



SOLIHULL



TEA  
LEAF  
TRUST

## A Team Solihull initiative

Volunteering opportunities for alumni and friends of Solihull School to help lift Sri Lankan Tea Estate Communities out of extreme poverty

*If you want to make a real difference  
but don't know where to start, read on!*





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# A Team Solihull Initiative

Volunteering opportunities for alumni and friends of Solihull School to help lift Sri Lankan Tea Estate Communities out of extreme poverty.





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## Who are Tea Leaf Trust?

For many tourists, Sri Lanka's Central Highlands offer a welcome breath of cool amidst the tropical island heat. Everywhere you visit, the lush green tea bushes are tended carefully by an army of hardworking tea pickers. Yet, Sri Lanka's Tamil plantation workers are among the islands most disadvantaged and isolated groups. Work and living conditions in the tea estates are in stark contrast with the rest of the country. Entire families live in cramped, aged accommodation on the tea estates, with facilities that have changed very little in the last 200 years.

Schools are often understaffed, and children have few role models outside of the plantation industry to gain knowledge of other possible occupations (Culture Smart, Kuperard).

Many are living in abject poverty without a chance to move up or out because of perceived social exclusion.





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# TEA LEAF TRUST



## Our founders' journey



We believe that education, and in particular a strong English education, has the ability to lift a young person out of this situation and offer them more choices in life. Therefore, since 2009 we at the Tea Leaf Trust have provided free, high-quality education programmes for young people living in the tea estates. We have since grown to five centres in Maskeliya, Nuwara Eliya, Bogawantalawa, Pussallawa and Udapussalawa.

One of the main ways we help to create change, is to improve both the employability of youth and the choice of employment options outside the tea estates by facilitating the development of high-standard English language skills and professionalism.

But we are much more than an English school! To uplift these communities, we ensure our focus is a holistic education for these young people which encompasses two further key areas.



## Improve emotional health through positive coping strategies

Alcoholism and substance abuse, domestic and sexual violence, self-harm and suicide are all common issues that many young people on the tea estates live with on a day-to-day basis.



Our curriculum educates and encourages safe spaces for emotional health conversations. This enables our young people to develop positive coping strategies to deal with the complex societal issues that exist in their communities.

## Improve self-worth and value through social transformation

Conversations with the young people of these tea communities revealed a feeling of apathy and sadness – most felt they had nothing of value to offer society and this has had a huge effect on their self-esteem and confidence.

We want every person on the tea estates to realise that they are valuable members of society, and that they can help transform the communities they live in into places of happiness and hope. We help affect social transformation in tea estate communities by highlighting the importance of community service, and by instilling it as a core value in youth through a series of practical programmes.

Every Wednesday afternoon, 500 of our students leave the Tea Leaf Trust and give back to their community by delivering the Children's English Programme. Our programme provides primary aged children with free 1 ½ hour English classes straight after the school day has finished. Lessons centre on basic vocabulary (greetings, colours and family) with a focus on children developing their speaking confidence and pronunciation.

Alongside this, each student completes an individual service project in their communities. From buying hens for single parent families to repairing a school toilet block; students look intently at the needs of their community and then work hard to provide solutions. Students also work together on group service projects including cleaning bus shelters or delivering social awareness dramas in villages and schools.

## What does volunteering with Tea Leaf Trust look like?

We are looking for enthusiastic individuals who are passionate about making a positive impact upon the lives of others. Whatever your skills, qualifications or experiences, we would love you to come and share them with our young people!

One of the greatest challenges our communities face, is lack of opportunity. Our students are hungry to learn from their teachers.



Volunteers play a vital role in supporting staff and students in developing their understanding of, and confidence with, the English language. From your first day with us, our staff will encourage you to be part of the team - engaging in lessons, chatting with staff and students and enjoying a cup of tea together! All of this builds staff and students' confidence.

### How can volunteers help?

As the centres engage young adults through a variety of programmes and activities, there are many ways you can work to support it, at all levels, whether that's with the students, staff, management, or all three. Some examples of the ways volunteers have helped are:

- Support the teachers or teach classes
- Provide conversational English support in small groups
- Attend Community English Programme sessions and chat with local children to help them improve their confidence
- Mentor a group at our Business Fair to ensure they make the most from the opportunity
- Mentoring students preparing to perform at our Talent Show
- Get involved with community projects

Many volunteers have shared their skills or passions with our staff and students, running workshops or activities which have boosted our staff development (and wellbeing!)

This is an amazing opportunity for you to experience the wonders of the tea estates - their beauty, the amazing smiles and generosity of the communities, as well as developing your own skills and expertise.

The schools are located in beautiful parts of Sri Lanka that are not on the main tourist routes. We offer visitors a different experience of the Central Highlands and... a very personal one. You can meet students and staff and find out about their lives, cultures and experiences. Students and staff love to share their knowledge of the local area, so you are certain to leave with suggestions of walks and views and a host of new friends!



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## Who?

We host volunteers over the age of 18, from across the world with all kinds of experience, from diverse backgrounds and of all ages. Our previous volunteers have included IT specialists, chefs, accountants, communications officers, researchers, nurses and teachers. This is a perfect chance to use your skills, experience and time in a way that's different and memorable.

