

# **Navigating the Economic Crisis: Sustaining Youth Well-being at Shanthi Maargam Youth Center - July 2023**

By Razmina Razeen - General Manager

## **1. Introduction**

Amidst Sri Lanka's economic downturn, the impact on the country's youth and children was deeply felt, exacerbating their vulnerability and limiting their opportunities. However, the Shanthi Maargam Youth Center continued its mission despite the dark shadow cast by the economic crisis. The center stood as a testament to the unwavering dedication of its staff, providing a safe space where children and adolescents from all walks of life could seek solace and support. With open doors and compassionate hearts, the center served as a constant reminder to the youth that even in the midst of darkness, there is always a path toward a brighter future. The dedicated staff of Shanthi Maargam Youth Center worked tirelessly, serving the youth and adolescents five days a week. This project report will delve into the strategies and initiatives implemented by the center to sustain its programs and services during this critical period of Sri Lanka's economic crisis. It will shed light on the profound impact of these efforts on the youth beneficiaries and their families, showcasing the center's commitment to uplifting the community's spirits and nurturing the growth of its youngest members. By catering to the holistic needs of the youth, the center played a pivotal role in instilling resilience, fostering personal growth, and igniting hope within the hearts of the youth.

## **2. Center Activities**

### **2.1 A session on raising awareness of Sexual and reproductive health among parents.**

At our center, we organized a highly informative and interactive session on Sex and Reproductive Health, led by Dr. Gayani, a renowned expert in the field in March 2023. The session was specifically designed for individuals aged 13 and above, aiming to provide them with valuable insights and knowledge on this important topic. During the session, Dr. Gayani engaged the youth in meaningful discussions and activities, creating a safe and open environment for them to explore various aspects of sex and reproductive health. The interactive nature of the session allowed the participants to actively participate, ask questions, and share their thoughts and experiences. By addressing important topics the session equipped the youth

with crucial information to make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive well-being. Dr. Gayani's expertise and guidance ensured that the information shared was accurate, age-appropriate, and tailored to the specific needs and concerns of the participants. Overall, the session on Sex and Reproductive Health at our center was a resounding success. The youth who attended gained valuable insights and knowledge that will empower them to make responsible choices and prioritize their well-being. We are proud to provide such engaging and educational sessions that contribute to the holistic development of the youth in our community.

## **2.2 English Class**

In our English classes, we covered a range of fundamental topics, including the alphabet, numbers, and basic grammar rules. To make the learning experience engaging and interactive, we employed various techniques such as games and role-plays. During the classes, we introduced the students to the English alphabet, helping them familiarize themselves with the letters and their corresponding sounds. We also focused on numbers, teaching them how to recognize and pronounce them correctly. Through interactive games and activities, we ensured that the students actively participated and practiced their skills. Overall, our English classes aimed to provide a solid foundation in the language by covering important topics such as the alphabet, numbers, and basic grammar rules. By incorporating games and role-plays into our teaching methodology, we created an engaging and dynamic learning environment, allowing the students to actively participate and apply their knowledge.



(Figure 1 – Shanthi Maargam counselor conducting English class)

### **2.3 Art sessions**

Our art sessions are the most popular activity at our center, offering children and youth a platform to unleash their creativity. We provide a supportive environment where they can explore various art forms, experiment with different mediums, and express their thoughts and emotions through visual representations. With a wide range of materials and tools available, we encourage them to embrace their individuality and explore their own creative visions. Our dedicated counselors provide guidance and inspiration, fostering growth and learning. Overall, our art sessions create a safe and nurturing space for youth to express themselves and develop a lifelong appreciation for the power of creativity and self-expression.

