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Friends of Kalangarai

A Non-profit Organization Supporting the Human Rights of Widows in India

Our mission is to support community-based programs working to enhance dignity, self-reliance, and the wellbeing of widow-headed families in South India

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Dear Friends,

A year has passed since my daughter (Emma), her friend (Tessa), and I visited Kalangarai and marched in the streets with about 700 widowed and abandoned women who were demanding their human rights and changes in governmental policies. Kalangarai continues to work toward the empowerment of widowed, deserted, and marginalized women by helping them to organize as a movement in collaboration with like-minded groups. Through self-help groups, income-generation programs, and skills training, Kalangarai supports women and their families to attain improved health, security and a violence-free life.

Friends of Kalangarai is a U.S.-based non-profit that supports the programs of Kalangarai through education, fund-raising, and research. We invite you to join us in our mission to improve the lives of women who have been marginalized, silenced, and deprived of their rights—including the right to live a dignified life, right to mobility, right to assume leadership, right to property, right to re-marry, right to dress and beautify themselves, etc.

Please consider making a donation or volunteering your time. Our projects this year continue to focus on the education of the children of the women of Kalangarai (see article “Student Housing” for our current appeal).

Best wishes for a joyful and healthy New Year!

Karen Kayser

President, Friends of Kalangarai

Success Story – Your Support Makes a Difference!

Santhana Mary lives in a small village in the southern part of India. She is the second of four daughters in her family. Santhana's family belongs to a scheduled caste community ("Untouchables") and lives in extreme poverty. Her parents were landless, hourly laborers and depended on a governmental program that provides work/pay for only 100 days per year. Santhana Mary was working on her diploma in health assistance at St. Joseph's Community College when her father died of cardiac arrest.



Santhana joined St. Joseph's Community College in July 2015 with the hope that she would get a job after finishing this course. She was given a scholarship by Kalangarai because her family could not afford to pay the full amount of the schooling after the death of her father. At present Santhana is working in Arthur Hospital, Nagapattinam. She is earning Rs. 6000 per month (\$93), which provides significant financial support to her family. With the money earned, Santhana's family is able to educate the youngest sister as well.

St. Joseph's College was established by Kalangarai after the Indian Ocean Tsunami so that local youth could learn skills to provide them with a livelihood. Santhana Mary is a model for the present students of St. Joseph's.

Student Housing

St. Joseph's Community College serves poor students in the local community (many of them are from female-headed households). The Community College is affiliated with Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai. It offers four Vocational Diploma Courses in Electrician, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning, Desktop Publishing and General Duty Nursing Assistant.

Kalangarai rents two houses close to campus to accommodate the many students who need housing. The students pay for about half of their monthly room and board and the rest is covered by donations. **We aim to raise \$3,235 to cover 30 students for the year.** Please consider supporting this effort with a donation.

Kalangarai Launches New Sponsorship Program in Mid-Wife Nursing/Health Workers

This past summer Kalangarai established a program to sponsor students to attend courses for a diploma certificate in Auxiliary Nursing Mid-wife (ANM) or Multi-purpose Health Workers (MPHW) at Catholic Institute (Tiruchiarapally) for one year (2017-18). The students are either daughters of widowed or deserted women. The two-year course is recognized by the Medical Council of India/Tamil Nadu and the graduates can register in the Medical council once they complete the course. There are great employment opportunities for those who hold this diploma certificate.

In the Spring, Friends of Kalangarai conducted a "Mother's Day" appeal for donations for this program using the crowd-raising platform of Razoo during the weeks before Mother's Day. We were able to raise \$1500 toward expenses (course fee, room & board, uniform, medical kits, and instruments) for two students.

Health Needs Assessment in Collaboration with Kalangarai

Shirnett Khorream-Gajaraj, MD, MPH

In January, 2017, Board Member Shirnett Khorram-Gajaraj traveled to Kalangarai to conduct a needs assessment for her Master's degree in Public Health (University of Massachusetts-Worcester). Her husband (Dr. Gajaraj) and her daughter (Ro) traveled with her. She interviewed healthcare providers and village leaders to assess the health needs of the women and children. Although regular checkups for children and adults are provided by the government hospitals and clinics free of charge, access to these services is a problem. Because most of the women are working long hours in the fields, they do not have the time to visit clinics during regular hours of operation. They have insurance cards to pay for appointments but the card is like a credit card and there is a limit on the expenses. Another barrier to using healthcare is a lack of trust in the male physicians. The women prefer to be seen by a female physician but according to Shirnett, the chances of seeing a female physician are very slim.

Shirnett also assessed the water and sanitation needs in the villages where the widows live. Sanitation and safe drinking water remain as critical needs among these villages.

Shirnett intends to return annually to follow up on developments and progress of addressing the health care of the women.

Shirnett Khorram-Gajaraj, MD, MPH was trained as a physician in pediatrics, psychiatry, and infectious diseases and worked in the Caribbean, Miami, Detroit, and Boston. She teaches nursing and public health courses and does research in HIV/AIDS. Her interests are focused on public health and healthcare for the poor and underserved, particularly women and children.



Dr. Khorram-Gajaraj teaching proper hand-washing to the children at Kalangarai.

Friends of Kalangarai is a U.S.A. non-profit that supports the programs of Kalangarai through fund-raising, education, and research. We are a 501(c)3 charitable organization. Please send donations to:

***Friends of Kalangarai, P.O. Box 5366
Louisville, KY 40255***

To learn more about the programs, visit www.kalangarai-india.org

