

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark hair, smiling warmly. She is holding a blue, fluffy stuffed animal with yellow accents. She is wearing a white sleeveless top with red floral patterns. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

CHILD PROTECTION
AS PART OF PROGRAMMING IN **SRI LANKA**



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Cover photo:

Canadian Red Cross Child with program mascot, "Asha."

Seven Fundamental Principles

HUMANITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

IMPARTIALITY

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

NEUTRALITY

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

INDEPENDENCE

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

UNITY

There can only be one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

UNIVERSALITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is world-wide.

Background

Following the devastating December 26, 2004 Asian Tsunami, there were many needs facing survivors across Sri Lanka. Among these was the protection of children from all forms of violence.

Once the initial emergency response and immediate needs were provided, the Canadian Red Cross with approval from the Sri Lankan Red Cross began working with local government and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) to identify practical ways to strengthen efforts to protect girls and boys from violence as part of long-term programming within communities.

In 2007, after detailed assessments were completed through consultations with 80 child protection personnel and local schools and communities a pilot child protection project was developed and implemented with local NGO Sarvodaya and the University of Peradeniya. After the pilot in 2008, the project was scaled up in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), and the Probation and Child Care Services Department. In 2014 a partnership was developed with PLAN Sri Lanka to integrate the project into PLAN's ongoing programming.

THE PROJECT GOAL WAS:

“To develop and strengthen capacity of vulnerable children and their caregivers to improve children’s safety from violence.”

THE TWO OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT WERE:

- ↘ Organizational systems are improved among partner agencies to enhance the safety of children from violence and abuse.
- ↘ Partner agencies are effectively delivering education to prevent violence and abuse against children.

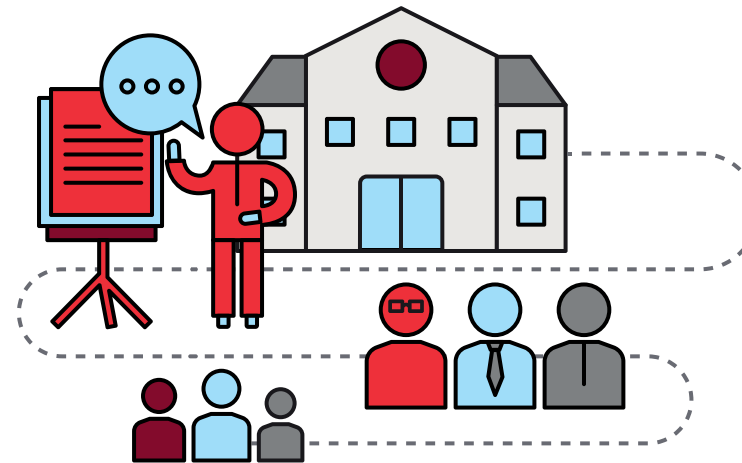
Specific actions taken by Red Cross in partnership with the Ministry of Education, local NGOs, and PLAN Sri Lanka have included:

- Integration of child protection content into the work of schools within select districts across the country using the “Be Safe!” resource package.
- Improving child protection systems and protocols within schools using the “Ten Steps to Safe Environments” methodology.
- Supporting partner agencies to build their capacity and knowledge about child protection.

- Reaching parents with practical skills to protect children from various forms of violence.
- Supporting youth to lead local micro-projects aimed at preventing violence against children.

Be Safe! Project was implemented in all 25 districts of the country and the Ten Steps in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy, Matale, Nuwera-Eliya, Galle, Matara and Hambantota Districts.

