

## The MCC Centre of Excellence gets underway



Cricket players, Foundation of Goodness (FoG) staff, volunteers, community members and local MCC Trustees gathered for the soft opening of the major training centre and community hub the MCC Centre of Excellence in Seenigama last week.

The MCC Centre of Excellence, sponsored by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) and a wealth of other donors, is an ambitious project comprising of a medical centre, women's enterprise division, environment office, business skills development centre, modern computer lab, pre-school, handicraft boutique, re-building lives programme, English training school, MCC gallery, tsunami gallery, administration office and accommodation for volunteers, donors and trainers.

Built on the grounds of FoG's founder Kushil Gunasekera's ancestral home, the Centre of Excellence represents a major step forward from the devastation of the 2004 tsunami.



'I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in getting this Centre to where it is today - a unique landmark project against the backdrop of a rural community,' said Mr Gunasekara.

'Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the Marylebone Cricket Club in the UK for sponsoring the entire project, beginning with a tsunami relief cricket match between the MCC and a world XI which opened the gateway for the waves of compassion to make it all happen.'



The generosity of donors from across the globe and the hard work of Foundation staff has seen the transformation of what was once a ruined villa first into a relief co-ordinating secretariat for over 20 villages in the region, and now a modern facility well equipped to better the lives of people in and around the Seenigama rural communities.



The restored villa, with the tsunami mark in view



Mrs Weersinha lights the oil lamp



Sidath Wettimuny lights the oil lamp

Following a traditional oil lamp ceremony, attendees were given the opportunity to tour the extensive facilities which took a year to complete, with many commenting on how impressed they were by the high standard of presentation throughout the complex.

'It is hard to believe that this Centre was just a dream which many felt was too ambitious to become a reality after the tsunami flattened the whole area,' said Mr Gunasekera.





'Words cannot express how grateful the Foundation of Goodness is for the support – starting with Miloš Stanković who believed in the vision from the very beginning – which has enabled us to create a centre that will provide opportunities for thousands of local people to improve their lives.'

Sponsors of the Centre of Excellence and its programmes include: Marylebone Cricket Club (major sponsor), AVIVA, Direct Relief International, Help Sri Lanka, International Youth Foundation, NOKIA, Miloš Stanković, MBE, Ranjan De Costa, Sri Lankan Tsunami Children's Appeal Townsville, Stafford International School, VU Medisch Centrum Netherlands, UNICEF.



'The Centre provides empowerment through education, healthcare and vocational training, so that disadvantaged children and youth have greater opportunities to succeed,' Mr Gunasekera said.

Guests at the opening included Sri Lankan cricket team captain Mahela Jayawardena, local MCC trustees Vijaya Malalasekera, Ajith Dias, Mano Ponniah, and honorary MCC member and former Sri Lankan cricketer Sidath Wettimuny, highlighting the strong link between FoG and cricketing organizations who have offered much support in rebuilding the area.