

Success Story- Short: Sri Lanka 2011

Honoring children in vulnerable situations

Acknowledgements

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The 2011 World Day celebration in Sri Lanka demonstrates how World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (DPAC) can be used to honor and empower children in vulnerable situations. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is a large and established Sri Lankan organization providing social services and development and relief programmes. In Sanskrit, *Sarvodaya* signifies *Awakening of All*, and *Shramadana* means *to donate effort*. Sarvodaya has been organizing regional and national actions for DPAC since 2008. Each year, the organization expands the reach of the World Day by involving new actors and communities in the actions. In 2011, Sarvodaya worked through its extensive programs and strong network to plan a celebration for children and workers in childcare institutions, focused on the theme of ending all forms of violence against children.

Honoring and empowering young people

The celebration took place on 20 November 2011 when more than 200 children living in childcare institutions and 100 adults working in childcare institutions came together for the occasion. Participants came from homes for children run by Sarvodaya, as well as homes run by faith-based

Welcoming children with a national custom

In Sri Lanka, it is customary to welcome guests with a garland. This gesture was incorporated into the November 20th celebration with a specific focus on honoring and welcoming children.

Recognizing the central significance of children to the celebration, the organizers engaged young participants in this custom. Children placed garlands on other children, underscoring their role as honored guests, and demonstrating approval and recognition for children living in vulnerable situations.

organizations and the Department of Probation and Childcare of the government of Sri Lanka. The program included presentations from representatives of religious institutions, government, and UNICEF.

If our religious leaders, religious institutions and spiritual organizations also join in the efforts of the government institutions with such action we can make good progress towards ending violence against children in Sri Lanka.

- Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, Executive Director, Sarvodaya

Building on the work carried out with children in previous years, child participation and engagement remained an important aspect of the DPAC actions during the 2011 celebration. Prior to November 20th, children reviewed and selected relevant quotes from different religions to be shared during the event. Presentations from a young person from the National Children's Council and a child representative of the Governance Committee of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children infused the celebration with voices and perspectives of young people. Face-painting activities entertained children during the event break.



The program also engaged participants in a dynamic self-defense display led by a master in martial arts. This activity helped to make the celebration accessible for the younger children. Young people were invited onto the stage to learn and demonstrate defense techniques. The display demonstrated acknowledgement of the vulnerable situations many of the child participants had experienced and nurtured self-confidence among the participants, sending a message of empowerment.

The interfaith prayer for children anchored the celebration. Representatives of the Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian faiths, the four main religious groups in Sri Lanka, came together for this powerful segment of the program. Each one offered a prayer or a moment of spirituality. The prayer concluded with a collective moment of silence and compassion for children who have experienced violence.

Tips:

- Begin planning early.
- Bring diverse groups and individuals together to participate in the planning process.
- Focus on issues related to violence against children that reflect the reality in your society.
- Reach out to new groups and individuals to build the DPAC network.