

The Aram Initiative

Annual report | 2024

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Executive summary

The Aram Initiative envisions a thriving Sri Lanka shaped by its youth. Through our structured approach of discovery, research, and delivery, we aim to uncover and nurture areas of potential through a youth-led platform that facilitates challenge identification, knowledge exchange, and implementation of sustainable development solutions. 2024 marks a second full year of operations, and has been a year of immense growth, strengthened connections, and validation that Sri Lankan citizens and its diaspora are ready for change.

1. In our second annual trip, we expanded our volunteer base to 32 members who raised £35,000+, demonstrating the growing strength and potential of our diaspora reconnection mission.

2024 trip marked a significant step forward in scale and ambition, with a 50% increase in funds raised compared to 2023. This year's team brought together a mix of new participants and returning volunteers from our 2023 trip, reflecting the renewed commitment to our cause. The months of pre-trip preparation involved collaborating with 20+ beneficiary groups, coordinating donations, and designing structured activities to address pre-identified needs.

Over 14 days, the self-funded team worked across multiple regions, splitting into smaller groups to deliver healthcare camps, educational workshops, and infrastructure improvements. Donations ranged from essential quality-of-life improvements such as medical supplies and school equipment, to longer term improvements in physical and digital infrastructure – this facilitated both relief and sustainable development.

The trip's impact extended far beyond its duration. New partnerships were formed, international volunteers joined the effort for the first time, and many participants have since remained engaged by continuing to support longer term initiatives.

See Page 6 for Trip



Our 2024 trip route

2. Building on reflections from our inaugural trip, we've expanded both our geographical reach and the types of initiatives we deliver, enabling us to contribute to communities with limited development coverage today.

Based on feedback from our previous trip, we expanded beyond the North into the Upcountry and Mullaitivu regions, challenging the traditional concentration of development support from the diaspora. Each region presented distinct socioeconomic challenges, from addressing educational barriers in tea estate communities to tackling technological gaps in post-conflict areas. This geographical diversification brought us into partnership with organisations that have transformed our approach to creating impact.

Tea Leaf Trust's pioneering work in Maskeliya demonstrated how structured education programs (post-school English course) can break inter-generational outcomes.



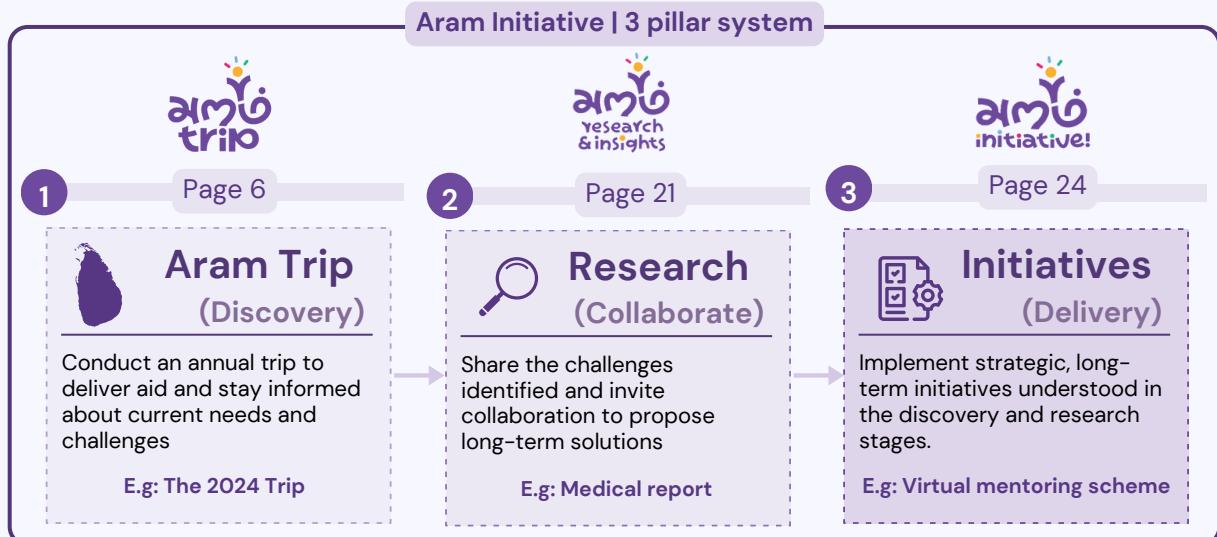
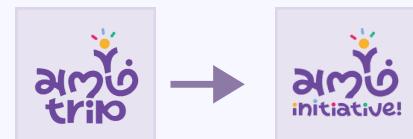
See Page 6 for Trip

Dreamspace's technology initiatives opened our eyes to innovation's role in community development, while the Impact Collective's strategic guidance helped us think bigger about our potential scale. These partnerships have evolved beyond traditional charity models – where we previously majored recreational activities and one-off donations, we now are attempting to build sustained programs with clear research and initiatives.

3. Our community reach has expanded significantly, with social media presence growing by over 3x, relationships established at 10+ UK universities, and various Aram showcases at networking events and institutions.



4. We've evolved from a single annual trip into a comprehensive year-round initiative. Our new structure reflects our commitment to continuous engagement and lasting change.



Our systematic approach ensures that insights gained during trips mature into researched solutions and ultimately translate into sustainable programs, with each pillar strengthening the others through continuous feedback and learning. Recognising that sustained impact requires expertise across multiple domains, we're partnering with various organisations (e.g. Dreamsplace, medical organisations, TPN) to enhance the delivery of our research and initiatives.

