

Friends of Kalangarai

Our mission is to raise awareness and support for women of Kalangarai to realize their abilities and worth to sustain their livelihoods.



JUNE, 2023

Dear Friends,

Empowering women through entrepreneurship has become an integral part of Kalangarai's mission. Over the past 5 years, 400 widowed women have received assistance from Kalangarai to start their own businesses. These include businesses like shops, restaurants, selling fish, collective farming, among other enterprises.

During a recent trip to India, Dr. Sarah Acland (my friend from Louisville), and I had the privilege to visit the Kalangarai staff and the women who participate in their programs. We were delighted to meet five women entrepreneurs who pulled together their resources to lease land for collective farming. Since farming can be an unreliable enterprise due to the weather, the group also started a fish pond and a food store. In addition to providing funds for starting small businesses, Kalangarai also provides skills and leadership trainings.

We also visited the students at St. Joseph's Technical Institute campus. This is the **new campus for St. Joseph's Community College** which is moving toward accreditation as a 2-year Industrial Technical Institute (ITT) or 3-year Poly-technic College. Currently, the college is offering vocational diplomas in 1) electrician, 2) refrigeration and air-conditions, 3) desktop publishing, and 4) general duty nursing. Friends of Kalangarai support the daughters of the widows by providing financial aid for them to attend the college.

This year Kalangarai celebrated **International Widows' Day** (June 23rd) with several other women empowerment groups and self-help groups from five zones. The theme of the program was "Valihalai Valimaiyakkuvom" ("transforming pains into power"). The celebration included folk songs, skits, and dance. As a sign of self-respect and life, the women wore bindhi and flowers.

Warm regards,
Karen Kayser
President, Friends of Kalangarai
kalangarai.friends@gmail.com



Shop Owners



Tailoring Class



Students at St. Joseph's
Community College
Technical Institute Campus

Reflecting on my Visit to Kalangarai- Dr. Sarah Acland

In early March, I was invited to accompany Karen Kayser on one of her trips to Tamil Nadu, the southern most state of India. A very thrilling invitation! I have ties to the subcontinent, my father was born on a teagarden in Assam, and I have spent 10 years working and teaching in Nepal. But I have never been to South India.

We landed in Chennai where Karen has many friends and colleagues, the great variety of whose professions indicates Karen's wide range of interests. This was all fascinating, exciting and new.

But the core of the trip was a visit to the Jesuit house at Kalangarai, where the widows program is based. Widowhood in India means suddenly moving from respected wife and mother to a life of no status, no choices, and no official existence, if any. A widow should not wear color or jewelry, usually has no skills, and, if her sons cannot or will not support her, is reduced to menial jobs, or even to begging.

I was able to see the Kalangarai widows program at ground level. We arrived in time for International Women's Day. First, the entryway was decorated with flowers, drawn on the ground, in colored powder; roses and colored powder, Tika, were given to each woman as she entered. All were dressed in glowing colors. It was a great day as woman after woman rose and spoke, some for the first time in their lives; there were dramas, songs, and poems, and at the end everyone was dancing.

A few days later, we met some of the village groups and saw the variety of entrepreneurs they have set up: shops, farms, fishponds, and especially tea shops-without which India would not be India. One group was learning tailoring, which hopefully may result in contracts for school uniforms. All this activity produces essential income, but more than that it leads to self-confidence, self-respect, and community support.

I was able to spend an afternoon talking to one young widow, a woman with a great deal of misfortune and hardship in addition to widowhood. It was a sad afternoon, but even so it was clear that with the help of the other women in her group, she was not sunk in despair, and was able to make some plans for her future. I look forward to hearing news of her one day.

I am extremely grateful to Karen and to the Jesuit fathers and brother at Kalangarai for this wonderful opportunity – and of course, to all the ladies whom I met there as well.



International Women's Day Celebration

Upcoming Events

Lecture Series: GEMS (Gender, Equity, Mobilization, Sustainability): Initiatives from the Global South (Virtual on Zoom)

Friends of Kalangarai is launching a series of six virtual lectures by experts leading innovative programs that address poverty, women's rights, environmental injustice, and socioeconomic development in South Asia.

It Takes a Village: An Exhibit of Warli Tribal Paintings from India

New Bedford Public Library (Downtown), New Bedford MA

During November and December, Friends of Kalangarai will sponsor an exhibit of Warli tribal paintings that depict life in tribal villages in India. There will be a reception for the exhibit on Thursday, November 9, 2023.

Fall Festival Fundraiser - Sunday, October 29, 2023

Friends of Kalangarai will hold a fundraiser with music, craft beer, food, and a silent auction.

More information about these events can be found on the website: kalangarai-india.com/events