



The Asia Foundation

LankaCorps Fellowship Program

The LankaCorps fellowship program is a unique opportunity for young leaders of Sri Lanka heritage to professionally engage in social, cultural, and economic development activities in Sri Lanka. The program aims to foster the involvement and understanding of young members of the expatriate Sri Lankan community who have limited in-depth experience with the country of their heritage. Each year since 2012, The Asia Foundation selects an outstanding group of LankaCorps Fellows to live and work for six months in Sri Lanka, granting them the unique chance to “explore their roots while giving back.”

“Where Are You Now?”

What have you been doing since the LankaCorps Fellowship?

How has the Fellowship helped you in your career/education/life in general?

Looking back, what is the most important lesson you learned from the experience?

Do you keep in touch with other LankaCorps Fellows?

Class of 2012:

Sahani Chandraratna

Host Organization(s):
MAS Holdings

Sivashankar Krishnakumar

Foundation for Goodness

Seshma Kumararatne

1. *Foreign Ministry*
2. *Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute*

Sabina Martyn

National Water Supply and Drainage Board

Ann Selvadurai

1. *Women in Need*
2. *Samuttana*

Class of 2014:

Angeli Jeyarajah

Host Organization(s):
Verite Research

Mira Philips

Centre for Poverty Alleviation

Nayantara Premakumar

Redlime Pvt. Ltd.

Suruthi Ragulan

1. *Family Planning Association*
2. *Good Practice Group*

Madushi Seneviratne

Institute of Policy Studies

Melanie Wathugala

1. *Genetech*
2. *Family Planning Association*

Class of 2013:

Charles Aruliah

Host Organization(s):
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies

Natale Dankotuwege

Sri Lanka Unites

Kaitlin Emmanuel

1. *The Post Graduate Institute of Archeology*
2. *University of Visual and Performing Arts*

Harshi Hettige

Foundation for Goodness

Anthony Obeyesekere

Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Chethana Perera

Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute

Tara de Silva

Federation of Environmental Organizations

Class of 2015:

Suram Edirisinghe

Host Organization(s):
Emerge Lanka

Ruvani Fonseka

1. *Centre for Poverty Alleviation*
2. *Women in Need*

Sanjay Pathmanathan

Foundation for Goodness

Rapti Ratnayake

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Nithya Thiru

Verite Research

Jessica Uthayakumaran

Family Rehabilitation Centre

Class of 2016:

Nina Fernando

Host Organization(s):
International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Savini Ganhewa

Centre for Poverty Alleviation

Shaaranya Pillai

1. *Family Rehabilitation Centre*
2. *Chithrasena Vajira Dance Foundation*

Sindu Sivayogam

1. *World Bank Open DRI*
2. *The Asia Foundation Sub-national Governance Program*

Heima Sritharan

Foundation for Goodness

Melinda Yogendran

Carbon Consulting Company

Class of 2018:

Natasha Karunaratne

Host Organization(s):
International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Fredrick Martyn

Ministry of Health, National STD/AIDS Control Program and National Dengue Control Unit

Maya McCoy

Foundation for Innovative Social Development

Vasana Ranasinghe

1. *Foundation for Goodness*
2. *Vishva Niketan*

Hafsa Razi

Goundviews

Aisha Rupasingha

Merrill J. Fernando Foundation

Class of 2017:

Jaliya Fonseka

Host Organization(s):
MICD Associates - Chartered Architects

Minuri Gamage

1. *Family Planning Association*
2. *Ministry of Health*

Maddhi Jayagoda

1. *Emerge Lanka*
2. *The Asia Foundation Gender and Justice Program*

Shivanti Kariyawasam

1. *Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation*
2. *Manasuwa Piyasa, Colombo South Teaching Hospital*

Erin Leonard

Institute of Policy Studies

Myra Sivaloganathan

Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute

Class of 2019:

Kiyomi De Zoysa

Host Organization(s):

1. *Centre for Women's Research*
2. *The Asia Foundation Sub-national Governance Program*

Nimasha Fernando

Family Planning Association

Daniella Kern

Environmental Foundation Ltd.

Alain Paul

Shift Integrated Pvt. Ltd.

Aneesa Rupasinghe

Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC



Ann Selvadurai

Host Organization(s):

- 1. *Women in Need*
- 2. *Samuttana*

I completed my Accelerated Bachelors of Science in Nursing in St. Louis and worked on a cardiac floor as a nurse at Barnes Jewish Hospital for 2.5 years.

I then decided to become a Travel Nurse and took one assignment in Seattle, WA, to work on a complex medical/surgical floor, which I loved, and then came back to St. Louis to take another assignment on a Neurology Floor. After this assignment I focused on my Masters in Nursing and my wedding in 2020.

The fellowship has helped broaden my perspective on life and has always made me have a passion for international work. Looking back, I met so many people who were simply happy with what they had in Sri Lanka. It always gave me perspective and reminded me to not sweat the small stuff so much.

The other LankaCorps fellows and I do keep in touch. We have a WhatsApp group and we all met up as well! It was so much fun. We've been lucky to keep in touch with one another over the years and I look forward to seeing most of them soon.



Sabina Martyn

National Water Supply and Drainage Board

After LankaCorps, I moved to New York to complete my Masters degree in environmental policy and public administration at Columbia University. I am now working for an engineering consulting firm managing infrastructure

resiliency projects focused on water quality and flood management for cities. My LankaCorps placement at the National Water Supply and Drainage Board in Colombo was a great foundation to learn about policy, government, and infrastructure in Sri Lanka, and strongly influenced the direction of my postgraduate studies and career. Through LankaCorps, I also developed a more nuanced sense of identity, history and culture, especially in connecting to my family's ancestral home in Jaffna. Our cohort is still close, and our friendship is one the things I value most about the LankaCorps programme.

2012 Fellow Group Photograph



Sahani Chandraratna

MAS Holdings

After the LankaCorps program, I remained at my placement for an additional seven months before moving to New York City. I graduated from Columbia University with a Master in Public Health and Master in Social Work

and then worked for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for almost three years. My work has focused on health equity and the social determinants of health. I recently moved back to Sri Lanka and am currently working at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Colombo.

