



## Newsletter 40 – 15th anniversary of Hellabeem Sri Lanka

**It fills us with pride to see what a wonderful project Hellabeem has become in those fifteen years. We are happy to take you through everything we have achieved together for our physically disabled youngsters.**



**End of May 2007: Helène Heijen and Jan van Beek started with eight pupils.**

**Result in 2022: Sixty physically disabled boys from underprivileged families have been enabled to build an independent living. They have their own business or a job, and there is much more!**

The first pupils received their diploma or certificate in 2009. Since then, 55 boys have opened a shop or repair workshop or found a job. With another five or six due to pass out in October 2022, this adds up to sixty pupils who have found their way to independence thanks to Hellabeem.

The boys come from various backgrounds. Some are orphans or only have a mother to care for them – a few fathers have died, but all too often fathers walk out on a disabled child. The majority of pupils are Buddhists, but we also have Muslims, Christians and Hindus sometimes. It is vital, therefore, that we manage to create a warm family feeling at Hellabeem.

The pupils who want to start a business get help from Hellabeem to fit their shop and buy workshop tools. If needs be, Hellabeem arranges a microcredit for them, which they repay properly. Sometimes the boys join forces. Sampath, Janith, Danuska and Lahiru – four boys who also have a minor mental disability – were very eager to start a shop of their own with our support and now they sell foodstuffs and incense sticks. They run the business with their mothers.

We have also welcomed disabled girls at Hellabeem over the past years. They came for our special training courses like computer classes, sewing and making jewellery or simple sandals. For deaf boys we have developed and organized mobile phone repair courses.



A lot of attention has also been paid to the neighbourhood around Hellabeem. Disabled children living in the area come to us on Saturday for physiotherapy and hydrotherapy. Where necessary, we provide disabled youngsters with a bathroom or toilet at home.

It is thanks to our marvellous sponsors, big and small, that Hellabeem has been able to achieve all this, and more!

## Education

We have had a varying complement of between 25 and 31 pupils over the years. Some of these disabled boys have hardly ever been to school before, as there is no disability transport service in Sri Lanka. The curriculum at Hellabeem therefore starts with reading, writing and arithmetic if necessary. These basic subjects are taught by one of our former pupils, Tushara, and a retired school teacher, Ms Nayana.

When the elementaries are in order, the boys are given vocational training. The main subjects here are basic computer skills, graphic design and elementary electronics. They then move on to advanced electronics, which focuses on the ability to repair objects like phones, TV sets, computers and laptops. Not every pupil is able to perform at this level, however, so in that case we look for other vocational options. The boys get training in horticulture, cooking and creative subjects, to make them learn a trade that will enable them, too, to earn their own living.



Working with art, drama, dance, music and sports has a positive impact on the cognitive and motor skills of our pupils. They can be themselves in a safe environment, develop self-confidence and relax.

Garden therapy is another creative subject we provide. Gardening has a calming effect and may bring about positive change. We feel this is very important, because the pupils have often had nasty experiences.



The worldwide Covid pandemic has put our current pupils at an educational disadvantage of about eighteen months. Although we did provide some online lessons, not everyone had access to a phone or internet connection at home. Practical training was impossible, nor did the boys get any therapy. It took a while for most boys to get vaccinated and return to Hellabeem, where they first had to be quarantined for five days. Due to various circumstances, some of the boys are yet to come back. In any case we have now welcomed six new pupils.

### **Students not finishing school**

Not all boys are able to finish their training at Hellabeem in preparation for an independent life. Some drop out prematurely because they are homesick or turn out to be unsuited. To our sorrow, several pupils have passed away at home, after a period of illness: Nipuna, Tharindu, Ravindu, Nilu and Kalu will live on in our memories.

### **Therapy**

Physiotherapy at Hellabeem is given on a daily basis. All our pupils are treated by assistant physiotherapist Sameere and by physiotherapist Janaka, who comes in every two weeks. They also treat children from the area once a week.

Every year, we welcome four Psycho-Motoric Therapy trainees from the Windesheim Academy in Zwolle (NL). These students use motion as a basis for observation, diagnosis and therapy to help physically disabled people with psychosocial or psychological issues. They address themes like motivation, respect, self-confidence, leadership and anger. In addition, they give swim therapy in our own outdoor pool.

We have also had several Physiotherapy trainees over the years. In addition, we had five Human Kinetic Technology students from The Hague at Hellabeem, who produced objects like a flight of steps and wall bars in support of occupational therapy for the boys.

Before coming to Sri Lanka, all trainees have to organize a little campaign to raise money for Hellabeem. One of them did something quite extraordinary, which was noted by a local TV channel: “It was a tough and unusual weekend for Halbe-Jan Douma from Opende. He completed the famous Eleven Cities Tour, not on skates but by handbike. A 200 km ride facing wind and rain.”

### **Staff**

Hellabeem has quite a lot of staff, from nannies for the boys’ daily care and teachers to physio, management, garden and kitchen workers. Our staff turnover so far has been fairly low. Some employees have retired, others have made a career move. We are pleased to note that many former pupils have found employment on our Hellabeem campus. We already mentioned Tushara who gives basic education. Indunil is an orphan and initially worked as a kitchen assistant but now helps in the home garden. Sameera is our assistant cook. He lives nearby and used to come to Hellabeem for physiotherapy from age 9. Damike was initially employed by us as a gardener and animal carer, but when that proved too difficult for him, he managed to find a government job in security. His child also has a genetic disability.





