

Kingsbury Nurtures For A Better Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka is proud of a culture that values generosity and compassion. Inspired by this heritage and to ensure the longevity of these morals, The Kingsbury's new corporate social responsibility arm, The Kingsbury Nurtures, has launched several projects that will both raise awareness on social issues and improve the living standards of many.

By Keshini de Silva

“As individuals and through organisations we engage in various acts of charity. ‘The Kingsbury Nurtures’ initiative brings these efforts under one umbrella with the hope that there will be more focus and a greater impact,” says Dinithi Somaratne, Director Communications, The Kingsbury.

Citing various health concerns and issues of mental and physical abuse towards the

vulnerable, Somaratne said their aim is to help improve the living standards of those affected. The Kingsbury Nurtures further seeks to create awareness on the social issues and inspire society as a whole to share in the responsibility through acts of benevolence.

In its first round of CSR projects, The Kingsbury Nurtures identified critical problems faced by women, children and the elderly. Accordingly, a Breast Cancer Awareness campaign, World Children's Day Tea Party and campaign to provide vision care for the elderly were launched. The projects are being implemented in collaboration with the Cancer Care Association, National Child Protection Authority and Help Age Sri Lanka to ensure that the needs addressed at a significant level.

"We aimed to focus on one of the biggest concerns for women from a health perspective. Breast cancer is a burning issue that affects women. We are a segment that significantly contributes to the economy. Women account for a substantial percentage of the workforce, as professionals and as employees in the apparel and tea industry, Sri Lanka's largest exports, thus making a significant contribution in terms of foreign exchange earnings. Women are today both caregivers and breadwinners in their families," explains Somaratne.

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Sri Lankan women account for 35.5 per cent of the country's 8.8 million labour force, with many more employed in the informal sector. In 2014, women earned 6 billion US dollars and were declared the country's highest foreign exchange earners. "So who is really there for this segment?", questions Somaratne.

Currently, an estimated 2,500 cases of breast cancer are reported in Sri Lanka annually. Therefore, through its Breast Cancer Campaign, The Kingsbury Nurtures primarily aims to encourage women to undertake cancer screenings as there is a greater chance for cure if breast cancer is detected early.

Dinithi Somaratne revealed that while women in the rural community have limited access to health care, women in the city neglect their health due to a lack of time. Therefore, The Kingsbury Nurtures further hopes to inspire Sri Lankans to aid the Cancer Care Association in purchasing mobile mammography machines that would facilitate door-to-door screenings. Currently only a few institutions including the National Cancer Hospital in Maharagama offer pre-medical cancer care, which makes screenings inaccessible and time-consuming. Thus, the ease of obtaining mammogram examinations will encourage more women to undertake the screening.

The Cancer Care Association is a non-government organisation dedicated to the well-being of cancer patients and their families. According to Somaratne, Dr Samadhi Rajapaksa, the CCA's founder; Dr Ranga Perera, Consultant Oncological Surgeon; Dr Indrani Amarasinghe, Consultant Oncosurgeon and Dr Jayantha Balawardana, Consultant Oncologist and Radiotherapist have been instrumental in The Kingsbury's efforts to create awareness on breast cancer.

“We Want To Instill The Values Of Respecting Elders, The Environment And Flora And Fauna In Them At A Young Age.”

Promoting the welfare of children was seen as important to The Kingsbury Nurtures, in the face of an increase in child abuse across the world. In the month of October with the launch of “The Kingsbury Nurtures” we began by commemorating ‘World Children’s Day’ with a lovely Tea Party for children from several orphanages in the outstations. It was a remarkable day to see them enjoying themselves whilst playing games and getting their faces painted. All 130 plus children received a gift bag from The Kingsbury staff. Today children are burdened with academic and extra curricular activities to the extent that they do not even have time to play. As a result many do not attend Sunday school. We believe that if we start grooming our youngsters today, tomorrow there will be a better society. Hence, values such as respecting elders, the environment and flora and fauna will certainly help bridge the gap we see in children’s lives today, thereby creating a righteous society,” she said.

In its next step, The Kingsbury Nurtures is also looking to appoint the ‘Kingsbury Junior Ambassador of Goodwill’, who will be a role model to the other children in Sri Lanka.

Since 2013, The Kingsbury has been conducting a mobile medical clinic to distribute spectacles and offer free of charge cataract surgeries to underprivileged senior citizens. This year, together with Help Age Sri Lanka, The Kingsbury Nurtures has decided to facilitate free cataract surgeries on a monthly basis, as they have seen a dire need amongst this segment.

Somaratne stated, “Underprivileged senior citizens of this country find it difficult to carry on with their lives without a steady income and most do not even have their eyesight to manage daily life. The Kingsbury Nurtures identified this and it is our intention to pay tribute to those elders who once contributed to their families and the country by giving them the ‘gift of sight’. This would probably be our most rewarding initiative today as we make the time to find out how our gift of vision can help improve their livelihoods.”

Alluding to Sri Lanka’s long history of being a cultured and empathetic nation, Dinithi Somaratne concluded, “We believe it is time Sri Lankans walk the talk and start contributing more to their country. We hope our efforts will inspire another corporate or an individual to do more for their motherland.”