

The Unifund Project Newsletter

Issue 3, July 1st 2012

Australian Society of Graduate Tamils (ASoGT)

University Update



The UNIFUND Project provides financial assistance to 73 undergraduate students at the University of Jaffna (UOJ) and 16 students at The Eastern University (EU)

We are proud to announce that 17 students from UOJ and 1 from EU graduated in 2011; a further 27 students are expected to graduate in 2012.



School Projects



UNIFUND is also currently sponsoring 5 disadvantages school students from the Pirapanthanaaru Maha Vithyalayam.

Future Projects



UNIFUND's ambitious future projects include:

- Providing journals (online and printed) and textbooks for university libraries
- Organising seminars, workshops and visiting lecturers to maintain academic excellence at our universities
- Providing necessary medical and psychological support to needy students.
- Microfinance support for families

Another project of the Australian Society of Graduate Tamils (ASoGT)



UNIFUND Highlights

"The UNIFUND Project" (UP) was established by the Sydney University Tamil Society (SUTS) in 1991, and adopted by the Australian Society of Graduate Tamils (ASoGT).

Aim is to form bridges between Tamil university students in our homeland and graduates in the Tamil Diaspora, thus continuing the tradition of assisting our brothers and sisters in North-East Sri Lanka.

Over the past 12 years, this project has raised and donated over Aus \$75,000, to the University of Jaffna and the Eastern University.

Following the end of the Vanni War in 2009, many university students, most of whom were released from IDP camps, suffered from depression, have lost family members or are destitute with no source of financial support and as a result are unable to pursue their studies.

Since September 2009, UNIFUND launched its latest phase, and as at 2012 July, sponsors 73 students from UOJ and 16 from EU.

	Management & Commerce	Arts	Fine Arts	Agriculture	Science	Law
UOJ	19	33	8	6	5	1
EU	-	15	1	-	-	-

18 students graduated in 2011, with a further 27 expected to graduate in 2012.

Currently UNIFUND has 45 individual sponsors and 5 group sponsors, with a further 10 students awaiting sponsors for financial assistance.



Thank you from a graduated student...

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thanking for the Financial Assistance

I am Sithambarappillai Prabalini, studied General Degree in Arts and Culture (three year degree programme) at the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

I was selected to the Eastern University in the year 2007 GCE A/L from Mannampitty, in the stream of Arts and Culture. I have four sisters and a brother and my father was 75 years old. So I was thinking to give off my education due to the poverty, was wondering that I won't be able to obtain a degree which was my dream.

During that time, fortunately I was applied to receive the financial assistance from the UNIFUND and selected. That helped me to carry out my studies continuously and complete the degree programme. Finally I have sat for my final year examination last week. Without this UNIFUND financial assistance I am sure that I would not be able to make my dream come true.

This is time to thank the UNIFUND and its members who selected me and several other deserved students for the financial assistance. Also I assure you that I will also be a part of the UNIFUND in future when I get a job and will assist the students who suffer financially.

Thank you once again UNIFUND for assisting the poor clever students and I pray the god for your health and wealth. May god bless you.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

S. Prabalini

A sponsor's experience ...

In July 2011, I took my first trip to Jaffna since my family migrated to Australia 15 years ago. One of the unforgettable experiences of this trip was meeting the three students that UNSW Anjali Tamil Society had sponsored through our "Oli Olli 2011" program.

Each of the three students had their own unique experiences to share, revolving around family hardships and the consequences of war. What seemed common amongst all three students is how important their education was in ensuring they could build a foundation for their lives going forward, and support their families. The importance of education in one's life became even more apparent after meeting these students.

As someone who has completed his entire education in Australia, I felt very privileged for the opportunities I have had in this country, and more so, how much we take this asset of education for granted.

I believe the notion of students helping other students is extremely fulfilling, and I left Jaffna with a much stronger resolve to work harder to fulfill the dreams of fellow university students back home.

The aim for "Oli Olli 2012" was to go "bigger and better", and raise funds to sponsor another 3 students for the entirety of their students. I am extremely proud to say with my amazing team, and invaluable support from the wider Sydney Tamil community, we surpassed all expectations and raised enough to sponsor 4 new UOJ students.

