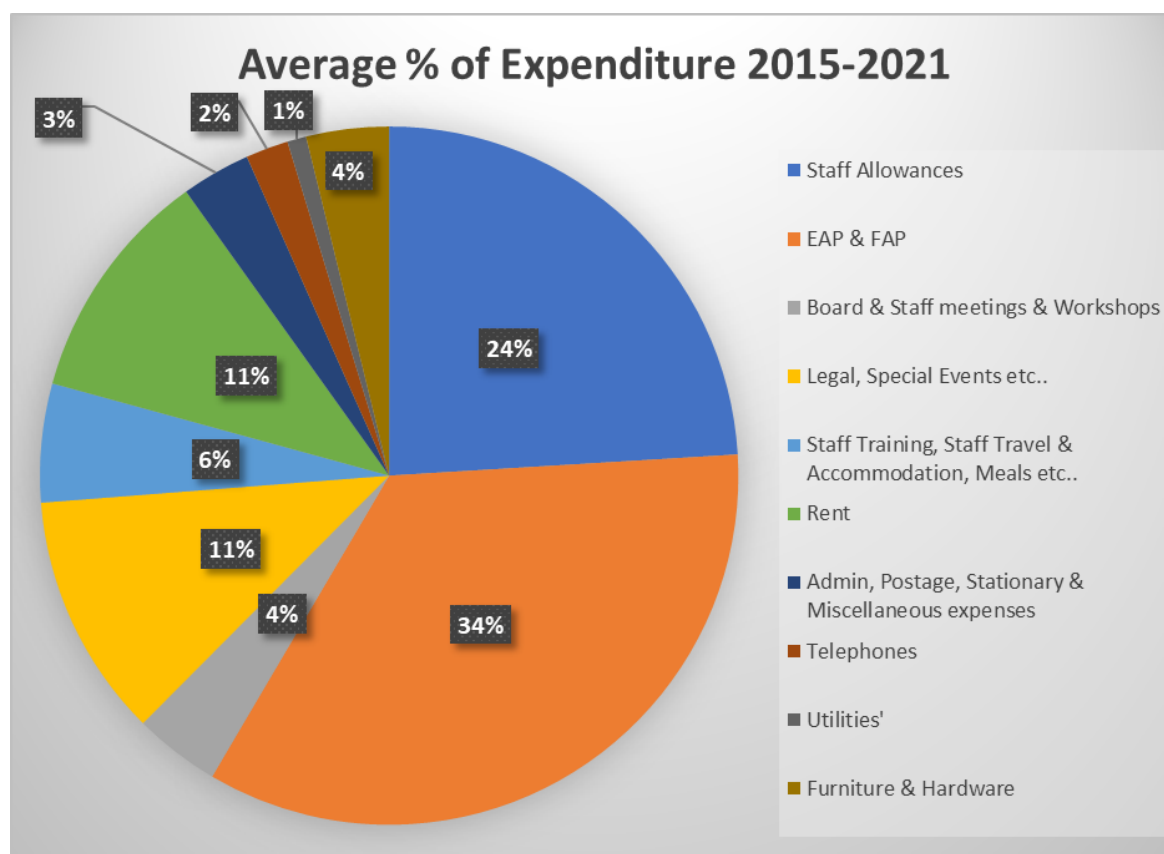
Expenditure Ratio 2015 to 2021	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Administration Expenses	13%	9%	3%	3%	1%	3%
Indirect services to beneficiaries	11%	15%	11%	10%	10%	8%
Direct services to beneficiaries	76%	76%	86%	87%	89%	89%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### EXPENDITURE RATIO ANALYSIS:

“Direct services to beneficiaries” comprise salaries and allowances paid to specialist teachers & caretakers, rent for centres, EAP, FAP and Nutrition program, medical assistance for children, camps, workshops & seminars, special events & special celebrations, travel assistance to children and parents.

