

**The Ruhuna Children Development Trust
Third English Teacher Training Programme
14th August 2008 to 10th September 2008**

**Trainer: Mr Clifford Farthing (ex-OFSTED Inspector & UK Headmaster)
Organiser & Coordinator: Mohan Samarasinhe (Founder/Chairman, RCDT)**

Following the success of the 2006 and 2007 programmes, our third project was arranged at the Management Development & Training Institute in Wackwella, to the interior of Galle in the Southern Province, in collaboration with the British Consultancy Charitable Trust, Mr Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the President of Sri Lanka and the Southern Province Education Department. I feel confident that the support we received from them will continue in the future.

I met with Mr Sunimal Fernando, Adviser to the President and Coordinator/Convenor of the Special Presidential Task Force. This body was set up this year to work with the Indian government who have offered to finance the promotion of the teaching of English on the lines of the Indian model, to enhance job opportunities. The programme is very similar to what we have been doing since 2006 and has a strong Strategic Framework and Fast Track Activity Plan which could succeed provided it is as strong at the point of delivery.

The format of this year's programme was slightly changed at the request of the Director of English to include the Co-ordinators and members of the five Regional English Support Councils (RESC) and teachers of English from the twenty four Lighthouse Schools in of the province. The programme was therefore divided in to three sections; the Refresher Course for the teachers who attended the last two years courses, a programme for the RESC members and one for the Lighthouse Schools teachers. The last named are the best schools in their respective areas as identified by the Education Department.

Refresher Training (14/08 – 17/08)

Only a third of teachers from the previous two years' programmes attended the course for various reasons. However, those who did attend got a lot out of the training as is apparent from the feed-back comments on their forms.

RESC Coordinators and Members (18/08 – 22/08)

The total number who attended was 15 out of a total of 20 who had been written to by the department and of this number, 7 were teachers who were sent as representatives. However, it turned out to be a very successful 5 days and as stated by Cliff Farthing, the group was very responsive and showed some extraordinary progress during the second micro-teaching session. Three of the younger teachers showed real promise and we hope to train them further so that they could be mentors to their colleagues.

Lighthouse School Teachers Training (25/08 – 29/08)

This was a great success for the vast majority of the teachers, with a few reservations. It was evident that when the Principals are asked to nominate a teacher, the most senior refuse to come and a younger vulnerable replacement was substituted. Quite a few of these 'replacements' did not have a command of spoken English or understanding required for them to participate in the activities.

School Visits (02/09 – 10/09)

As in previous years, Cliff and I visited the schools (the Lighthouse Schools in this instance), some of which were situated in very remote areas from Kataragama to Elpitiya. We were well received by all of them and it was most encouraging to find that the teachers had already changed their old methods and started to use the newly gained skills. The students too, were responding with great enthusiasm to the new style of teaching spoken English.

We have learnt a great deal more from this year's programme and it would appear that the real interest and keenness lies mostly with the younger teachers who acknowledge their weaknesses and are willing to sacrifice their free time to improve their skills. They are the future of our country and we must help them at whatever cost.

We found it very encouraging when one of the leading government schools in Colombo who had heard of the RCDT programme, requested our help to improve the standard of English in their school, particularly amongst their intake of the many scholarship winners from rural areas. We had a very interesting meeting with the Principal and the Director of English of this leading school in Colombo and they expressed their desire for us to undertake a mini training programme. We have indicated our willingness to oblige and are waiting for their response.

Cliff and I also had a long meeting with the Minister of Education, Hon. Susil Premajayantha MP who showed a genuine interest in our programme and was very appreciative of our work.

Last but by no means least, RCDT and the teachers of English in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Cliff Farthing for his extreme hard work and commitment. As many of the teachers themselves have said, he is a unique person who genuinely cares for the teachers and children in rural Sri Lanka. He has in the past three years worked tirelessly (9.00am to 8.00pm every day) on a very intensive and demanding programme free of charge and put up with the basic food and accommodation provided for us without complaint.

Rural Sri Lanka is desperate to learn English and the parents of poor families make huge sacrifices in order to send their children to English tutors whose ability to speak English is limited at best. Anyone who is desirous of helping us should kindly contact me on 020 8906 1227, 07976 900 784 or by email on mohan@samarasinhe.com

My sincere thanks are due to the following for their invaluable assistance which helped to make the programme a success for a third year:

Mr Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to HE The President of Sri Lanka.

Mr N J Karunadasa, Director of Education, Southern Province.

Mr K V Wijesinghe, Director of English, Southern Province.

The Staff and Students of Wykes Regis Junior School, Friends of Sri Lanka

Associations and friends of RCDT whose generosity helped us to help our teachers of English in remote villages.

Mohan Samarasinhe
Founder/Chairman