I sincerely hope that Anjali and other sponsors will continue to support UNIFUND in its current and future endeavors, as we all work towards a common goal. As anyone that has met the students will agree, sponsorship provides immense rewards not only to the students but also to the sponsor.

Sriram Jeyaraman
Ex-President (2011/12)
UNSW Anjali Tamil Society



Message from the Unifund Team

It is my pleasure to share some information about the Unifund Project.

Beginning of Unifund Project (1991)

In 1991, Prof. Thurairajah (former Vice chancellor) invited his students, friends and well-wishers to provide financial help to the University of Jaffna. The invitation was also received by the Sydney University Tamil Society (SUTS) which decided to build a bridge between the undergraduates in Sydney and the undergraduates in North and East. The committee of late Dr. Maheswaran (1st President), Dr. Sridevy Sriskandarajah, late Mr. Kathirgamanathan, Mr. Jovan Titus, Dr. Thava Seelan, Mr. Rajendran, Mr. Arulventhan and me. Later the committee was strengthened by Dr. Manomohan, Dr. Vasuki Mylvaganam Dillio and many other members of local community and the undergraduates of the University of Sydney.

The committee organised annual fundraising cultural program, called 'Unifund Kalaikkathambam'. We also conducted Dinners, Radiothon and funds directly from well-wishers. The funds were distributed to both Jaffna and Batticoloa Universities as student sponsorships, educational facilities (computers, TV, Video player, educational materials including text books and journals). Prof. Thurairajah created 'Vice Chancellor's welfare fund' in early 90's. We also contributed to the fund, later we identified specific projects for our funding. The Unifund project had established an IT centre in the faculty of Medicine of UOJ in later 90's. At the same time, many students from Kilinochchi were affected by war and did not get any financial support from parents. These students formed a 'Kilinochchi student Union (KSU)' and started collected funds to support the affected students. The Unifund project had donated Rs. 350,000 to initiate their project. These funds are also being distributed now to the recently affected students from Kilinochchi region. The Unifund project had also helped a number of staff of both universities to follow their higher studies in overseas.

After July 2009

After a dormant period for Unifund (between 2002 and 2009), we started to hear many sad and pathetic situation of students from families left destitute after the Vanni war. Two students of the Eastern University committed suicide. And many more were in financial hardships. Many undergraduate students were held in detention camps. Gradually these students were allowed to leave the camps after the intervention of University officials. The students were released in batches. They left the camps with just a plastic (shopping) bag with just spare clothing. In August 2009, several medical students too were released from the camp and left to live in a vacant house. One of those students had lost both his legs above knee level. The Unifund team acted quickly to help these students with their basic needs and also to resume their University studies. Friends of Unifund project (led by Mr. S. Muruganathan and Dr. T. Balamurugan) took them in a van to Jaffna city and bought them clothes, food and stationary items.

That brought some smile in their faces. They joined their lectures within a few days. In addition to these medical students, several other medical students have been sponsored by Australian Medical Aid Foundation (AMAF). The student, who lost his legs, received new artificial legs in 2011. Subsequently, more students returned to their Universities in Jaffna and Batticoloa. The Unifund project continues to offer help to all these students.

After the Vanni war, several individuals and organisations also volunteered to help these students. There were confusion for some time as to who was sponsoring which student. However, the Unifund project formed a network with other welfare organisations to eliminate double payments and to identify the really needy students. For this reason, we decided to contact the Welfare department of the University. Mr Jeyakumar (Assistant Registrar, Welfare) has been very helpful to us to identify the needy students and to distribute the money monthly.

Finances of Unifund Project

The Unifund project faced a number of challenges from time to time. Initially, there were many students needing help but there were not enough sponsors. Some well-wishers donated money promptly to begin paying the students without much delay. We gradually found sponsors for those students too. But this cycle continues as we take new batches of students every time. Once we agree to care for a number of students, we immediately commence the payment from our reserves until we find sponsors for them. Sometimes several students get paid without sponsors from 6 months up to 12 months. Many sponsors do continue their sponsorship and transfer to another new student when their student graduates. Our sponsors have been truly magnanimous in responding to the sad plight of the students. Some of them talk to their student recipient and / or meet them when they happen to visit Sri Lanka.