## How long?

Some volunteers join us for a month, whilst others volunteer at the school for a week as part of a longer holiday to Sri Lanka. We've even hosted volunteers for a year. Whether you are looking for a career break, or an alternative experience within your holiday, we would love to chat with you.

## Where would I stay?

As a Tea Leaf Trust volunteer, there are many options, depending on how long you might stay with us. Options include a home stay with a local family in Maskeliya, which is available for a small fee. This provides a great opportunity for you to be immersed in Sri Lankan culture.

Rentals and some very well-appointed budget to mid-range guest house options are also available close by, some with breathtaking views.

## Want to find out more?

We'd love to arrange a time to chat about how we can welcome you to TLT. Drop us an email at [info@tealeaftrust.com](mailto:info@tealeaftrust.com) with some info about yourself and we'll be in touch!

## Impact

### IMPACT SINCE 2010

54,345

Children & young people educated

80%

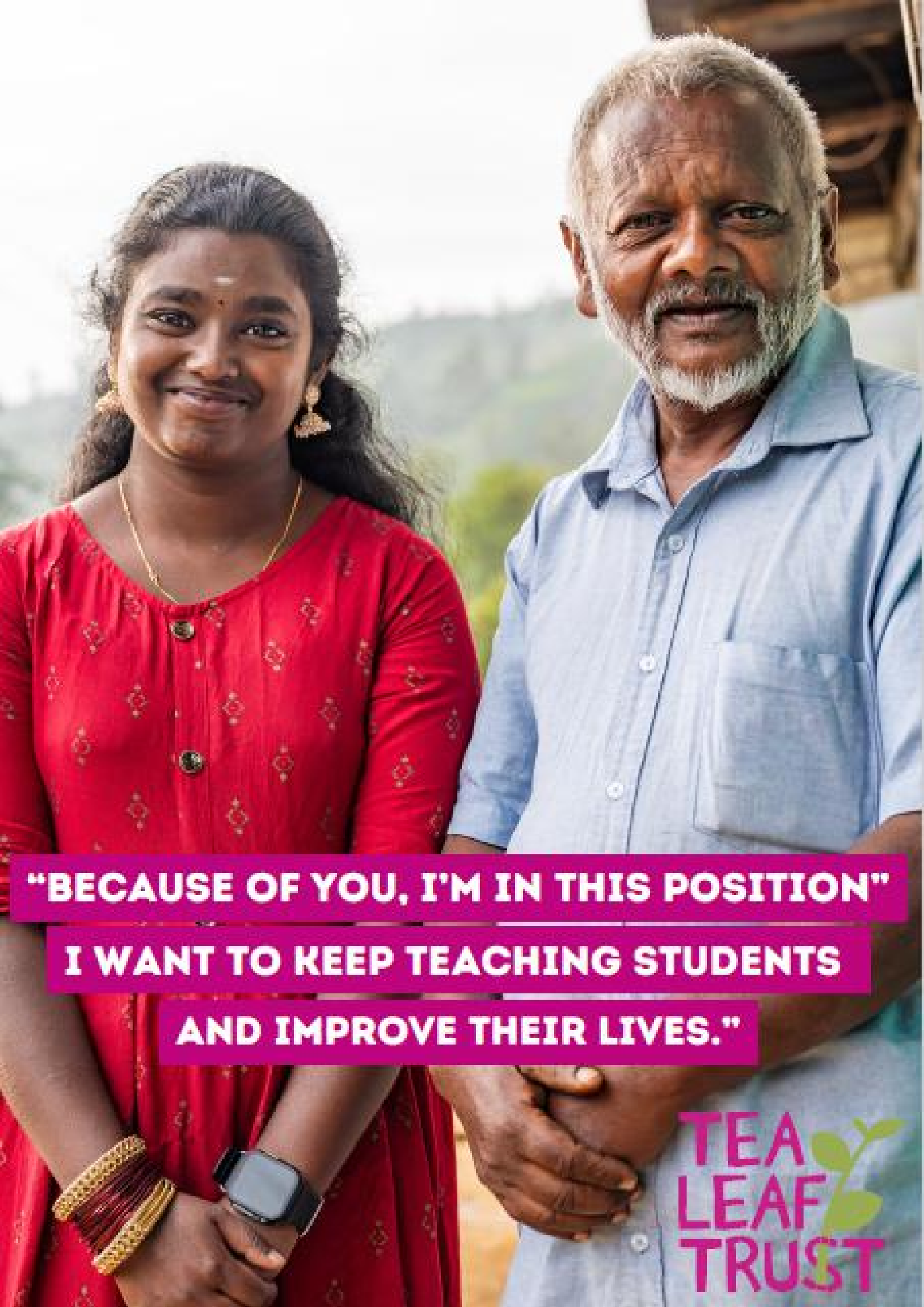
Sri Lankan youth progress to employment or further education