5. Thanks to extraordinary volunteer commitments, we've maintained zero administrative costs.

Our growth has been powered by partners who share our vision: Tamil Aid's Arnold and Meera shaped our trip framework from the ground up, Rinujan at the Impact Collective connected us to international stakeholders, and KCL Tamil Society's Kings of Gaana brought our message to greater audiences. Professional volunteers such as Sanjay Sakthivel (SS Visuals) and Joel at Dreamsplace elevated our media presence through high-quality video production at no cost. This generosity – professionals offering their expertise while balancing client work – is what enables non-profits such as Aram to thrive and create lasting impact in our communities.



Joel – our videographer!

As our projects scale we anticipate additional operational costs, and will fundraise separately to cover these through dedicated partners – this ensures that public donations continue to go directly to our initiatives with zero administrative costs

Our year in numbers



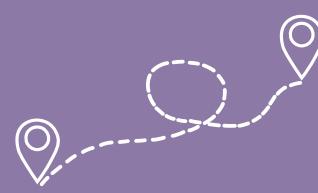
50

Volunteers reconnected with their roots over Aram Trip '23 and '24



~ £40k

Fundraised in revenue in 2024



4000km

Travelled across Sri Lanka on the second Aram Trip



1st

Ever free healthcare camp set up in Maskeliya estates



3

New long-term initiatives set up from the UK



30+

New students enrolled on our virtual mentorship program



£1.5k+

Deployed across Sri Lanka for flood relief



2+

Infrastructure projects completed in Sri Lanka



1000+

New followers on Instagram and Tiktok



THE ARAM TRIP



Our evolution from the 2023 trip

This year's trip planning was shaped by key insights gained from 2023:

- Short-term contributions address immediate needs, but they alone cannot create sustainable impact and we can do more to support this while in Sri Lanka and from the UK
- The trip needed to evolve into a platform for discovery – an opportunity to learn, explore, and lay the foundation for more significant contributions, maximising the value of in-person volunteer presence
- More structured pre-planning of resources and activities would enhance both the impact and efficiency of our trip
- Building trust with people on the ground was essential to foster longer term collaborations



Confidence workshop at Saratha Girls' during Aram Trip '23

What we took forward to 2024:

In response to these lessons, we refined the aims of our trips to prioritise lasting impact. This year, our efforts focused on:

- Setting up long-term infrastructure for community development (page 17)
- Spending more time to create well-structured resources for our activities (page 9 and 11)
- Organising more diverse and higher impact initiatives (e.g. health camp, digital mentorship, kullus)
- Collaborating with local organisations to understand and create sustainable systems

Each year brings valuable lessons that shape our future endeavours. We remain dedicated to carrying these insights forward, continuously evolving to maximise our impact.

The 2024 Aram Trip



This year our trip team brought together 27 self-funded volunteers from diverse backgrounds and ages. Whilst some volunteers were students studying subjects such as Economics, Medicine, and Pharmacology, other volunteers were working professionals and entrepreneurs. This diversity brought a wide range of skills and perspectives to our journey, enriching the overall experience. Our journey started in Colombo and ended in Jaffna. Along the way, we visited 14 institutions – 7 were places we had worked with before, and 7 were new organisations that we have now built relationships with both during and after the trip.

Our work during the trip can be split into five spotlight areas:

- Healthcare
- Education
- Recreation
- Community Development
- Technology

Read on to learn more about our activities in each of these sectors.

New Partnerships

Their focus

<p>Tea Leaf Trust Sri Lankan-led charity focused on uplifting tea estate communities through education and professional development.</p>	<p>How we work with them</p>
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<p>DreamSpace Academy DSA is a social enterprise based in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, which addresses local socio-economic and environmental challenges through innovative solutions.</p>	<p>We maintain a collaborative partnership with DSA, leveraging their ground-level networks while providing support for their initiatives and strengthening their connections with the diaspora.</p>
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<p>TEN TEN focuses on ground-up economic development in devastated regions through their 'Kullu' scheme (see page 27).</p>	<p>TEN's work has provided us with valuable insights into grassroots development, and we continue to work with them long-term to support and enhance their operations.</p>
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<p>Grassroots leaders Individuals that contribute significantly to create and grow impact across Sri Lanka alongside us at a youth and university level.</p>	<p>From assisting with logistics, to enhancing exposure to new communities and partnering on social projects, our partnership with Grassroot Leaders is diverse.</p>
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Trip spotlight: Healthcare

Our Approach:

Our healthcare team consisted of nine medical students and a doctor. With the available time, resources and expertise, we aimed to learn about the communities we worked in, and contribute meaningfully within our remit to address pre-assessed needs.

Before the trip, we developed structured resources for wellbeing sessions and healthcare camps, which we implemented during our visit. Our partners in the upcountry facilitated arrangements for health camps, where we conducted check-ups and provided basic medical support. Additionally, we led educational workshops on healthcare practices and led wellbeing sessions focusing on both mental and physical health.

Recognising the challenges of period poverty in the Up-country region, and limited access to otherwise ubiquitous SEN medical treatment, we provided donations to meet these acute needs. This balanced approach allowed us to contribute meaningfully and provide immediate help, while gaining a deeper understanding into local contexts, which is important in planning future sustainable responses.

Donations:

• Feminine Hygiene Products	Tea Leaf Trust, Saratha Girls', Herman Girls'
• General medical equipment (e.g. BP monitors, gloves, masks, oximeters)	Tea Leaf Trust
• Medical awareness, and wellbeing posters and resources	Saratha Girls', Herman Girls', St John's Boys'
• TENS machine, infra light machine, ultrasound pain relief, sodium diclofenac gel	HOPE autism centre

Activity 1. Healthcare camp



Monitoring station



Blood pressure reading



Drop-in station

Over the span of two days, our medical team ran a healthcare camp for women and children living in Maskeliya. Each check-up began with measuring basic observations such as heart rate, BMI and blood pressure. Residents were then given the opportunity to speak openly about any health concerns. Volunteers provided advice, conducted examinations where possible, and made initial judgments to be further validated with doctors.