### **2.4 Movies circle**

We organized a movie screening of the film "Frozen" at our center in March 2023, followed by an engaging discussion with the youth, specifically focusing on relationships. The screening of "Frozen" provided an opportunity for the youth to enjoy a popular and heartwarming cinematic experience. The film's themes of friendship, family, and love resonated with the audience, captivating their attention and sparking emotions. Following the movie, we facilitated a thought-provoking discussion centered around the various relationships portrayed in the film. We encouraged the youth to reflect on the dynamics between the characters, their interactions, and the lessons they could draw from these relationships. By creating a safe and open environment, we encouraged the youth to express their thoughts and share personal insights. The discussion fostered critical thinking, empathy, and self-reflection, helping the youth gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of relationships and the impact they have on personal growth and well-being. Overall, the movie screening of "Frozen" combined with the subsequent discussion provided a platform for the youth to engage in meaningful conversations about relationships.



(Figure 2 – Movie circle at Shanthi Maargam youth center)

## **2.5 Reading circle**

During our reading circle session, we delved into a captivating story that highlighted the power of open communication, celebrated the uniqueness of individuals, and emphasized the importance of teamwork in resolving conflicts. The chosen story captured the imagination of the participants, immersing them in a narrative that showcased the transformative potential of effective communication. Through the characters' interactions and dialogue, the story emphasized the significance of honest and transparent conversations in overcoming misunderstandings and finding common ground. In addition, the story underscored the power of teamwork in overcoming challenges and resolving conflicts. It showcased how collaboration, cooperation, and the pooling of talents and abilities can lead to successful outcomes.

## **2.6 Youth club**

We, at Shanthi Maargam, have achieved a significant milestone that has been our goal since the beginning - the establishment of a youth club! Our youth club comprises 19 enthusiastic youngsters, including a president, vice president, secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer, and organizing committee members. The primary objective behind its creation is to enhance youth engagement and ownership within Shanthi Maargam, while imparting vital skills such as leadership, teamwork, accountability, and event organization. The club members were elected through voting conducted among the children and youth who attend our center. To promote inclusivity, we intend to rotate the board positions every three months, enabling others to assume these roles as well. The children and youth share our excitement and have eagerly embraced this opportunity for personal growth and leadership.



(Figure 3 – Shanthi Maargam youth club meeting)

## 2.7 Sinhala new year celebration

The Avurudhu Uthsawaya (Sinhala New Year Celebration) organized by the Shathi Maargam youth club was a resounding success. The event brought together 50 enthusiastic youth who engaged in various activities. The dedicated youth organizing team meticulously planned exciting games, captivating dancing performances, delicious food, and a prize-giving ceremony. It was a vibrant celebration of the Sinhala New Year, showcasing cultural traditions and fostering camaraderie. Participants actively took part in the games, showcasing their talents through captivating dances. Traditional food was served, offering a delightful culinary experience. The event concluded with a joyous prize-giving ceremony, recognizing the achievements of the participants. The celebration not only allowed youth to enjoy the festive spirit but also provided them with valuable organizational and teamwork skills through active involvement in planning and execution.







(Figure 4,5,6,7 – Avurudu Uthsawaya celebration)

## 2.8 Music class

In May, we introduced weekly guitar lessons led by our talented counselor, Nathan Anandappa, to inspire individuals and ignite their passion for music and the guitar. The lessons began by familiarizing participants with the different parts of the guitar, providing a solid foundation of knowledge. Nathan also introduced them to chords, an essential aspect of guitar playing, empowering individuals to express themselves creatively. These lessons not only taught a new skill but also showcased the therapeutic benefits of music, promoting personal growth and emotional well-being. The supportive and encouraging environment allows participants to learn at their own pace while fostering a sense of community. We anticipate witnessing the growth and development of participants' musical abilities and hope that this experience will cultivate a lifelong appreciation for music and spark personal transformation and creativity.





(Figure 8, 9 – Counsellor conducting a guitar class)

## **2.9 Parents awareness session conducted by Child protection officer (NCPA)**

The Shanthi Maargam youth center organized a parental awareness session facilitated by a child protection officer from the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) to promote child protection. The session covered crucial topics, including age-appropriate considerations, the role of parents in child development, and the concept of child protection. Parents were educated about recognizing and addressing sexual abuse, including how to communicate effectively with their children and create a supportive environment for disclosure. The session provided parents with valuable knowledge and tools to protect their children and will be an ongoing effort to prioritize child protection. By empowering parents, Shanthi Maargam aims to create a safer environment for children, promoting their well-being and development.



