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Annual Report 2010

Six years on from the Asian Tsunami, the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project continues to run a thriving and firmly established Women Only Swimming Day at the Lighthouse Community Swimming Pool in Galle, on the south coast of Sri Lanka, where between 35 and 60 women and teenage girls at a time have come for free swimming lessons provided by local female teachers trained and paid for by the Project. This year, one of our swimming teachers became probably the first-ever expectant mum in Sri Lanka to experience the joy of total weightlessness a few weeks before baby was due by demonstrating a buoyant mother-and-bump Float-and-Breathe to unbelieving villagers who considered such a feat unachievable. Having laid to rest the superstition that pregnant women cannot float and that water is bad for expectant mothers, Samanthaika has been since safely delivered of a bonny baby girl and is now looking forward to piloting the Project's first mother-and-baby sessions sometime in 2011.



Pic 1. Galle, in the south of Sri Lanka



Pic 2. Swimming Teacher Samanthaika

In addition, the Project piloted a trial new swimming location in the village of Habaraduwa, sandwiched between the coast and Koggala Lake lagoon. This very rural area of the coast, between Galle and Weligama, is reputed to be home also to crocodiles in the local lagoon, which rather inhibits local enthusiasm for swimming in its waters. So far, we have only seen large aquatic monitor lizards up to two metres in length, which are scary enough for us to stick to the safety of the pool. A new batch of women with leadership qualities were formally trained as Student Swimming Teachers at the villa and included a mother and daughter. All our new teachers are now deployed to teach swimming at the Women's Only Day in Galle.



Pics 3. Daughter Hiruni and her mother, Shirome, (centre pair, left and right) studying hard at Habaraduwa under swimming teacher Dinusha and Project Founder Christina



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Back in Europe, the Project Founder addressed a drowning prevention conference of the Lifesaving Foundation in Dublin, which supports the Project directly. The theme of the Project's presentation is our belief in the principle of teaching people to perfect learning to float and breathe instinctively and comfortably for extended periods first, before going on to develop stroke. In a coincidence linking Sri Lanka, Hawaii, Ireland and Norway together, the Norwegian leader of the Float-and-Breathe-First movement in the international arena, Dr Robert Stallman, recognised a friend of his in one of our presentation slides. The image, a Sunday Times newspaper article about hydrotherapy, showed one of our earliest swimming teachers, assisting one Dr Jan Prins in a hydrotherapy session in Colombo.



Pic 4. Sanduni assisting a patient to walk in water



Pic 5. Flashback 5 years: Sanduni receiving her Teacher Certificate from Olympian Julian

It turns out that Dr Prins, who is American and lives in Hawaii, has Sri Lankan roots and returns each year to give hydrotherapy sessions in Colombo. The Sri Lankan pool owner, Olympian swimmer Julian Bolling is Sanduni's current employer and had chosen her to be his representative for the session and hence, unknowingly, established the link to Dr Prins from Hawaii through the Project in Sri Lanka to Dr Stallman from Norway to the presentation in Dublin - small world. At the presentation, the Foundation pledged its continued support for the Women's Swimming Project drowning prevention work in Sri Lanka. Still in the international arena, the Project was honoured to learn that an Abstract on its work in Sri Lanka had been accepted at the next World Conference on Drowning Prevention to be held in Vietnam in May 2011.



Pic 6 Another new group of 'I Can Swim. Can you?' students learn to relax and just Float-and-Breathe

Having successfully piloted a two month trial of its long-term goal of a permanent, residentially-based swimming teaching facility training female swimming teachers, the Project can look forward to 2011 to make teaching water safety and swimming a self-sufficient micro-economic activity in a local community. In conclusion, the Trustees and Operatives of the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project are grateful to the Lifesaving Foundation and other donors for their support in the advancement of saving lives by teaching swimming so that, in many a remote village and hamlet, people may in future might confidently say:

'I can swim. Can you?' and hear back the reply 'Yes, I Can Swim.'

REGISTERED UK CHARITY NO 1129236 ARRAN HOUSE, HENLEY ROAD, MARLOW, BUCKS SL7 2DG