Navajeevana
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320, Mahawela Road,
Tangalle,
Sri Lanka.
Tel : 047-2242718/224 1345
Fax : 047 224 0579
Email : navajeevana@sltnet.lk

British teenagers bring new life to Navajeevana

Navajeevana Rehabilitation Tangalla, an NGO specialising in disabilities, knows that talent and potential to blossom lies within every disabled person regardless of their disability. Indeed Navajeevana's name, which means "new life" in Sinhala, and their extensive services for people with disabilities reflect this ethos.

This week, eighteen UK based teenagers have visited Navajeevana to help "new life" of a different kind blossom - by working for ten days to landscape, design and plant a "wild flowers of Sri Lanka" garden at the organisation's holistic centre for people with disabilities in Tangalla. The garden will form one part of a new project recently undertaken by Navajeevana and Mercy Corps to develop the site into a centre for responsible tourism, bringing awareness of and opportunities for people with disabilities.

The young people, who are aged between fifteen and eighteen and attend the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Alford, Lincolnshire, are visiting Sri Lanka for three weeks through the international adventure organisation World Challenge.

Sixteen year old challenger, Emma said: "This is the first time I have come to a country as far away as Sri Lanka, so it's a huge adventure for me. I am so excited to be here and am enjoying getting stuck into the work – even though it's hard, hot and sweaty work!

Claire, also sixteen, added: "We have all been very impressed with the work that Navajeevana does for some really disadvantaged people in Sri Lanka so we're very happy that our hard work here will help the organisation in the future. It's a big challenge for us too, and we are already learning so much from being here!"

The World Challenge project at Navajeevana will last for ten days, in which the young people will clear a large patch of land at the rehabilitation centre, lay the flower beds and plant the seeds. The responsible tourism project will see a coffee shop and handicrafts centre being constructed on site – all to be staffed by people with disabilities and their families. Aside from bringing much needed assistance to Navajeevana, the World Challenge project is also bringing support to the local community, as the project is dependent on sourcing equipment and goods for the project from small businesses of the area.

Kumarini Wickramasuriya, Founder and Chairperson of Navajeevana said: "Our vision for the Navajeevana centre is a holistic "one stop shop" for people with disabilities to access the services they need under one roof, and a place to showcase our vision of a world where people with disabilities are equal, visible, and participating.

"We have already constructed purpose built facilities for people with disabilities, including a special school and a fully accessible training centre, but have not had the chance to develop the garden. We are therefore extremely grateful to World Challenge and the young people from the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School for giving us this fantastic opportunity. They really are helping new life blossom at Navajeevana!"

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

World Challenge, which was established in the UK almost twenty years ago, designs and delivers outdoor educational programmes for school groups. While on expedition, the students will work as a team to manage themselves and their itinerary. The organisation arranges short term projects which benefit local charities or NGOs. The Sri Lanka project at Navajeevana will last ten days, after which the young people will visit tourist destinations around the island.

Navajeevana, meaning “new life”, has been working to rehabilitate people with disabilities in southern Sri Lanka for over twenty years. Based in Tangalla, the organisation’s vision is to see people with disabilities as equal and participating members of a non-discriminatory society. Navajeevana provides a holistic service for people with disabilities and work with the “whole” person—from early identification, intervention, and treatment to full rehabilitation, where the person is able to earn an independent income. It is this holistic approach which makes Navajeevana unique in Sri Lanka.