(Figure 10 – Parental awareness session conducted by NCPA officer)

### **2.10 Parents Meeting**

In June, the Shanthi Maargam youth center organized a parent meeting to promote effective parenting strategies and a supportive environment for children. Despite lower participation, likely due to work and economic challenges, the session covered important topics such as expressing love and care, positive responses to children, and understanding and supporting youth and adolescents. Insights were shared on the physical and mental changes during adolescence, helping parents comprehend the challenges their children may face. Practical strategies were provided to foster healthier relationships and create a safe space at home. Recognizing the challenges faced by working parents, future meetings will be scheduled on Saturdays to increase participation. The parent meeting served as a valuable platform for discussion and highlighted the organization's commitment to supporting parents in nurturing their children. Through ongoing initiatives, Shanthi Maargam aims to empower parents and create a nurturing environment for children to thrive.



(Figure 11- Parents meeting at Shanthi Maargam)

### **2.11 Cricket match screening**

As the cricket season kicked off, Sri Lanka found themselves in the qualifiers for the highly anticipated Cricket World Cup. At our center, we decided to create an exciting and engaging experience for cricket enthusiasts by screening three of these thrilling games. The atmosphere was electric as the matches unfolded on the big screen, filling the air with cheers, excitement, and a sense of camaraderie. It was a time of celebration, with each match bringing a wave of emotions and unforgettable moments. The cheers and shouts of joy reverberated throughout the center, highlighting the sheer enjoyment and engagement of everyone present.



These screenings not only offered a chance to witness the cricketing prowess of Sri Lanka but also provided a platform for children and youth to bond over their shared love for the sport. The games served as a unifying force, transcending barriers and bringing children and youth together in a collective celebration of national pride and sporting excellence. At our center, we believe in the power of sports to foster a sense of community and promote positive interactions. The joy and excitement experienced during these screenings will undoubtedly be cherished by all who attended. It was a memorable time, fostering a sense of unity, camaraderie, and pure enjoyment. As the cricket season unfolds, we eagerly anticipate more moments of shared celebration and pride, strengthening the bond within the youth center children.



(Figure 12- Cricket match screening at Shanthi Maargam youth center)

## **2.12 Free play**

Shanthi Maargam recognizes the significance of offering a free play area at their youth centers, prioritizing inclusivity and a sense of belonging. The space is thoughtfully designed to be inviting and comfortable, catering to the diverse interests of the youth. Various activities are provided, allowing them to explore their passions and stay motivated. Clear rules and boundaries are established to ensure safety and promote respectful interactions among the participants. Trained staff members supervise the area, offering guidance and support when needed. By creating a safe and enjoyable environment, Shanthi Maargam facilitates positive habits, attitudes, and interactions, contributing to the overall development

### **2.13 A session on Fashion Designing**

At our youth center, we recently organized a fashion designing program specifically tailored for young individuals who have a keen interest in this field. The program was led by Ms. Kasundi Naranwala, a skilled and experienced fashion designer. Throughout the program, participants were introduced to the basic fundamentals of fashion designing, providing them with a solid foundation to explore their creativity and develop their skills. One of the key topics covered during the program was the concept of color mixing, specifically the blending of hot and cold colors. Ms. Kasundi Naranwala explained the principles and techniques behind effective color combinations, highlighting when and how different colors should be used to create visually appealing designs. This aspect of the program was particularly eye-opening for the participants, introducing them to new perspectives and approaches within the realm of fashion designing. For many of the children involved, this program presented a unique and valuable opportunity. Despite their passion for fashion designing, their economic circumstances prevented them from enrolling in formal courses or accessing professional guidance. By organizing this program, we aimed to bridge this gap and provide an inclusive and accessible learning experience for these talented individuals.



