

WRITE UP ON THE GUNASEKERA CHILDREN'S HOME, NAWALA

Current Status

At present there are 21 children in the Home. There are 7 children in the 8 – 12 age group, 10 children in the 13 – 15 age group and 4 in the 16 – 18 age group. All children except one attend Government Schools at Nawala, Rajagiriya and Borella. Two of the older children have sat for the GCE 'A' Level and three others will be appearing for it in 2010.

The children are encouraged to participate in extra curricular activities in schools and several are engaged in Volleyball, hockey, netball, athletics and in School Societies. Participation in these activities are quite costly at times, but even with the limited resources available, every encouragement is given to the children to participate if they so desire as a means of overcoming the hidden stresses embedded in their lives due to the traumatic situations they all have undergone in their tender years.

We are very proud to state that one of the older girls is a prefect and a sports captain of the house. Three of our girls have won their places in the School Hockey Team and represent the school in all the inter-school matches..

Activities

Recognizing the importance of providing the children with a good education, several teachers have been engaged to provide extra lessons to help them in their studies at all ages and grades. Special teachers are engaged to assist children in the higher grades to prepare for the GCE 'O' level classes. The two girls who have completed the 'A' Level are enrolled in classes in preparation for their further education while the other three attend extra tutorial classes outside of the Home.

With the donation of a computer from a Swedish Organisation, a programme was embarked upon to provide all children with computer training. As a result, all children from the youngest to the oldest are computer literate and can operate the computer at varying degrees.

Weekly 'in house' classes are conducted for dancing, singing, sewing and hand work.

A counselor in the guise of an English Teacher visits the Home five times a week. She has won the confidence of the children through her frequent and close association and confide in her on matters of concern to them. Using this platform, regular counseling is carried out when required to help the children overcome their day-to-day problems.

An evaluation of all the children and the matrons has been carried out by trained personnel of a professional body, and the recommended follow-up actions suggested in the Report have been carried out. Children receive counseling services at the Damrivi Foundation whenever necessary as well as participate in the weekly programmes carried out by this Organisation for children to inculcate good values with special focus on how to grow up to be a good citizen. On a regular basis, the children observe religious rights daily, and in the evenings they all do this together with the

matrons, and spend a few minutes observing mettha meditation. All the younger children attend the Dhamma School at the closeby closeby.

Daily Activities

Children have an early start on weekdays by getting up at 5 a.m. They all step out to the garden or to the auditorium in our building and led by an older girl engage in 20 minutes of exercises. A cup of hot milk awaits them on the completion of this session. They assist the Matrons in carrying out group tasks assigned to them such as cleaning, sweeping, and cooking. They attend to any homework they were not able to complete the previous day, and then get ready to go to school. After breakfast, individually they all engage in five minutes of religious activities and at sharp 7 a.m. get into the van and are on their way to school accompanied by a matron.

On return from school around 2.30 p.m. they all wash up and have their lunch. They are free to do what they like till the tuition teachers come in at varying times to assist them. It's playtime for most from about 4.45 to 6 p.m. after their milk and a small snack at tea time. After a wash and change of clothes, they engage in an hour and a half of study time ending up by getting their school bags ready for the next day. Together they engage in religious activities before dinner and then they all listen to news on the TV and then its bedtime for all except the bigger children who do extra studies to be better prepared for school.

While the above is a rough outline of their daily programme, we at Gunasekera Children's Home have special activities on special days! The birthday of every child is celebrated. At tea-time, a birthday cake is cut with all inmates singing "Happy Birthday" to the birthday girl. We receive assistance from the Zonta Club who help us by giving the cake on each of their birthdays.

On the 1st of January and on the New Years Day in April, traditional milk rice is prepared and the Chief Matron feeds all the children wishing them well for the year after boiling milk and cooking milk rice. Then they sit round a table laid with traditional sweet meats and dressed in new clothes partake in the first meal.

Christmas is a time for celebration, and a Christmas party with the traditional Christmas tree and other forms of entertainment are arranged for the children depending on the sponsorships received. We have been fortunate enough to receive sponsorship for this event through a kind benefactor.

Vesak and Poson days are observed with the children observing Sil at the temple closeby. On other days they observe sil at Home itself following the programmes transmitted via the radio and the TV. In the evening they go to the temple close by and followed the programme organized by the temple.

Financial Assistance

The Probation and Child Care Services Department provides Rs.600/= per month towards the maintenance of a child. Since this amount alone is grossly insufficient to meet the costs involved, the Welfare Society engages themselves from time-to-time in various fund raising activities.

We have been fortunate enough to receive assistance from a Swedish Organization that promotes the educational activities of children in Homes. They also fund the tutorial lessons of the 'A' Level students.

The NGO that has donated the beautiful building to us comprised of Sri Lankans living in America to accommodate up to 40 Children. This NGO provided a sum of Rs.150,000.00 on a monthly basis to support the 20 children we had since February 2006 and due to the receipt of this regular funding we were able to improve the standards observed at the Home and several of the above mentioned activities were commenced for the betterment of the children with special focus towards improving the mental outlook and Societal acceptance of the girls after the receipt of this assistance. Additionally, a van was hired on a monthly payment of Rs.40,000 to take the children to schools . The provision of the van had a positive impact and removed the stigma the children regularly faced being classed as “children from the orphanage” when they were taken to schools by the matron, walking one behind the other. With the provision of the van this stigma ironically was greatly reduced, and they were accepted as any one of the others. The children went to school happily and on a few occasions even brought their friends to the Home for lunch!

However, since April 2009 the support received from this NGO has ceased due to a decision taken by their Board based in the States perhaps due to the ongoing recession. This has led us to find new donors to help us carry out the programmes started at the Home, as a cut down in these activities will seriously impact negatively on the children.

Sponsorships

With the stoppage of the funding from our regular donor, it is necessary to raise funds and Projects such as Meal Sponsorship programme, Christmas/Greeting Cards, hand made gift cards by the children, raffles, etc. are planned for the immediate future.

On a long term basis, We are seeking sponsorships for the regular funding of food, dry rations, clothes, linen, van hire, salaries of the matrons and the watcher, and for transport etc. On a very rough average we require about Rs.170,000.00 a month to cover the cost of running the Home.

Infrastructure of the Home and Staff

The Board of Trustees are the legal owners of the Home while the day to day activities have been delegated to the Gunasekera Children’s Home Welfare Society which is the body registered with the Department of Probationary and Childcare to run this Home. The Society consisting of voluntary members holding the positions of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and two Joint Manageresses and other committee members. The two Manageresses of the Welfare Society overlooks the functioning of the Home regularly completely on voluntary basis.

The three 3 “live-in” matrons look into the day-to-day needs of the children, and prepare the meals with the help of the older children. A watcher has been recently engaged to ensure the safety of the children.

The Vision of the Home

The Vision of the Voluntary members is to provide these girls with a life filled with warmth to help them forget the traumas and undue stresses from which they have suffered due to no fault of theirs.

Our aim is to provide them with a good education, bring them up to be responsible citizens capable of supporting themselves financially. Finally when they are ready to leave our Home and mingle with the world outside, to ensure that they do so, as civic minded useful citizens to their motherland, capable of being dutiful wives and finally loving mothers who would look after their children and not make them go through what they themselves had to face during their own childhood days.

8th January, 2010