The Fellowship was a formative experience that allowed me to learn, explore, travel, and make life-long friends! It taught me to be patient and adaptable and showed me the importance of considering multiple perspectives. My batch has remained good friends, and we meet up whenever possible.



Seshma Kumararatne

- 1. *Foreign Ministry*
- 2. *Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute*

Upon completing the LankaCorps Fellowship in December of 2012, I attended the University of Minnesota Law School the following year. After graduating from law school in 2016, I then joined the workforce as a lawyer

for a telecommunications company called NTT (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone). Most recently (November 2019), I have accepted an opportunity as corporate counsel in San Francisco at an edtech company called UdeMy.

Not only has the Fellowship allowed me to indicate to various employers my breadth of experience in policy, business, and the law, but it has also provided me with lifelong friendships and memories.

The main lessons I took away from my experience were that (1) perceptions abroad were not always accurate of current climates in SL, and (2) immersing one's self into different localities and customs brings about a new awareness and value for both simplicity, as well as an appreciation for the experiences that are gained from life's ups and downs.

Through the years many of those in our inaugural class have had various life events, such as weddings and graduations, which we have attended together. Our class is close and we enjoy the times we spend together.



Sivashankar Krishnakumar

Foundation for Goodness

I never knew that when I decided to apply to LankaCorps it would change the course of my life forever. While working at the Foundation of Goodness, I met a Sri Lankan expat from France and long story short, we

fell in love and got married a few years later. I miss Sri Lanka, I miss the culture, the food, the beaches but what I miss the most is the spirit of the people. In Sri Lanka, I learned about the power of the human spirit and what it truly means to be happy. I live in LA now and work as a technology consultant, I still travel a lot whenever I can and still stay in touch with everyone I met during the fellowship. If there is one thing that Sri Lanka thought me it's that only three things matter: family, friends and coconut sambal.



Charles Aruliah

Host Organization(s):
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies

According to the last update, Charles has continued to work in International Policy Research with organizations such as the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and the Security Governance Group, working on both Canada-Asia

foreign relations and international conflict issues. He has been back to Sri Lanka since the Fellowship and have had the privilege of meeting current LankaCorps Fellows during his visits. He says "The Fellowship gave me a once in a lifetime perspective on conflict and reconciliation issues, which has added insight and experience that have proven incredibly useful in my professional career. The Fellowship and TAF has also given me a reason to always visit Sri Lanka.



Natale Dankotuwage

Sri Lanka Unites

According to the last update, after completing the Fellowship, Natale worked in Hyderabad for a year, on developing a community space called Roots. She was then selected to be one of seventeen Fellows globally, in the IDEX Fellowship. Since returning to Toronto,

she has gone to Grad school for a Masters in Strategic Foresight and Innovation. She has worked at the Federal Government of Canada as a Junior Analyst on Digital Strategy related to Service Delivery. She says "My experience with The Asia Foundation has been helpful in inspiring me to believe that following one's passion for social change is valuable and rewarded"



Kaitlin Emmanuel

- 1. *The Post Graduate Institute of Archeology*
- 2. *University of Visual and Performing Arts*

Kaitlin is currently based in Ithaca, NY. "I completed my MA in Asian Studies at Cornell University in 2017, in which I defended a thesis on the modernist

photographer Lionel Wendt. Following my MA, I began the PhD in History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell. My project looks at modern and contemporary art by artists from Sri Lanka and its diaspora. In August, I attended the most beautiful wedding celebration of my former Lanka Corps roommate Harshi.



Chethana Perera

The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations

According to the last update, after completing the Fellowship at The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations, Chethana spent a year in Istanbul. Upon returning to the US, she entered Law School, focusing in

Civil Litigation. She has been back to Sri Lanka after completing the Fellowship and reconnected with family and friends she made during her Fellowship.



Harshi Hettige

Foundation for Goodness

In the years since my LankaCorps Fellowship, I lived in Guatemala, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and worked remotely while traveling for six months. I contribute communication and marketing skills to development projects, always pursuing more creative

ways to do so. The Fellowship showed me how I could be most valuable in an organization, as well as what I most value in myself and those around me. LankaCorps enabled me to get to know Sri Lanka on my own terms. My roommate in Colombo, Kaitlin, played a key role at my wedding in 2019.



Anthony Obeyesekere

Central Bank of Sri Lanka

After LankaCorps, I took up employment as a Senior Policy Advisor in the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. In 2015, I accepted a Sydney-based role as a Researcher within the Macroeconomics and Fiscal Management Practice of the World

Bank. In 2018, I spent some time as an Associate Director at the New South Wales Department of Treasury. In 2019 I have been primarily engaged as a Senior Adviser at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I have also been providing some support this year to the World Bank's economics team in Lao PDR. In 2020, I will be joining the World Bank in Jakarta.

Since 2015, I have been involved in establishing a charity named Effective Altruism Australia (EAA).

I am currently also completing a Diploma majoring in non-profit governance.

The Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to reconnect with my relatives in Sri Lanka, many of whom I had long lost touch with - it was my first trip back to Sri Lanka in 13.5 years. It helped establish in me a strong sense of Sri Lankan identity and an attachment to my country of birth. It also helped me to better understand my parents, and improve my relationship with them, through a better appreciation of the circumstances and experiences that shaped them. I'm not entirely sure what these things will lead to, but I certainly have a strong desire to engage with Sri Lanka and contribute to the future of the country in some capacity. Since my LankaCorps Fellowship concluded and I can confidently say that I am today far more aware of, and connected to, people and contemporary developments in Sri Lanka than I would have been without the LankaCorps experience.

I keep in touch with just one or two other LankaCorps Fellows.