(Figure 13 – Fashion designing session conducted at Shanthi Maargam)

### **2.14 A session with the founder**

In May, our esteemed founder Kamani Jinadasa who visited Sri Lanka made a visit to the youth center and personally engaged with the children and youth at the youth center. During this visit, our founder initiated meaningful discussions and shared valuable insights with the youth center children. The primary focus of these interactions was to check on their well-being and ensure that they were thriving in their environment. The discussions held between our founder and the youth were centered around their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Our founder actively listened to their stories, providing a supportive space for them to express their thoughts and concerns. Through these conversations, our founder aimed to understand the needs and aspirations of the children, ensuring that they were receiving the necessary support and resources to thrive. This visit not only provided an opportunity for our founder to connect directly with the youth center children but also allowed the children to feel valued and heard.



(Figure 14 – Shanthi Maargam youth center children with the founder)

### **2.15 Lunch Program**

Our commitment to nourishing the children at the center remains steadfast as we continued to provide lunch twice a week. This initiative ensures that they receive the essential nutrients required for their physical well-being and cognitive development. Understanding the vital role that nutrition plays in the lives of growing children, we prioritize the provision of balanced and wholesome meals. Our lunch program aims to not only satisfy their hunger but also fuel their minds and bodies for optimal growth and learning. Providing lunch twice a week not only addresses their immediate nutritional needs but also supports their overall well-being.



(Figure 15 – Lunch program at Shanthi Maargam youth center)

### **3.Provision of Free Counselling Services**

Despite the evolving circumstances, including changes in working capacities and various political and economic challenges, Shanthi Maargam has remained steadfast in providing crucial mental health support to children and youth. Our commitment to offering free counseling services has not wavered. Our hotline continues to be available every day, operating from 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM. This vital resource provides immediate assistance through first aid and psychological counseling over the phone. Our trained counselors are readily available to lend a listening ear, offer guidance, and provide support to those in need. In addition to the hotline, we conduct one-on-one counseling sessions to address more complex mental health concerns. Given the current situation, the majority of these counseling sessions are conducted online, ensuring accessibility and safety for both clients and counselors. We offer counseling services in multiple languages, including Sinhala, Tamil, and English, to cater to the diverse needs.

By providing this comprehensive range of services, we aim to uplift the mental well-being of children and youth. Our commitment to offering counseling support in multiple languages and through different platforms reflects our dedication to reaching as many individuals as possible. Despite the challenges posed by external factors, Shanthi Maargam remains committed to making a positive impact on the mental health landscape. We strive to provide accessible and high-quality counseling services, ensuring that no individual is left unsupported during these challenging times.



The hotline counselling team attended 468 hotline calls, 124 tele-counselling sessions through the hotline, 183 1-on-1 online counselling sessions, and 8 new clients from February to June 2023.

#### **4. The Helvetas Project - Youth Changemakers Circle**

##### **4.1 Supporting the 30 youth to explore their future education or career pathways and utilize their time in a productive manner through career guidance event**

The Shanthi Maargam Helvetas project team organized a career guidance session at the Obesekarapura Community Hall, attracting the participation of 59 motivated youth. The session aimed to empower them in making informed decisions about their future careers. Eight career guidance facilitators, selected for their expertise in various fields, covered a diverse range of career-related topics. The program focused on raising awareness about different career opportunities and the qualifications required. Career assessments were utilized to help participants identify suitable career paths based on their skills, interests, and values. Additionally, the program included sessions on personal development, emphasizing self-reflection, mindfulness, and stress reduction techniques. The career guidance session provided the youth with valuable insights and knowledge to navigate their professional journey effectively.



(Figure 16,17 – Helvetas projects career guidance program)

##### **4.2 Event of celebration and exhibition of creative arts**

The primary objective was to provide a platform for these young individuals to showcase their artwork and projects, which they had been working on throughout the program. The event aimed to recognize their achievements, promote positive social behaviors, and reinforce values related to violence prevention. The exhibition featured an impressive array

of artwork, each piece carrying a powerful message about positive social behaviors. The youth conveyed their messages through diverse artistic mediums, allowing their creativity to shine. Some of the impactful messages conveyed through the exhibited artwork were community Building, Non-violence, Self-Expression and Hope.

