

Education

Toastmasters - Rural Voices Unlimited launched in 5 cities

Opportunities to learn effective communication in the English Language is only available to a limited number in the student population, mostly confined to the western province and a few cities outside. In order to broad base it and make it available to students in other cities the Rotary Club of Colombo West, US Embassy and Toastmasters District 82 have commenced the 'Rural Voices Unlimited' project to form 5 Toastmaster Gavel Clubs. These 5 Gavel clubs in 5 outstation cities will enable the students to learn and practise effective communication and leadership to enhance their futures.



The inaugural sessions of Rural Voices Unlimited (RVU) project commenced on November 28-29 in Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Bandarawela, Hambanthota and Trincomalee.

1. Hambantota

RVU-Hambantota was inaugurated at Zahira College, Hambantota on November 29 2009. The event was graced by the Chief Guest, Azmi Thasim, Director General of the Chamber of Commerce, Hambantota. The Zonal Assistant Director of Education (English & Tamil) Mr B Jalaldeen was the Guest of Honour.

The Chief Guest urged the 25 students who attended to make the maximum benefit of this rare opportunity where the RVU team was coming all the way to Hambanthota to help them develop their communication and leadership skills. He stressed on the importance of communication skills and shared his personal experiences on how he as a young student had to travel all the way to Colombo to learn English.

Mr Jalaldeen noted that the RVU project was in synchronization with President Mahinda Rajapaksa's designated Year of English and IT. He also stated that with the massive infrastructure development taking place in Hambanthota, the youth of Hambanthota should be ready and poised with proficiency in English communication skills to garner the benefits of these development activities and grab the available opportunities to advance their lives.

2. Bandarawela

A total of 32 students attended the inaugural meeting graced by the Chief Guest Mrs. Sujatha Jayasinghe, Coordinator for the Regional English Support centre & Visiting lecturer at the open University .Mrs Jayasinghe was very happy about the programme and decided to send some of the English teachers of the area to attend it.

3. Batticaloa

Twenty seven students attended the inaugural session graced by the Chief Guest Dr Karunakkaran, Dean Faculty of Medicine of the Eastern University. In his speech he highlighted the importance of oral communication skills even in the mother tongue which may help in resolving many of the modern day conflicts including incidents that happen at universities. He also stressed the importance of effectively communicating in the English language for the young students to link up with the newest developments.

4. Anuradhapura

Dr Palitha Bandara, Regional Director of Health was the Chief Guest at the opening ceremony to inaugurate RVU-Anuradhapura. Dr Bandara was educated in Anuradhapura and is a past president of the Rotary Club of Anuradhapura. He stressed the importance of improving communication and leadership skills at a young age. He also informed the students of the importance of applying whatever skills and knowledge gained through the RVU programme. He pledged his fullest support for this programme and wished the 32 students who attended the inauguration the very best for their RVU activities for the next 6 months.

5. Trincomalee

The Chief Guest, Rev. Dr. C.P. Rajendran spoke on effective communication, its uses and the role in the modern world of communication skills, which enhanced the knowledge of the many students, parents and Rotarians present.

Each centre had four or more trained Toastmasters attending, who conducted a model Toastmasters' meeting immediately after the opening ceremony. The highlight of the model meeting was the feature presentation titled "effective communication" done by a Toastmaster which was well received by the students, teachers and parents alike. The model meeting also had a Round Robin Session, a model prepared Ice breaker speech, a table topics session and the Evaluations of the speeches and role played.

The Rotarians and the teachers of the respective towns played a big role in ensuring the success of the inaugural session, which made the tasks of the Toastmasters easier. The English language skills of the students were at a good level and the enthusiasm and interest was extremely high. The gavel club meetings will be held every week for six months on Saturdays at each of these five locations. A team of Toastmasters will attend the first four meetings and thereafter meetings every fortnight.

The project objective is to ensure that the gavel clubs formed with the guidance of the Toastmasters are sustained after the initial six months mentoring period.

The expected outcome of this pilot project is the formation of 5 Gavel Clubs in the aforementioned five cities through which the project partners expect to produce 200 effective communicators and leaders from the students. Upon successful completion of the pilot project, it will be extended to other towns in Sri Lanka.

As this programme will also be extended to other cities in Sri Lanka, Toastmasters will be willing to assist anyone coming forward to sponsor such a programme. Any student interested in joining such a programme is welcome to contact the Toastmasters.

More information about RVU can be obtained by contacting the Project-Chairman Arunasalam Balraj (Balraj@sltnet.lk) or Project-Cordinator Rayhan Wannappa (rayhan@sltnet.lk)

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