

What dreams may come true!

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'Horizon Lanka', the model for taking ICT to the rural villages, is a famous word in Sri Lanka. It is also receiving international recognition. In fact, we never thought of creating a model to take ICT to the rural villages. First, we only wanted to develop our village. For this, we had a great hero to guide us. He is Mr. Nandasiri Wanninaya, our English teacher since 1998. I was 11 years old then.

Mr. Nandasiri was teaching us English in a public school of my village. His teaching method was able to attract us to the subject, although English was a subject hated by most children. Before Mr. Nandasiri it was difficult to learn, as we did not have a teacher who could teach us in a better way. But, Mr. Nandasiri managed to turn the tables. While we were continuing studies, our elder brothers and sisters started a journal called 'The Horizon'. We wrote stories to that journal and Mr. Nandasiri photocopied them from

the nearest town, which is 40 kilometers away from my village. By a stroke of good luck, the US embassy found out about the journal through an article which was written by Mr. Gamini Akmemana for a public English newspaper in Sri Lanka. The US embassy helped us with a 486 model computer and a dot-matrix printer, along with some computer books.

Mr. Nandasiri started teaching us about computers with the knowledge he gained from reading those books, as he himself did not have enough knowledge about computers. Each student got 5 minutes to operate the computer under Mr. Nandasiri's guidance. This was a fantastic experience for us children of poor farmers.

With Nandasiri sir's leaving public school, we were really sad since nobody could do Nandasiri sir's job there. We did not give up our way. We got together as a team and talked him to arrange an English class for us. He accepted our request and





started the class under a huge mango tree in his garden. and we did not forget to continue the journal too. A family called Gaminitilake donated a used computer to our English class and we started a website with their help and uploaded it from the town. Through the website, we got a big publicity throughout the world. It was a big revolution of us. Lot of donors came to us and helped to improve our English and computer knowledge. Eventually we could build a small computer room with the support of donors and the capacity of our parents. This was our journey.....

Today we have a modern computer Lab that was donated by Mr & Mrs. Charles. And we could build a tower to connect to the Internet from our village since we had to travel 80 kilometers up and down to access internet from the nearest city 'Anuradhapura'.

However, now I am 19 years old and I am confident that we can do something for our village from the knowledge we gained during a period of about nine years from Horizon Lanka.

About ten months ago, I realised one of the dream, in my life. I could travel to two countries for a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) training. I never had been out from this small island. But I was lucky to travel to Laos and New Delhi in India with the sponsorship of ICT Agency of Sri Lanka. During that training, we could see practically their operations and the way a BPO company meets the clients' demand, on time with good quality. Eventually we ended the training and returned to Sri Lanka with

the mind of starting our BPO Company in Mahavilachchiya. After a training period of three months, we had an opportunity to start a BPO company in rural Mahavilachchiya village. A foundation called FARO (Foundation for Advancing Rural Opportunities) is helping us in the initial stage to run the company. Already we have started the company named OnTime Technologies (Pvt) Ltd. John Keells is a major client of us.

We also are discussing with Dialog Telekom Ltd. and Singer Sri Lanka to get some more work for our youth. Around 50 youths are being trained to take up BPO jobs from Mahavilachchiya. Mahavilachchiya has very good infrastructure like a modern computer lab with 512 KBPS internet connection, 50 computers in the village households - 30 of them are connected to Internet through mesh technology - and 7 Wi-Fi zones in the village where you can use your laptops. Through our company, we are offering job opportunities for the youths in the village. This is a big revolution in the village and we are happy to say. This is what we wanted to do. However, we could do it. Now we are using same Horizon Lanka building and Horizon Lanka equipments. In the future, we hope to develop our company as the largest BPO company in Sri Lanka and build a huge building and develop as an our owned company. Nirosh Manjula, who trained with me in Laos and India and I am running this company.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped us to success this journey. ■

Horizon Lanka Foundation

The **Horizon Lanka Foundation** was established in 1998 because of the determination of a group of children from the rural village of Mahavilachchiya. Their thirst for knowledge and educational advancement led them to the door of Mr. Nandasiri Wanninayaka (now CEO of HL Foundation), their former English teacher in the public school. Thus began an after school club providing children further education in English and computers. It has become a popular place for many children of the village. Since 1998, the Horizon Lanka Foundation has branched out. As well as providing an all round education to the village children at Horizon Lanka Academy, they have expanded into the Information Age and now service their entire community with their computer lab, which has 24h Internet access. In 2001, the website www.horizonlanka.org was launched by the children of Horizon Lanka Academy, opening a window to the world.

HLF is also responsible for beginning a project, which is bringing PCs to the homes of the villagers of Mahavilachchiya. So far more than 30 homes have been furnished with a computer and this is increasing monthly. MicroScholarships is a project of the Horizon Lanka foundation that aims to help deserving students in their education. Many capable students in rural Sri Lanka are forced to interrupt their schooling because of financial difficulties. MicroScholarships ensure that every child covered under the scheme gets a quality education and a happy childhood. Under it, volunteers offer financial assistance that gives the child a small amount of money every month. The efforts, funded purely by kind donations and sponsorship, are now providing over 160 students of the village with computing skills, access to the Internet, PCs in their homes, an Academy to improve their education specializing in ICT and English and most importantly, giving the children and community fresh hope for their futures.

Source: www.horizonlanka.org