The exhibition served as a powerful platform for these talented youth to amplify their voices and communicate important social messages through their artistic expressions. It fostered an environment of appreciation, reflection, and engagement, empowering both the youth participants and the viewers to embrace positive social behaviors and values. .



(Figure 18, 19 – Helvetas project final creative art exhibition)

## **5. SVRI Project**

As part of the initial phase of the SVRI project, we organized online focus group discussions in May to gather valuable insights and perspectives involving from users of Shanthi Maargam's online and hotline mental health services. Five individuals who have utilized our services participated in these discussions, contributing their experiences and viewpoints. The objective of these focus group discussions was to gain a deeper understanding of their needs, preferences, and challenges when it comes to accessing mental health support online. By directly engaging with service users, we were able to listen to their stories, learn from their experiences, and identify areas where our services can be enhanced. The insights gathered from these discussions will be instrumental in shaping the development of a digital application for our services. By understanding the specific requirements and expectations of our service users, we can tailor the design and features of the application to meet their needs effectively.

In addition to the above following activities took place from March to July

### **March:**

On March 22nd, 2023, a Tech team meeting took place, involving two individuals who discussed wrapping up features and planning the next steps for the project. Additionally, a steering committee meeting was held on March 31st, 2023, to provide updates and discuss project progress.

### **April:**

In April, the Project Year 1 interim narrative report was drafted and shared with the donor, SVRI. A Tech team meeting was also conducted on April 18th, 2023, focusing on summarizing the findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and providing an update on the progress of tech development.

### **May:**

On May 23rd, 2023, an online Focus Group Discussion (FGD) took place, involving eight Shanthi Maargam service users from the hotline and counseling services. This session aimed to gather valuable insights and feedback from the users. Additionally, a Tech team meeting on the project's Year 2 was conducted on May 17th, 2023, to discuss plans and strategies for the upcoming year.

### **June:**

A qualitative data analysis workshop was held on June 13th, 2023, providing an opportunity to analyze and interpret the qualitative data collected during the project.

Furthermore, Co-PI Suresh Subasinghe visited the Shanthi Maargam center to provide final input to the UX (User Experience) designer, ensuring a user-centric approach to the project's tech development. Moreover, a steering committee meeting was held on June 27th, 2023, to review progress and make important decisions. Further, two tech team meetings on project year 2 were held on 07.06.2023 and 21.06.2023.

July:

On July 6th, 2023, a community consultation was conducted, involving local stakeholders in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Children (VAC) prevention. This consultation aimed to gather insights, perspectives, and inputs from the community to enhance the project's effectiveness in addressing these critical issues. These meetings and activities carried out over the months demonstrate the ongoing progress and collaborative efforts of the project team. They serve as important milestones in the project's development, ensuring continuous improvement and aligning with the project's goals and objectives.



(Figure 20, 21, 22 – SVRI community consultation event)



## **6. The Asia foundation project**

Shanthi Maargam began a new project funded by the Asia Foundation in March 2023 , with the objective to improve the organizational management, operational capacities, and services of Shanthi Maargam. The project is driven by two intermediate objectives. They are; To better align the organization with its mandate, mission, and goals through conducting an institutional capacity assessment of Shanthi Maargam. The second one is to improve emotional well-being in children and youth within the selected communities by raising awareness and service provision on mental health.

### **6.1 Psychosocial school workshop 1**

Workshop 1 on mental health took place at Susamayawardhana Vidyalaya on June 22nd, 2023, with the goal of raising awareness among students. Attendees included 65 students and four staff members from Shanthi Maargam, with Rashmi Gunawardana as the resource person. A pre-workshop questionnaire was used to assess students' initial knowledge, followed by an introduction by the outreach coordinator, Wasanthi Herath. Rashmi Gunawardana engaged students with a game of "Simon says," fostering active participation. The workshop covered an introduction to Shanthi Maargam and mental health topics, with students responding to questions. Some older students in grade 11 at the back rows became distracted, potentially due to the school's interval time. A post-workshop questionnaire assessed student comprehension, enabling evaluation of the workshop's effectiveness. Insights from the evaluation will inform future workshops, tailoring content to meet student needs and interests.