PROJECT REACHED:



127,444
children

221,792
adults

5,715
teachers trained

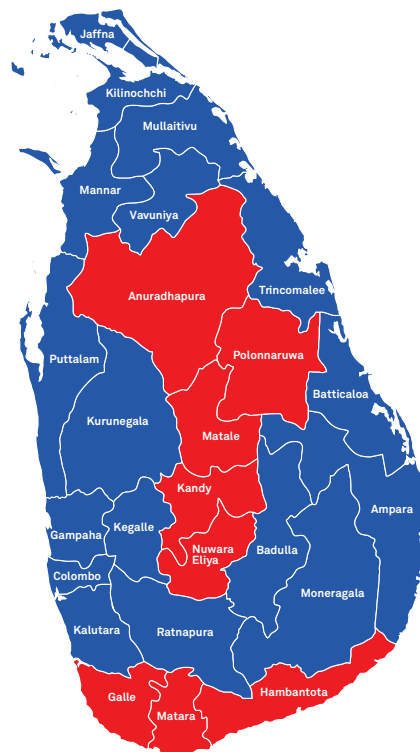
234
master trainers

2,211
schools (23% of all government schools)

223
schools introduced child protection committees

A total of **355,767** people reached at a cost of \$4.64 CAD per person

- Districts with Be Safe!
- Districts with Be Safe! and Ten Steps



Coverage of Be Safe! and Ten Steps Program in Sri Lanka

The Problem

Physical, sexual, psychological, and gender-based violence are, like in countries around the world, a problem in Sri Lanka. The violence disproportionately affects girls and boys of all ages and backgrounds across the country. The human, economic and community-development consequences are profound.

STUDIES FROM SRI LANKA SHOW:

20% of boys are sexually abused.¹

10% of girls are sexually abused.²

10% of girls and boys, ages 10-13 years, have experienced some form of sexual abuse. Among 14-19 year olds, 14% have been sexually abused with little difference among boys and girls.³

16.8% of adolescents in the district Anuradhapura have experienced sexual abuse.⁴

¹ The National Child Protection Authority (www.childprotection.gov.lk)

² Ibid

³ UNICEF. (2005). *National Survey on Emerging Issues Among Adolescents in Sri Lanka*.

⁴ Wickremesekera, S. (1998). *Prevalence and some correlates of sexual abuse among adolescents in the Anuradhapura Municipal Council area schools, unpublished dissertation, Post Graduate Institute of Medicine*.



Photo: Be Safe! Sri Lanka 2011 Asha video screen shot ↗

[Click to watch video](#)

“Before this program, they did not know how to protect themselves from violence. After the Be Safe! program, they know.”

– Parent of child participating in child protection project



Tools Developed and Used in the Project



“BE SAFE!” RESOURCE PACKAGE

“Be Safe!” is a child protection resource that is designed for children ages 5-9 years, their teachers, and their parents. It addresses physical and sexual abuse and family violence. The “Be Safe!” resource package contains multiple resources. Master trainers are trained in 4 day training then they train teachers in 2 day training. Teachers deliver the program to children and conduct awareness sessions with parents.



Asha the Puppet:

↘ This puppet is used by primary school teachers to deliver protection messages to girls and boys in a child friendly manner and creates a safe medium for children to interact.



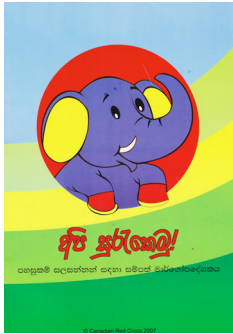
සෑම මනසකදීම අපගේ (අප්පිටය) සිරිමනස.
ஒவ்வொருவரும் ஒரு உடலாகக் கொண்டிருக்கிறோம்.
Everyone has a body.

Lesson Cards:

↘ There are twelve lesson cards built around 4 themes:

- body ownership;
- safe and unsafe touches;
- secrets about touching should never be kept; and
- safety rules to avoid unsafe situations and access help if ever needed.

The lessons are delivered using a variety of activities that are suitable for different ages. Each lesson is designed to be delivered within 30 minutes.



Resource Guide:

- This is used by primary school teachers; it contains detailed instructions on using the various tools and outlines activities that can supplement messages.



Song Cassette/CD:

- The cassette/CD contains a song titled “my body belongs to me” for kids in the three main languages. The song reinforces key messages and provides a child friendly way for children to remember safety rules.

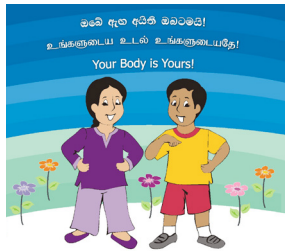


A Poster:

- A poster with the key safety rules and helping resources (e.g., telephone hotline number) is provided for each classroom.