Depending on their needs and difficulties, the Unifund Project also offers help and support to our students in various other ways, where needed. Eg. One of our female students who lost her leg during the vanni war, has been fitted with prosthesis. As she finds it difficult to climb the stairs to attend her classes, she requested a laptop in order to cover the subjects without going upstairs. On hearing this story a well wisher came forward to donate a new laptop for this student. Another student from Vakara, who had an eye injury, was losing his vision on one eye. The Unifund project donated money to restore his eyesight by surgery last month. Now he is back to university, after successful surgery. There are several more similar stories to tell. The Unifund project is offering number of other services to those students for their education and their wellbeing. The Unifund project is sponsoring 5 school students at Pirapanthanaru Maha vidyalayam, in Paranthan.

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Untold Stories

I lost my parent when I was one year due to a car accident. I was brought by a church till 5-year-old then was given to a divorced lady, my adapted mother. My adapted mother passed away in 2009 due to breast cancer. Now I only have the grandmother (of adapted family) She is 79. I only hear old these stories but I do not know if I have any relatives as my parents married against the wish of their parents and did not have any contact. I am caring my grandmother if something happens to her I have no one.

My brother died in Vanni war. Older brother injured during the war lost one of his leg. Mother is deeply depressed and cries all the time. Father is old cannot do much work. Now doing some farming in Mullaitheivu. We lost everything now living in a shed waiting for some support to build the house.

I was brought up in an orphanage. I do not know if I have any relatives. I was told some one visited me when I was 5 year old may be my sister but did not have any contact with me at all. I am living at Uni residence. I have nowhere to go during the Uni breaks except the orphanage.

This girl cried a lot during my conversation and said, "I am not sure why I am living."

I lost my mother when I was at Uni. I was not sure it was suicide or accident fell in the well. We did not have a father. My mother did not want to tell me how he died. I have no one. I feel very bad I wasn't there for her.

I lost my mother when I was young. My father got remarried. I do not have good relationship with him. I am glad UNIFUND helped me to continue my studies. I am returning this help by assisting the disadvantaged school students in Vanni. I am very saddened to see our (Tamils) education have gone to the bottom. I see lot of students receiving 0 to 20 marks for their subjects. I am helping these students with the help of University by arranging classes.

I lost both parents due to war. Now living with the grandmother who is old. I do not what will happen if she is not there.

Education is a valuable asset to Tamils. We have a duty to preserve it in North and East of the Island of Sri Lanka.

“An unforgettable experience”

On 14th Feb.2012, my wife and I went to the Jaffna University and met with Mr. Jeyakumar, Asst. Registrar, Welfare. We were also able to meet the students (many orphaned and/or left destitute by the war) who were being supported by the Unifund project for their studies. Along with this meeting, we organised a lunch for all the students and others who attended. Both vegetarian and non vegetarian lunch was served.

Mr. Jeyakumar was very courteous and helpful. Two Lecturers who were also keen about these students' welfare were also invited to join us at the meeting and lunch at the University. The lecturers were A/Prof. Sri Satkurunathan and Mr. N. Sivaharan. After a brief talk by me, Mr. Jeyakumar and Mr. Sri Satkurunathan, many of the students also spoke about their family background and the initial difficulties they faced in attending the University. Their stories were rather moving.

One of the students became too emotional to talk. All of them expressed their gratitude to the Unifund for providing them with the funding to continue with their Tertiary education. They also mentioned that with the support they receive from Unifund, they are able to devote themselves fully to their education without other worries.

Many of them also promised to repay their debt to the Community especially to those facing hardship as they themselves had faced until Unifund came to their help.

