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## Widows At Work

### Interviews

#### Empowering Women In Kuchchaveli Through Hospitality

After years of struggling, beaten down by the war and the poverty stricken conditions which they lived under, four young widows saw their luck change when they were plucked from obscurity and empowered by Uga Escapes keen to make a positive contribution to the community in which their business is based. Jungle Beach by Uga Escapes is in the tiny hamlet of Kuchchaveli in the Trincomalee district an area with its fair share of unemployed women living in difficult circumstances. In a pioneering move to help some of these women to a better life Uga Escapes has employed four widowed females in various capacities and these women have now changed not only their lives but those of their families too.



Dharma Susi is a forty year old whose worry lines have now been replaced by tiny laughter lines. She lost her husband in the war and struggled to eke a living working a few hours in a shop which just about helped her put food on the table. A mum of two children she led a desperate life trying to educate her children and provide for them on the meagre income she earned as a shop assistant. When she heard that Uga Escapes were looking for laundry staff she presented herself at an interview and sufficiently impressed them enough to land the job. Now she works full time and her life has come full circle with her being able to save money as well.



Thirty five year old Vami is a mother of two. Her husband a fisherman set off to work one day and never returned home, lost at sea she presumes. A widow for three years she was fortunate to have the support of her mother-in-law to help with raise her young family. Unskilled and no training as such the future looked bleak for Vami. She too was selected to work in the laundry and learned the ropes quickly. Still living with her mother-in-law Vami says most of her salary goes on educating her young children as she wants them to grow up and make successes of their lives.



Entrepreneurship runs through the veins of thirty five year old Sugandhini, as she lost her husband in the war over ten years ago. After struggling to survive for three years with her two young children she launched a small enterprise providing lunch packets for the workers building the road near her house. After the completion of the road, business slowed down and Sugandhini was another lucky one to gain employment at Jungle Beach. Her days are spent in the laundry too.



The babe of the bunch at 27 is Selvi, as her husband died after a sudden illness leaving her a widow at the tender age of 18 with an infant to look after. Desperate to better her life she worked under trying circumstances in a garment factory. When she heard that Jungle Beach had employment opportunities she applied and got a job as a cleaner. The most enjoyable aspect of her job she says is meeting the hotel guests as she gets through her daily work. She says it is nice talking to them.

Not afraid of hard work these women stated that no amount of hard work will deter them from being able to provide for their young families. Despite having a rudimentary education themselves these women are united in their desire to give the best education to their children so that they will have better opportunities in their lives.



“The lack of employment opportunities in this area prompted Jungle Beach, the first resort in the Kuchchaveli Tourism Zone to look at avenues how to help the locals,” explained V.A Sivapriyan the General Manager of Jungle Beach. “Apart from empowering these women we also wanted to lead by example so that other hospitality ventures that intend on coming to this area will also follow suit. The women that we have employed are heading their families as they are widows, we would like to think that we have contributed to making their lives better by giving them gainful employment and changing the course of not only their lives but that of their families and their community too,” he added.





Watching the women work in unison chatting and laughing with equal measure it is no doubt that although they still face uphill struggles, the fact that secure employment has altered the course of their lives is indeed a bonus which augurs well for the entire community as Sugandhini said “Yes, life will always be a struggle but at least we can come to work and we know that we are able to educate and provide for our children which makes us all happy - a win win situation all around!”



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