

Davis Projects for Peace Proposal
Reconciliation Through Rural School Development

Jaffna District, Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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Background Information

After a bloody civil war, which lasted for nearly 3 decades and took the lives of almost 80,000 innocent civilians and finally ended in May 2009, people in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka were left with very poor living standards. The Tamil community, which is a minority ethnic group in the densely populated Northern Province of Sri Lanka, was under the control of the insurgents widely known as L.T.T.E (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). When the war broke out, it left almost half of the Northern Province devastated. Most of the people in the Northern Province lost their parents, children, relatives, land and money they had saved for decades. Even after 4 years since the war ended, thousands of people are still missing. It is a past that every person in the north tries to forget. It was mainly the children who experienced the worst effect of this war. A significant amount of war victims were orphaned after the war and due to the psychological trauma many of them are still under huge mental stress and depression. Fortunately some trusts and organizations have taken the initiative to give these orphaned children shelter and education. The two schools, namely Sivabhoomi Arakkatalai and Muththuthambi Vidyalayam, are located in Pondawill and Thirunalveli respectively. Both of the schools are situated in the Jaffna District, Northern Province not far from each other. The Sivabhoomi Arakkatalai is a trust with 214 mentally disabled children with special needs. It is a newly built school with a plot of land bestowed to them to be developed into a playground. The trustee Aaru Thirumurugan mentioned that some students from this school have participated in the Special Olympics and have even won awards. This emphasizes the need of a well-developed playground to help them transform their special talents into great results in the future. Muththuthambi Vidyalayam is a government school residing about 200 orphaned war victims, who find it hard to study with other children due to stress and feel uncomfortable mingling with the society. This school lacks proper sanitary facilities, which exposes them to many health risks. Also the children in these schools have no exposure, even to the basics of English Language.

Kavindra belongs to the minority ethnic group (Tamil) but was born and lived in the Sinhala dominated central province and western province. He has great connections with the majority ethnic group (Sinhala) as most of his friends are Sinhalese. He has been an example all his life on how to be in peace with other ethnic groups. After the civil war, he was keen to help the many orphaned children who were war victims. The victims belong entirely to the Tamil ethnic group. As Kavindra is a Tamil himself, he is very fluent and is capable of interacting with the war victims and other officials in the Northern Province. He found out through his victimized relatives and social service organizations about the situations in the North. After contacting the trusts and schools in the north who have stretched their arms to take in war victims, he felt the need to support them by developing basic needs in those schools. As the UWC mission states, **“UWC makes education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future.”** Kavindra decided this summer to help them acquire a quality environment for education. At Luther he has shared his experience with Noorullah Zafari, who is also passionate about planning and participating in projects which help improve the quality of education for the students with special needs. So we have joined hands as a group to utilize our previous experiences in social work and the passion to help children to promote peace by designing a project for the mentally disabled and orphaned children of Pondawill and Thirunalveli by improving the playground, sanitary facilities, the environment of the school and by providing guidance and counselling.

Goals and Objectives

As there are two small schools involved, the goals and objectives are defined separately based on the needs they identified.

- Sivabhoomi Arakkatalai: We will clear up the already available plot of land allocated for the playground with the help of volunteers. After the clearing up is done, we will build a small pavilion in the ground with aluminum roofing and cement slabs to sit, with the help of the trustee, Mr. Aaru Thirumurugan, for the purpose of shelter. He has also agreed to provide laborers to help us with building the pavilion. We will also paint lane lines around the ground for the purpose of track events. We will also build a simple long jump pit with soft sand in a corner of the ground. Also we will have extended sessions to have conversations with the children to make them feel better. We would compile resources on adaptive Physical Education at Luther from the college's special needs educator, Mr. Jeff Wettach, to bring with us to Sri Lanka to help them benefit from it in the years to come.
- Muththuthambi Vidyalayam: We will build toilets in this school with adequate water supplies with the help of Mr. Sathyabalan who is a member of the school officials. There will be one toilet for men and one for women. Each toilet will have two separate compartments and each compartment will have one seat. Also we will be painting all the school buildings. As this is a Government school, we have already got the permission from the Zonal Education Department to start proceedings anytime. As these children are war victims, we have decided to give them some counselling sessions with the assistance of Mr. Sathyabalan, who is willing to hire a counselor from a local social organization, to develop their self-confidence. As another objective, we will be teaching the children the English alphabet and will be giving them some English grammar lessons.

Timeline

We plan to arrive in Sri Lanka on the **24 May 2014**. Then we will move to Jaffna town, where we will be working closely for **five days** with the schools and organizations that are willing to help us. After this we will spend **four weeks** working on Sivabhoomi Arakkatalai and **four weeks** working on Muththuthambi Vidyalayam, to fulfill all goals and objectives mentioned above. Next we will spend **one week** evaluating our project, before returning to the United States on **31 August 2014**.

Expected Outcomes

We believe that by the end of this project, the children in Sivabhoomi Arakkatalai will become more active and interested in participating in sports. This will create an opportunity for these children to express their talents and to win more awards at future Special Olympics, which will eventually lift up their self-confidence and help them build their personality to become great achievers. On the other hand, we also strongly believe that the newly built toilets will reduce the children's vulnerability of infectious diseases in Muththuthambi Vidyalayam. Painting the whole school will give them a feeling of a brand new start and a more vibrant environment in which to learn. We also hope that the counselling sessions will benefit the war victims and help them recover soon from their past. Learning the basics of English language will provide them with an opportunity in the future, to face the society more confidently, as English is an official language of Sri Lanka. As children are the seeds for a bright future, all these outcomes mentioned will together help them grow into strong trees and use their experiences in life to build a better future in which peace will prevail.