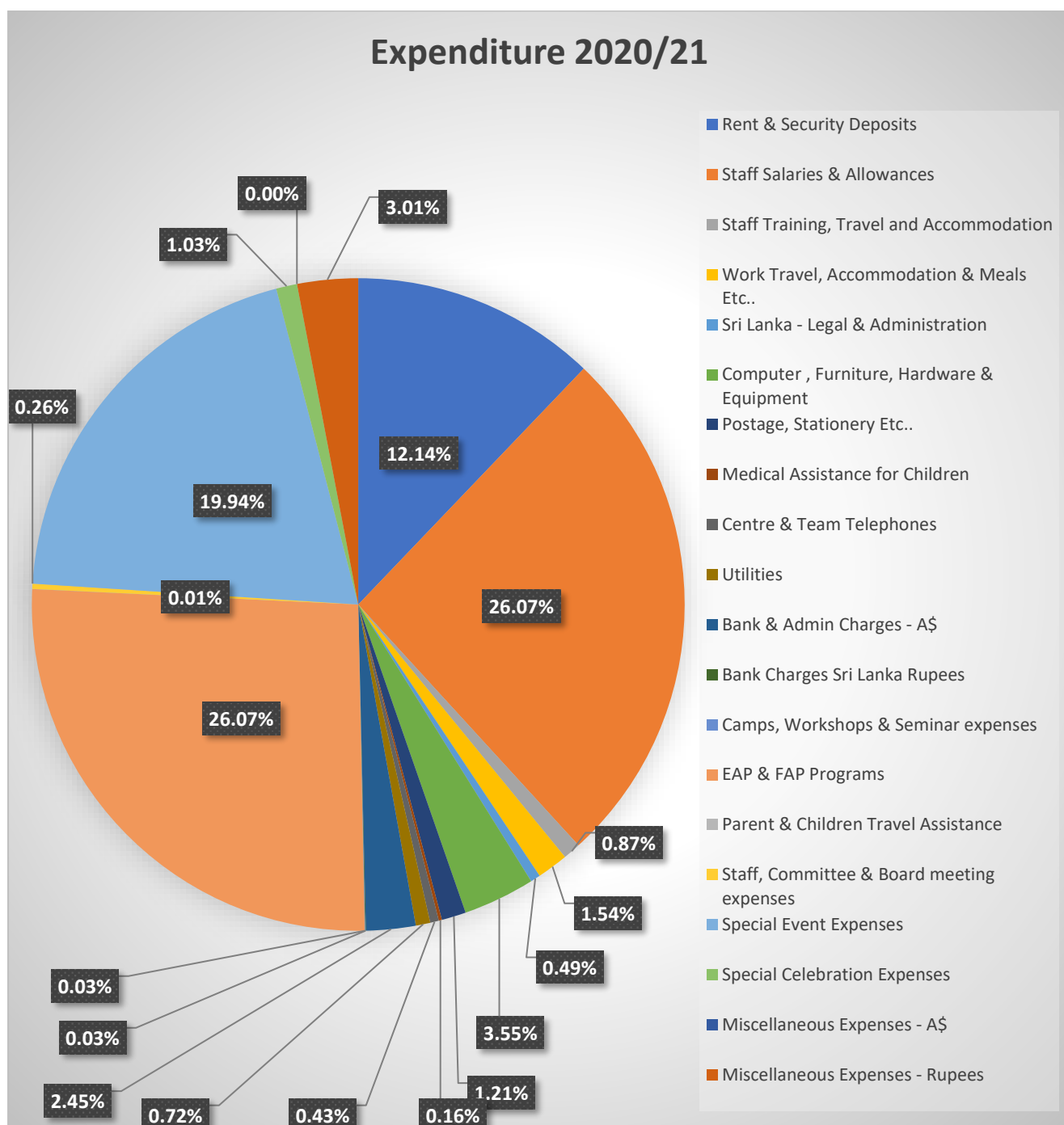
“Indirect Services to beneficiaries” comprise staff training, work travel expenses, postage, stationery, utilities, staff, committee & board meeting expenses, centre expenses & miscellaneous expenses.

