

UMSL Operation Teardrop Campaign Fall 2009 Update

Thank you for your continued support of the UM-St. Louis Sri Lankan Educational Fund. We've had a number of important accomplishments over the last year! Our Operation Teardrop Campaign works to improve educational opportunities for children at Macaldeniya Tamil Vidyalayam, a primary school on a remote, impoverished tea estate in the central hills of Sri Lanka. Here's what we've been up to since my last update:

Installation of Computers & Computer Room/Computer Classes

In the spring of 2009, we installed a small computer room at the Macaldeniya school with five computers.



Mannivanan & Madishraj



Shalini & Kaushalya

We also hired a computer teacher for the school. She teaches computer skills to 3rd, 4th and 5th graders during school, offers after-school classes, and also holds classes on Saturdays for older youths on the Macaldeniya estate.

Macaldeniya Montessori – Construction & Start Up



You may recall that in the fall of 2008, we sent a young woman from the estate, Miss Puwaneshwari, to Colombo for Montessori training. During her training, Puwaneshwari stayed with our friends Nilu Abeyaratne and Mana Samarasinghe, and trained at Stepping Stones Montessori in Nugegoda. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Nilu and Mana, who gave up their guest room for nine months and welcomed Puwaneshwari into their home, and to Charmian Colombage at Stepping Stones for providing Puwaneshwari's excellent training in Montessori philosophy and techniques, and for donating Montessori equipment to our Montessori.

Puwaneshwari completed her training in July 2009. In the meantime, we began construction of the Macaldeniya Montessori; registered our first class of 24 students; had school uniforms made for each of the children; purchased furniture, equipment, and supplies; held an official opening, and began classes in October 2009. Our heartfelt thanks to our friend Marilyn Morton, who provided the generous donation that helped make the Montessori a reality.



Puwaneshwari in training in Colombo



Lighting the oil lamp at the Montessori opening

Each child who enrolled in the Montessori received a new backpack, sandals, handkerchiefs, and school uniforms (two shorts and three shirts for boys; two dresses and three shirts for girls).



Alagaswary, Nirosha & Kavinda are curious about being measured for their school uniforms



But Dhanukrishanthani & Kaviya aren't so happy about it...

The site we chose for the Montessori has a spectacular view of the surrounding hills and valley. On the first day of building, more than two dozen men from the estate volunteered to help with groundbreaking. It was a truly moving day, especially because they came to us with the suggestion of doing so.





Montessori – Under Construction (8/2009)



Near Completion (10/2009)

Our official opening ceremony was held on September 12, just before I returned to the U.S. In addition to receiving their school uniforms, backpacks, and sandals, we opened children's savings accounts for each of the new enrollees (500 rupees each, or approximately \$5). Staff from People's Bank in Koslanda attended the opening to distribute the children's savings passbooks. We are planning a matching feature for this program—each year, when parents continue to deposit funds into their children's accounts, we'll match their contribution up to 1,000 rupees. We aren't charging an enrollment fee for children at the Montessori; instead, parents will volunteer one hour each month at the Montessori as their child's enrollment fee.



Ribbon cutting at the Montessori opening



Kids explore the Montessori's equipment and educational toys



*Ceremonially handing over the Montessori key to Purwaneshwari
(to my right are estate owner Mr. Radakrishnan and Macaldeniya Principal Raja)*

Photo Project: *Tea & Me: Estate Life through the Eyes of Children*

Last summer when I spent time on the Macaldeniya Estate, I quickly realized that not only did the kids love having their pictures taken, they also loved taking pictures of their family, friends, and community. So when we returned in January 2009, I brought along five digital cameras for the children to share. The resulting photographs were beautiful!