For many residents, some as old as 70 years old, this was their first experience of a medical check-up. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss their health concerns and speak freely about their struggle, without the rush often experienced at local facilities. Common health concerns included joint and muscle pains, fatigue, and symptoms indicative of chronic conditions such as hypertension, malnutrition and musculoskeletal issues. While we provided guidance on managing symptoms through rest, improved nutrition and breathing techniques, we recognised that their demanding schedules, often picking tea leaves for up to 10 hours daily for minimal wages, made looking after their health difficult. This highlighted the need for more sustainable support systems to better their health and enable lasting health improvements.

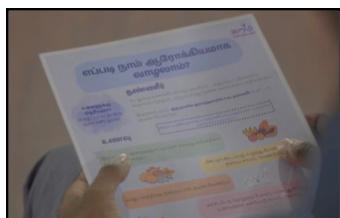
Activity 2: Healthcare workshops

Our team ran a series of workshops aimed at teaching preventative measures for common health conditions, and improving healthcare education. Prior to the trip, volunteers created posters and resources in Tamil on the following topics:

- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Iron deficiency
- Stroke
- Menstrual health & feminine hygiene
- First aid and CPR
- Healthy eating & living
- Dengue fever



Volunteers demonstrating the recovery position



Poster on Healthy Living

Selected topics were based on research that highlighted their prevalence.

At Tea Leaf Trust in Maskeliya, volunteers demonstrated CPR and emergency scenario management through interactive role plays. Small-group discussions on nutrition and feminine hygiene provided learning opportunities for both interns and volunteers. The laminated resources donated will enable interns to continue teaching these topics to their students.

At Herman Girls' Home in Kalmunai, we led a session on feminine hygiene and menstrual health. Given the taboo nature of the topic, this created a valuable safe space for learning and open discussion. The girls connected deeply with the volunteers, referring to them as sisters and expressing gratitude for the supportive environment.

Activity 3: Wellbeing Circuit

Building on insights from 2023, we prioritised mental wellbeing support at some of the children's homes through an interactive circuit of workshops, creating Tamil-language resources including instruction posters and activity guides.

The circuit comprised of four stations:



Yoga station

1. Guided yoga and breathing: Introduction to basic poses and breathing techniques for mindfulness practice, with resources made to follow
2. Trust workshop: Group activities centred on mutual trust and support, followed by open discussions on self-belief.
3. Origami and arts: A creative break station designed for natural connection between volunteers and the girls.
4. Recognising emotions: Using custom-designed cards to guide discussions around identifying emotions and coping mechanisms.

The circuit's design was very well engaged with, and our donated pre-made materials and staff training ensured these wellbeing practices could continue after our departure. Overall, the feedback from the girls was overwhelmingly positive, with many girls expressing a particular appreciation for the yoga and breathing session.

Visiting Vavuniya and Jaffna Hospitals

Our medical students were able to:

- Observe outpatient consultations within both hospitals
- Observed surgical procedures within Jaffna University Hospital

Our clinical exposure demonstrated how Sri Lankan medical professionals adapt and maintain patient care despite significant resource and technological limitations, showcasing their dedication and resilience.

Trip spotlight: Education

Our Approach:

This year, we shifted our educational focus from subject-specific teaching to equipping students with fundamental study skills and resources for long-term success. We developed and delivered workshops on effective revision strategies, including spaced repetition, active recall techniques and wellbeing techniques that students could apply across all subjects.

To extend our impact beyond the trip, we trialed virtual classroom lessons in remote, underserved areas, laying the groundwork for ongoing online mentorship programs. At Tea Leaf Trust's request, we also conducted CV writing workshops to enhance students' employability prospects after graduation.

Donations:

• Technology and digital learning equipment (e.g. laptops, projectors, webcams, speakers, cables)	Saratha Girls Home, Tea Leaf Trust, HOPE, St John Boys, Vavuniya Tutors etc.
• Educational materials (340 school bags, incl. supplies)	Tea Leaf Trust, Herman Girls Home, Ohiya, etc
• SEN specific toys to promote interactive learning	HOPE, Serendip Special Needs

Digital mentorship lesson

We piloted virtual learning sessions at the orphanages, connecting with UK-based volunteers online whilst we were there to trial a brief for Maths and English lessons. To understand which formats would work best for future virtual mentoring, we tested various setups, from full classroom projector sessions to small group sessions around a laptop. Students engaged with different digital learning tools, and were very receptive to the set up and screen sharing. The exercise helped us assess their comfort with technology and identify the most effective approaches for our upcoming virtual mentoring program.



Trial lesson with two of our 2023 trip volunteers

Study Skills Workshops & Resources



Study techniques poster

We developed comprehensive study resources in Tamil, focusing on effective revision strategies including spaced repetition, active recall, and revision techniques. At Saratha Girls' and Herman Girls' home, through small group discussions, we identified key challenges ranging from fatigue-related focus issues to limited use of recall techniques and proper breaks. We will aim to address these in our virtual mentorship curriculum.

Our workshops addressed these specific needs, introducing structured breaks and learning theory-based learning methods. Time management strategies and techniques to prioritise tasks were also introduced. We provided translated materials to ensure students at these homes could continue applying these techniques across all subjects after our departure.

Tea Leaf Trust workshops



Business skills prep



Sales and communication



Business workshop

At Tea Leaf Trust, we focused on equipping students with practical skills for future employment opportunities. We structured our support to build on their existing curriculum and principles as being outside-in workshops that were agnostic of their teachings.

