WE ARE FAMILY
love is love
EQUAL GROUND is 15! I can hardly believe such a lot of time has flown seemingly so quickly. It was just yesterday, in my head, we decided to come together; a bunch of friends who had ideas to change the world we lived in, to change the way we were perceived in this country. They were the first group of Trustees - Sahran, Tami, Husna, Ranjan, Emily and me. Through time, our board has changed and evolved, the society we live in has also changed and evolved and so has EQUAL GROUND. However, the essence of the organisation has not changed and it still has the same vision and mission, still the same strategy as before.
Throughout the years, we’ve been blessed with support not just financially. Volunteers still make their way to EQUAL GROUND and give us their valuable time and input. Staff members, there’s been many throughout the years, have come and gone. Many of them have left behind a legacy that has served us well in our efforts to change the way Sri Lanka thinks of us. Our allies have grown exponentially, and we know that without them, we would not be where we are today. I distinctly remember when we first started EQUAL GROUND, how several members of the LGBTIQ community warned us against having heterosexual allies on board as our partners and supporters. “They have plenty of their own spaces so why have them in our limited space as well?” Our reply to that was always “We need to be inclusive of all persons. Exclusivity cannot be sustained and will not give us our rights.” Now more than ever, we need to make sure that we never leave anyone out. We must embrace diversity and shy away from distrust, hate and division. Our country needs it, we need it.

From its inception EQUAL GROUND’s focus has always been both local and international. We realised back then, that our battle is not just a battle we fight alone in our country but a battle we must fight on behalf of every LGBTIQ person across the world that faces discrimination, criminalisation, violence and hate. We are not alone in this battle. We can count on hundreds of activists from across the world as our allies and friends. Through the global discourse we have seen many incredible changes taking place. LGBTIQ issues are fairly and squarely the focus of attention of the UN, Foreign Offices and Governments and Corporate communities. Our voices are amplified through these sources to implement change in many, many countries. Over the years we have seen many countries decriminalise consenting same sex relationships, implement nondiscrimination policies to protect and serve the LGBTIQ community and legalise gay marriage.

In the past 15 years, we have also been actively engaged with the UN, utilizing the UN Treaty Bodies and other mechanisms to highlight the issues faced by the LGBTIQ community in this country. While there have been positive statements by our Government to accept legal change and implement nondiscrimination policies, none of it has been implemented, to date. There is simply no protection for LGBTIQ persons in this country - still. While the LGBTIQ community is more accepted in Sri Lanka and there is growing support for us here, it is sad that it is taking that much longer for our country to realise the importance of embracing diversity and all its citizens, regardless of Sexual Orientation and/or gender identity and expression. A very strong economic case can be made for decriminalisation of consenting same sex relations and embracing diversity and inclusion, not just in the workplace but in all spheres of society. Other countries that have changed their laws and attitudes to include the LGBTIQ community have seen exponential results in their economic growth.

Our international outreach and engagement has been constant over the past 15 years. Our engagement with ILGA (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association) has provided over 10 years of Executive Board representation. We are still a member of ILGA and work closely with them on UN matters. Our affiliation with The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), has been active since 2013. We were founding members and provide the current Chair of TCEN. TCEN works within the Commonwealth and its engagement has seen positive gains within Commonwealth countries with more discussion and more focus growing daily, on LGBTIQ rights, the decriminalisation of consenting same sex relationships and the right to live as full citizens of the Commonwealth in every member state of the Commonwealth. Currently 36 Countries out of 52 member states have decriminalised consenting same sex relationships.
A key element of our strategic plan is the sensitising and education of civil society to enable them to fully realise the importance of human rights for all citizens of this country. The EQUAL GROUND team has worked in 12 of the 25 Districts of Sri Lanka, conducting sensitising and educational workshops with the general public, health care workers, local government authorities, law enforcement officers, lawyers and youth. These years of engaging with rural communities as well as urban dwellers have enriched us as well as opened doors to more understanding and support of the LGBTIQ community in this Country. We work closely with civil society and community based organisations to enable us to reach out to people from all walks of life, thus building a wider support base and increasing the engagement on LGBTIQ issues. This was very evident for example during the Constitutional reform process that saw all 25 districts recommend that Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) be incorporated into the constitution (Article 12).