“Administrative expenses” are legal expenses & bank charges and fees



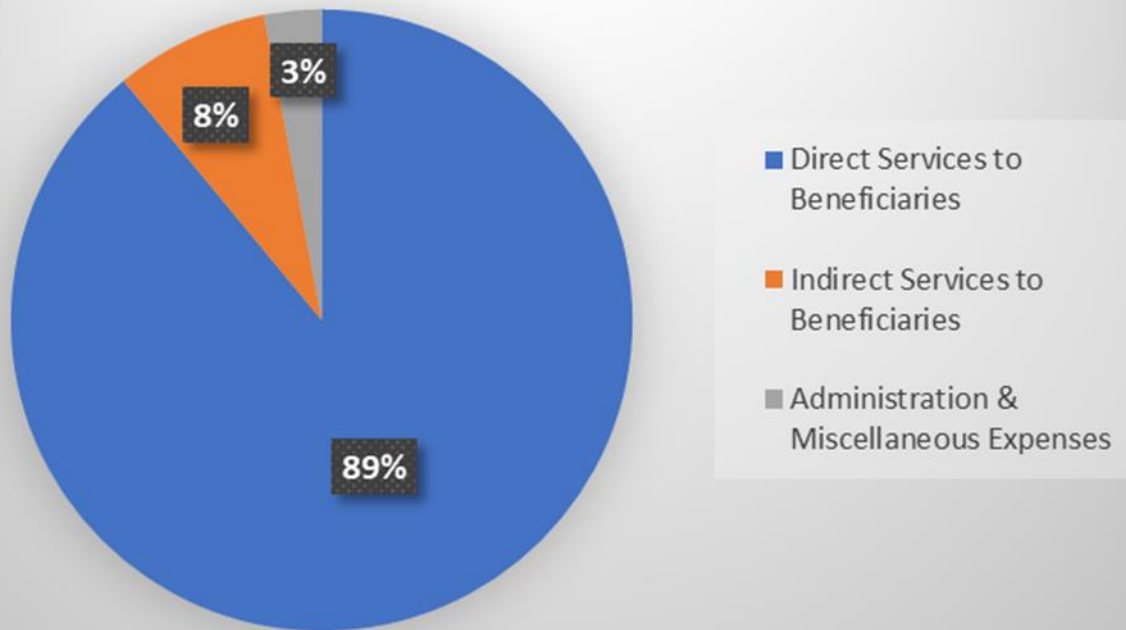
## EXPENDITURE & DEPLOYMENT OF FUNDS : 2020 / 2021

Expense Analysis 2020/2021			
Direct Services to Beneficiaries		A\$ 32,279.47	89.00%
Indirect Services to Beneficiaries		A\$ 2,912.16	8.03%
Administration & Miscellaneous Expenses		A\$ 1,078.78	2.97%
<b>Total</b>		<b>A\$ 36,270.41</b>	<b>100.0%</b>





## Expense Analysis 2020/21



### **Where were funds deployed?**

Due to our predisposition and adherence towards a policy of volunteerism where of the 141 members only 8 are paid staff, we have managed to meticulously limit our overall total expenses and reduce unproductive administrative expenses from 13% of total expenses 5 years ago to as little as 3% this past year.

Overall expenses this year remained similar to last year's levels chiefly due to the inclusion of VACD's support of the Bandarawela Hospital upgrade. We continued to pay rent for 2 centres and the payment of salaries for 8 staff, despite extended COVID19 related lockdowns. The key reason for total expenses to remain relatively subdued was the ongoing COVID pandemic that precluded us from implementing a series of our regular and specially targeted projects & programs.

The relocation of the VACD Badulla Dora Jeanne Centre to larger premises in January saw an increase in expenses relating to this move along with a higher monthly rent. This move was made as the previous centre had reached maximum capacity and the new premises being located adjacent to the Provincial General hospital in Badulla.

The eligibility of EAP and FAP beneficiaries are reviewed on a regular basis in order to ensure that policies and guidelines surrounding these initiatives are being strictly adhered to. The process of filling vacancies that arose when beneficiaries became ineligible has been slow due to the pandemic but should accelerate once conditions get back to near normal. The new intake of assistant specialist teachers is reflected in an increase in staff salaries & allowances.

### **Our achievements during the past year**

Although Sri Lanka was affected only lightly at the beginning of the pandemic, during the first quarter of 2020 Covid 19 transmissions gathered momentum and soon reached crisis levels, with the two VACD centres having to be closed for extended periods following strict local lockdowns, forcing us to temporarily stop regular programs and postpone many other new initiatives.

When lockdown restrictions were softened, the Sri Lanka leadership team together with the specialist teachers and office staff devised a syllabus and trained our new Specialist Assistant teachers, conducted written tests, and provided hands-on training for them at the Bandarawela and Badulla centres. The teachers also planned and executed a program to keep the children learning from home (see below for more details of both programs).

Despite these challenges, some programs continued as usual, and the following were achieved as at end of June 2021:

- 31 registered children with disabilities received monthly allowances under the Educational Assistance Program. The Education & Training committee together with the leadership team have reviewed and eliminated 8 applicants who no longer met the strict criteria for this allowance and are now in the process of vetting new applicants. Numbers are expected to increase further when Welimada centre opens.
- 13 families who met the eligibility criteria presently receive monthly financial assistance under the Family Assistance Program. We anticipate that there will be many more eligible applicants seeking financial assistance in the not-too-distant future.