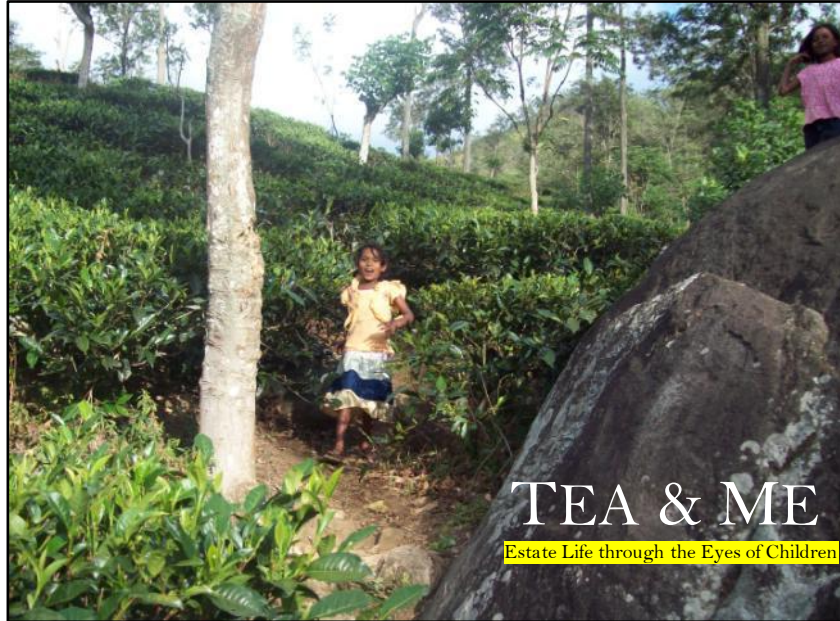


Photo by Gurukumar



Photo by Satheeswaran

In December of this year, they'll be featured in an exhibition at UMSL's Gallery Visio. In addition, we produced the small coffeetable book, *Tea & Me: Estate Life through the Eyes of Children*. It's now on sale for \$20 a copy. If our book sales are successful, we'll be using the funds raised to start a vocational training centre on the estate, to provide young people with new employment opportunities beyond estate labor.



Macaldeniya School Carnival

In May 2009, we also held a school carnival at Macaldeniya Tamil Vidyalayam. It was great fun, with lots of games, and with students, alumni, and parents racing for a variety of prizes.



Ring Toss



Third grade girls in the balloon race



Macaldeniya moms run the three-legged race



Rameshwaren takes the lead in the sack race



Priyadarshan's dad wins the lime & spoon race

More Macaldeniya Teachers

In early 2009, Macaldeniya's one government appointed teacher received a two-year leave of absence to go to Batticaloa for training. Left with only one remaining volunteer teacher and with no prospects for a government replacement, Principal Raja located another young woman from the estate to volunteer at the school. We're now paying regular salaries to five women: the two volunteer teachers, the computer teacher, Puwaneshwari at the Montessori, and her assistant. We're still hopeful that the government will send a formal appointee, but in the meantime the children are relying only on our support for their educational needs.

Service Projects – Macaldeniya Clothing and Toy Drives

Last fall, the amazing Karen Heimer at the University of Iowa and her wonderful daughters organized a children’s clothing drive at their elementary school. The result was overwhelming. Karen drove to the American Society of Criminology meetings held in St. Louis last year in order to deliver an entire van load of clothes for the children on the Macaldeniya estate.



Yashotha in her new sweater & skirt



Dilini in her new t-shirt



Thilagaswary & Dharshika model their new clothes

Like the students in Iowa, last spring Mrs. Swalina's 4th graders at North Glendale Elementary School in Kirkwood, Missouri also organized a school-wide drive—to collect toys, games and books for the Macaldeniya schoolchildren. Puny and I visited the kids at North Glendale to talk to them about Sri Lanka, and it was wonderful to see such passionate kids who were eager to learn about children's lives in other parts of the world, and do their part to make the world a better place.



Mrs. Swalina's 4th grade class with their collection for Macaldeniya

School Photos

Finally, as in years past, we've taken annual school photos at Macaldeniya Tamil Vidyalayam, to provide the kids and their families with this important record of their transitions through childhood. Each child received a copy of their individual portrait and class photo.



Macaldeniya Third Graders



Pradeep's First Grade Portrait

What's Next?

Our biggest fundraising needs are to support continued programming at Macaldeniya Tamil Vidyalayam and the Macaldeniya Montessori. We've taken on large yet vitally important commitments on the estate. We also hope that proceeds from *Tea & Me* will be sufficient to accomplish our new goal of building and running a vocational training centre on the estate. Because so many of our youths drop out of school at young ages, such training will provide them with useful income-generating skills for the future. It's also the project identified by the Macaldeniya community as the top priority on their wish list.

If you're interested in purchasing a copy of *Tea & Me*, please e-mail me at jodymiller@umsl.edu.

To make an additional **tax deductible** donation to the project, please send checks to:

UM-St. Louis Sri Lankan Educational Fund
Center for International Studies
366 Social Sciences Building
University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, MO 63121

I hope you appreciate seeing the continued impact of your generous donations. Thank you for all of your support!

Jody Miller, Project Coordinator

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