2013 Fellows with Dr. Naj Nagendra





Angeli Jeyarajah

Host Organization(s):
Verite Research

Since completing my LankaCorps Fellowship I have completed an MSc in European and Comparative Social Policy in London and started a career in the private consulting sector, initially based in London before relocating to

Brussels where I worked on EU level policy evaluations and research studies. I returned to the UK following a year and a half in Belgium and have just taken up a position as Policy Advisor for the UK Government. The Fellowship was an invaluable experience in terms of developing me both personally and professionally. At the end of the programme I left Sri Lanka feeling a sense of wholeness having affirmed my identity as both a Sri Lankan and a British woman, when I had felt a sense of insecurity about this duality before. One of the most important lessons I learnt from my experience as a Fellow was to trust in my resilience. Moving to Sri Lanka was an initially daunting prospect but leaving six months later with incredibly close friends, professional contacts and a list of my favourite local Colombo spots was a really satisfying feeling and has since given me the confidence to take on and overcome initially intimidating challenges.



Mira Philips

Centre for Poverty Alleviation

After completing the LankaCorps Fellowship in December 2014, I stayed at my job at the Centre for Poverty Analysis for another seven months, which allowed me to participate in a major research study on tourism. After leaving Sri Lanka, I co-founded the arts

education organization Sunayra Lanka, with Nayantara Premakumar and Suruthi Ragulan, who were also in my LankaCorps cohort. Sunayra started its programming in 2017, working with rural youth in Eastern Sri Lanka. I also completed a Master's Degree in Social Policy at the London School of Economics in 2017. After leaving Sunayra in December 2018, I began my current job as a Development Associate with the fundraising consultancy firm Robin Heller International. At RHI, we support non-profits to bolster their fundraising capacity. In this position, I have advised organizations working on human rights, peacebuilding, and education.

The Fellowship definitely gave me an advantage when applying to graduate school, and the skills I gained in research and adapting to new settings, have been instrumental in taking on the challenges of my work since. It also allowed me to connect more deeply with Sri Lanka, a country that I had only visited for short vacations. I learned more about the politics and culture, and my connection to the country was what encouraged me, alongside Nayantara and Suruthi, to start Sunayra Lanka. The most important lesson I learned was how much work is being done on the ground to support economic, political, and social change, and that it is important for Diaspora Sri Lankans looking to understand the most pressing issues facing the country, to learn from what grassroots activists are doing.

I continue to keep in touch with my own cohort. I also speak with Fellows from other years. It is great to have a connection to people with similar backgrounds and who have had similar experiences living and working in Sri Lanka.



Nayantara Premakumar

Redlime Pvt. Ltd.

Nayantara Premakumar is currently working as a non-profit consultant, taking the global experience that the LankaCorps Fellowship afforded her to help guide organizations to instill and communicate a commitment to diversity and inclusivity. She is currently living

in the USA, after her stint as Executive Director of Sunayra Lanka, an organization whose roots also lay in the LankaCorps Fellowship. She has recently found a love for long hikes with her dog, and definitely doesn't miss the gym at all!



Suruthi Ragulan

1. *Family Planning Association*
2. *Good Practice Group*

Since the Lankacorps Fellowship, I completed my Masters Degree in Public Health and moved back to co-found a non-profit with some of the people in my cohort. We focused on Eastern Sri Lanka used a creative education model

to engage youth around pressing issues in their communities. I left that role in 2018 and started a job at York University in Toronto, working to support student mental health in the post secondary space. Life's been busy since the fellowship in 2014 and I'm always amazed to look back and see how many different things have happened since that time! Having the opportunity to explore Sri Lanka at that stage of my life was a critical experience. My professional and personal experiences on the island shaped the direction of my graduate studies as well as the different things I saw as possibilities for my career. I definitely wouldn't have been so bold as to start a non profit in Sri Lanka without the experience of my TAF fellowship!

I think it was valuable to have the opportunity to engage with the island for myself and explore how I fit into the island as it currently exists. Sri Lanka is a complicated space and continues to be as it grapples with its history and new realities. It was an important lesson for me to know that I could forge my own identity to the island and I am immensely grateful to TAF for providing me the opportunity to start that process!

Do you keep in touch with other LankaCorps Fellows?

Yes, we have a WhatsApp group that we use to chat from time to time. Everyone's been so busy with so many life changes since 2014 it's nice to have a space to connect from time to time.

2014 Fellow Group Photograph





Madushi Seneviratne

Institute of Policy Studies

I completed my Master of Planning degree at the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen's University in Kingston, ON Canada and am currently working as an Investment Analyst for the Real Property division of the Government

of Canada. The Fellowship experience has actually been invaluable asset so far in my academic and professional life - I have been able to demonstrate my capacity as an independent researcher for my graduate school admission and the results of the intensive project work provided a concrete product that illustrated my analytical and written skills to my current employer. Personally, the fellowship gave me a chance to rekindle a connection with my homeland and this is something that will stay with me for a lifetime. It inspired me view my birth country in a new light through my own learned experiences and gifted me with 5 incredible, lifelong friends. The Fellowship gave me the chance to experience the world of policy and, while I learned that it wasn't quite what I wanted to pursue, it left with an enhanced set of skills that put me on the track to the life I was fortunate enough to build.



Melanie Wathugala

1. Genetech
2. Family Planning Association

Since the fellowship, I've been going through medical training -- I finished medical school earlier this year and am now in my Family Medicine residency program. I am about to

experience my first "real" winter in Boston.

Working at FPA really exposed me to the importance of sexual and reproductive health care access and education and has really helped form my career goals. Family Medicine doctors can be very involved with sexual and reproductive justice issues.

The main thing I took away from the experience is that I have more ownership over my Sri Lankan identity. Before I would tell people I am Sri Lankan (or, Sri-Lankan American). Now I feel like I can understand more what being Sri Lankan means -- more than just a place where my parents grew up but as a place I also did some growing.

Do you keep in touch with other LankaCorps Fellows? We do keep in touch -- most recently most of our chatting has been on our still existing Whatsapp group.