(Figure 23, 24 – The Asia Foundation project School psychosocial support workshop)

## 6.2 Psychosocial school workshop 2

Workshop 2 on Psychosocial support took place at Anuruddha Balika Vidyalaya, with the objective of educating students about mental health. The workshop faced challenges with lower-than-expected attendance, possibly due to competing school events and negative perceptions about mental health. Efforts to establish a therapeutic relationship with students and address misconceptions are crucial. Collaboration with school authorities and organizing awareness sessions and parent-teacher meetings are part of the strategies. Despite the challenges, student engagement during the workshop was commendable. The workshop aimed to enhance understanding of mental health and promote Shanthi Maargam's services, with evaluation feedback informing future workshops and overcoming obstacles



(Figure 25 – The Asia Foundation project School psychosocial support workshop)

## **7. Employee Development**

From April to June, our training efforts focused on enhancing our counseling services. Bi-monthly supervision sessions provided guidance and support to our counseling team, allowing for case discussions, experience sharing, and advice seeking. Peer supervision sessions promoted collaboration and feedback exchange among counselors. Special training sessions were tailored for hotline counselors, refreshing their understanding of policies and protocols. These sessions covered various topics, including complaint identification and therapy goal development. Weekly supervision sessions for hotline counselors ensured quality service delivery by providing structured reflection, guidance, and support. Investing in training and supervision enables our counselors to offer the best support, fostering positive outcomes and personal growth for our clients.

In the month of May our Executive Director, Kamadi Jinadasa had a session to revisit the values of Shanthi Maargam, and current issues faced by the team, and to discuss more efficient methods of providing our services.

## **8. Workshop on Dignified Menstruation**

We recently had the privilege of hosting a truly remarkable session by the team from the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation. The session focused on Menstrual Dignity and left a lasting impact on all of us. It was undeniably one of the most engaging and incredible sessions we have experienced thus far. The session provided us with invaluable insights and knowledge, empowering us with the necessary tools to make a positive difference in our own communities. The Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation delivered the session with utmost dedication and passion, effectively conveying the importance of menstrual dignity and its impact on the lives of individuals.

We are immensely grateful to the entire team for their commitment and for choosing our center as a platform to share their expertise. The session resonated deeply with everyone present, and we thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn from their wealth of knowledge. The visit from the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation was an exceptional experience for our center. Their dedication to menstrual dignity and their engaging session left a lasting impression on us. We wholeheartedly appreciate their efforts

and the invaluable contribution they have made toward empowering our community. We look forward to implementing the tools and insights gained from this session and working towards promoting menstrual dignity in our own community. The impact of this session will continue to reverberate as we strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all individuals.



(Figure 26, 27 – The workshop for Diginified Menstruation for Shanthi Maargam staff)

## 9. Social Media

On the 1st of March, we commemorated Self Injury Awareness Day, sparking conversations around self-harm. We celebrated Women's Day on the 8th, with the talented women of Shanthi Maargam sharing with the world how they feel empowered in their professions. We covered an awareness day on Eating Disorders and invited our communities to visit. An Instagram reel by one of our counsellors educated our audiences on the things they probably didn't know about bipolar disorder. We also continue to fundraise for school meals through our social media platforms - visit them below to find out how you can donate.

In the month of April, we actively engaged in various meaningful initiatives to raise awareness and promote inclusivity. We commenced the month by commemorating



World Autism Day, emphasizing the importance of empathy and creating opportunities for children with autism to thrive. Throughout the month, we celebrated a diverse range of multicultural festivities. We joyfully observed Easter, the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, and Eid, embracing the spirit of unity and cultural diversity. During this festive period, we placed special emphasis on our hotline, ensuring its accessibility and raising awareness about its availability for support. In line with Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, we took to social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to share an engaging video. This video, available in both Sinhala and Tamil languages, shed light on the concept of consent and emphasized that it encompasses more than a simple "yes" or the absence of a "no." Our aim was to foster a deeper understanding of consent and promote a culture of respect and understanding.