Since 2005, EQUAL GROUND has organised Gay Pride celebrations in Sri Lanka. Colombo PRIDE too is in its 15th year of celebrating LGBTIQ lives in this country. While mostly based in Colombo and its suburbs, PRIDE has also visited Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Nuwara Eliya and Matara. We hope to eventually be more forthcoming in having PRIDE in other parts of the country. Colombo PRIDE has been key in highlighting and mainstreaming LGBTIQ issues in Sri Lanka. Over the years we have seen more and more persons coming out and participating in Colombo PRIDE and the other events we hold throughout the year. The LGBTIQ community has become more vocal and unafraid - this was very apparent in the Butterflies4Democracy protest last November and December (2018).

EQUAL GROUND has come a long way and has most definitely carved a place in society for LGBTIQ persons to stand tall and proud. Government apathy and opposition notwithstanding, we are confident that eventually we will see a Sri Lanka embrace the LGBTIQ community, we will see positive changes in the law and we will see more protection and nondiscrimination policies being implemented to protect our community from the needless homophobia and marginalization that still takes place in this country.

My one wish for the future is that we finally have competent, caring leaders for this country who put the country and its people before their own personal greed and satisfaction. Certainly, over the past 70 years since Independence, our country has been rocked by conflict and poor leadership opening doors for indecision, extremism and hatred to fester. I believe we would all like to see radical changes take place in this country, that will make living in this Paradise Island easier and safer for all its citizens. EQUAL GROUND is more committed than ever to make this a reality. We are committed to legal, constitutional and social change and we will continue to fight hard against tyranny and homophobia to make this happen. My message to the leaders of our country is simple and evoke the sentiments of one of my heroes, Harvey Milk:

“It takes no compromising to give people their rights. It takes no money to respect the individual. It takes no survey to remove repressions.”

Give us our freedom, give us respect and in turn we will give our country a workforce, a community unshackled by discrimination and fear with the ability to contribute to our country’s economic and social stability.
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This is the story of EQUAL GROUND, a justice organization forged in the crucible of San Francisco’s gay revolution, molded in the struggle in Sri Lanka and honed through international bodies such as the UN, ILGA, The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) and CHOGM, among others.

EQUAL GROUND celebrates a major milestone along the path of not just surviving in a harsh environment, but overcoming conditions that would rather see us vanish. Along with the joy of that celebration comes the opportunity to reflect on what it took to get here, to take stock of:

- the vision and courage that got us started,
- the stalwart support of many principled allies,
- the dramatic advances in the building of a strong LGBTIQ community nationwide, and, most of all,
- the inspiring stories of growth, progress and personal triumph of our members and colleagues.

The transition from living in the shadows to shining brighter than the spotlight in which we are now willing to stand, is the greatest testament to EQUAL GROUND’s tireless crusade over the last decade and a half. That there are so many of us standing out and proud and being more accepting of ourselves in ways that foster acceptance among those around us, is cause to rejoice.

From its inception, EQUAL GROUND’s mission was making sure LGBTIQ persons in Sri Lanka, didn’t have to face criminalisation, marginalization, violations of their rights, violence and family exclusion. This gamut of issues arises from a vestige of British Colonial rule - that terribly outdated law which deems consenting same sex relations a criminal offense. In light of this, EQUAL GROUND’s fundamental goal was to work towards the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the nation’s acceptance that it’s OK to be gay.

It would be disingenuous to claim that life for LGBTIQ people in Sri Lanka is anything
but hard and challenging. It is still taboo for many to even talk about their sexuality and a lot of harassment from law enforcement, militant religious groups and the general public continues. However, into this hostile environment, EQUAL GROUND has introduced settings that are conducive to open discussion on the issues, about which there is now far more knowledge and acceptance throughout the country. Evidence of this progress can be seen today in urban areas where there are large pockets of LGBTIQ persons openly going about their business, proudly.

What enabled EQUAL GROUND to accomplish this was, and is, a determined commitment to a three-point approach that is now seeing these gains spread beyond urban centers. The first point is to address the need to educate and sensitize our own community. Our people grow up with so much homophobia around them that they internalize the negativity they experience every day and begin to believe there is something wrong with them. The adverse influences are no more visible than the number of Sri Lankan psychologists and psychiatrists who advertise widely discredited “cures” for gayness. Given the pervasiveness of the negativity, it is understandable that our people would feel that there is a stigma to being anything other than heterosexual in this country.

Faced with this, EQUAL GROUND devoted concerted efforts to communicating the message that being gay is legitimate and that we are entitled to feel the way we do. We wanted to create understanding of that as an undeniable fact, which is supported by a global authority - the World Health Organization (WHO) - that established that homosexuality is not a mental illness or sickness of any sort. When our people take this to heart they can begin the long process of counteracting the marginalization and dehumanization of sexually diverse people.