The first workshop focused on soft skills development, covering interview techniques including body language, voice projection, and confidence building. Students practiced these skills with CV and cover letter preparation exercises. Their enthusiasm showed in voluntary peer practice sessions between workshops, demonstrating both quick learning ability and strong motivation.

Building on this foundation, we delivered business fundamentals training to prepare students for upcoming trade fairs. Working in small groups, students developed business concepts, created budgets, and gained hands-on experience through auction participation. Our volunteers provided targeted support to each group throughout their project development.

Trip spotlight: Community Development

Our Approach:

Our community development work this year focused on understanding diverse regional challenges across Sri Lanka. Through local connections, we engaged with self-help groups in Mullaitivu through The Economic Nest, provided school essentials for 140 students in under-resourced Vavuniya villages, and explored mountain communities in the Upcountry region.

We renewed existing partnerships, particularly with HOPE Autism Centre, where we continued supporting refurbishments and special needs initiatives. In Ohiya, we undertook an infrastructure project while learning about the unique challenges of mountain communities. These interactions allowed us to gain valuable insights to areas otherwise missed by traditional aid approaches.

Donations:

• 60 school bags containing books and stationery	Vavuniya village schools
• Hampers containing stationery, bracelets, rape alarms and sanitary products	Herman Girls' and Saratha girls'
• Funding for the reopening of a water tank	Ohiya Preschool
• Funding for classroom and roof	HOPE centre

Rural School Visits

Through a local resident's connection, we visited several village schools in rural Vavuniya. While we provided school shoes and bag vouchers for 140 students aged 6-16, these visits proved most valuable as learning experiences.

Parents and students openly shared their challenges and aspirations, particularly emphasising their desire for better educational opportunities. We engaged with the younger children through interactive games, discussed the importance of good secondary education with teenagers, and held frank discussions

with local leaders about community challenges, notably where mothers shared deeply personal concerns about drug-related safety issues affecting their children's education.



Classroom Games

The Tamil Economic Nest (TEN) – Self Help groups

We explored the Tamil Economic Nest's growing ethical microfinancing initiative in war-affected regions across Sri Lanka.

Their 'Kullu' scheme provides low-interest micro loans to female-led households, empowering small businesses in sewing, fishing, and farming while protecting families from predatory lending. Beyond financial support, the initiative fosters community bonds among participants, a crucial element for recovery in these regions.

Observing their operations was inspiring, highlighting their resilience to improve their lives despite past hardships. Aram's visit revealed opportunities to enhance impact through digitisation and streamlining of finances which we began executing on the trip and are continuing to do so (see page 27)



Post meeting snap

Refurbishment – Ohiya & HOPE

Ohiya:

We funded the restoration of a water tank that had been unused for over a decade. Residents of Ohiya previously had to walk for over a kilometre up a hill to simply access clean water, thus this was an essential, long overdue project that will deliver immediate impact.

We will also fund the installation of a working toilet in the local primary school for students and teachers to use.



Ohiya water tank project



Hope:

At HOPE Autism Centre, we supported ongoing refurbishments including roof repairs and a new classroom, and have been funding community events to maintain a nurturing environment for the children.

Writing a mural for HOPE's motto, post refurbishment

Overall, while these projects met critical needs, they highlighted the importance of establishing local maintenance systems to ensure long-term sustainability without repeated external intervention.

Trip spotlight: Recreation

Our Approach:

Alongside our development initiatives, we integrated recreational activities to build connections and promote wellbeing. For children with special needs, we spoke to healthcare professionals (including Dr. Puvendran of SPARKS) before the trip, who recommended specific toys, play techniques and resources for us to use.

We provided sports equipment across several locations to encourage healthy pastimes, while at Serendip Fine Arts Centre we participated in a concert with several musical performances and also donated instruments for their students. These activities created moments of joy and connection valued by both locals and members of the trip.

Donations:

- Play therapy and sensory toys (push/pop, gym balls, ring towers, doctors play set) Serendip Special Needs and HOPE
- Sports equipment (e.g. professional cricket sets, sports cones) Herman Girls' and St John's Boys'
- Musical instruments and equipment (violins, guitar, drums, microphones) Serendip Fine Arts
- Sensory toys (e.g. starlight projectors, bubbles, stress balls) Multiple centres

SEN Activities (HOPE/Serendip)

We spent time at these centres engaging children in activities aimed at enhancing cognitive development. These included drawing, arts and crafts, music and sports activities which we organised as a circuit to ensure that each child had a chance to explore each activity.

At both HOPE and Serendip many parents were also present, giving us the chance to speak with them and gain insights into common concerns and the opportunities available for those living with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

Our time at the centres highlighted the need to educate parents and the wider community about disabilities through accessible media, offering practical guidance and fostering greater understanding



Classroom Games



Arts & Crafts

Music and Dance



Serendip Fine Arts performance

Building on 2023's success, music and dance continued to be a powerful tool for connection across all regions. They were invaluable in breaking down barriers and creating instant bonds with children across all locations we visited, transcending language and cultural differences.

At Serendip fine arts centre, we participated in a showcase hosted in honour of our visit with a musical performance. The centre received donated instruments to enhance their future music sessions. At nearly every home we visited, our visits concluded with a singing and dancing session, creating joyful moments and stronger connections with the children.

Sports



Netball tournament



Varany netball first XI x Aram



Pannankandy school

We participated in Varany Central College's sports day, fielding teams in football and netball tournaments. These matches created natural opportunities for connection and friendly competition. At St John's Boys Home, we continued building relationships through spending time playing football and cricket with the boys, and we also had several graduates from the home return to spend time catching up and joining in on the activities with us.