Class of 2015



Ruvani Fonseka

1. Centre for Poverty Alleviation
2. Women in Need

I am currently a PhD student studying Public Health as a predoctoral fellow at the Center on Gender Equity and Health at University of California San Diego. I am writing my dissertation on gender-based violence in Sri Lanka. Many of the

Sri Lankan research collaborators that I have worked with over the past 5 years were people who I first met or learned about during my time in LankaCorps - I am grateful for the opportunity!

I definitely have kept in touch with other LankaCorps Fellows - I had dinner with Kaitlin in Colombo, attended Jessica's wedding in Jaffna, had lunch with Savini in San Diego, had dinner with Charles in Vancouver, and visited Nithya in New York City while she was a grad student at Columbia. Any fellows who find themselves in California should reach out to me - I would love to connect! I learned so many things from the Fellowship experience. I think for me the biggest thing was the importance of my family in Sri Lanka. As a child of immigrants in the States, it was so easy for me to think that my "family" was just my parents and my brother. LankaCorps gave me the chance to explore professional opportunities in Sri Lanka, but also to reconnect with family members that I hadn't seen in 10 years, and to meet new relatives. Living there for 6 months instead of my previous 2-week whirlwind visits gave me a chance to see people repeatedly, and to learn more about them and share more about myself with each subsequent visit. Thanks to social media and the internet, I still regularly communicate with my relatives, but the foundation for these strong relationships was established during LankaCorps, for which I will be forever grateful.



Sanjay Pathmanathan

Foundation for Goodness

Since the fellowship I have been focusing on my startup and was making steady progress. We were poised to raise more capital at a multimillion-dollar valuation, but with the emergence of COVID we don't expect to raise the capital in the short run.

I will also be moving back to Toronto in under 2 months, with the intention of seeking employment and potentially doing an MBA. I have given several years of my life to my work here in Sri Lanka, but unfortunately due to domestic and global instability I need to redirect my efforts elsewhere. Maybe there will come a time where I move back here.

Well, the Fellowship allowed me to come back to Sri Lanka and then build a network, which I needed to start a life here. It also taught me several different life skills and created a new found sense of autonomy, which was achieved through living in a foreign country and building new relationships which would have not happened had I not taken part in the fellowship. And it most definitely helped me identify with a culture that should have been more familiar, but due to migration and years spent apart was not.

I think one of the biggest takeaways for me was that I was privileged enough to receive an education abroad and come back and contribute to a country which is suffering from brain drain. I think if any of the fellows are passionate and able to afford to live in Sri Lanka, that their presence here would sincerely uplift Sri Lanka via their more progressive outlook of the world that was learnt through their time spent abroad. As far as civil liberties are concerned Sri Lanka can stand to benefit from people that have lived in countries that are more progressive and adaptable.

I have kept in touch with Suram from my batch.



Suram Edirisinghe

Host Organization(s):
Emerge Lanka

This year, I finally took the plunge and started pursuing acting. I have done a few film projects and couple commercials. I recently got cast, as one of the leads, in a small indie film.

Outside of acting, I volunteer for a local organization that works with victims and survivors of Sex Trafficking. I have participated in a few events and will soon partake in their Advocacy Training Program.

The Fellowship allowed me to connect to the country of my heritage, in a completely different way. It enabled me to gain a new perspective and an even deeper connection to Sri Lanka, by participating in the different activities and lectures offered by the program. It helped me redefine what it means to be a Sri Lankan-American. I now have a connection to the country filled with historical, socio-political and cultural context, separate from the familial experiences of my parents.

Prior to the program, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the arts. However, having gone to university, I also realized I had an interest in women's health, specifically individuals who have faced sexual trauma. The Fellowship granted me the ability to work with Emerge Global. I worked alongside amazing and passionate women, who provide services and opportunities to girls who have experienced sexual trauma. The experience made me realize that I wanted to continue working with individuals who've experienced sexual assault, in some capacity. That is why I am pursuing a life path that allows me to engage in both environments.

I faced the most difficult point in my life during the Fellowship. I lost my father a month into the program. (I am truly grateful to the Asia Foundation for allowing to go home when I found out my father was terminally ill, that I could be there with him in his last moments, and having the opportunity to return and finish my fellowship.) Having a moment to step away from the program provided perspective I didn't have before. I realized I entered the Fellowship with expectations, which I found difficult to divert from. As a result, I was failing to see the amazing opportunities I had been given and wasn't even utilizing the different skills and resources I had at my fingertips. The time home allowed me to recognize my errors. Returning to Sri Lanka with a new perspective I tried to invest more into my environment, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity. However, looking back, I do not know how successful I was.

There are three big lessons I take away from the experience: perspective, patience and being present. The first lesson I learned early on in the Fellowship, the other two I didn't fully understand until months after the program ended.



Rapti Ratnayake

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Since leaving in 2016, I graduated from McGill University with a Masters of Law and as a recipient of the O'Brien Graduate Fellowship for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism. The Fellowship piqued my interest in new fields of Law

and gave me the edge to take on research opportunities in International Criminal Law and Human Rights Education. Earlier this year, I made the big move to Toronto and was especially grateful to the wonderful network of Fellows who made the new city feel like home. The Fellowship has undoubtedly been invaluable in driving my personal interests and career pursuits. It has also allowed me to build a network of creative, open-minded and supportive friends. I hope we can have a big reunion soon!



Nithya Thiru

Verite Research

1. Since completing the LankaCorps Fellowship at the end of 2015, I have returned to the United States. After spending a couple of years working as a freelance writer, substitute teacher, and in the nonprofit sector, I left my home state of Alaska to attend graduate

school at Columbia University. In May of 2019, I received my Master of Public Administration in Human Rights and Humanitarian Policy, with a specialization in Gender Policy. I am now working in Anchorage, Alaska as the Executive Director of Story Works Alaska, an organization that works to support youth voice through storytelling.

2. Since coming to Sri Lanka in 2015, my entire family has become more connected to the island. It was also the LankaCorps experience that encouraged me to explore a career in policy. My experience working in Sri Lanka directly influenced my interest in studying human rights and gender policy in graduate school.

