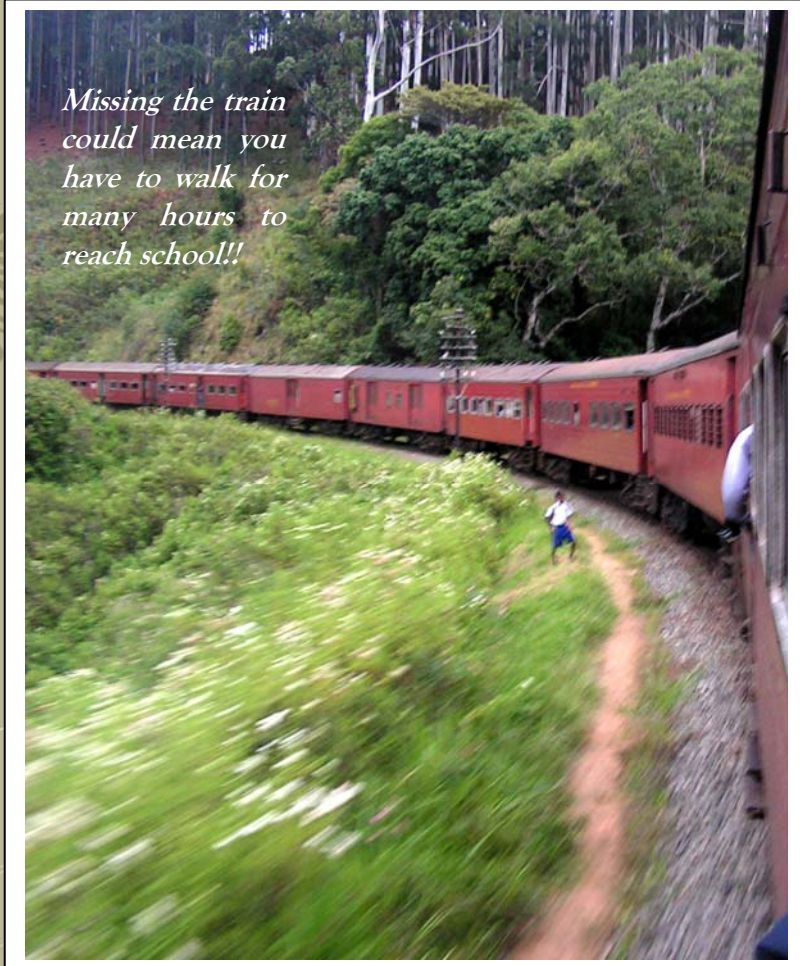


# A CHANCE

## TO REACH FOR THE STARS

The Rural Education Assistance Programme 2009 funded by Sahaya Foundation USA, aims to promote equitable access to education for some of the poorest children of Sri Lanka, the children of estate workers in the Plantation Sectors.

Administered by its local partner, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) this programme will provide small scale scholarships taking into account their performance in the face of very difficult circumstances.



### EDUCATION FOR ALL...

**Phase One- Selection Criteria** Ten children were chosen for the first stage of this scholarship programme. A number of schools which had been involved with CPA in the previous "Inter Community Student Exchange programme 2006/7" were selected. Selections were made with two main criteria in consideration - best results in Ordinary Level examinations in spite of extreme poverty and resultant challenges. In all cases these are plantation sector families living well below the poverty line, representing three provinces, Central, Uva and North Western.

The scholarship recipients were nominated by the Principal and Advanced Level Teachers of the specific subjects currently followed by the students, in each school, following which representatives of CPA visited their homes, researched their family backgrounds and further assessed their suitability.

\* (1 USD=114 LKR)

### LIVING CONDITIONS IN GENERAL

Most families have a combined family income in the range of 4000/= (that's less than USD 40/=\*)- 6000/= (USD 60/-) a month for a family of up to 6 persons.

That is far below the World Bank Poverty line for Asia of USD 1.25 per person!

In the estate sector these families live in "Line Houses" which have one room per family, and do not belong to them (and never will.) Although officially there are development initiatives and workers unions, in practice they do not possess many fundamental rights. Welfare is not attended to by the companies owning these estates.

In general children have to walk miles to school, have barely one meal a day as can be understood from the income levels, and often are expected to look after their younger siblings and sometimes face prolonged domestic violence which negatively affects their studies. They are however determined to study and get ahead in the face of these overwhelming obstacles.

