

Poverty and Hope Appeal: Sept 2019 update from Sri Lanka



Eradicating child abuse, and exploitation in Sri Lanka

Partnered with CMS, supported by Poverty and Hope since 2018.

Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019. Just before 9:00am at least six blasts rocked Sri Lanka, killing 259 people and injuring more than 500. Suicide bombers had targeted Christian churches and luxury hotels. Any semblance of peace achieved in the years after the 26-year civil war ended in 2009, was destroyed. And at least 45 of the victims were children.

CMS local partner, Nevedita and her team were immediately called upon to support victims and their families. A mental health specialist by profession, Nevedita manages the child protection unit of LEADS, a community development organisation in Sri Lanka. She is responsible for a programme of advocacy, intervention and rehabilitation for children who have been traumatised through experiences of abuse and exploitation. Nevedita describes her calling to LEADS: *“My mission is to show God’s love to children who have been through trauma and abuse. Being an ambassador of God’s love for such children is the greatest difference I would like to make in their lives.”*



Nevedita Jeevabalan, manager of the child protection unit of LEADS.

For the first two months after the bombing Nevedita and her team focused all their attention on attending to the aftermath of the attack. They spent time listening and talking to victims and their families; dealing with practical needs like finding necessary medicines or negotiating overstretched hospitals with people who were confused, frightened and traumatised by their horrific experiences. They provided play equipment for children, and through playing together were able to give the kids much needed emotional support.

One victim of the attack was an 11 year-old boy, whom they met at the hospital. His mother had passed away in the bomb and his father was seriously injured. Such were the boy’s injuries that initially he couldn’t be told that his mother had died. He suffered terrible burns, which meant that he would have to wear a mask over his

face for the next 6-8 months, to protect damaged and sensitive skin. He couldn't go to school, play outside, or simply enjoy the sunshine.

Nevedita and her team have been following up with this lad, who is just one of many who have had to adjust to a heart-breaking new normal. His mother's sister stepped in to care for him and has been looking after him as if he were her own child, especially since his father is still too ill to take on the task. He has recently been able to go back to school, which has really helped boost his confidence and help him get back to a recognisable routine.

Sri Lanka is still recovering from the shock of the attack. Security remains tight, including at churches where guards still patrol outside during Sunday services. And although Nevedita's team are experienced in dealing with trauma, for them like many others the bomb triggered memories of the war, and has increased anxiety around carrying out the simple tasks of life.

From mid-June, Nevedita stepped back into her more regular tasks. This term, the team will have 13 children in Kedalle, LEAD's therapeutic rehabilitation centre for traumatised children and young people. Three of the young people the team are working with at the moment are underage mothers, below the legal age of consent, who have been dealing with the grief of giving up their babies for adoption. It's been a hard process, but Nevedita is encouraged that two of the girls have already decided to go back to school because this in itself is an indication of renewed hope for their future.



Kedella therapeutic rehabilitation centre.

Nevedita is a very busy lady, dividing her time between therapeutic counselling; team management and support; advocating for kids at a national level and relief work. But she loves her work and is motivated by being able to have a positive impact on people's lives. It's challenging work, but Nevedita frequently recalls Isaiah 58:6 to express the response of her heart and her calling. Where God speaks: *'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'* She says, *"Some days are stressful, but most days I don't know what else I'd do."*

Please pray:

- For Nevedita's team, working on the emotional and spiritual frontline and dealing with struggles in their own lives, that God would help them maintain healthy balances in their lives
- For God's wisdom and guidance. The CEO at Nevedita's organisation has recently retired, so this inevitably will mean changes in leadership and responsibility.