3. Before coming to Sri Lanka, I believed that I had to be either American or Sri Lankan, and that it was impossible to be both. Through my experience as a LankaCorps Fellow, I learned that our identities and histories are complex, and that it is okay to live in the space between worlds, and be many things at once. I have learned that my Tamil identity and my Alaskan identity are not separate, but deeply connected to one another, and to my belief in fighting for justice, equity and decolonization.

4. I have kept in touch with my cohort intermittently over the years. Ruvani visited me in New York! I also got to connect with Fellows from other cohorts while living in New York (Savini, Heima).



Jessica Uthayakumaran

Family Rehabilitation Centre

According to the last update, after the Fellowship Jessica took some time off to travel and work on some personal projects. She was also applying for a Post Graduate Degree program in Social Work. She says "I have never visited Sri Lanka until the Fellowship.

Living and working in Sri Lanka through the Fellowship has helped foster a special relationship to Sri Lanka, one that I never thought I was really missing. My experience from the Fellowship, has inspired me to learn more about my family's history. It has also encouraged me to have more dialogue about Sri Lanka with my family and friends, learn about their feelings, thoughts and relationship with Sri Lanka as well. I am currently working on creating a family journal. I have been compiling personal stories/ memories of Sri Lanka from different family members. I have been in touch with a few Fellows and we are hoping to visit again very soon. The island is already calling us back.

2015 Fellow Group Photograph





Nina Fernando

Host Organization(s):
International Centre for Ethnic Studies

After returning from LankaCorps in early 2017, I moved from California to Washington, D.C. with my husband, Noel, and began working at [The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#),

a multifaith coalition that connects, equips, and mobilizes faith communities to counter the problem of anti-Muslim discrimination and violence in the United States. I also had the opportunity to take part in a global music exchange program as a 2018 [OneBeat](#) Fellow. The LankaCorps Fellowship allowed opportunities to awaken and connect with a deeper and broader sense of self and community, and it clarified questions I had about the next steps in my professional path. I am grateful to keep in touch with our cohort through WhatsApp and the occasional in-person rendezvous, though it never feels often enough. Noel and I look forward to returning to Sri Lanka in the future - we hope soon!



Savini Ganhewa

Centre for Poverty Alleviation

After the LankaCorps Fellowship, I returned to Sri Lanka for another 7 months and joined the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) as a Researcher and Programme Officer. During my time with ICES, I co-authored a report titled, "Making Ends Meet:

Women's Livelihoods in Post-war Sri Lanka," which focused on women's post-war livelihood outcome factors. When I returned to the states, I moved to New York and joined the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security as a Policy Research Fellow. Currently, I am working as a Graduate Research Assistant at Columbia University, where I completed an MA in Political Science; my own research at Columbia focused on factors that cause variation in the use of state-sponsored violence during intrastate conflicts. My personal and professional experiences within the LankaCorps Fellowship program transformed the direction of my career and continues to influence my commitment to human rights and social justice today. The other 2016 fellows became some of my family and closest friends during and after the program; everyday, they continue to teach me to be a more critical, empathetic, and tenacious person.

2016 Fellow Group Photograph



Heima Sritharan

Foundation for Goodness

I manage a rape crisis counseling program, entitled 'Youth Empowered conSensuality' (YES) Program, at Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center in Manhattan, New York. My work entails

delivering primary prevention workshops to high school and college age students on sexual assault, DV, and violence. In addition to serving youth and adolescents under the age of 26, I also manage the program and co-chair a subcommittee in New York. Needless to say, the work is never ending, especially during these COVID times.



Sindu Sivayogam

1. *World Bank Open DRI*
2. *The Asia Foundation Sub-national Governance Program*

Since the Fellowship I continued to work in Sri Lanka with the Asia Foundation as a Senior Program Officer in the SNGP team until September 2017. The following year I was self-employed as an Urban Planner/Designer working

on projects with multiple clients including UN Habitat. I also made the decision to pursue graduate education and spent the last year completing my Masters of Science in City Design and Social Science at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I was awarded the Hobhouse Memorial Prize for Best Overall Performance with Distinction within my program. My final thesis, "Reinscribing Colombo After Domicide: On the 1983 Anti-Tamil Pogrom and Urban Memory in the City" explored the social and spatial landscape of collective Tamil identity and memory after extreme violence in Wellawatte.

Since completing this degree this past August, I have returned to Canada. I am currently pursuing project work in Syria with UN Habitat on their Restoration of Minimal Functionality of Infrastructure program. Finally, following the Fellowship I have continued to pursue art to explore my identity as a Tamil woman through a feminist lens. Through the encouragement of my fellow Fellows, I have made many beautiful connections with my community through art.

The Fellowship has given me much by way of life lessons and experience to support me in my career and education endeavors. However, the most important, that I would like to elaborate more on has to do with myself as an individual. Living and experiencing life on the island with the Fellows opened me up emotionally and spiritually in ways I did not anticipate. Those incredibly vulnerable moments shared with the Fellows have allowed me to lean into and cultivate my own personal growth, something that has allowed me to live a more fulfilled and open life today. I am so grateful to the program for having brought me to Heima, Shaaryana, Nina, Melinda and Savini.

The most important lesson I learned from my experience during the Fellowship was that my identity as a Tamil Canadian does not need to be divided, compartmentalized or essentialized to suit others or myself. More importantly, that my identity can be parceled in a myriad hybrid way that complement and contradict each other – and that is okay.

I keep in touch with as many LankaCorps Fellows as possible! I was blessed during my cohort (2016) to gain the strong friendship of five incredible people who have shaped my life forever and continue to do so (our WhatsApp chat continues on!). I have met and kept in touch with several fellows outside of my own batch including Kaitlin (2013), Suruthi, Nayantara and Mira (2014), and Rapti and Jessica (2015).