We donated various pieces of sports equipment to Pannankandy school. The children at this school were extremely interested in badminton, volleyball, cricket and football, and are determined to pursue competitions at the regional, national and international playing stages. Playing with them not only helped create unforgettable bonds, but also understand the high level of ambition in the children.

Trip spotlight: Technology

Our Approach:

With available resources and expertise, we aimed to establish sustainable technological foundations that would extend our impact beyond the trip. Our efforts included building digital infrastructure for remote learning across the North, Centre, and East, conducting technology workshops at Mullaitivu Media Lab, and teaching basic Microsoft Word lessons at Varany Central College. We also donated various electrical items to develop local communities, including a sewing machine to generate revenue.

Donations:

- Digital classroom equipment set (i.e., projector, webcam, microphone, laptops) x5
- Tablets (x2)
- Sewing Machine (x2)
- Laptops (x8)

Tea Leaf Trust, HOPE, Saratha Girls Home, St Johns
TEN – Mullaitivu
Herman Girls Home
St John Boys, Vavuniya Tuition Centre,
TEN – Mullaitivu, Saratha Girls

Setting up digital classroom equipment

The team set up digital infrastructure required for online learning (i.e. laptops, cabling, projectors, camera) in 5 rural and underserved regions with the hopes of bringing them online for virtual mentorship for our future initiatives (see page 26 for more detail). This unlocks potential for more volunteers to get involved from their own home.

Reflections: We are constrained by the quality of internet services in each location but this is another issue we could explore in improving. Beyond setting up equipment, we would also want to look at how we digitise processes outside of education (e.g. transitioning from paper to digital records)



Example set up of digital learning equipment in Trincomalee

IT Skills Workshop

Before we visited Varany Central College, we incentivised 3 teachers to begin a 3 month program of teaching grade 6 students basic IT skills to nurture interests in Computer Science from a younger age. Our volunteers supported a few lessons, helping teach basic Word skills to students. We also reviewed the curriculum that the teachers had developed, and discussed how they would follow up with developing further interest in IT.

Reflections: The school faces challenges in technology adoption as most staff have extremely limited digital skills, with only a few faculty members proficient enough to teach basic Microsoft applications.



IT skills workshop

AI Workshop

The team visited the UKTSU media lab in Mullaitivu to deliver a workshop on AI and ChatGPT. While ChatGPT is now widely used in Sri Lankan universities, secondary school students in rural areas had little to no awareness of it or AI as a concept. Volunteers introduced the students to ChatGPT's use cases and potential pitfalls, followed by an interactive activity where students used the chatbot to role-play as effective tour guides in Sri Lanka. The chatbot also became a useful tool for volunteers, serving as a translator when their proficiency in the local language fell short. The session concluded with a discussion on additional AI applications.



ChatGPT Workshop



Mullaitivu Media Lab

Reflections:

Introducing generative AI to remote communities requires minimal effort especially for the transformative potential it holds for development. During the workshop, students quickly recognised how AI could enhance their studies—something they had not previously considered. However, it was essential to emphasise the limitations of large language models, such as generating incorrect information ("hallucinations") and the risk of over-reliance, which could hinder independent thinking.

Beyond education, AI has vast potential to streamline local businesses and healthcare operations in Sri Lanka. A key challenge for future implementation will be digitising these processes, as many remain paper-based and manual. Given the early stage of AI adoption and its ability to level the playing field across various capabilities, increasing AI fluency in Sri Lanka presents a unique opportunity to accelerate development and close the gap with the rest of the world.

Where did your money go?

Thanks to the help of volunteers, donors and partners, this year we have raised ~£35K during the Trip Season. See a breakdown of funds collected, and an overview of how they have been used below.

2024 Sources & Uses:

Source of Funds	£
'23 Balance carried over	1,159
Trip 24' - JustGiving Team Fundraising	24,940
Trip 24' - GiftAid from JustGiving	5,923
Trip 24' - Harley Lounge Soiree	3,305
Trip 24' - University Events	778
Balance at Trip 24'	36,097
UK Tamil Awards	500
Sony Music India	5,000
Total	41,597

2023 donations totalled ~£21k and ~£19k was used across various initiatives

Sponsorship deals were secured post-trip by showcasing the impact from the 24' Trip

Partner location donation requests were scrutinised to ensure real impact could arise from them. Further funds were spent on items needed to deliver our initiatives.

When required, we partnered with local organisations to secure required items at favourable rates

We aim to allocate funds in a way that maximises impact, informed our by trip discoveries. The 2024 surplus will be used across various initiatives in 2025.

Thanks to our volunteers, we were able to keep 2024 completely admin cost free!

Use of funds	£
Trip and Initiatives	
Community Development - Physical Infrastructure Projects	782
Community Development - School supplies and shoes	601
Community Development - Hardship Fund	2,500
Education - Digital Learning Equipment	1,150
Education - Supplies	305
Recreational - (SEN Toys, Arts & Crafts, Sports)	706
Rereational - Musical Instruments	777
Healthcare - Equipment & Resources incl. Special Needs	1,127
Technology - Laptops	Sponsored
Technology - Other	824
In-progress deployment (Trip follow ups in healthcare and community development)	~3,500
Acute uses	
Flood Relief - Various partner locations	1,597
HOPE extracurricular activities	615
Total	14,484
Cash at hand (incl. in-progress)	27,113

Reflections:

Each visit to Sri Lanka reveals new insights that shape our approach. The diversity of needs across regions continues to challenge our assumptions, reminding us to stay flexible. Our understanding deepens with every interaction, showing us that our most valuable contribution often lies in listening and connecting rather than prescribing solutions.

