

## **Ram**

Afraid about when the next bout of headaches will surface; 21-year-old Ram faces each day confused, disheartened, and desperate. For him and many others living on Tea Estates, being able to see a specialist doctor depends on whether his mother has enough money for the appointment. Ram's mother receives Rs. 5000 (Approximately £28) each month. After settling the credit at the local shop incurred during the month and other small loans, the family will then allocate money for things that they class as an emergency. The money remaining is used to buy food for the family of five.

As a result, the dental problems that Ram suffered as a child were never a priority. What this meant for Ram, was that the nerves of his teeth were constantly exposed throughout his childhood. He also suffered many mouth infections, leading to a situation in which his tooth nerves leading to his brain have become severely damaged. This has left him with chronic bouts of severe headaches. The government-run Nawalapitiya Hospital have told him that he must have monthly medical check-ups to monitor his condition, but he will need a brain scan to identify the exact damage caused as a result of the exposed nerves in his teeth.

Suffering from terrible headaches, Ram still needs money from his mother's salary packet to get him to the hospital for his medical check-ups and medicine to keep his headaches under control. However, the family's lack of money means that he does not attend his appointment on a regular basis.

Despite his ill health, Ram is determined to overcome his battles. This bright young man learned the basics of Microsoft Office when he finished his G.C.E. A/L Exam (national level government examination) so that he could get work pay for a part time course in graphic designing in a Computer School in the nearby town of Hatton. He has a talent for speech and debate in the Tamil language, and has participated in many debate programmes in Colombo. Recently, he was involved in a televised debate.

His family is typical of one living on a Sri Lankan Tea Estate. His mother Selvam, labours hard among the tea bushes from morning until evening. His father Murugesu, was also a labourer on the Tea Estate, until and he fractured his arm due to his colleague's carelessness. As a result, he lost his job and did not get any medical assistance from the Tea Estate as he could not afford to contribute to the medical fund. However, Ram's father does odd jobs when he can get the work, to earn money for the family. Ram's younger brother was born deaf and dumb. However, after some medical treatment, he has much improved, but there is not enough money to meet all of the required treatment for his brother. Both of Ram's brothers attend the school on their Tea Estate.

Ram's mother wakes up at 4.00 a.m. every day and starts cooking breakfast and lunch for her family, usually roti and sambol (griddle cakes made of wheat flour

and scraped coconut mixed with chili powder, salt and onions). After she has served the school-going boys, she serves her husband and Ram. At 7.30am, she starts work. Picking tea can be extremely difficult, the dampness and rain coupled with inadequate shoes and clothing leaves Ram's mother susceptible to colds, flu more serious conditions such as pneumonia, along with the constant fight with leeches and having to watch out for snakes. The working days are becoming fewer, as the estate owners try to make the most profit. Ram's mother works solidly until just after 3.00pm. Once her arduous backbreaking working day is done, she then continues her arduous backbreaking domestic duties, gathering firewood for food and bathing, and fetching water for the home. As dusk settles, she hand-washes their clothes and prepares dinner, usually rice and a vegetable curry. Their house initially consisted of two line-rooms, used by the family of five for living, sleeping and cooking, but using most of Ram's father's pension money, they built a separate kitchen, so that the family could have more space. However, his pension money wasn't enough to complete the kitchen and presently stands half finished.

Ram believes that the centre will hugely improve his ability to speak English and will help him to realise his computer skills. He feels both will make him more attractive to the graphic design field, a profession he dreams to be in. The Success and Ethics lessons, which are designed to bring about the best in a person have helped Ram come to terms with his situation and shown him how to best overcome his battles.

There are thousands of youth are in situations similar Ram's, wondering, hoping and dreaming of a way out. Tea Leaf Vision Centre for Professional Development stands like a beacon to young people like Ram, providing them with real life skills through education and marketable skills, which will ensure them salaried permanent employment. Through an improved family income, they can enjoy an improved quality of life.

Through your generous sponsorship the life of many deserving youth like Ram can be touched and changed for the better.

\*\* Student's name has been changed to protect his identity. Exchange Rate :- SL Rs. 168 = £1 approximately.