### A 16 km WALK TO SCHOOL

17 year old **Master U. Vinod Kumar** studying at Badulla Sarniya Tamil Maha Vidyalaya is an orphan whose parents both died when he was younger; he grew up with his aunt who worked on an estate and has now retired due to old age. He is a bright cheerful child who studies very hard. He was also awarded the first place prize for solo drama in an All Island Cultural Competition organized by the Sri Lanka Education Department. He has to walk daily from Keenasena Estate to the Keenakale bus halt (which is 6 km away) .Then he has to travel 16 km by bus which takes more than one and a half hours. if he misses this he has to walk almost 16km to school. Lodging nearer to the school would give him more time to study .

### A SPECIAL CHILD FROM A SPECIAL SCHOOL

Ms Prashandanee aged 17 is studying at Springvalley Tamil MV District Badulla an Estate sector school which caters to children from a number of nearby estates. Notably, in the 1983 riots ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_July](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_July)) this school was completely burnt down and destroyed; Residents of the area, pushed for years to get this open again, but there was no political will. The parents in one line row, decided to sacrifice their homes and allow that row of houses to be used as a school. They agreed to live in temporary shacks so that teachers could teach. Subsequently with more push and intervention it was possible to open the school, due to the efforts of 4 local individuals who are still held in great esteem.

Ms Prashadanee's mother is elderly and unemployed and her father is an estate worker getting a salary of about 3500/= a month. She does not attend supplementary classes, but studies from the old notes of her brother and friends. She is a very disciplined child according to the School Principal. During the afternoons when she has time she teaches her neighborhood children the subjects she knows. She would like to study hard and become a teacher.

### STUDYING FROM BORROWED NOTES

Ms M Punthiamala aged 16 studies at Badulla Halealla Tamil Collage they live in Line Houses in the Rokkatanna Estate , Halealla which is a very remote area about 2 and half km from the main road, and there are no busses. The student has to walk to school every day 2 km.

Her parents divorced ten years ago. They do not have a house and the student lives with her mother in the maternal grandfather's house, with an older sister ( aged 20)and a younger brother( aged 14)who is studying in year 9.

She does not go to extra classes, as she cannot afford it, but borrows notes from other children to study. She has a high rank in class, and when selections were made for the scholarship, the other children in her class, as well as the teachers unanimously recommended her.

### A BLACKBOARD LIVING ROOM

M Krishna Kumar aged 17 studies at Passara Tamil MV in the Badulla District, a mixed school which caters to children from a number of nearby estates. In the afternoons the principal and teachers hold free classes. The teachers and principal are very dedicated to somehow educating these children. The principal has personally given accommodation to A level children at his quarters so as to provide them extra classes for the exams.

Master KrishnaKumar has two younger brothers in Year 5 and Year 8. He is studying for Advanced Level Maths. His parents are estate workers earning a combined salary of 6000/- per month. Class fees for maths are higher and for the purpose of paying these expenses his mother works at a house in Colombo. The family lives in a Line home in the estate. Noticeably this is the only house in the line with a black board – and the only furniture in this room was a table and a chair and a blackboard...

Teachers say he is one of the brightest students at school. Sometimes due to financial problems he is unable to attend school.



MS PUNITHAMALA



MASTER KRISHNAKUMAR IN THEIR LIVING ROOM

and place photo here



### **DETERMINED TO STUDY WELL**

Name: B Pradeep Nalinkanth aged 17 studies at Lunugala Shri Rama Krishna Collage in Badulla District, about 22 km from Passara.

**Family Background:** The student's father (aged 66) is a pensioned superintendent of estate, blind in one eye. His mother is also at home. The older brother (aged 20) last year sat for the A level examination and now works at a shop in Colombo due to financial problems. There is another son studying for O levels. Educational expenses such as tuition cost about 800/= a month and Bus fares roughly 500/- a month for Pradeep Nalinkanth. The principal has said he will be able to gain entrance to University ; furthermore he is very good at sports. This family lives in an old half-constructed house made from their father's pension. They do not have money to eat or to educate the children therefore they sent the other son to Colombo. Special achievements

Good results for the O levels. The principal recommends him. His past achievements are noteworthy and determination is strong.