This May, we spoke about anxiety for Mental Health Awareness Month. Our counsellors posted trilingual videos on different techniques that could help manage anxiety and we followed these up with tips and reminders on how to do so. We also commemorated the festival of Vesak and, on Mother's Day, reminded the world that our mothers are multifaceted humans with complete lives of their own, reminding our audiences how important it is to give them the tools and space for them to flourish.

We also addressed the sensitive topic of Eating Disorders, breaking myths around EDs and reminding people that they can always reach out for help. We recently shared an important awareness video across our social media platforms, shedding light on the critical topic of eating disorders. It is crucial to understand that eating disorders carry the highest mortality rate among all psychiatric disorders. We believe it is essential to raise awareness about this issue and provide support to individuals who may be struggling. In the video, we featured counselor Nathan Daniel Anandappa, who shared valuable insights and expertise on eating disorders. With a compassionate approach, Nathan offered guidance and information to those who may have a complicated relationship with food. We recognized the significance of promoting awareness and understanding around eating disorders, as they are often misunderstood and

stigmatized. By sharing this video, we aim to initiate a dialogue and create a safe space for individuals to seek guidance, gain knowledge, and find the support they need.

In June, we celebrated Pride Month by raising awareness about the challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community in Sri Lanka and advocating for reform. Our social media posts aimed to educate people about discriminatory laws and encourage support for the community. We highlighted the significance of the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill 2023, which, if passed, would be a historic moment for the country. We also emphasized the importance of supporting the LGBTQI+ community during Pride Month and countering hate with kindness and acceptance. Additionally, we shed light on the origins of outdated laws that have been used to discriminate against and harass LGBTQI+ individuals, stressing the need for their repeal. Through our awareness posts, we hope to inform and inspire positive change, promoting a more inclusive and accepting society.

<https://www.facebook.com/ShanthiMaargamSL/>

<https://www.instagram.com/shanthimaargam/?hl=en>

#### **10. External Events /training participated by staff**

In March 2023, Project Coordinator Menusha attended a networking event organized by Central Start-up Hub, ICTA, Nagarro, and Trace expert city at the American Corner Kandy. The event aimed to foster connections and collaborations among tech-based initiatives and professionals, encouraging partnerships. Shanthi Maargam Center youth will have the opportunity to participate in Trace expert city outreach programs in the upcoming months. Additionally, Counsellors Nathan Anandappa and Jayeshi Perera attended an event on mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) in the apparel industry of Sri Lanka. The objective was to develop a national program to support the industry by understanding the work of various organizations and exploring future contributions. The session included discussions on future plans, impact measurement, challenges, and learnings, with the aim of implementing positive change in the apparel industry.

Our Counsellors Thishakya and Nathan Anandappa took part in a 2-day training held by Helvetas in May. The first session was on how to navigate through, detect and respond to violent extremism in the media. The second session was on the destruction caused by harmful gender norms in our society and how we have to begin by recognizing the harmful gender norms we hold individually, the importance of systemic change to support survivors of violence, and the need for increasing the awareness of gender-based violence. Shanthi Maargam Community outreach & center coordinator, Wasanthi Herath and Counsellor Rashmi Gunawardana participated in MHPSS training organized by The Asia Foundation. This capacity-building training provided by TAF has proven to be highly useful for Shanthi Maargam, which also works with youth and adolescents to enhance their mental well-being through mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) services.

#### **11. External event organized by staff (Good market event)**

We had the opportunity to host a stall at The Good Market on March 25th, dedicated to raising awareness about Eating Disorders. Our informative booth provided resources and knowledge on various types of eating disorders, emphasizing the importance of seeking support and understanding the recovery process. Additionally, a listening booth was set up for individuals to speak confidentially with a counselor. Being part of The Good Market allowed us to make a positive impact in the community, fostering meaningful conversations and connections.



(Figure 28, 29 – The Good Market event organized by Shanthi Maargam staff)