Reflecting on each of the different aspects of the trip we made the following learnings:

	Reflections	Objectives
1	We constantly witness remarkable potential in individuals in Sri Lanka. They are hindered by opportunity and foundational support (i.e. basic health / education) rather than ability.	Identify problems and their root causes, define potential solutions and initiatives, and share observations with partners who are better positioned to contribute.
2	Small interventions which may seem like marginal improvements can yield significant impact. Simple insights that we know from abroad can have a huge impact if shared.	Build a repository of resources across all focus areas and make this accessible to target groups via different media forms.
3	Certain initiatives, such as those in education, require partnerships with decision-makers and organizations to deliver, as they extend beyond our capabilities or need approval.	Communicate effective solutions based upon data and evidence, and work with necessary partners to scale them.
4	There are many capable local organisations to partner with – we must prioritise the most impactful solutions and empower locals to execute them with ongoing collaboration.	Work with locals to define needs, build a local volunteer network and integrate their in-flight efforts with our initiatives.
5	We aim for the trip to be an avenue for long term involvement, with clear pathways on how to contribute beyond the two weeks.	Frame the trip as an entry point to all initiatives, with volunteers forming a clear idea of where and how to contribute before they begin proposing solutions.

RESEARCH

Introduction to Research and Insights

2



Research and Insights

Communicate and share the challenges identified and invite collaboration to propose long-term solutions

Communicate observations
Social Media, Articles

Write up findings
Analysis and reports

Collaborate on solutions
Advisory network

Propose systems
Strategic initiatives

Why Research & Insights?

Research and insights form the second pillar of Aram's approach, going beyond surface-level recounting to share deeper insights about Sri Lanka's current reality and explore areas of interest with our own findings, further research and data.

By communicating themes and breaking down initiatives we come across, we hope to inspire the next generation of diaspora to contribute and take steps to understand how communities are developing, through both long-form and short-form media. Our analysis aims to help organisations and individuals with different skills see exactly where they could make an impact, whether it be through funding, expertise, or direct involvement.

We invite experts, organisations, and interested parties to engage with our findings and help develop solutions that address the real needs that we have identified.

Current research pieces

We are currently sharing our trip insights through diverse formats, from in-depth analysis to short-form content

1. Self-Help Group Article Series

2. Documentary Reel Series

3. Aram Medical Report

Research and Media

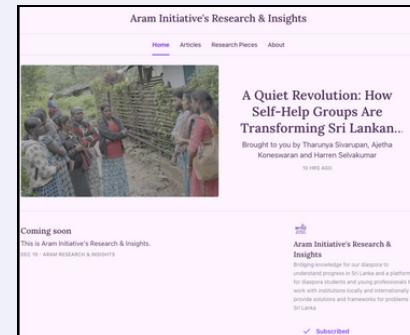
1. Research and Insights site

Our recent field visits to Sri Lanka revealed the transformative work that is being done across different areas of development.

Our Research and Insights site aims to shed a light on these initiatives and show the diaspora how these community-driven initiatives create sustainable change beyond traditional aid models.

The first article shares inspiring examples of rural Sri Lankan communities building resilience through collective action in the form of Self-Help Groups.

Our site



2. Documentary-style reel series

We are communicating information about the locations we visited, the activities we conducted and organisations we partnered with across the 2-week trip through reels for the public. Beyond educating and showing what we did in short-form, these reels aim to give exposure to the good work of our partner organisations, creating the potential for the public to work with them or generate exposure for fundraising.

Our videos



3. Medical Report

During our visits, we conducted different forms of healthcare intervention. Through checkups, we collected and anonymised data to understand health patterns in the communities we visited. We presented these findings in a report with suggested interventions, aimed at decision-makers who can enact change. The analysis highlights prevalent conditions, healthcare challenges across varying settings and regional disparities.

Our report, data and insights





Healing Opportunity Persons for Empowerment

Vision: an inclusive society providing the persons with disabilities a dignified life with ample equal opportunity in the community

Mission : to fulfil the rights in the inclusive society providing persons with disabilities improving education, economy, health, medical care, vocational, etc



INITIATIVES

Introduction to Initiatives

3



The Initiatives

Where we implement strategic, long-term initiatives understood in the discovery and research stages

Identify volunteers & partners
Within diaspora and on-the-ground

Designate leads to implement
At a sustainable commitment level

Monitor, measure and learn
For future trips/initiatives

Why initiatives?

Initiatives form the third pillar of Aram's approach, where we turn insights into action. When we first started our work, like many organisations, we believed that it would be difficult to make impact further than fundraising and allocating money. Our first year consisted of a two-week trip with visits and donations. While forming valuable learning experiences, these interventions left us questioning: *what happens after we leave?*

The rapid digitisation post-COVID has enabled us to be more collaborative than before. We have followed this shift, setting up digital infrastructure in centres across Sri Lanka to enable year-round engagement. Through these platforms, the diaspora can now maintain meaningful connections with local communities, whether it be through virtual mentoring or supporting ongoing projects.

In-flight initiatives

We have identified numerous follow-up opportunities through our discovery and research phases, and are actively piloting initiatives, **examples include:**

1. Virtual mentoring scheme
connecting students to diaspora mentors
and organisations

2. Digitising microfinance project
Improving the operating model of
Self-Help Group finances

While we cannot address every challenge directly (and are not best placed to), we will focus on collaborating with partners who can contribute by using the infrastructure we have set up.

Initiatives

1. Virtual mentoring scheme

Context

We recognised we needed to maintain the momentum from our visits. These students were eager to learn, and we had a real opportunity to build lasting connections that could support their educational journeys.