The second point is the other side of the coin where EG focuses efforts educating and sensitizing the general public. Just as it is vital to dislodge the generations of conditioning that homosexuals have undergone, it is also important to liberate
heterosexuals from the misconceptions to which they have been subjected. This is essential to creating a productive society of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence wherein all lives matter as much as the other.

These two areas of focus develop the necessary groundswell of acceptance for our third and primary point - decriminalisation. That is what EQUAL GROUND has been working for tirelessly for the past 15 years. It is encouraged by the recent legislative triumphs in Trinidad & Tobago (2018) India (2018), and Angola (2019), and strives to join that list sooner than later.

An anniversary affords the celebrants an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved and it came as somewhat of a surprise to EG’s hard working staff and board of trustees when they looked back and saw all they have done in a relatively short time.

The most prominent, of course, is Colombo PRIDE. For every year of EG’s existence, it has held about 8 events in 14-days for the Colombo PRIDE festivities. In some years there were 10 events in three weeks. Not only did the introduction of these public celebrations of homosexuality openly refute the government of the day’s spurious contention that there were no gay people in Sri Lanka, it created a space where LGBTIQ people, for at least two or three weeks in June, can stand tall and proud. They can reach out to other LGBTIQ people and feel the relief and strength that comes from knowing they are not alone. This fellowship is vital because it assuages insecurities and fosters confidence just by ‘hanging out’ in a supportive community of shared values and struggles.

In the same spirit, EG hosted three big drag shows in Colombo which are extremely popular, packing a full house on every occasion. However, while these ground breaking events established gayness in the mainstream culture of Sri Lanka in a very visible way EQUAL GROUND also achieved many firsts with initiatives that build and support community more quietly. These include:

With the steady progress EQUAL GROUND began making, it became apparent that to advance locally it had to be active globally. Flamer-Caldera joined the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex Association (ILGA) and served as ILGA Asia representative to the board and later its Co-Secretary General for two terms. Subsequently she was a founder of the Commonwealth Equality Network and is now its chair. These positions exposed Flamer-Caldera to a broad cross section of people in powerful positions - heads of state, foreign ministers, celebrities, diplomats, UN officials and activists, all of whom strengthened EG’s existing local network with a higher level of power and ability to influence the Sri Lankan government and funding bodies. This has contributed immensely to EG’s progress in Sri Lanka.

Flamer-Caldera gives credit to her staff of approximately 10, which on occasion, depending on project load, can double in number. Given the challenges and stresses listed in the main article and the constant pressure to gain sustainable funding, the average term of a staff member is 3 years. They move on to less taxing opportunities.

The founder and executive director, however, has been at it for the full 15 years serving as both guiding light and driving force, committed to achieving EG’s stated goals for the benefit of Sri Lanka. Evidently, Flamer-Caldera is still fired up about the years ahead as she recently declared, “For the LGBT community worldwide we have to be vigilant all the time. We can never be complacent. We need to work hard every single day, because it’s just not going to be handed to us on a platter. It never will be, and we can’t throw it away by being complacent.”
• Conducting formal research and studies on LGBTIQ lives in Sri Lanka;
• Designating the EG offices as a safe haven where people can be themselves in a space with a full library of DVDs and printed resources. Whether it is a movie night, barbecue or Bollywood night that EG hosts monthly, LGBTIQ people have a relaxing center for fellowship and sharing of common pursuits;
• Running a counseling phone line exclusively for LGBTIQ persons for all of EG’s 15 years;
• Visiting rural areas and workplaces to openly discuss LGBTIQ issues and matters of importance to lesbians and bisexual women, such as violence against women;
• Writing an island-wide module for conducting workshops for members of remote communities on subjects central to the LGBTIQ experience;
• Writing regular columns in English and Sinhala daily newspapers to address an LGBTIQ audience and the general public to build understanding and acceptance.
• Introducing a corporate diversity and inclusivity program through which EG educates staff in ways to fully utilize the economic power of all employees instead of marginalizing some and limiting the company’s economic performance. This has been well received in the hospitality industry, among others, and most notably in the large conglomerate, John Keels Holdings. Keel’s leadership recognized the value of diversity and inclusivity and changed its human resources policies to accept sexual orientations and gender identities and expression and protect LGBTIQ people in the workplace. In working with Keels, EG educated almost 5,000 of their employees nationwide.
• Publishing material that addresses issues of everyday life. For example, publications catering to:
  - parents to help them understand and deal with the unique circumstances of their LGBTIQ children;
  - young LGBT persons to help them recognize who they are and be their authentic selves;
  - LB women about breast and cervical cancer;
  - victims of domestic violence issues;
  - addressing a broad range of topics such as law and human rights, among many others.