All of them enjoyed their lunch with us and we parted happily wishing them every success. It was a memorable get together for us during our trip to Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Mr. S. Ponmailainathan
A member of Tamil Seniors' Citizens Association
Strathfield, Australia



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The Unifund team has limited its operational expenses to almost zero. I wish to thank Mr. Pradeepan (Proprietor of TSS money transfer) who does not charge us any fee for money transfer to the universities.

Interaction with our recipient students

We talk to every student at least once or twice in a year. Most of the students do wait for our calls. Dr. Chithra Harinesan and Mrs. Kirija Thavabalan (Unifund team) devote their own time to talk to these students and try to find solutions to any issues that may arise with their studies. When members of Unifund team or our donors or well wishers visit Sri Lanka, we request them to meet as many of our students as possible. We also organise a lunch for them over a casual chat. We also identify their difficulties and issues and try to address them as a group or as individuals.

Future Plans

The Unifund project is also focusing on academic excellence of the students and staff. I'm proud to inform you that we are in process of establishing an e-library for the University of Jaffna with a number of text books and journals for most of the departments. We trust that this will allow the students and staff to access up-to-date information in most of their subjects.

I sincerely thank our donors for their support. Their generosity will help these students finish their degrees without any worries about finances. We wish the students to be successful in their lives and hope they will repay their debt to the community with commitment.

Dr. P. Ketheswaran
The President, The Unifund Project, ASOGT

Helping hands from Tamil Association

In addition to our individual sponsorship scheme, a number of Tamil Organizations in NSW (Australian Medical Aid Foundation (AMAF), Australian Tamil Seniors' Association (NSW), Tamil Senior Citizens' Association (NSW), and Tamil Senior citizens' Association (ACT) already joined the Unifund sponsorship programs. We are pleased to announce a few major contributions:

- ❖ UNSW Anjali Tamil Society continues to support UNIFUND through their annual "Oli Olli" cultural programs; the majority of the "Oli Olli 2012" proceeds were donated to sponsor 4 new undergraduate students, bringing Anjali's total to 7 students.
- ❖ Mr & Mrs Chinniah donated \$5545 from the Venthanar Book Launch.

Invitation to UNIFUND's "Thanks Giving Dinner"

The UNIFUND Project's "Thanks Giving Dinner" for sponsors and well-wishers will occur on the 2nd September 2012 at the Yaarl Function Centre (Pendle Hill) between 6:30PM and 9:30 PM. The night will involve an information session, interviews and discussions, first hand experiences, video presentation and a discussion on future goals and plans.

About UNIFUND Sponsorship Program:

The program provides monthly financial assistance through the VC welfare fund on a prescribed date of each month. We request Aus. \$50 per month to sponsor a student. If you wish to sponsor a University Student in Jaffna or Batticaloa, please download and return the duly completed and signed form to us.

Payment may be via electronic bank transfer or via a direct deposit to 'Unifund Project' account at the Bendigo bank. Payments can be quarterly (\$150), half yearly (\$300) or annually (\$600). When depositing please indicate clearly, Name of Donor. Cheque (in favour of 'ASOGT-Unifund Project') or money order or cash (paid only to our authorized members).

Unifund Project receives periodic reports and accounts from the VC's office. We then communicate with our sponsors through individual letters and newsletter such as this. Your feedback and valuable comments will improve our future efforts.

1. Students are displaced from their hometown.
2. Students who have lost their breadwinners.
3. Students who are from families with meager income and more children.
4. Students who got married and come from IDP camps.

ASOGT - Unifund Account

All money should be deposited to the 'ASOGT - Unifund' account.
 Bank: Bendigo Bank
 Branch: Homebush, NSW 2140
 BSB: 633-000
 Acc: 118947092

The UP Contacts:

Phone: +61 (0) 439 474 804 or +61 (0) 433 088 725
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This is an official newsletter of the UNIFUND Project of the Australian Society of Graduate Tamils (ASoGT) to inform our sponsors and well wishers about the project and its progress. We welcome your comments about the newsletter and the UNIFUND Project.

You may write to our Editor, P O Box 4040, Homebush South, NSW 2140 or email: unifund.asogt@gmail.com.

Visit our website for more information: www.theunifundproject.org