Shaaranya Pillai

1. Family Rehabilitation Centre
2. Chithrasena Vajira Dance Foundation

I was able to visit Sri Lanka for the first time because of the LankaCorps Fellowship, which definitely changed my life. The fellowship allowed me to cultivate my passion for the arts in a

more meaningful way and inspired me to take my career in music more seriously. The experience further instilled in me a sense of purpose in celebrating my culture, as I have been able to do through my musical projects. I also shortly after took a development position at India Home, a nonprofit organization in Queens, New York. I was able to use my fellowship experience and teaching background to inform my work at India Home, where I currently serve as Deputy Director. Through LankaCorps, I was able to become a lot more in touch with myself, what I value, and have made the closest lifelong friends. I cannot emphasize enough how grateful I am for having had this experience.



Melinda Yogendran

Carbon Consulting Company

After the LankaCorps fellowship I decided to stay in Sri Lanka for another 8 months, which allowed me to gain invaluable experience in field work and explore my interest in working at the intersections of policy, planning, and community development. This eventually

led me to move to Toronto, where I'm currently completing a Masters in Urban Planning. I will be graduating in April of 2020, after which I plan to stay in Toronto for the near (and possibly distant) future. Most importantly, however, the fellowship provided me with such a unique opportunity to develop a relationship with Sri Lanka, and build life-affirming friendships with the other fellows. I feel so deeply connected to my cohort - they are a never-ending source of love and support in my life. I hold a lot of gratitude for The Asia Foundation and cannot emphasize enough how much my time in Sri Lanka shaped so much of who I am today.

Class of 2017



Minuri Gamage

1. Family Planning Association
2. Ministry of Health

After the fellowship, I returned to Colorado to finish my Masters of Public Health at the Anschutz Medical Campus Colorado School of Public Health. I graduated in May 2019 with an MPH in Global Public Health and Maternal

and Child Health. I began medical school at St. George's University in August 2019, and plan to eventually practice Rural and Family Medicine in the States and abroad.

The LankaCorps Fellowship retroactively served as my practicum experience for my MPH. I maintained contact with my preceptor from the Ministry of Health, Dr. Novil Wijesekara, and he became my preceptor for my capstone project as well. My project was titled "Evaluation and Revision of Sexual and Reproductive Health Trainings in Disaster-prone Regions of Rural Sri Lanka" which was a continuation of the work that I began during the LankaCorps Fellowship. I'm very grateful to have met Dr. Wijesekara through the fellowship and to have received his guidance in completion of my MPH degree.

I learned to embrace the unexpected! The LankaCorps Fellowship brought about many new and exciting opportunities that helped to shape my career aspirations in ways I hadn't considered before. Beyond professional impact, I established unexpected friendships through the fellowship that have significantly changed me and my relationship to Sri Lanka for the better.

The fellows from the 2017 cohort group Skype occasionally, and we regularly keep in touch through social media. A long-awaited reunion will hopefully happen sometime next year!



Shivanti Kariyawasam

1. Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation
2. Manasuwa Piyasa, Colombo South Teaching Hospital

Following the LankaCorps fellowship, I continued working in Sri Lanka for a few months for The Asia Foundation with the Peacebuilding & Community Dialogue & SNGP programs as a Program

Associate, by contributing to a memorialization initiative using elder's stories, and conducting "age-friendly" audits of local authority offices. Upon returning to the U.S., I began my studies in a clinical doctorate program in Occupational Therapy at Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine. My LankaCorps placements at the Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation and at Manasuwa Piyasa, delivering cognitive screenings to older adults & conducting research health and well-being of grandparent caregivers, were a great way to start developing the clinical skills I will use frequently as a practicing occupational therapist. Recognizing that occupational therapy is grounded in a person's values, beliefs, and spirituality in addition to his or her physical health, LankaCorps gave me the both the opportunity and confidence to develop my own therapeutic use of self by exploring a large part of what makes me myself- something I will be grateful for both personally and professionally. I have kept in contact with my cohort (and a few people who I worked with in Sri Lanka) thanks to Snapchat & old-fashioned letters. I have been very lucky to have visited Sri Lanka quite often since the fellowship, but hopefully in the future after gaining more experience working in healthcare in the U.S., I can return to Sri Lanka to work in some capacity as an occupational therapist and/or with older adults.



Maddhi Jayagoda

1. Emerge Lanka
2. The Asia Foundation Gender and Justice Program

Following the LankaCorps Fellowship, I started graduate school at Columbia University where I'm currently pursuing my Masters in Social Work and studying anti-oppressive, trauma-informed

interventions – my professional trajectory was almost entirely inspired by my gender justice research and direct practice experiences in Sri Lanka. Living in the diaspora, cultivating a strong relationship with the island has always been critical to my evolving definition of self and home, and this fellowship sparked a lifelong journey of learning and engagement with Sri Lanka in a way I could have never imagined before. I'm so grateful for the friends I made along the way and the overall life-changing impact of this fellowship, and I look forward to living and working in Sri Lanka again one day soon.



Jaliya Fonseka

Host Organization(s):
MICD Associates - Chartered Architects

The LankaCopsr fellowship has been an expansive and meaningful experience that has brought me closer to the place I have struggled to know throughout my life. It offered the time and space to connect with Sri Lanka more intimately

and develop relationships with people that continue to grow in new and exciting ways. I am grateful for the spectrum of fellows I have gotten to know, and although keeping in touch has proved challenging, it has been meaningful connecting periodically through messages, Skype calls and spontaneous meetings in new cities.

The end of my time in Sri Lanka was followed by a month-long trip through Nepal and India, extending my interest in traditional craft and architecture, and getting to know the stories behind the creators. Upon returning to Canada, I taught first and fourth year design studio's at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, while pursuing work at an architecture practice in Toronto. All my engagements are in some way painted with my experiences in Sri Lanka, and like many of the artists I met in my travels, I continue to search for new ways of expressing my understanding of the place I call home.