➤ Be Safe! Kit



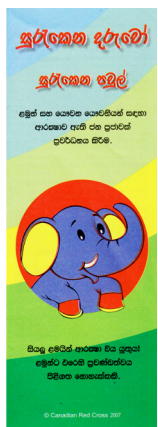
Children's Book:

➤ **Your body belongs to you:** the book contains additional information to supplement messages in the lesson cards. There is one book in each kit and can also be made available to kids during free time available to browse.



Bookmarks:

➤ At the end of the twelve lessons, each child receives a bookmark as a certificate of completion of the lessons. The bookmark contains key messages and safety rules, including where to get help.



Parents/Adults Leaflet:

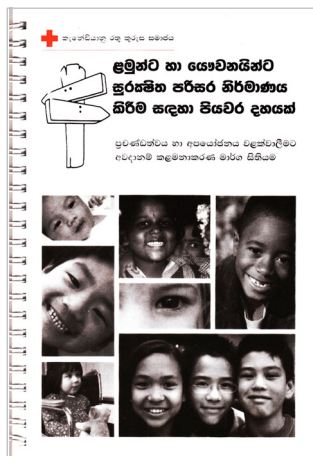
➤ **Safe Kids Safe Families:** the leaflet is designed as an overview for parents to understand the risk of violence against children and actions they can take to keep their children safe. Parents are invited to a one-hour orientation session before lessons are delivered to girls and boys within schools.



Rear view of Be Safe! Resource box



Ten Steps Manual in Tamil ↗



Ten Steps Manual in Sinhala ↗

“TEN STEPS TO CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS”

The “Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments” (“Ten Steps”) methodology helps organizations, like schools, to go through a step-by-step process to develop policies and systems to protect children from various forms of violence. The “Ten Steps” complements and reinforces the “Be Safe!” resources.

Key actions include conducting internal risk assessments, developing multi-stakeholder plans of action with school leadership and external partners, and conducting ongoing monitoring.

To guide the process, a school child protection committee (SCPC) made up of children, teachers and parents was formed in each school.

THE TEN STEPS

- Step 1** Understand the problem
- Step 2** Recognize the vulnerability and resilience of people
- Step 3** Define Protection instruments
- Step 4** Create a prevention team
- Step 5** Conduct a risk assessment
- Step 6** Develop policies and procedures
- Step 7** Educate adults, youth and children
- Step 8** Respond to disclosures of violence
- Step 9** Meet the challenges, and
- Step 10** Maintain safe environments

“Students practice learning about safety with the support of teachers. A culture of maintaining safety has been established.”

– Student participating in the “Ten Steps” project

Evaluation Results

EVALUATION: A study of the Impact of the School-Based Child Protection Program in Sri Lanka.

EVALUATOR: Harry Cummings and Associates.

YEAR: 2015.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the effects and impacts of the child protection project (specifically the “Be Safe!” and “Ten Steps” elements) had on children, parents, teachers, and school environments in Sri Lanka. The report also reviewed the sustainability issues associated with the project.

METHODOLOGY: The study used a cross sectional approach by way of a modified quasi-experimental design. Qualitative data was collected through a literature review, questionnaires (parents and teachers), interviews (government and NGOs), and focus groups (girls and boys). Approximately 835 parents and family members, 57 teachers, and 383 children participated in the study and represented 54 schools.

Key Findings:

- 1 There was overall satisfaction** with the project from the parents, teachers, and children who were involved. In examining the effects of age and gender, a positive correlation was found between project dosage and parent’s belief that the project is beneficial for older children; however the majority of parents believed that the project is beneficial for all age groups. The researchers found no statistical evidence to suggest that the gender of the participant affected the success of the project. Slight preferences were found on the benefit of the project for girls over boys; however the general consensus was that the project is beneficial for both genders.
- 2 Higher exposure to the project led to greater effectiveness** around children’s sense of safety at school, knowledge on who to go to regarding concerns about violence, awareness of school safety rules.

