

RYS: Youth Volunteers Help Restore Water Supply in Sri Lanka Village

Alan Pang
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Coordinator, RYS Global



Kalutara District, Sri Lanka – Religious Youth Service (RYS) Sri Lanka celebrated its milestone 40th anniversary with a project organized around the theme: "Restoring Trust: What Can be Done for Peace Now?" The project, supported by UPF-Asia Pacific and UPF-Sri Lanka, involved 34 participants and 10 staff, and took place in Kalutara District, Sri Lanka, from August 7-13, 2026.

The program followed the official three-stage experiential model: orientation, work service and reflection. The journey began with interactive sessions led by **Mrs. Fazida Abdul Razak** and **Mrs. Dinesha Liyanasuriya**, to establish the RYS social covenant. To support team cooperation, **Mrs. Angilay Davy** administered a DISC psychometric assessment, enabling participants to understand their diverse personality profiles and work together effectively.



Internal foundations were established through lectures by **Mrs. Ursula McLackland**, president of UPF-Asia Pacific, on "Principles of True Love" (focusing on complementarity, self-regulation and universal family ethics), and "Spiritual Values as the Foundation for Good Leadership" (introducing selfless service). Mrs. Fazida facilitated the session "Organizing My First RYS" to equip participants with the project design skills needed to launch local peace projects in their home countries.

The centerpiece of the program was an intensive village water restoration project at the Matugama Rubber Estate in Kalutara, serving 101 rural families (291 individuals). Working in high spirits, the cohort dug trenches for laying clean water pipelines, painted the community pump house, and

prepared the local well for future work. This manual labor translated spiritual ideals of interfaith love into practical, community-building action.



Relational trust was deepened through an interfaith pilgrimage to local places of worship, including a Buddhist temple, the Welithara Jummah Masjid, and the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Church. Recreation included waterfall bathing, visiting Hiriketiya beach, and visiting a sea turtle hatchery to connect the ethic of service with ecological conservation. Cultural Night allowed participants to share their national heritage and faith through song, prayer and dance.



On August 12, 2026, RYS hosted a celebration of UN International Youth Day. The keynote address was delivered by **Hon. Maithripala Sirisena**, the seventh president of Sri Lanka, who spent over two hours with the youth. He listened to their service testimonies and insisted on taking photos with every participant and staff volunteer, leaving a lasting impression of humility and down-to-earth leadership. Mrs. McLackland spoke on the deep, historic relationship and support the former president has consistently given UPF initiatives.



The project concluded with structured reflective exercises: the "magic light stick" circles, facilitating quiet, deep emotional sharing; the Post-it Appreciation Gallery, focusing on the “strengths I see in others” mindset; and writing personal "commitment letters" to apply their learnings back home. In the moving closing ceremony, participants pinned mementos and expressed well-wishes to a chosen peer. The program culminated in a magnificent beach campfire, where youth shared moving testimonies and performed musical pieces.



Deep appreciation is due to **Dr. Chula Senaratne**, secretary general of UPF-Sri Lanka, and his dedicated team, who worked tirelessly to coordinate stakeholders and ensure the success of this project, and to the project's generous sponsors and partners. Long after the water flows from the taps of the village in Kalutara, the trust restored in this project will continue to ripple across the globe, inspiring the youth to live for the sake of others.

