

## The RORP Story

The harvesting of playgrounds started with a cup of coffee. Whilst attending a Bendigo Bank Directors Conference in Adelaide I met with Eshantha Ariyadasa who was staying with friends as he wrote up his PhD on Sri Lankan Social Services. Dr Eshantha, his wife and two young daughters had spent time in Adelaide whilst he undertook his studies.

Over the course of that afternoon I learnt more about an extraordinary man and family who had originally graduated with a degree in Architectural Design from a University in New Zealand. Whilst there he thrived in the sporting facilities that New Zealand offered as he was a leading sports person back home in Sri Lanka. This sporting interest led to his establishing and running a Sports College, called Sputnik, on his return to SL rather than becoming a dedicated architect. This sporting interest led to him being awarded a scholarship to Japan to complete a Masters' Degree in Sports Science, a period that saw the conclusion of the Tamil war at home in Sri Lanka. As a father of two daughters he was distressed that the many homeless girls, unlike the boys, were not being adequately cared for in state facilities. This prompted him to write a children's story book in Ceylonese and Japanese whilst studying in Japan and the proceeds were used to build and manage a home for girls near his Sports Academy. He was successful in his studies but his experiences in Japan was to change the thrust of his academy from sport to Japanese, a facility that now prepares students and business people for study and business in Japan. Sputnik Girl's Home, walking distance from Sputnik Academy, had become an exemplary facility and resulted in the offer of his PhD studies in Australia.

In the conversation that afternoon I learnt that he was in need of support to provide the "sputnik girls" with IT experience as industry in SL was rapidly evolving to harness this technology and future jobs for the girls would require them having IT facility.

Rotary can supply those I explained, knowing that our facility in West Footscray received computers from organisations like the Bank of Queensland which rotarians with a background in IT fully refurbished and made available to need organisations at a low cost. After many frustrating attempts to "piggy back" shipments into Sri Lanka, we resolved the only option was to send our own container containing the computers with other items to fill the space. The space was more than filled quickly with refurbished sewing machines, refurbished bicycles, etc and a 40ft container was purchased with plans for it to become a community library at Sputnik. Even after adding bookshelves, cupboards, windows, doors, and, many books and toys, we still had space. In a call to Dr Eshantha he confided that he would love an outdoor playground like the one down the street from his house in Adelaide that his daughters had enjoyed so often. There were very few such facilities in Sri Lanka he explained.

How do you get an outdoor playground?? Lots of investigations learnt that playgrounds were regularly replaced and the old ones were usually very serviceable. I live near Geelong and was in luck. I worked with Greater Geelong Council and had their process explained and the difficulties that they would face in giving a playground to Rotary. Sufficient to say, five donated playgrounds later, we jointly plotted a solution. They were wonderful! Helpful, constructive and supporting. They are committed to recycling.



The council playground at Leopold was disassembled by Rotarians and members of the Geelong MG Classic Car Club. Car club members have the knowledge and the tools.

It was disassembled and transported to the Rotary Warehouse in West Footscray, added to the other items in the container and shipped. It is now a community resource along with the lending library/container that can be seen in the background of the *Rotary Sputnik Playground* in Kurunegala, central Sri Lanka.



The Rotary Club of Flemington asked itself the question, now that we have shown that sending playgrounds to Sri Lanka is possible and that thousands are sent to landfill in Australia each year, why don't we continue? The SISL Project (Slide into Sri Lanka) was born with the partnership of the Rotary District of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Rotary District 3220. Past District Governor for District 3220, Senake Amerasinghe, committed to leading the project on behalf of the District. If RC Flemington can get them to Colombo, District 3220 would commit to their distribution and safe re-installation throughout Sri Lanka.

Through his connections, Senake was able to negotiate a tax free import agreement with the government. The sourcing of playgrounds and establishing a procedure was commenced by RC Flemington.

A member of the Rotary Club of Flemington, a professional Engineer, agreed to develop plans for each playground that saw a unique code assigned to every strut, bracket, slide, ladder, etc. These codes were added directly onto a series of photos of the playground before it was disassembled. The photos, codes, donor details, etc were all added to an online file that is available to Rotary in Sri Lanka to guide the safe and efficient re-installation.

An agreement with the Liability Insurance arm of the Municipal Association of Victoria took care of the legal concerns of the donor organisation. Requests for us to source playgrounds for other countries, one to Tanzania and five to Timor Leste, saw the project name change from SISL to RORP (Rotary Overseas Recycled Playgrounds). The project needed a funding source to be viable in the longer term. This has been achieved by charging the donor a fee of \$500 plus GST for the work that Rotary undertakes in the playground removal. With up to eight playgrounds in a container this levy is sufficient to pay the shipping from Melbourne to Colombo.



RORP now has many supporters amongst Rotary Clubs in all Rotary Districts in Victoria, with many Municipal Councils, Schools, manufacturers, contractors and other businesses. They contact the RORP team with details of a playground that is to be removed who in turn locate an interested Rotary Club in that community. This partnership is attractive to the local media and the story about recycling, playgrounds and needy kids overseas makes a great story. The local Rotary Club assist with the dismantling after adding codes and transporting from the site and this makes the \$550 charge insignificant. There is no shortage of playgrounds to harvest. Greater Geelong Council has approx. 300 of their own and there are many at schools, kindergartens, hotels, businesses throughout Geelong. With 79 Councils in Victoria it is estimated there are more than 20000 playgrounds and at least 1000 are replaced each year with the old ones currently going to scrap and landfill. They are consigned to landfill as they are unable to be re-used in Australia for legal that involve potential litigation. A RORP partnership ensures the playground will not be used in Australia.

RORP is still evolving. With more people involved it is likely that improvements to our coding, documentation, work flows, etc will emerge and be adopted. As of July 2019, the project is

still in need of a warehouse area where playgrounds can be stored, cleaned and possibly



repaired before loading into a container and shipping. The widening interest in playgrounds for Timor Leste raises a cost issue as shipping to that country is much greater than to Sri Lanka and the levy system is not sufficient to meet that cost. A special arrangement for import charges in Dili also needs addressing. This photo is of the RORP

playground installed at the Belola School built by Rotary in Timor Leste.

As RORP becomes better known it is expected that many Rotary Clubs will partner RC Flemington Kensington, our club has just changed its name, or harvest and send playgrounds to overseas countries where they are conducting projects of their own that could benefit from a playground.