EQUAL GROUND takes great pride in its record of initiating so much progress and it is heartened to see that the outcome is increasing the numbers of LGBTIQ persons out and proud and actively participating in the nation’s life. A splendid example of this occurred last year during the attempted constitutional coup in Sri Lanka. The LGBTIQ community peacefully took to the streets under the banner of Butterflies for Democracy to protest both the President’s homophobic slurs about the Prime Minister and his cabinet, as well as the President’s crude attempt to wrest control unconstitutionally. Joining other pro democracy protestors the over 100 LGBTIQ marchers showed they are ready to come out and assert their political rights. While the Butterflies4Democracy was not an EG initiated event, EG played an integral part in organising the event with the other members of the partnership forum (a caucus of LGBTIQ activists and organisations).

These great strides could not have been made without the strong backing of several international organizations and operational supporters. Financial support from:

- Hivos in the Netherlands;
- American Jewish World Services;
- Hilary Clinton’s Global Equalities Fund;
- The governments of Norway, Britain and Finland;
- The State Department of the US government and
- Open Society Foundation
- The Local Diplomatic Missions of the US, EU, UK, Netherlands, Norway, Australia and Germany
- Equality Without borders

is crucial to sustaining EG’s operations. Moreover, the operational support that we receive from the diplomatic missions and consulates of foreign governments in Sri Lanka has been hugely influential on the
effectiveness of EG. Thanks to their lobbying on our behalf at the UN, with their governments and with foundations, EG has been able carry out its mission despite facing many obstacles. Without their faith and support EG would not be able to improve the lives of so many.

While it might make eye opening reading if this article were to chronicle the litany of obstacles placed in the way of EG’s progress - the death threats; the harassment by police; intimidation by random groups of men on the street who surrounded the car of EG’s executive director; having to enlist the support of the supportive foreign governments to facilitate the closure of an extremist nationalist organization’s Facebook page because it was inciting its 60,000 followers to commit violence against EG and attendees of EG events; constant surveillance and bugging by state security; the raids of partner organisations by the Criminal Investigation Department; the need to have security personnel in place to counter the constant danger of EG leaders being subjected to the common government practice of detaining human rights activists at the airport when they were leaving or returning to the country; and obstruction by municipal authorities who delay responses to permit requests until after the date of the applied for public event has passed - EG, in its characteristic emphasis on the positive, prefers that this article document the milestones achieved and the encouraging signs ahead.

One such source of hope is what EG speakers observe when they address senior students at schools run by international bodies not under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. Students react very enthusiastically. Many are gay or transgender or have friends who are. The students are not only well informed, but ask intelligent questions out of intellectual curiosity. These students are very fortunate they are growing up in a time when the Internet makes information easily available. They can access a range of information sources, including EG’s web presence, and are able to connect, share and learn through social media. As a result they are more sophisticated, unprejudiced, and many are motivated to become active in pushing for progress.

This is in stark contrast to the schools under the purview of the Ministry of Education where bullying of students who are not, or thought not to be, heterosexual is pervasive. The trauma experienced by these victims is so debilitating that many drop out before completing their basic secondary education. In addition to the damage this does to the lives of so many of our young citizens, this has a net negative effect on the economy. Illogically, the government does not see this as a problem even though they end up spending more on people who are less educated, who have mental health issues, who have physical disabilities all arising from the abuse and trauma of growing up LGBTIQ in a country where their very being is a crime. Somehow, the government rationalizes that it makes economic sense to brutalize people and pay them for their injuries, instead of educating them and allowing them to be healthy members of society who contribute energetically to its economic and cultural growth.

While EG is proud of its progress, it recognizes the importance of sustained effort. Resisting complacency is essential if the primary goal of repealing criminalisation is to be achieved. This is particularly true in these times with the resurgence of bigotry and hatred throughout the world. EG fully recognizes that its quest doesn’t stop with decriminalisation - the ultimate goal is to make sure that all the persons from the LGBTIQ community regardless of their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, regardless of who they are and what strata of society they come from, enjoy the same rights as their fellow citizens who are heterosexual. The ultimate goal is that equality prevails; equality for all sexual orientations and gender identities, human rights for everyone: that’s the EG mission.

It is the declared determination of EG that at some point in the future the headline of this article will be expanded from Courage, Fortitude and Fellowship to include Freedom.
This fellowship is vital because it assuages the constitutional coup in Sri Lanka, the rise of the so-called 'western representatives' to take power through shenanigans of who they are and what strata of society. These students are not only well informed, but ask intelligent questions out of intellectual curiosity. These students are very fortunate to be young and deal with the unique issues of everyday life. For example, they are able to connect, share and learn through social media. As a result they are growing up in a time when the Internet makes information easily available.