492,162

Members of tea estate community supported by youth alumni

100%

Sri Lankan led - Supported by global board of experts



**“BECAUSE OF YOU, I’M IN THIS POSITION”  
I WANT TO KEEP TEACHING STUDENTS  
AND IMPROVE THEIR LIVES.”**

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# Meet Dhanusha

2022 Graduate

Current Position: Teacher, TLC Nanu Oya

**“We live in a line house on a tea estate, we have a small home. I share a bed with my mother and my brothers share another bed while my father sleeps on the floor. My father and mother were estate workers. When my sister got married, we paid for her wedding using my mother’s pension. Now that my parents are retired from the estate, it is up to me and my two elder brothers to provide for our family. I feel a lot of pressure to support my family.**

**What I love about teaching is seeing my students after they’ve graduated. I had a student in 2020 who came with really poor English and very low confidence but he left Tea Leaf with a distinction pass. Now he is in Kuwait as a central manager in a company. He called me to thank me and said “Because of you I’m in this position”.**

**When I hear these kinds of things it makes me so proud. I want to keep teaching students and I want to improve their lives.”**



**Tea Leaf Trust has been working in the Sri Lankan tea estates for 15 years, providing free education and training that enables young people to access a wider range of employment opportunities.**



**“THOUGH WE HAVE STRUGGLES  
AND THOUGH WE HAVE PROBLEMS.  
IF YOU STUDY, YOU CAN **ACHIEVE**  
SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE”**



## Meet Chan

2012 Graduate

Current Position: Staff Development Manager

**“I was somebody who used to be very shy and who didn't like to talk to people. I always wondered what they would think about me because I was really concerned about my skin colour. People used to criticise me by my colour. That was the main reason why I was really demotivated.**

**The Tea Leaf Trust gave me everything: the teachers, the way that they spoke to me, the way that they guided me, the way that they understood me.**

**I was struggling and I thought, "Okay I want to support those who struggle like me". I know the pain. I know what they need so I can give them that if I work for Tea Leaf.**

**And of course it's my community, right? I have to show them that though we have struggles and though we have problems, if you study, you can achieve something in your life.”**



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## Visitor and Volunteer experiences

### Mark & Donna Penney (Solihull School)



When we visited the Tea Leaf Trust, it was a revelation to find such a beacon of positivity & inspiration in the midst of the poverty we'd see first hand. Here, young adults from some of Sri Lanka's most disenfranchised families, were fully embracing their good fortune at every turn. For so many of them, this is their one chance of a golden ticket to a better life, whilst also giving back to their community. It a truly magical place, and great things happen there. Volunteering at the TLT would be a milestone in your own life, as much as it would be for those whose lives you'd transform for the better.

Please contact [dev-os@solsch.org.uk](mailto:dev-os@solsch.org.uk) if you would like to speak to us and find out more.

### Asini (UK Volunteer)

This was one of the most special and memorable experiences of my 6 months travelling Asia. If you want to open your eyes to how people from a disadvantaged community facing poverty live, get a deep insight into Sri Lankan culture and contribute to a cause that's making a significant impact in changing lives, then this is the place for you!

I think even a volunteer like me, who doesn't have expertise in education/teaching, can have an important impact by making the students and teachers in this community feel seen and cared for by someone from outside of their world, I could really see how much it meant for them that I wanted to help them improve their English, understand their lives and be their friend.

### Naveen Subramaniam (Trustee)

I was born and raised in Sri Lanka. My parents had come from the tea estates communities and had managed to access better opportunities due to their English education. I now live in Australia, but when I visited my family in Sri Lanka in 2016 I was keen to give back to my community. What inspired me (and continues to inspire me) about Tea Leaf Trust is their belief that everyone has the potential but just needs to be given the opportunities to help them reach their potential. What I saw in 2016 and I see every time I visit, is that every single young person leaves Tea Leaf empowered to go on to something bigger. That's because the curriculum is so useful in their lives - the English, the emotional health tools, the relationship strategies. All of it helps them to know that they are worth something.

## Laurent Sarrazin (French volunteer)

In Sept 2023, we spent one intense and great week within the Maskeliya Tea Leaf Center, to share with managers, teachers and students various practices and tools directly linked to the 21st century skills such as innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, dialogic vs instructional teaching, agile leadership, etc. The welcome, the energy and the willingness to learn were unforgettable. We are already planning our return.

## Jenny and Frankie (UK volunteers)

Incredible. The Volunteer Coordinator prepared us so well. Jenny had teaching experience and key skills she could bring, but my skills were more in business management and customer relationships. It was great chatting this through with the TLT team; they made it clear to us that we would find our greatest use in coming alongside the staff and students and listening to them and supporting them.

From the moment we stepped into the staff room, we felt embraced, accepted and welcomed. Being around the staff was easy and fun. Lunchtimes are a really special memory for me: how the staff made us feel so welcome as we all tucked in to the delicious lunch packets! It didn't matter who you were sat with, you were always made to feel part of the team and welcome at the table. (Frankie)

I remember going to the morning assembly on our first day and feeling really emotional. The students' enthusiasm for learning; their pride in winning awards and their joy in celebrating their classmates success was incredible, and it confirmed for us that we'd made the right choice in volunteering with TLT. (Jenny)



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