

Friends of Kalangarai

Supporting the empowerment of widowed women of Kalangarai to realize their abilities and worth and attain sustainable livelihoods.



**December 2025
NEWSLETTER**

Expanding Opportunities for Widows of Kalangarai

Karen Kayser

In January 2025, a group of seven (board members and friends) traveled with me to Tamil Nadu to visit NGO Kalangarai, the staff, and the widowed women who participate in Kalangarai's programs. Witnessing the impact of Kalangarai's mission firsthand, everyone seemed deeply moved by the vibrancy, motivation, and joyfulness displayed by the women in the self-help groups and by the visionary leaders who help guide the widows' movement. But Karen Wilbur's experiences in the villages (and with their dedicated staff) left a lasting impression, inspiring her to take action. After her return from our trip, she felt compelled to make a meaningful contribution to the widows she had met during her time there.

Dr. Wilbur was particularly impressed by the dedication of the Kalangarai staff, who consistently bring the needs of widows and their children—many of them young adults—to the attention of local and state governments. Through their compassionate and strategic approach, the staff supports the women's initiatives ranging from small-scale projects like helping them to establish their own shops (or raise goats) to advocacy at the central government.

It's our honor and privilege to announce that Karen Wilbur and her wife, Dorie, have chosen to make a major gift of \$25,000 to bolster Kalangarai's programs. In addition, Wilbur also reached out to her network of friends and fellow travelers, encouraging them to contribute matching funds of \$5,000. Through these combined efforts, a total of \$35,000 was raised.

These funds will directly support programs for widows in the adjacent Mayiladuthurai District which is next to the Nagapattinam District (where Kalangarai's main office is located). Approximately 1200 widows residing in this district will now have opportunities to participate in similar self-help groups, receive micro-credit loans to launch new businesses or expand an existing business, and attend leadership trainings.

Our U.S.-based, nonprofit, *Friends of Kalangarai*, extends our heartfelt gratitude to Karen and Dorie, and to *all* our wonderful supporters whose contributions this past year have made a significant difference in the lives of thousands of Indian women and in turn have inspired our continued work on their behalf.

***Women of Truth and Courage: The Widows of Kalangarai* wins “Best Documentary” at the India International Film Festival Boston (IIFFB)**

Our film was selected for screening at the India International Film Festival in Boston and won “Best Documentary”. The festival, in its 8th year, was held in Cambridge, MA and featured numerous screenings and gala events. It was exciting to be part of such a vibrant celebration and recognized with the award.

We welcome invitations to show the film at other venues (e.g. libraries, churches, schools, nonprofits). If you would like us to bring it to a venue near you, please email Karen at kalangarai.friends@gmail.com. The length of the film is 22 minutes, and we include a Q&A discussion after the film.



Fall Festival Fundraiser – A Big Success!

The Keith Farm in Westport was the venue for our annual fall fundraiser. The event was held on a beautiful October day on the bucolic Southcoast of Massachusetts where guests were treated to colorful fields and meadows, stone walls, and falling leaves—all quintessential elements of autumn at a New England farm! Delicious food (clam chowder, apple crisp, and lots of appetizers) from Lyn Keith's kitchen was served. And Mark T Small, an accomplished acoustic guitarist, filled the barn with American roots music creating a peaceful and uplifting ambiance.

The event also included the screening of *Women of Truth & Courage: The Widows of Kalangarai*, which highlights the work and impact of our non-profit. Twenty-four silent auction items were donated, (tickets to Patriots Game and Boston Ballet, Southcoast Airbnbs, and more) and all received winning bids, adding to the success of our event. Some guests also purchased pashmina shawls from Kashmir, hand-crocheted market bags, and note cards with watercolor prints of Indian saris.

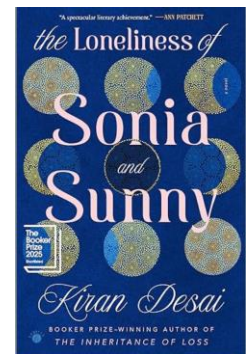
Thanks to our dedicated behind-the-scenes volunteers and some generous contributions from venue participants, \$14,000 was raised for the widows' empowerment programs of Kalangarai.



Book Group Discussion – February 20, 2026

The Loneliness of Sonia & Sunny by Kiran Desai will be our next book. Discussion will take place at our New Bedford office and online **Friday, Feb. 20 at 4:00 (ET)**.

This 2025 novel is about two young Indian-Americans, Sonia and Sunny, who meet on a train in India and navigate love, family, and cultural alienation as they search for happiness between India and the U.S. The story explores themes of immigration, class, race, and the complexities of modern life, blending a love story with a family saga and a rich novel of ideas. It follows their separate lives in the U.S. and India, their past connection through a failed matchmaking attempt by their grandparents, and their eventual reunion as they confront personal and societal challenges.



Register Online

Welcome Our New Intern: Sri Lakshmi Gandham

Sri is from the small village of Alamuru, India. She spent 8 years working in the tech industry in Hyderabad before coming to Dartmouth, MA to study Technology Management at the University of Massachusetts and graduated this summer with her Master's degree. When she arrived, Sri quickly turned her focus from computers to community and took advantage of dozens of campus and community service opportunities, including the Social Justice Choir.



Sri's civic involvement soon extended beyond campus. Living in New Bedford, Sri found a home at the First Unitarian Church, where new friends encouraged her to explore her love of music, culture, and volunteerism. In less than a year at UMass-Dartmouth, Sri logged over 550 hours of community service. Recently she became a regional commissioner and the treasurer for Bristol Commission on Status of Women.

"I've always been strong and independent... Coming here helped me realize I want to work with nonprofits. I want to give back."

We are delighted that Sri Lakshmi has joined us.

We are grateful to our volunteers who helped with the Fall Festival Fundraiser

Sri Lakshmi Gandham
Tonianne Wong
Deborah Weinstein
Jane O'Rourke
Meg Hawley
Barbara Honthumb
Winston Langley
Chrisann Newransky
Karen Kayser
Cathy Ivonoski
Marcia Hathaway
Sarah Beston

Rob & Becky Vercollone
Kit Shaffer
Tim Titcomb
Dave Kayser
Kerry Staninus
Cameron Hoffpaur
Elizabeth Victor-White
Evan Alfonso
Matthew Pimenta
Grace Sperry
Noah Sperry
Judy Lister
Ashwini Biradar

And to the businesses and organizations that contributed . . .



YOUR IMPACT

Thank you to all who contributed to making 2025 a successful year for Friends of Kalangarai. With your generous donations, we have been able to sustain our organizational activities, provide grants to support the livelihoods of widows and their children, and meet our program goals of providing educational content on gender equity, economic development, and sustainability for the women of Kalangarai.

If you would like to make a year-end contribution, you can donate online or by mail.



Donate Online with QR

OR

Our Mailing Address:

Friends of Kalangarai,
P.O. Box 8755,
New Bedford, MA 02742

Friends of Kalangarai is a U.S.-based 501(C)3 nonprofit that supports community-based programs for widowed/abandoned women in South India through fundraising, education and research.

<https://kalangarai-india.org>