- Up to 45 or more children with disabilities who attended our two centres received a daily nutritious meal.
- Up to 45 or more children with disabilities received basic numeracy and literacy education, computer, vocational, music, dance, and sports training in both centres.
- A two-week introductory and familiarisation training course for an intake of assistant specialist teachers was organised by VACD Sri Lanka Secretary – Retd. Col Kumarasinghe and conducted by Ms. Manjula Wijesinghe (Specialist teacher at our Dora Jeanne Centre, Badulla) and Mrs Dilka Wasanthi (Specialist teacher at the Sir. Robert Clark Centre, in Bandarawela).
- A home learning program devised by the specialist teachers, where once a week the children and their parents come to the centre to receive work to be done at home and hand in work done during the previous week was introduced.
- The re-location of Dora Jeanne Centre, Badulla to larger premises was accomplished as part of our capacity expansion drive.
- Celebration of UN World Children’s Day and other cultural and religious festivals were held in Badulla and Bandarawela as allowed during the pandemic.
- We raised funds for an upgrade of the Bandarawela Hospital to cope with Covid 19 pandemic.
- 20 National Youth Corp volunteers organised and worked together with parents to clear the grounds of Sir Robert Clark Centre in Bandarawela. This program was organized by Major General S.P.Senevirathna – Director National Youth Corps – Uva Province and overseen by drill instructor Mr. N.B.P.Manage, husband of Mrs. Shyama Chamini (teacher at the Bandarawela centre).
- The VACD Sri Lanka leadership team obtained workman’s compensation, public liability, and personal accident insurance cover for all our VACD centres, staff, visitors, buildings, contents, activities & programs etc. so as to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all concerned and the reputation of our mission that satisfies our OH&S, child protection, staff, and visitor policies.

## Our planned future programs and projects

- A key strategy of VACD over the next few years will be to reach out to parents and families who have children with congenital impairments and live in remote and impoverished regions of the province, in collaboration with the local health, social services, and medical authorities given that in most cases these families and parents do not seek professional help due to social stigma, community harassment and superstitious beliefs.

Disability	Number of Children
Impaired vision	161
Impaired Hearing & Speech	336
Physical Impairments	432
Mental disorder	125
Intellectual impairments	305
Epilepsy	147
Multiple disorders	529
Other disorders	107
<b>Total</b>	<b>2142</b>
Uva - Badulla Administrative District - Divisional Secretariats	Number of Children
Badulla	155
Bandarawela	133
Ella	241
Haldummulla	160
Hali Ela	162
Haputale	75
Kandaketiya	73
Mahiyanganaya	174
Meegahakivula	147
Passara	141
Rideemaliyadda	123
Soranathota	53
Uva Paranagama	309
Welimada	196
<b>Total</b>	<b>2142</b>
<b>Badulla Area</b>	<b>1028</b>
<b>Bandarawela Area</b>	<b>609</b>
<b>Welimada/ Uva Paranagama Area</b>	<b>505</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2142</b>

The above are official numbers in just the Badulla district. The unofficial numbers in this district alone are reported to be significantly higher.

- Opening the VACD Welimada centre to meet the needs of the higher than usual concentration of children with disabilities in this local government area. Department of Social Services data show that there are 505 children with disabilities between the ages of 5 and 20 in the Welimada/Uva Paranagama region with the unofficial number believed to be substantially higher. A search for suitable premises has been delayed by the pandemic lockdown. This centre is being sponsored by our longstanding supporters and collaborative partners Teardrop Hotels: <https://www.teardrop-hotels.com/> in Sri Lanka.
- Ensuring that all our centres are adequately equipped to comply with national and international OH&S standards by replacing existing unsuitable/second-hand furniture and equipment with: Custom built specialised desks and chairs suitable for children with congenital impairments, providing suitable physical and vocational training equipment, providing musical instruments and audiovisual equipment for dance/music training, public awareness and advocacy programs, education and training seminars, workshops for parents, families and Young VACD Club members, and health & rehabilitation clinics for children.
- Train and facilitate children and families in home gardening and small-scale agriculture, poultry, bee keeping and animal husbandry, in a sustainable and organic manner under the guidance of our collaborative partner Teardrop Hotels. This program was unfortunately interrupted due to lockdowns but will be implemented no sooner COVID restrictions are eased.
- Early Childhood Supported Playgroup Program to be facilitated by VACD Australia director Ms. Gabriella Vascotto (Bachelor Special Education, Visiting Consultant to VACD Sri Lanka, Learning Consultant Autism/Behaviour and Supported Playgroup Project Consultant for Catholic Education in Melbourne, Australia).
- Ms. Vascotto and Mrs Sabena Peterson – VACD Australia Operations & Administration Manager - (Bachelor of Applied Science, University of Sydney, Certified Practising Speech Pathologist, previously Senior Speech Pathologist with the NSW government) have both volunteered to work with Dr. Gopi Kitnasamy and his team at the MJF Charitable Foundation

centre <https://www.mjffoundation.org> in Rajagiriya , Sri Lanka via digital means .