- 3 The project did not achieve the anticipated results around perceptions of physical punishment** as an inappropriate disciplinary measures in schools. Even after the project, a majority of parents continued to believe that physical punishment by teachers against children is acceptable in school.
- 4 Changes in behaviour among parents were present** after participating in the program. Specifically, 45.6% of parents in the study reported that they have adopted safety mechanisms to increase their child's safety after participating in the program and 147 parents said that they were able to avert an impending threat of violence as a result of their training.
- 5 There risk of the project not being sustained is a risk.** Many teachers reported teaching the program as an extracurricular activity, as opposed to during class time. When asked if there was anything that would motivate them to continue the program, the general response from teachers was that they would continue teaching the project messages if there was support/ follow-up from their superiors, and resource support from an outside source (i.e. the government or an NGO).
- 6 Parents and teachers indicate a high endorsement of the project.** In particular, significant correlations were found between project dosage and the following variables: increase in children's sense of safety, the confidence of girls and boys to express themselves at school, knowing where to seek help for violence, and knowing that if they report violence they will be heard. Parents and teachers also indicated that children exemplify safe behaviour after participating in the project, and that the project had a positive effect on the school environment.

Supporting Teachers to Take Action



Photo: Child protection master trainer, Mr. Jayantha Janapriya [↗](#)

“Even today, many years after I was trained, I continue to use ‘Be Safe!’ material to educate parents and other adults in the community.”

“Even today, many years after I was trained, I continue to use ‘Be Safe!’ material to educate parents and other adults in the community,” says, Jayantha Janapriya. Mr. Janapriya is a Career Guidance Officer of the Ministry of Education in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. He was trained as a Red Cross child protection master trainer in 2008 in order to train the teachers and parents he works with on prevention and response to violence against children. He is among 234 master trainers that have reached 5,715 teachers across Sri Lanka who in turn have educated 355,767 children and adults.

The “Be Safe!” project was developed as a consequence of the 2004 Asia Tsunami. Findings from Red Cross health assessments showed communities were concerned about violence against girls and boys. This is consistent with a growing number of studies around the world that show violence against children can elevate during emergencies, due to a combination of increased stressor on families and strains on protection systems. In Sri Lanka the Red Cross consulted with dozens of local child protection agencies, government ministries, parents, teachers, and children to develop a child protection resource, to complement existing efforts, for use in primary schools.

Mr. Janapriya explains that because the problems of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children, and within families, are not always discussed openly they remain “*sensitive topics.*” He adds, “*At first I was hesitant to discuss the topics, however, the novel method used during the training and the support provided after the training by the Red Cross allowed us to*

reach out to other teachers.”

During the 4-day master trainer training, Mr. Janapriya and his colleagues, with help from professional trainers and local child protection experts, covered content such as the various types of violence against children, protection laws in Sri Lanka, prevention strategies that adults can implement, and where and how to access support for children affected by violence.

Unfortunately, the need for the “Be Safe!” project has been underscored by studies that show 10% of girls and boys, ages 10-13 years, have experienced some form of sexual abuse. Among 14-19 year olds, 14% report having been sexually abused with little difference among boys and girls.⁵

Mr. Janapriya has found that the training has not only strengthened work in schools to prevent harm but it has also helped teachers to take specific action to respond to violence. For instance, he shares that “*An eight-year girl, who had just completed the ‘Be Safe!’ lessons walked*

⁵ UNICEF. (2005). *National Survey on Emerging Issues Among Adolescents in Sri Lanka.*

up to the teacher and said that the school security guard had tried touching her in unsafe and sexual way as she waited by herself for the school bus. The teacher was able to take prompt action, get help, and to report the problem to local authorities. If it wasn't for the 'Be Safe!' project, I wonder what would have happened to that girl."

