The Soothing Therapies of Thusare Talking Hands

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The premises of Thusare Talking Hands

The rhythmic motions of the therapeutic treatments relieve the stress of your exerted body. There are no sounds except for calming oriental music. You are completely removed from the outside world; it is here at Thusare Talking Hands that you experience the healing touch of the visually impaired.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

Ishikawa Naohito, Director/Founder

Thusare, means healing in the native language of the indigenous Ainu people of northern Japan. Because therapeutic Shiatsu acupressure is performed at this centre, the Japanese name was given to respect its heritage. Talking Hands, reflects the philosophy of communicating through one’s hands instead of speaking. Thus, Thusare Talking Hands has unique meaning. Created by APCAS, a Japanese NGO co-founded by Ishikawa Naohito, Thusare, gives opportunities for the visually impaired.

Assisted by many, Ishikawa, Director/Founder, Thusare, says it is not a charity but a social business that sustains itself.

Having arrived in the Island in 2002 with JICA, Ishikawa had met a blind person during his social work and realised that Sri Lanka did not provide suitable occupation for the visually impaired. At that time, he recalled that in Japan, government supported vocational training and skills programmes, enabled those with visual impairments to become qualified acupressure or Shiatsu therapists, which provided a suitable occupation. With this idea in mind Ishikawa approached the Ministry of Social Services in Sri Lanka and realised that a ten-month training programme on therapeutic massage had already been initiated for the visually impaired. The first batch had five students, yet once qualified they were unable to find work in the more established places in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Ishikawa decided to start his own centre to demonstrate the abilities of the visually impaired. It is in this manner that Thusare Talking Hands came into being.

Ishikawa approached Dr Sasada, who has been a trainer and advisor at similar centres in Japan and after his retirement in Malaysia, India and Thailand. Being visually impaired himself, the Master developed many training programmes that were tailor made to the abilities of the trainees. While Ishikawa’s initial objective was to establish an Ayurvedic centre, as it was already popular in Sri Lanka, Dr Sasada had suggested introducing something different and the decision was thus made to teach acupressure therapies. Dr Sasada visits Sri Lanka every three to four months and also continuously upgrades the training syllabus according to the requirements as well as conducts the examinations. Depending upon the capacity of the visually impaired trainees to grasp the techniques initial training is conducted for six to eight months. Thereafter, the students become junior trainee therapists, which is the starting point and they begin to earn a salary. After a year they become trained therapists. A resident trainer from India who is visually impaired and is Dr Sasada’s student assists with the training. The entire training period is approximately 24 months, which is stretched over a period of three and a half years. The initial six to eight months is free of charge. Hence, transport, food, lodging and clothing is provided by Thusare Talking Hands. Once students enter the workforce they do receive a salary and all benefits. Everything is provided through the funds, which are earned from the business itself. Therefore, the endeavour is self funded, which also ensures its sustainability.



A training session in progress

Thusare Talking Hands enrolls trainees every month. With a current staff of ten including a trainer, the aim is to have 50 trained therapists by 2020, where similar acupressure centres will be established in various locations in Colombo. Employing therapists from around the country including as far as Jaffna, Batticaloa and even Bandarawela, the greatest challenge for Ishikawa and his team is to encourage the visually impaired to join them in their endeavour. Sri Lankan culture is such that in general families are reluctant to let their children live away from home. However, Thusare Talking Hands continues to educate students and provide them with the skills and facilities to become independent.

The staff as well as trainees are provided accommodation. The thinking is not only to give them a salary and a livelihood, but to also make them independent where they can build their own lives and have families too.



The team at Thusare Talking Hands (L – R) Krishanth, Sasanka, Amit (Trainer), Nishantha, Sanjeewa, Quantan and Ragu, (absent – Rumesh, Rukman and Ketish)

The treatments that are provided by therapists at Thusare Talking Hands is the therapeutic Shiatsu, acupressure. Thus this includes full body as well as head, neck, foot, arms and many other treatments, which relieve the pressure and stress from the identified areas of the body. Shiatsu acupressure is based on the 360 points on the body, where relief is achieved by adding varying degrees of pressure to these points. Shiatsu acupressure does not require the use of oil, therefore the customer does not need to undress. Furthermore, to ensure the comfort of the customer, a piece of cloth is placed on the area in which the treatment is conducted. The customers of Thusare Talking Hands include many high profile individuals, professionals and those who wish to relieve their stress and enjoy ‘me time’, as privacy is ensured. Thusare Talking Hands provides great therapeutic relief to all those who step through its doors. It is an experience that must be felt by oneself.

Opening Hours: 8.30am to 7pm
103/12 Dharmapala Mawatha
Colombo 7; (+94 11) 436 9967
bookings@thusaretalkinghands.com

thusaretalkinghands.com