- Our intake of six assistant teachers and 1 head teacher will be undergoing further hands-on training kindly offered free of charge by the Ayati Foundation (<https://www.ayati.lk/>) in Ragama and the National Centre for Children with Cerebral Palsy and other Developmental Disorders (<https://www.mjffoundation.org/>) in Rajagiriya.
- The employment of a suitable office administrative assistant cum Assistant specialist Teacher for the Sir Robert Clark centre in Bandarawela will be done soon to strengthen the administrative section of our operation in Sri Lanka as we expand our activities across the Uva province.

The following have very generously and kindly offered their pro bono services to us:

- Ms. Lasanthi Daskon - Attorney at Law, Deputy Director the International Foundation for Electoral Systems - Sri Lanka, Visiting Lecturer Centre for Disability Research, Excellence & Practice at the University of Colombo and visiting Lecturer, Department of Disability Studies at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Kelaniya.
- Dr. Ranil Sugathadasa - Keynote speaker on Mindset, Motivation, Transformation, Peak Performance & Happiness, and Leadership & Management Coach.
- Ms. Lakmini Balasuriya - Clinical Audiologist at Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya & Ayati Centre Ragama
- Dr. Tiraj Mendis - Consultant Paediatrician at Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka and Base Hospital Diyatalawa
- Dr. Chaminda Liyanage - Consultant Paediatrician at Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka and Base Hospital Welimada
- Mr. Kevin George - Head of Cloud & Automation at ANJN Group

- Mrs. Gaya Hapuarachchi – Public, Business, Human Resources and Management Training, International Human Resources, Advanced Promotional Practice & Marketing and Technical & Electronics Engineering
- Dr. Gopi Kitnasamy – Founder & Chairman Cerebral Palsy Lanka Foundation & Head of Rehabilitation Services at MJF Charitable Foundation.
- Mr. Asoka Walpitagama - Partner – IKAD Consultancy & Corporate Trainer – ICT and soft skills.
- Mr. Saman Rajapaksha - Country Manager - Sri Lanka at HELUKABEL GmbH, Certified Trainer, Motivational Speaker, Cricket Coach, Drug Counsellor
- Arpico Ataraxia Capital Partners - <https://www.arpico.com/> (supporters & sponsors of VACD) based in Colombo have offered to train eligible VACD children and their siblings in hospitality, travel and ticketing services and place successful candidates in various commercial enterprises for work experience and potential employment.

We deeply appreciate and value the bro-bono services extended to us by these experts and aim to hold seminars, workshops, clinics and camps for our children, their families and our young VACD club members covering a variety of valuable and relevant themes. These workshops will be tailored to meet our rehabilitation, leadership, motivation, skills, and vocational training objectives.

I deeply value and treasure the long-standing friendship that I have had with Mr. William (Will) Clark who continues to sponsor and support our Sir Robert Clark Centre for Children with Disabilities in Bandarawela, and Mr. Greg Fendler (VACD Australia Board Colleague), his wife Jenny (VACD Australia Fellow) and their family for sponsoring and supporting our Dora Jeanne centre for Children with Disabilities in Badulla.

I am deeply indebted to the VACD leadership team in Sri Lanka who continue to devote their time and resources for our humanitarian mission, practice the true spirit of altruism and share in the values of volunteerism.

My dear VACD Australia Board colleagues and Fellows: You have made my task much lighter by your dedication, commitment, and passion towards our mission. The continued support, counselling, advice, and guidance that you have extended to me over the past years has given me the strength, courage, and a strong conviction to keep pushing boundaries in order to fulfil our vision and mission for a group of vulnerable children and their families for whom we are their only hope.

The journey so far has been very challenging, bumpy, yet extremely rewarding and fulfilling given what we have collectively achieved for our VACD children, their parents, and families over the past years.

However, the journey that we embarked on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 has a long way to go. I look forward to your continued support and guidance, support from the VACD Sri Lanka leadership and the VACD USA team so that together we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of our children, their families, and their communities who we have pledged to love, support, care for, serve, uphold, and uplift.

Let me conclude my 2020/2021 annual report to you with a thought provoking saying: "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"

Many thanks, best wishes and warmest regards to you, your families and loved ones.

Sincerely yours in service.

***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***

27<sup>th</sup> July 2021