He continues, describing another situation in his school district: *"A nine-year old boy suddenly turned up at his father's work place, on a Saturday morning, all by himself. The work place was several blocks from the child's home; he has got on a bus and has managed to find where his father was. The father was surprised because this was the first time that his son had travelled anywhere by himself. When the father asked why his son had taken such risks to see him, the son disclosed that his grandfather was trying to touch him in a bad way and Asha had taught children in school that if anyone tried to touch a child in an unsafe way they could get away and tell someone they trust."* Mr. Janapriya explains that the boy's father was shocked

and also pleased with his son's courage. He then asked his son who Asha was given the fact that the father had not been able to attend the "Be Safe!" parent awareness session. *"The son then described in detail how Asha was a puppet friend at school who taught them to be safe. The very next school day, the father met the teacher and profusely thanked her for educating his son about safe and unsafe touches and how to get help."*

Student Led Micro-projects

On Sri Lanka's southern coast is the district of Matara. This was a location particularly hard-hit by the 2004 Asia Tsunami. As part of the recovery to the Tsunami, and reflecting the risk of physical, sexual and psychological abuse that can occur in emergencies, the Red Cross developed a school-based project to prevent and respond to violence against children including for future emergencies.

Mrs. Sarojini Muthukumarana, a Psychosocial In-Service Advisor for the Ministry of Education in Matara, helped to lead the violence prevention project in her district. She explains, that after being trained as a master trainer she began to work with the Devinuwara National School, *“Together with the principal and the other two teachers that were trained, we carried out several awareness programs for the teachers and parents of the school after which the school child protection committee (SCPC) was formed.”* The committee was run together by children, parents, teachers in order to develop and implement child protection projects to make the school as safe as possible.

 **Photo:** Mrs. Sarojini Muthukumarana delivering child protection messages



“They rationalized that, if they could draw attractive murals with a safety message, it would not only convey a prevention message to the school community but to the community of the entire village.”

“As a micro-project, the students came up with the idea of painting murals on the school wall, which was in a very poor state. They rationalized that, if they could draw attractive murals with a safety message, it would not only convey a prevention message to the school community but to the community of the entire village that passes by the school daily,” says, Mrs. Muthukumarana.

She adds, *“First, the students got together and cleaned the dilapidated wall. This took almost two days. In the meantime the art teacher of the school guided the students to develop appropriate drawings for the murals. Some parents also*

volunteered to support the students to draw. It was a pleasure to see the whole school community involved in this project and the entire process was observed by me and the Child Rights Promotion Officer of the Probation Department of the area.”

The micro-project led by the SCPC and also the education to teachers was all part of a broader Red Cross approach called, “Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments.” In this approach schools conduct safety assessments, identify points of risk of violence against children, create prevention teams, define practical actions to prevent violence, develop policies, and then monitor their progress. Mrs. Muthukumarana notes, *“I am very happy to have played a role in this whole project and to contribute in some way to creating a safer environment for our students.”*

Photos: image of the wall before the micro-project and images of the wall after the micro-projects



Red Cross Partnership with PLAN Sri Lanka

Photo: Master trainer and school guidance counselor, Mr. Sridharan



“It’s about changing the attitudes and behaviour which cannot be done overnight. We need to continue the dialogue and provide guidance for children, parents and teachers.”

In 2014, the Red Cross and PLAN Sri Lanka began a partnership to implement child protection programming. In particular, PLAN adopted the Red Cross “Be Safe!” resource package that supports schools and communities to prevent and respond to physical, sexual and psychological violence against girls and boys.

A first step in the partnership was a joint training

of master trainers. Mr. Sridharan, Career Guidance and Counselling Officer at Batticaloa West Education Department, was one of the master trainers.

During consultations with communities before the “Be Safe!” project was implemented, “It was found that on one hand, parents did not always have a high interest in being involved in their children’s education. On the other hand, children

found themselves to be isolated from their families and friends. It was evident that children and parents, and even teachers, needed more guidance, knowledge and skills to create better and safer environments for children,” recalls Mr. Sridharan.

In response to these needs, Mr. Sridharan and other teachers began to integrate the “Be Safe!” into their work with students, teachers and parents. “Be Safe!” was also used within local children’s clubs in order to support girls and boys to develop communication, leadership, and life-skills, and to learn protection tactics. When training parents conversations with different perspectives were encouraged to help participants debate and decide their own solutions to foster nurturing environments for children in their homes.