### **9As WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF A FATHER!**

M Divya aged 17 studys at Hatton Highland Collage, Nuwaraeliya District. For facilities this is the best school in the district - this student was able to get into this school due to passing a scholarship with good results. She had earlier passed the grade 5 scholarship examinations but had not received the funds (the State requirement was that parents should be earning less than 800/- a month which it is difficult to prove)

#### **Family Background:**

For personal reasons this child is unwilling to give details about her father. She lives with mother, a single parent, in rented accomodation (Rs 2500/= a month) Her mother works in a polythene company for a salary of Rs 6300/= . Divya has a younger brother in year 7 . She is studying in the commerce stream and monthly education expenses such as transport and tuition fees cost about Rs 2000 /=. She has not been able to buy the A level subject books or other resources yet due to lack of funds. Her mother has not taken even one day leave from the workplace in case that reduces their income. Her job hours are from 6am to about 7.30pm therefore she was unavailable for interviewing.

### **STUDYING WELL IN SPITE OF GREAT DIFFICULTIES**

Name: M Vaishnavi aged 16 studies at Puliyawatte Tamil MV in the Nuwaraeliya District.

Her mother died when she was small. Her father remarried and they have another son, a younger step brother in year 2. Step mother is an estate worker. Her father is in a workers union and gets about Rs 3000 a month. The school principal and subject teachers recommended her as a bright child who is studying hard against the odds. She currently spending about 600/- on tuition and a further 500/= on bus fares per month

A very bright child in the school studying well through great difficulties

### **A BRIGHT YOUNG STAR**

Name: V Elayarajah

Age 17 studying in Norwood Tamil MV in the NuwaraEliya

Elayarajahs father was a street sweeper in Norwood Town. This child passed the O levels well but ceased going to school as the other children in his class would make fun of him about his father. The principal, who was very closely monitoring this bright child's progress, brought him back to studying by encouraging him and helping him financially too. (Subsequently his father too took up work in a different town)

His mother was previously a worker in the estate but accidentally broke her leg, had to undergo an operation and has been homebound for some time. He has an older bother and a younger brother studying for O levels. The older brother is now working in Colombo in a shop for 3000/- and cannot send any money home.



A rural school in Sri Lanka in an area difficult to access



B Pradeep Nalinkanth



M Divya



V Elayarajah



M Vaishnavi

Sahaya Foundation attempts to address the inequitable access to minimal standards of education in South Asia. Research on the subject underscores socio-economic status and region of residence as key barriers to equal educational opportunity in the region. Sahaya Foundation strives to bridge the chasm between these differentiated educational establishments employing the resources (financial, technical, instructional, material etc.) of the South Asian Diaspora.

# REAP 2009

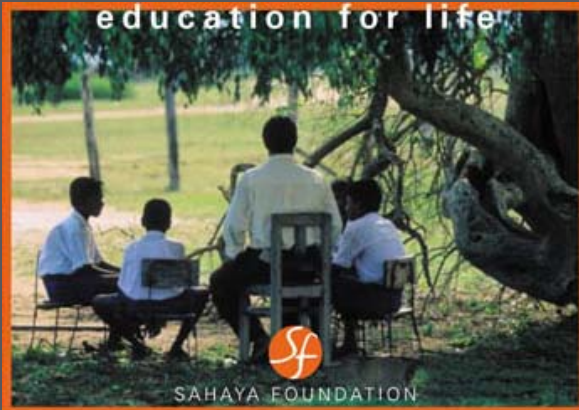
## The Concern

Statistics indicate that of the school age children in the Plantation Sector, only 58% attend up to completion of Primary Schooling and only 7% of students who pass Ordinary Level (10th grade) proceed to Advanced level studies. Less than 1% of the students who complete their Advanced Level Exam actually make it to University (less than ten a year).

Statistics of children of the ages from Grade 1-6 who are not schooling are not available. Reasons for the dropout rate are a culmination of extreme poverty, lack of awareness as to the importance of education, and lack of parental motivation. Furthermore, the schools in question do not have sufficient resources to ensure attendance

## Project Objective

To ensure student education up to Advanced Level Examinations, curbing the dropout rate at this level and facilitating deserving (as set forth in the selection criteria) students to reach University Entrance level.



## A few of the Thank You Letters

*"For this monthly amount which is helping me advance my studies, I, my relations, my teachers and my school principal all express our sincere gratitude"*

U Vinodkumar

*"Our family is very poor, this money is so important, it helps us so much. I will try my best to enter University using your generous contributions towards my studies."*

-Armugham

*"We are living in such difficulty due to poverty. It was very difficult for me to get 9 As but we were afraid wondering if we could bear the expenses of the A level. I give special thanks for your wonderful gift which made this possible"*

Divya

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