

CANDLEAID LANKA - COVID-19 INITIATIVE (UPDATE AS AT 15 JULY 2020)



Around the end of June 2020, we all breathed a sigh of relief as we believed the worst was over and life indeed got back to a more normal pace. It was a welcome sight to see the roads filling up with noisy vehicles, pavements jostling with pedestrians, people bustling in and out of shops and even children going helter skelter in their snowy white uniforms.

At CandleAid all of us were exceptionally happy as we were able to do something meaningful to give relief to all our beneficiary families. These are families who need monthly assistance in their medical needs, in placing food on the table, in funding the academic needs of their children, some in schools and others in university.

At the start of our initiative we intended to give an additional LKR 2,000 to the families of our Gift A Meal programme as that was all we could afford at the time. However, we ended up giving this extra assistance to not only all the beneficiary families in the month of April, but also in the months of May and June 2020. A staggering amount of **LKR 8.2 million** and over was disbursed in a very methodical and accountable manner notwithstanding the administrative difficulties faced due to the office being closed nearly two of the said three months. While we pat our backs for this fete, we know without a doubt who made it all possible.

It was **YOU**, our network of regular sponsors and donors, both individuals and entities and even more unbelievably total strangers, Sri Lankans and foreigners who fattened the CandleAid bank accounts with their generous contributions for our COVID-19 initiative. Appreciatively, mostly confined to their homes, our staff worked hard to keep tab of all the donations that poured in, this being no mean task as the banks too were more closed than open and working very short hours. To their credit, our bankers went the extra mile to help us to get the monies to the 1400 over account holders in every nook and corner of Sri Lanka. The bank manager himself came to our door to collect the instructions.

While all this was going on, our beneficiaries made numerous calls to ensure that they are getting this extra help and expressed their heartfelt relief and thanks for this meager LKR 2,000 at a time when they were literally scraping the barrel for their day to day existence.

Below is the COVID 19 initiative account at-a-glance.

| | | |
|--|------------|-------------------------|
| Allocation from General Fund (1) | LKR | 786,341 |
| Donations Received/Pledged | LKR | <u>7,413,659</u> |
| Total allocated for COVID 19 initiative | LKR | 8,200,000 |
| Less: Disbursements made for 1413 families in April | LKR | <u>2,826,000</u> |
| | LKR | 5,374,000 |
| Less: Disbursements made for 1340 families in May | LKR | <u>2,680,000</u> |
| | LKR | 2,694,000 |
| Less: Disbursements made for 1347 families in June | LKR | <u>2,694,000</u> |

Below is a snapshot of the number of families assisted.

| Families of: | <u>April 2020</u> | <u>May 2020</u> | <u>June 2020</u> |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Gift A Meal programme | 201 | 201 | 201 |
| Cancer Patients' Assisted | 334 | 317 | 309 |
| Pre-University students | 544 | 501 | 494 |
| University students | 334 | 311 | 331 |
| Victims of the Easter bombing | <u>0</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>12</u> |
| Total families that received assistance | <u>1,413</u> | <u>1,340</u> | <u>1,347</u> |

Though the number of families are 1413 in April, 1340 in May and 1347 in June, the number of beneficiaries served under the three sponsorship programmes amount to 1513, 1516 and 1513 in the months of April, May and June respectively. This is because there is more than one beneficiary in some of these families. In the month of April, due to the need to get help for these families fast, CandleAid was only able to do a quick screening of multiple beneficiary families. However, by May, CandleAid was able to determine the families receiving multiple sponsorships more accurately and this is how the numbers came down. When it came to June, we were uncertain whether we could include both university and pre-university students due to shortage of funds. Therefore, a choice was made to disburse monies to the university students as their usual monthly donation was withheld in May and June due to universities being closed. Another reason for doing so is that LBW Trust of Sydney, an entity sponsoring 170 university students over the past several years sent us a sizeable donation to be used in the COVID-19 initiative, with which we could help families over and above their 170 undergraduates.

Lo and behold! No sooner the above decision was made, two considerably large donations, one expected and the other unexpected, reached the CandleAid account, enabling us to dole out the assistance to the families of all our sponsored students in the month of June too. Both these contributions came from individual donors.

The one-year pledge of LKR 5,000 per family given to 12 Easter bomb victim families ended in May and June and they were also given the extra donation of LKR 2,000 in the respective months.

Below are the circumstances of just a couple of families assisted.



Lihini and Sanduni are two undergraduate sisters. They have younger brothers who are twins, 12 years of age. Their father was a builder who lost the sight of his eyes considerably due to an accident. Their mother earned a meager income plucking tea leaves. During the height of the COVID-19 their father fell gravely ill and was rushed to the Nagoda hospital.

He was diagnosed with Rat Fever and after a few days in the ICU, he died, leaving a devastated family in shock and unbearable grief and young Lihini to carry the burden.

CandleAid gives them a Gift-A-Meal sponsorship and two university sponsorships. At the time of the father's hospitalization and subsequent death, they were in a desperate situation. All they were sure of receiving every month were CandleAid's three donations totaling LKR 6,000 as the Mahapola university grant reaches them sporadically. In this situation the extra LKR 2,000 given went a long way. CandleAid also gave them a special donation for the funeral expenses of the father.

Karunaratne (61) lives in Rambukkana with his daughter and aged mother. Karunaratne is visually handicapped from birth and as such has never been gainfully employed. His spouse, a teacher, had abandoned the family in 2003. In the early years she had been the breadwinner. His daughter, 21 years of age is writing the GCE A'Level examination this year for the second time.

Karunaratne receives the LKR 5,000 Government dole given to people with disabilities. They are supported by immediate family as and when possible.

CandleAid has given them a Gift-A-Meal sponsorship and they also received the extra LKR 2,000 from the COVID-19 initiative.



Yes, we did breathe a sigh of relief as mentioned earlier, but with all the recent COVID-19 positive patients that have been identified, sadly our relief was rather short lived. The pandemic is not over, and we have no control of it whatsoever. But all of you who joined CandleAid in our COVID-19 initiative and all of us at CandleAid can be deeply satisfied that we were able to help the likes of the above two families through our combined efforts.

CandleAid extends its most grateful thanks to each and every one who participated in this initiative. Please continue to walk with us on this long journey where we cannot gauge the distance to our destination, nor do we know what awaits us round the corner. We have no GPS or radar but we can be sure that the road will be lined with people in need, people who have no means to reach you on their own, people who need to smile at least once in a while.

***"It is better by far to light a solitary candle
than to curse the darkness"***

Please visit our website at www.candleaid.org
Dil Jayawardena

21 July 2020