This realisation led to our second year, where we focused on building digital infrastructure through providing laptops, WiFi connections, microphones, and projectors. We needed to create sustainable relationships that would outlast our physical presence. We realised that students had diverse needs across the country and across the board were very eager to learn, but (a) lacked role models in non-standard (e.g STEM) pathways, and (b) lacked guidance to navigate the education system to access their desired careers.

Aram's initiative

Our virtual mentoring scheme connects Sri Lankan students with, building on our in-person impact and opening new learning pathways and strengthen existing bonds. educational opportunities and community.

Our Plan of action

-  Set up equipment needed at in-person centres for remote teaching
-  Discuss mentorship needs with individual centres (including format, baseline ability etc)
-  Work with diaspora organisations and local volunteers to create holistic curriculum
-  Create matching and booking process for online mentorship
-  Gather diaspora and local volunteer availability
-  Launch, measure progress and iterate for individual subject areas

Progress so far

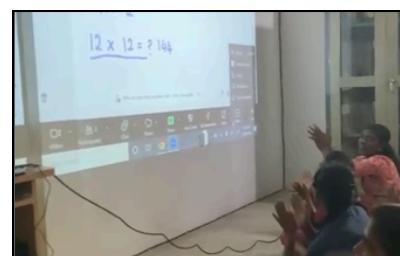
We have various programmes across different curriculum areas, all aimed at improving quality of life for 35+ students

- 1 **Foundational Maths and English:** in progress
- 2 **Career pathway development:** in progress
- 3 **Subject specific mentorship:** in progress
- 4 **Soft skills and wellbeing:** in progress
- 5 **Public speaking and confidence :** building
- 6 **IT Skills:** building

Study skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand effective study habits and routines; • Identify study techniques like active recall, spaced repetition, Cornell notes, and flashcards • Reflect briefly about organisational techniques such as making-to-do lists 	Presentation : https://h.blog/spacing-effect/ Sethu
Setting goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on personal goals and aspirations • Identify how to set goals using the SMART technique • Learn how to use SMART set personal and study goals 	Interactive whiteboard session Sethu
Growth Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to replace negative thinking with positive thinking • Identify how negative thinking is impossible, and every individual has their own potential and growth 	Motivational talk - lots of stories, examples, etc - not a lecture, but rather a moving/inspirational talk Get someone from St. to deliver talk maybe
Time management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how to prioritise tasks based on urgency and importance • Understand how to make effective to-do lists and schedules 	Presentation : Step by step guide to how to create a timetable + to-do list: https://www.google.com/search?q=how+to+make+a+timetable+for+school+with+examples+and+steps+in+easy+ways Ajancia Lesson plan: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D1u4



Example curriculum



Example resources

Teaching

2. Kullu

TEN Self-Help Groups (SHGs), locally known as "Kullus", are women-led microfinancing groups. We are working with management that empower low-income families to achieve financial independence. They provide members of the kullus with access to initial seed loans to start businesses, generate income, and ensure sustenance.

Aram's initiative

On the Aram trip we recognised potential to reduce workload and increase clarity for management. We're doing this by helping to digitise their financial tracking, streamlining processes that have been entirely manual to date. By automating and simplifying their accounting and finance processes, we aim to help management track and diagnose trends earlier, make better data-driven decisions and scale-up operations more easily.



Analysing current finances

Proposed system



New financial tracking templates that produce automated views on key performance metrics upon data entry



Digital input of savings and lending books via tablets connected to the internet for real-time data upload



New digital forms and questionnaires to replace pen and paper input with physical filing



Digital upskilling sessions held periodically to help management teams and treasurers get comfortable with digital systems



Progress so far

We have established tracking templates and digital forms, and are integrating these within a new finance function operating model. We will be conducting this digitisation exercise with 3 groups at various stages in their lifecycle and understanding best practices within these varied contexts.

Our aim is to bring audit completion time down by more than a year and implement real-time tracking within the next 3 to 6 months.

Our visit to TEN



How you can support us

Real change happens through collaboration. We are looking for passionate individuals ready to take initiative and drive projects forward. Whether you have a few hours or want to lead an initiative, there are many ways to make meaningful impact with Aram. We would value knowledge sharing and involvement from other organisations who would like to collaborate to make a change.

If you're a **student or young professional**, we would value:

The Aram Trip

 Joining us on the Aram Trip 2025

 Helping point us to people who can help us with travel/accommodation

Research & Insights

 Volunteering your research and writing skills

Initiatives

 Programme coordinators
Programme volunteers e.g. mentor

Operations

Social Media, Managing spreadsheets and tracking, building new tools

If you're a member of an **organisation or business**, we would value:

