

# JKF collaborates with ChildFund in the post-pandemic development of social and emotional skills of youth



The long-drawn COVID-19 pandemic resulted in multiple school closures as well as prolonged social isolation of children and youth who were exposed to many risks including mental health challenges. The ongoing socio-economic instability has added to this strain.

As a means of mitigating these risks, John Keells Foundation together with ChildFund Sri Lanka in collaboration with the University of Visual and Performing Arts and the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), successfully concluded a series of aesthetic workshops to address the social and emotional issues of children and youth in the Colombo 02 region stemming from intermittent school closures, online learning and limited social engagements during and after the pandemic.

The programme which was initiated in December 2021 comprised 48 workshops on art, theatre, music, and dancing conducted by a resource team from the University of Visual and Performing Arts headed by Prof. Saumya Liyanage over a period of nine months, proactively engaging over 70 youth (43 girls and 27 boys) between the ages of 15-24. Following the successful completion of the workshops, a visual and performing art exhibition entitled 'Coloring Their Dreams' was held on 18 September 2022 on Wekanda Jumma Musjeed Road, adjoining the De Mel Park Community Centre which was previously constructed by John Keells Foundation in collaboration with the CMC. This exhibition, whilst showcasing the aesthetic talents of 70 youth, also highlighted the significant improve-

ment of the participants who performed with much enthusiasm and confidence to a wide audience.

Fifteen-year-old Fathima Hakma said, "I initially joined only the dance workshops but soon I thought I should join all the other classes like music and theatre after seeing how fun and engaging they were. I never thought I could sing this way and learn to play instruments like I do now. I discovered hidden talents within me thanks to this workshop series. I believe I am capable and confident enough to perform anywhere at any given time now."

The initiative was conducted within John Keells Praja Shakthi – the John Keells Group's business centric community empowerment initiative managed by John Keells Foundation – which targets and addresses identified community development needs in collaboration with multiple partners in a sustainable manner.

Education is one of the six focus areas of John Keells Foundation - the CSR entity of John Keells Holdings PLC (JKH), one of Sri Lanka's largest listed conglomerate in the Colombo Stock Exchange operating over 70 companies in 7 diverse industry sectors. With a history of over 150 years, John Keells Group provides employment to over 14,000 persons and has been ranked as Sri Lanka's 'Most Respected Entity' for the last 17 Years by LMD magazine. Whilst being a full member of the World Economic Forum and a Participant of the UN Global Compact, JKH drives its CSR vision of "Empowering the Nation for Tomorrow" through John Keells Foundation and through the social entrepreneurship initiative, 'Plasticcycle', which is a catalyst in significantly reducing plastic pollution in Sri Lanka.