Thanks to a donation we were able to employ Shiran, who had become disabled in an accident while already a professional welder. After several weeks of additional training, he assembled and repaired wheelchairs in our workshop and made racks for our buildings. He had to stop because of serious pressure ulcers, for which he eventually had an operation. He has recently joined us as an electronics and mobile phone teacher, in succession to old boy Tharanga who was too busy running his own shop to do the teaching as well. Shiran has now been joined as an electronics teacher by Subash, who already operates a shop and workshop from home. The two men really like teaching. When they stay at Hellabeem, we need to create accommodation for them. Old boy Tharindu was sponsored by the Liliane Fund to do orthopaedic technician's training in Vietnam so he would be able to make braces. After two years of working for us in the workshop we had fitted for him, he moved to Colombo to have a job with an orthopaedic firm. Lastly, there is Kaveesha, who after getting his diploma became an administrative officer and computer teacher with us. He also understands networks, which he has learnt from Hellabeem founder Jan van Beek.

During the corona lockdowns we were fortunate that most of our employees could continue to come, because they live in the area. They worked in the garden and did all kinds of maintenance and overhaul jobs. Now that the staff is back at full strength, the boys can get more lessons and therapy again.

## Volunteers

We also owe a lot to the many volunteers who kindly stayed at Hellabeem for a few days or even months to roll up their sleeves for us!



Carla and Sake



Mandy and Amber amidst the boys

## Farming

We have developed the land and planted a lot of fruit trees. The old coconut trees produce fewer and fewer nuts and two hundred of them have had to be felled because of a disease. We have planted eighty new ones, but it will take a couple of years before they start producing coconuts. The entire crop of coconuts and fruit is for our own consumption at the moment.

The many cinnamon shrubs we have planted in our one-hectare cinnamon plantation now yield about €2500 a year and we can still develop more. We have a clean room for processing the cinnamon. Some of the pupils are interested in learning to do this.

For the four valuable cows grazing on our land we grow a special high-growing grass. We have built a cowshed and a biogas plant. Many chickens are pottering around the garden.



Tea has been less fruitful. Due to extreme droughts shortly after planting and in year 2016, our tea production has not been profitable. The recent ban on fertilizer will not do our harvest any good either.

We do benefit immensely from the sponsored polytunnel, a modern greenhouse which makes us less dependent on the weather when growing all kinds of produce.

### Amenities on our grounds

For weeks now, Sri Lanka has been facing prolonged daily power cuts, up to thirteen hours on end. This may well continue for a while, because the government has a huge liquidity problem. Fortunately, we have been installing solar panels since 2014. Thanks to our donors this has been a great success: we are much less vulnerable to power cuts and our electricity bill has gone down dramatically. Besides, we have solar water heaters. The wind turbine we had installed snapped off during a terrible storm in 2021. The turbine has been repaired, but two batteries have broken down, luckily within the warranty period.



We used to have quite a few problems with the water supply. When we have extra training courses for girls or deaf boys, there may be as many as fifty pupils and staff on the campus, which greatly increases the need for water. Thanks to a fifth well, a 40m deep tube well, we now have plenty. The wells are equipped with pumps, timers and level switches. Even so, we need to be quite careful with the water in periods of very hot weather to avoid drought.

The old wood workshop has been repaired and taken into use again. The dilapidated old shed has been replaced with a new one, 10m long and built to last. It serves as storage depot for wheelchair parts and as a workshop.







An extra new septic tank had to be bought. The old one had decayed as roots and animals had found their way in. The round septic tanks we now have are completely tight.

### A history of the buildings

In 2002, Jan and Helène bought two hectares of land from their own means. The next year, they had a road built and realized a water well and a water tower, each with a reservoir of 35,000 litres.

In 2003, the four staffrooms were built. The old hut for the labourers of the coconut plantation was refurbished to create a site hut for the builder. Afterwards, it became a storage facility for the big batteries of the wind turbine and solar panels.

In 2004, the long school with eight classrooms was built and also the Nasurdeen building with its office, computer room and two big dormitories for twenty extra pupils, usually girls. Nasurdeen would have been our first pupil, but he drowned in the tsunami. In memory of this boy we named the building after him. Also in 2004, we dispatched two containers full of supplies for Hellabeem.

In 2006, we built the hostel for thirty pupils. It has a bathroom with four showers and four toilets. The nanny's room has its own bathroom. The large central space, with a TV, is a relaxation area. In 2009, the large building that accommodates the physiotherapy room, the dining hall and the big kitchen was built. A wood oven and a small gas oven were added later.

A large donation enabled us in 2019 to build a little house for our officer Kaveesha and his mother. His muscular disease is only mildly progressive, but he does need her help with the activities of daily living. The building also contains another unit to accommodate a disabled guest and a carer.

All buildings have been made accessible with wheelchair paths and concrete entrances over the years, which put an end to the muddy tracks we used to have.





Unfortunately, all our roofs already needed renovation. This is quite normal in Sri Lanka. The wood is eaten away by insects and moisture attack. Monkeys jumping on the rooftops are no help either. Mending the roofs is a process that takes time, because you cannot work on the rooftop with temperatures around 35°C or when it is raining. By now, all the roofs have been repaired.



### Factsheet

Our manager Thishantha has made a compact presentation of facts and figures to show you all the achievements of the youngsters we have trained at Hellabeem. You will find this factsheet on our website.

**We could never have achieved all this without YOUR gifts.  
So from the bottom of our heart, THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