The Aram Trip

 Donations delivered **on the trip**

 **Infrastructure** project donations

 Flight discounts/
Sponsors

 **Domestic travel**
discounts/contacts

 **Delivery** logistics (for donations)

Research & Insights

 **Connections** to experts to collaborate on projects

 Expertise on advising on our focus areas

 **Office/ meeting room** space for collaboration

Initiatives

 Donations to enable rural connectivity

 Funding our long-term initiatives

 Delivery logistics (donations) – within SL

 Collaborative partners

Special acknowledgements

Tamil Aid	Arnold & Meera
Thank you for organising the Harley Lounge Soiree, and helping us with trip logistics and payments	Thank you again for helping us by being our mentors during this trip and empowering us with responsibility
DreamSpace Academy	Serendip Children's Home
Thank you for your help with bringing our resources to life, sourcing donations and for training amazing youth to innovatively contribute to our society	Thank you for coordinating and purchasing donations, and for hosting us at your Fine Arts Centre
TEN Team, Chayan and Abiramy	Nanthujan – Vavuniya
Thank you for maintaining the TEN organisation and working with us on trying to increase its impact	Thank you for taking us across rural villages in Vavuniya, running your tuition centre and coordinating our Vavuniya donations
Dhushanthan and Pranavan	Tim and Vinotharan from the Tea Leaf Trust
Thank you for introducing us to Ohiya village, for educating us and keeping us safe throughout our hike, and for altering our perspectives deeply on life within the hill country	Thank you for helping coordinate so much within our stay at Maskeliya, and for hosting workshops for our volunteers to learn more about fundraising
Lionel, Kirthi	Rinujan Kananeswaran
Thank you for safely taking us around on our trip. Despite our language barriers, we had some great moments and you really helped everyone understand what unity and peace is	Thank you for stepping in to help chaperone, connecting us with local networks and supporting what we're doing so deeply
Dr Puvanendran	Thaneswaran & Sumathi
Thank you for your kind donations and expertise on SEN education that we took forward on our trip	Thank you for stepping in to help chaperone, connecting us and looking after us when needed
Niruthihan – Kings College Tamil Society	Sony Music India
Thank you for making us your sponsor for Kings of Gaana 2024	Thank you for your kind sponsorship and endorsement from Anirudh
UK Tamil Awards	Sanjay Sakthivel
Thank you for awarding us as a 'pioneering charity in connecting thayakkam' and donating £500	Thank you for helping us out with our media and creating our amazing KOG video
Baskaran Kandiah	Gowri Akka (Thirandal Midukku)
Thank you for hosting us at Reecha Farms and inspiring the volunteers through showcasing your project and motivating words	Thank you for building a great network that has helped us greatly in finding new organisations such as the Tea Leaf Trust
University Partners	Tamil Entrepreneurs
Thank you to Kings, Imperial, Oxford, Cambridge, St Georges, Nottingham, Brighton, Sussex & LSE for sharing our vision of changing collaboration	Thank you for letting us be your charity sponsor for your 2024 networking event and allowing us to present to over 100 Tamil entrepreneurs

Thank you

This year's journey has been eye-opening; we were able to gain insight into regions of Sri Lanka that are not well understood or known. This would not have been possible without the trust and openness of the communities we visited. From the mothers in Vavuniya who shared their deepest concerns, to the Tea Leaf Trust students eager to learn, to the dedicated staff at HOPE and Serendip who work tirelessly with special needs children – your willingness to share your experiences and collaborate on solutions has been humbling, and your collective resolve is inspiring.

Our special thanks go to our local partners who helped us navigate new regions and understand complex challenges. The Economic Nest team showed us what genuine community-led development looks like. Tea Leaf Trust demonstrated how education can transform lives. Our partners across the country, especially in Ohiya and Vavuniya, helped us reach communities often overlooked by development initiatives.

To our volunteers who dedicated their time and expertise – from creating Tamil resources and running workshops to setting up digital infrastructure – your commitment to building lasting connections has laid the groundwork for our ongoing initiatives and we hope that our initiatives have helped reconnect you with your motherland.

To every single person who donated and trusted in the vision, thank you for empowering us – we hope to continue doing work that delivers impact and meaning behind your investment

Most importantly, thank you to the children, students and community members who welcomed us with open arms. Your resilience, eagerness to learn and hope for the future continue to inspire our work.

Just 24 months ago, Aram was simply an idea. Today, through the power of collective action, we've raised £70,000, travelled 4,000 kilometres across Sri Lanka, and become a trusted partner in facilitating development work. This momentum shows what is possible when we work together.

As we grow, we need your continued support – whether as a volunteer, knowledge-sharer, or fundraiser. The coming year will focus on strengthening our initiatives and building efficient operations to maximise our impact. Let us grow this incredible momentum and continue building meaningful change together.

As we move forward with our year-round initiatives, we remain grateful for these partnerships that make it all possible.



GALLERY

Appendix: Gallery



Healthcare workshop
Tea Leaf Trust



Medical team
Maskeliya



Volunteers delivering IT Talk
Varany Central College



Tour of different focus areas
Dreamspace



Volunteer talking to boys
St Johns Boys' Home



A warm welcome
Pannankandy School



Observing surgery
Jaffna Hospital



Netball tournament
Varany Central College



Volunteers & Dreamspace
Dreamspace



Music performance
Serendip Fine Arts Centre



Tea leaf picking
Maskeliya



Wellbeing workshop
Sarahtha Girls' Home



Healthcare camp
Maskeliya



Volunteers and children
Pannankandy School



Study skills workshop
Herman Girls' Home



Medicine talk
Varany Central College



Volunteers & Serendip team
Serendip special needs



Refurbishment design
HOPE



Dreamspace team x Aram
Dreamspace



Say cheese!
Ohiya



Smiles at Orhan
ORHAN



Self-defence
workshop
Herman Girls' Home



A poster donated on
the 2023 trip
Saratha Girls' Home



Economics A-Level
lesson
Vavuniya Tutory



Classroom games
Medikulum



Group photo
Saratha Girls' Home



Group photo
HOPE Autism Centre

Resources



Basic Life Support



Dehydration



Fainting



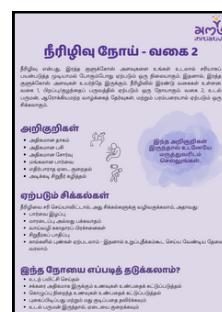
Emotion cards



Healthy Living



Yoga



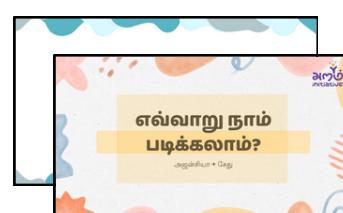
Type II Diabetes



Reflective prompts



Study skills



Virtual mentorship initiative decks



Womens health



‘அறம் செய்ய விரும்பு’

நன்றி வணக்கம்

Thank you for reading