



Hill Country Disability Group



Minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 10th June 2007 Rural Knowledge Centre, Bandarawela, 10-11:30 a.m.

In attendance

Mr. S. Chandrakanthan, Ms. S. Prema, Mr. Patrick Harrigan, and Mr. Robert Harwood of Koslanda; Ms. S. Nirmala of Haputale, Ms. K. Thilegeswary of Ella, Mr. A. Ratnayake of Bandarawela.

Mr. E.G.P. Samuel of Bandarawela, Mr. S.N. Selvaratnam and Ms. R. Pushpareka of Koslanda attended as observers. Mr. S. Srikanthan was unable to attend and sent apologies.

Late ICTA Chairman Dr. V.K. Samaranayake

At the suggestion of Mr. A. Ratnayake, a minute of silence was observed in memory of the late Prof. V.K. Samaranayake, Chairman of the Information & Communications Technology Agency (ICTA).

Contact Details

An attendance register was signed by all members and their contact details were taken.

Registration with Haldummulla Divisional Secretariat

The President Mr. S. Srikanthan and the Treasurer, Mr Patrick Harrigan, have met with the Haldummulla Divisional Secretary, who issued a form and requested a Memorandum of Association, and this has been given and accepted. They wish to know about the accounts and history of HCDG and also its parent organisation, Sri Lanka Children's Trust. Mr Harrigan has compiled the annual report for Sri Lanka Children's Trust, which will be e-mailed to all HCDG members. This report is also being given to concerned ministries. Our NGO certificate of registration will be issued once we have presented all the required documents. Then only we will be able to open a bank account at a state bank.

National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities

Patrick reported that Mr. Srikanthan and he have visited the newly formed National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities and met the Director Mr. M.A. Alam, who has given us a form with which to register an existing registered society. Firstly our parent NGO the Sri Lanka Children's Trust can be registered with the NSPD, and later only when our society is registered and keeps its accounts, our HCDG may also register itself. Mr Harrigan and Prema will visit the Haldummulla Divisional Secretariat tomorrow. Once a society is registered, joint projects may be undertaken with the NSPD, such as the national Wheelchair Project.

Printing of voucher books, receipt books, and letterhead

Mr Harrigan reported that voucher books will be printed shortly along with our society seal. Once we have a registration number for our society, we can get a letterhead printed with our registration number upon it.

Disability benefit payments

Mr. S. Srikanthan and Patrick have met with National Secretariat for People with Disabilities Director Mr. M.A. Alam. The NSPD can provide Rs. 3,000 each month to people with disabilities. For people living on the tea estates, a letter needs to be written and certified by managers of tea estates, stating each individual's disabilities and requesting the money in order to help them and their families.

Patrick emphasized that there are three important things to do as early as possible, namely: (1) identify the handicapped people; (2) inform them of this benefit; and (3) distribute a form needs in Sinhala, Tamil and English to the families. This needs to be started soon because it will probably take a number of months for the ministries to react. Every family with disabled members can benefit.

HCDG Newsletter

Patrick said that we published our first newsletter last year, and it is now time for a second newsletter to be published in Sinhala, Tamil and English. News stories and poems by children were two examples of what could be collected in any language and translated into Sinhala, Tamil, or English for the newsletter's three versions.

HCDG Database

This has been prepared but a form needs to be done so that members can fill out the required details of each disabled person that members meet or come across. These details can then be entered into the database. There was some discussion on best how to distribute these forms more widely. Mr. Samuel suggested that this could be done via school principals.



Hill Country Disability Group



Sponsorship Scheme

- **Eresha Dharmapala** of Haldummulla is a disabled 11 year old girl who is now being sponsored by Ms. Suyin Karlsen of the USA. Lady tutors have been arranged for Eresha: one to teach general subjects and a second one for English tutoring only. The sponsor money will be sent to Sri Lanka Children's Trust and from there it will be transferred to HCDG once a bank account has been arranged.
- **Tamilchelvam** and **Mahindan** are two physically and mentally disabled brothers living with their family on the Ambitikande Tea Estate. Sponsorship should be sought for this family.
- **Parameswari** on the Meeriyabedde Tea Estate now has a wheelchair. For 17 years since age 5 she had been living without a wheelchair on the floor of her family's tiny apartment in the estate line.

CDMA Telecom Livelihood Project

Lanka Bell CDMA phones should be provided to a number of disabled people we currently know about. These phones will give them a small income and provide a service for their communities. With 10 or more phones given to people with disabilities, they can communicate easily over a self-sustaining phone network. We are trying to get Lanka Bell to give us these phones for free, or at a reduced rate. Mr. Alam said, "Kindly send me a proposal and I will speak to the Chairman of Lanka Bell and request the phones." Patrick noted that he has been very busy with other matters lately but now he can get down to writing this proposal this month.

Wheelchair Project

Wheelchairs are currently bought in Colombo one by one and given to disabled people we know. A much larger project is envisaged with the Wheelchair Foundation of the USA. Mr. S. Srikanthan and Patrick last February addressed the Rotary Club of Colombo, who have agreed to be the coordinating club and will invite other Rotary Clubs in other countries to join the project.

The wheelchairs will be shipped by sea container in five sizes (the difference being the width of the wheelchair). The Rotary Club and Kiwanis must raise US\$25,000 here and five times that amount from international Rotary Clubs. The total cost is about Rs. 15,000 per wheelchair. There are 280 wheelchairs per sea container and the project aims to bring down four sea containers = 1,120 wheelchairs.

The NSPD Director Mr. Alam noted that there is a desperate need for wheelchairs in Sri Lanka, especially in the North and East where there are many people disabled due to land mines. Mr Alam agreed to issue a letter to Sri Lanka Customs to waive the import duty on the wheelchairs. The entire process will take at least 6 months.

The next step we need to take is to create a form in Sinhala & Tamil explaining the project and asking for full details of the handicapped persons (age, size, etc.). Then the forms need to be distributed directly to the families, or indirectly through Divisional Secretariats, etc. We are not responsible for raising money but we will assist with collecting information on the needy families, and later we can assist with documentation & publicity.

Save the Children

Patrick visited this organisation in Colombo on 8th June. He was not able to meet the Country Director but left a letter for him together with the annual report of the Children's Trust. We hope to work more closely with international NGOs like Save The Children of the UK that fund projects for children and handicapped persons.

Pilot Project to establish Rural Mini-Nanasalas, E-village Communication and Tele-Medicine Centres

Mr. Harwood reported on this proposed pilot project conducted jointly by the Koslanda Nanasala and our society at the Koslanda Organic Tea Estate. The manager of the Estate is keen to conduct this project and says that the Tea Workers Welfare Society might pay to refurbish the proposed building and pay for three computers. Our society is closely associated with ICT, and our strategy is to leverage ICT to empower families of the handicapped and give them the knowledge, the tools, and the confidence to become self-employed and self-reliant, and even to become community leaders helping other families to have access to ICT.

Next meeting

It was agreed that it is not necessary to meet every month, but every two or three months. The next meeting can be in late July or August. Everyone would be informed when the exact date and place is decided upon.

(Signed) *S. Prema*

S. Prema
Secretary

Patrick Harrigan

Patrick Harrigan
Treasurer