Mr. Sridharan took an active role in all the trainings, including the important supervisory and monitoring role he played when it came to the training of teachers. As an officer attached to the Education department of Batticaloa, he took on the responsibility to roll out the “Be Safe!” resources as a part of his day to day activities.

“As a result of the efforts taken by Plan International, education and child development authorities in the East, changes are becoming more evident,” says Mr. Sridharan. Monitoring visits and feedback from schools indicates that parents are now taking a greater interest in the education of their children and children also are more interested in going to school. In addition, schools now have codes of conduct for students and girls and boys have even developed criteria to assess how child friendly their schools are. Through school child protection committees that were developed as part of the project, children and adults are working together to raise awareness through street dramas and art competitions, and helping each other find solutions to violence in their schools and communities.

Looking back at the last two years, Mr. Sridharan says change will only grow but it will happen gradually. *“It’s about changing the attitudes and behaviour which cannot be done overnight. We need to continue the dialogue and provide guidance for children, parents and teachers. I’m sure we can reach there.”*

Training Others to Prevent Violence



“Most teachers would openly state that more than anything, they are thankful for the ‘Be Safe!’ project because it has changed their own attitudes about violence in general and corporal punishment in particular.”

◀ Photo: Nadeeja delivering child protection training to master trainers

“I had to travel to many districts in the country which was quite strenuous at times but almost always very rewarding because I got an opportunity to interact with primary school teachers and learn first-hand from them about the problems they face in their own contexts,” says Nadeeja Abeydheera. Nadeeja was the Red Cross Child Protection Training Coordinator. Over five years, working with four other professional trainers, she

supported teachers and government partners to implement the “Be Safe!” and “Ten Steps” resources to prevent and respond to violence against children. She notes, *“Working with this child protection team was the most fulfilling work experience that I have had.”*

Nadeeja came to the project with a background as a speech therapist and had worked with

the Sri Lanka Red Cross as the coordinator of the psychosocial program during the Tsunami response. With her extensive experience and ability to motivate others and to use gentle persuasion, she played a crucial role in the projects ability to reaching over 355,000 people and 23% of all the schools in Sri Lanka.

A key part of her role was to work with the Ministry of Education and other government partners to train, mentor and monitor master trainers, essentially senior-level teachers and guidance counselors, to implement education sessions for other teachers on the topics of preventing and responding to physical, sexual, and psychological violence and neglect against girls and boys ages 4-9 years old. This involved extensive travel across the country and coordination with many different agencies.

After master trainers were trained, support visits would be made by Nadeeja or members of her team to help with the delivery of each master trainer first training session. During these visits the Red Cross would also gather feedback from teachers and partners. *“This was the time that we learned about the impact*

that the program had on kids and I cherish those memories because that was evidence that the work that we did was bearing fruit and protecting children. Most teachers would openly state that more than anything, they are thankful for the Be Safe! program because it has changed their own attitudes about abuse in general and corporal punishment in particular.”

“We also constantly kept in touch with the master trainers via phone and this helped us to build trusting relationships,” Nadeeja continues. “Often the master trainers would call us when they had a technical issue and seek advice. Even after completing the project, I am still in contact with some of them and we often reminiscence about the ‘good old days’. From time to time, I even get invitations from far away schools to do training programs.”

When looking back on the project, Nadeeja reflects, *“The material inside the resource kit, especially Asha the puppet, was a hit among both teachers and students and at times we even worried that Asha might get misplaced from the kit! The introduction of child-led micro-projects towards the end of the project was very*

positive and helped the entire school population to take an active role in protecting girls and boys from violence.”

She also notes that the project was not easy and had many challenges. This included supporting multiple large and complex agencies coordinate activities, working with schools spread across

the country, and finding local solutions to reaching parents and helping children access support services when they report experiences with violence. Nadeeja summarizes the approach she and her team took: *“Willingness to learn from our mistakes, adapt and innovate was the secret of our success.”*



Photo: Nadeeja with a group of master trainers and “Asha” the puppet

Violence is Preventable.