Erin Leonard

Institute of Policy Studies

Since returning to the US from Sri Lanka in 2018, I have been working in Washington DC. Right after LankaCorps, I worked for the World Resources Institute on an initiative that supports Public-Private Partnerships in the developing world. For the past year, I have worked

for a start-up that produces market-data for the organic & non-GMO agriculture industry. In my free time, I practice yoga and volunteer at a small urban farm in DC. Next year, I hope to attend graduate school to further pursue my interests in agriculture and international development. Doing this fellowship helped me solidify my own professional goals and interests and allowed me to deepen my relationship to Sri Lanka. I hope to return to Sri Lanka soon and to focus some of my graduate studies research in Sri Lanka. Our LankaCorps cohort tries to catch up on skype periodically, and since the fellowship, I have had the chance to meet up with multiple fellows from different years in DC and elsewhere. It is wonderful to know I have this extended network of fellows across the country all doing fascinating things with their lives!



Myra Sivaloganathan

Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute

After completing a LankaCorps placement with LKI (in foreign policy and international relations), I joined The Asia Foundation as a Program Assistant for their Peacebuilding and Interfaith Dialogue Unit. Subsequently, I started law school in Ontario. Last summer, I

worked in South Africa and conducted research on constitutional rights; this upcoming summer, I will work for Canada's federal government and assist with case files and litigation related to Aboriginal, immigration, and tax law. The LankaCorps fellowship provided me with valuable work experience and the confidence to pursue further opportunities on an international plane. It also deepened my connection with my Sri Lankan heritage and Tamil identity, and allows me to continue engaging in dialogue on justice, reconciliation, and post-war reform with the diasporic community in Toronto.

2017 Fellow Group Photographs





Natasha Karunaratne

Host Organization(s):
International Centre for Ethnic Studies

After returning from Sri Lanka in 2018, I began working at a non-profit that supports immigrant youth in achieving personal, professional, and academic success through inspiring out-of-school experiences. Outside of work, I

continued working for my host site, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, illustrating covers for publications and working on a publication of my own, centered around history education reforms in Sri Lanka. The Fellowship helped me grow my interest and passion in the field of post-war education in the Sri Lankan context. My time at ICES also allowed me to expand my skills in graphic design and led me to begin an initiative, [Art for Immigrants](#), through which I create portraits for people in exchange for donations to organizations supporting immigrant rights. Looking back, the most important lesson I learned was to set goals for myself outside of others' expectations and go about achieving those goals no matter how much hard work it takes - I've found that fulfillment is not possible without hard work. My LankaCorps cohort is still in touch, through our group chat, Maru Machans, and by having small reunions in cities all over the U.S. - so far we've met in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Boston. We have yet to have a whole-cohort reunion, but it's in the works!



Fredrick Martyn

*Ministry of Health, National
STD/AIDS Control Program and
National Dengue Control Unit*

After the LankaCorps Fellowship, I returned to Washington, D.C. to complete my final year of medical school at The George Washington University. My time with the National

STD/AIDS Control Program reinforced my interests in community health and reaffirmed my decision to pursue a career in family medicine. My LankaCorps cohort was a creatively gifted group and through their support in Sri Lanka I began more actively pursuing my interests in writing and poetry. The fellowship gave me a new creative outlet and I have since had my words featured in some online publications. I communicate with my 2018 fellows on an almost daily basis, where we reminisce about Wellawatte sunsets and those dope coconut biscuits from The Asia Foundation biscuit jar.



Hafsa Razi

Groundviews

Hafsa graduated from the University of Chicago, with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy Studies. She has a background working in journalism. During her Fellowship Hafsa completed a six-month placement at Groundviews, a civic journalism

organization that provides alternative perspectives on Sri Lanka's politics and society. Groundviews is part of the civic media branch of the Center for Policy Alternatives. Through written articles and videos, Hafsa has worked on coverage of the anniversary of Black July, enforced disappearances, teaching sensitive histories in public schools, Muslim personal law, and minority rights during the constitutional crisis.



Maya McCoy

*Foundation for Innovative Social
Development*

After returning from LankaCorps in January, I moved to San Francisco to work at an education technology start-up. I also work as the Music Editor for a publication called Kajal that focuses on South Asian art and culture. I will be starting medical school in the fall of

2020. My experience doing LankaCorps helped solidify my desire to go into medicine and also has made me more driven to intentionally learn about the South Asian diaspora and its politics. I am grateful that I have seen all of the other fellows in my cohort since returning to the States, despite living in different parts of the country. Looking back, the most important takeaway from the fellowship has been these friendships and connections that I would never have been able to form without the experience in Colombo.



Vasana Ranasinghe

- 1. *Foundation for Goodness*
- 2. *Vishva Niketan*

I volunteered at a meditation center in South Africa for 2 months. Now I am in graduate school pursuing a Doctorate in Chinese Medicine.

The fellowship helped me feel more at home in Sri Lanka. It also made me more

confident to follow my own voice and gave me beautiful friendships. Looking back, the most important lesson you learned from the experience is more about who I am and how I want to live.

I have seen Maya and Fred in person, and I have kept in contact with all of the fellows. I consider them to be lifelong friends, and I love them all very much.



Aisha Rupasingha

Merrill J. Fernando Foundation

Aisha graduated from Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She has a background working in children's media and refugee resettlement. During her fellowship, Aisha completed a placement at Merrill J.

Fernando Foundation (MJF), the charitable branch of Dilmah Tea PLC. MJF focuses on providing special needs education to children with developmental disabilities and after-school enrichment for youth from low-income backgrounds. It operates through many centers across the island and Aisha was placed at the main MJFCF center in Moratuwa. Her duties and tasks included volunteering in classrooms and completing writing assignments for MJF and the main Dilmah corporate office. Concurrently, she worked on drafts for children's books on various issues of difference that MJF intends to publish. Aisha assisted with the MJF Youth program, curating and leading workshops on a variety of creative topics for the older youth. She also assisted Dilmah's digital brand and marketing team and Dilmah's Climate Reality conference team with various projects.



Class of 2019



Kiyomi De Zoysa

Host Organization(s):

1. Centre for Women's Research
2. The Asia Foundation Sub-national Governance Program

Before COVID-19, I was working part time during the interim period between the fellowship and grad school. As of June, of this year I began my master's

program under the Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship Program. It is a dual master's program in two different universities in Costa Rica and the Philippines. I am pursuing a MA in Transdisciplinary Social Development at Ateneo de Manila University and a MA in Response Management and Sustainable Economic Development at University for Peace.

The fellowship was largely instrumental for pursuit and selection for this scholarship program I am currently in. It gave me the experience I needed as a social researcher in Asia, and importantly my mother's country, to be able to market myself as an Asian scholar and a peacebuilder. It helped me to re-establish and deepen my connection to the country and establish important connections, both professional and personal, that have enriched my life and will continue to help me in the future. It meant a lot to me that I got to participate in the professional working lifestyle of Colombo and interact with other professionals who are doing great work in various fields. It was a key catalyst for my professional development and a pivotal introduction to the field of international social development, which is what I am studying now. I am beyond grateful for this experience as it has radically altered my life for the better.

Openness, particularly in the professional setting. Although some things are better not said, I really learned the importance of being transparent about the process of work especially with coworkers and managers. Laughter and clear communication are crucial for a positive workspace and with the right kind of leadership the workplace can be enjoyable and like a family! This is something I got to have during my time at SNGP of TAF and I felt so honored to be part of a family of an incredibly talented and humble team.

We try to have a monthly fellows call over Zoom and check in with each other every now and then to catch up. We are all very supportive of each other's goals and insist on not losing this important connection we have with each other. I am confident we will be friends for a long time to come! ;)



Nimasha Fernando

Family Planning Association

After returning to the U.S., I accepted a position with the Public Health Institute and U.S. Agency for International Development where I support international HIV prevention and treatment programs for mothers and children. During my LankaCorps

Fellowship, I worked with Sri Lanka's HIV programs serving key populations and saw both the challenges of developing sustainable health programs targeting marginalized populations and the triumphs of Sri Lanka building on the expertise of community organizations while celebrating the elimination of mother-to-child HIV-transmission. The lessons I learned from this experience greatly inform my work today as I believe other countries can learn from Sri Lanka's successes in the public health field. One of the most important lessons I learned from the Fellowship is to embrace both sides of being an American young professional and a Sri Lankan daughter; amidst the dissonance between these sides are valuable opportunities to make professional connections and contributions to the land of my heritage. I hope to help create similar opportunities for others through the emerging Sri Lankan American Knowledge Exchange organization. Our LankaCorps batch remains friends and aims to have monthly video calls -- we are and will always be The Fellows!



Alain Paul

Shift Integrated Pvt. Ltd.

Alain graduated from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University, with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. He majored in marketing with a concentration in information technology and minored in arts management with a concentration

in music business. He has a background working in marketing, audio, and analytics. During his Fellowship, Alain completed a six-month placement at Shift Solutions, an independent multi-disciplinary advertising agency providing everything from general brand strategy to creative visual content for some of the largest brands in Sri Lanka. Alain rotated through the brands, media, creative, and digital departments. The bulk of his work revolved around the digital and creative teams at Shift Solutions. His duties and tasks included creating analytics reports, developing content and SEO strategy, managing paid ads for clients Facebook business pages, graphic designing content, and conducting competitor analysis.



Daniella Kern
Environmental Foundation Ltd.

As soon as I completed my Fellowship in Sri Lanka and travelled back to the Netherlands, I started a new job. A dream job so to say as it is all about my big passion and love for the ocean. I started working for The Ocean Cleanup in Rotterdam as Legal Assistant. The

organization has a big, important mission: developing advance technologies to rid the world's oceans of plastic. I'm very happy with this opportunity and hope to bring the ocean cleanup's technologies to Sri Lanka one day too.

The fellowship has helped me to focus on my dreams and passions. To be led by this and not to be scared to take on opportunities even though you might not think they are for you. Through my fellowship and time in Sri Lanka, I have discovered and learnt so much more about my roots, who I am and what I stand for. This has definitely helped me in both my career and personal life. It has given me more confidence and the belief that I can appreciate how unique my background truly is. The working experience too has been a great asset in developing my CV and having such an experience as the LankaCorps Fellowship is something every potential employer or university for example will appreciate.

This would definitely be how I don't have to choose between the Netherlands or Sri Lanka. They are both my home. That I can embrace both cultures as they are a part of me.

We do keep in touch through our monthly skype calls which are always a lot of fun. Especially when we talk about all our memories and special moments that were made during our time in Sri Lanka. Even though we are far away, these chats make our bond even stronger. I truly hope we stay in touch but I am almost certain that we will!



Aneesa Rupasinghe
Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC

I am currently interning at a national civil rights organization called Muslim Advocates. They do a lot of important legal and advocacy work for American Muslims, and it has been really incredible to support their development and public advocacy teams. Of course,

everything is remote so it has been interesting to work with colleagues that I've never actually met in person. Outside of work, I've been trying to keep busy in quarantine - reading, playing music (mostly guitar and piano), and learning languages. Though I've been focusing mainly on learning Korean, I've also been continuing on my Tamil journey, which began at TAF!

The Fellowship helped me form a deeper connection with my family, both in Sri Lanka and at home. Since returning home, I've really enjoyed sharing and comparing my memories of Sri Lanka with those of my parents. But more than anything, I've cherished having a newfound bond with my grandmother, who I still keep in touch with.

More than anything else, my time in Sri Lanka taught me how to say yes to new experiences. It helped me view even the most challenging moments in a positive light and even embrace them. When I look back on my fellowship, I really do feel as though I made the most of it - with no regrets and no missed opportunities. I definitely left Sri Lanka feeling more free, independent, and overall, just more like my true self because of this.

We try to have a group video call once a month or so, though it has gotten a bit more difficult since Kiyomi has started grad school in Costa Rica. We also try to keep in touch in between our calls on our WhatsApp group.

2019 Fellow Group Photograph



The Asia Foundation

LankaCorps Fellowship Program