While it might make eye opening reading if you are interested in the theoretical side, what is important to remember is that this understanding of the situation is absolutely necessary to counter the spread of misinformation. It is also necessary to understand the immediate and long-term effects of a constitutional coup in Sri Lanka on the country's sociopolitical dynamics. It is necessary to understand how a constitutional coup can lead to the marginalization of certain groups and the promotion of discrimination and hatred. It is necessary to understand how a constitutional coup can lead to the violation of human rights and the erosion of democracy. It is necessary to understand how a constitutional coup can lead to the displacement of people and the displacement of their culture.

Faced with this, EQUAL GROUND devoted itself to the education and sensitization of our own people. It recognized the importance of sustained pressure to gain sustainable funding, the need to educate and sensitize our own people and pay them for their injuries, and the need to enlist support whenever needed and to take advantage of every opportunity to speak up for our rights. It helped that Flamer-Caldera could proceed to consult with foreign ministers, celebrities, diplomats, UN representatives and international organizations and operational support.

An Origin Story
The Founder’s Quest:

Moreover, the operational support that we received from financial support from:-
- Open Society Foundation
- The State Department of the US

These great strides could not have been achieved without the support of our member organisations: -
- Mahasen
- National Enquiry Committee on Human Rights
- COHRED
- CSO Coordination Group
- National Organisation of Women
- National Council for Children
- Sri Lanka Foundation

have mental health issues, who have experienced bullying of students who are not, or who delay responses to permit requests and obstruction by municipal authorities, specifically, but hard and challenging. It is still taboo for many women, more so for LGBTIQ persons openly going door to door, for eg. to recieve free Spa session.

Moreover, we have been working for tirelessly wherein all lives matter as much as the mutual respect and peaceful coexistence which they have been subjected. This is only did the introduction of these public PRIDE festivities. In some years has held about 8 events in 14-days for the heterosexuals from the misconceptions to the LGBT community worldwide we have to have an authentic and unique travel experience custom made for you. Special features for the LGBT Traveller.


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STORY OF EQUAL GROUND

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• Introducing a corporate diversity and acceptance.
• Writing an island-wide module for
• Educating staff in ways to fully utilize the
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or book, or campaign materials
• Conducting workshops for members of
• Fundraising and fundraising events
• The stalwart support of many principled
• The vision and courage that got us

1. LGBTIQ persons of any gender
2. Women
3. LGBTIQ persons
4. Equal Ground
5. The founder's quest:
In the same spirit, EG hosted three big events that build and support extremely popular, packing a full house on PRIDE. For every year of EG’s existence, it achieved and it came as somewhat of an opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished and what remains. For ROSANNA FLAMER-CALDERA, one such source of hope is what EG did to help LGBTIQ people and feel the relief and strength that comes with being seen, heard, and understood.

It is vital to dislodge the generations of mistakes and misconceptions that have shaped the experiences of LGBTIQ people. These are no more visible than the labels that society holds on LGBTIQ people, stemming from pornographic, heterosexual narratives. In light of this, EQUAL GROUND’s message that being gay is legitimate and normative is vital. It is about demystifying the body, accepting the reality of what gender identities and human rights are all about. Somehow, the government rationalizes that gay activism is against the national customs, which is an absolute lie. The trauma experienced by LGBTIQ people is pervasive. The government has rationalized that they are a threat, shutting down their existence, their rights, their freedom.

For every year of EG’s existence, it achieved and it came as somewhat of an opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished and what remains. For ROSANNA FLAMER-CALDERA, one such source of hope is what EG did to help LGBTIQ people and feel the relief and strength that comes with being seen, heard, and understood.

Conducting workshops for members of LGBTIQ communities on violence and harassment, as well as workshops for parents of LGBTIQ people to educate them and allow them to understand the challenges their children face. Somehow, the government rationalizes that gay activism is against the national customs, which is an absolute lie. The trauma experienced by LGBTIQ people is pervasive. The government has rationalized that they are a threat, shutting down their existence, their rights, their freedom.

The Founder's Quest:

Rosanna Flamer-Caldera had the good fortune of being part of a vibrant gay community and the time when Harvey Milk spearheaded the foundation of the Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus in the United States. She was fortunate to be surrounded by colleagues and friends who were fighting for legal rights in how much homophobia around them that they felt in their work. For the 15 years that EG has existed, it has been able to carry out its mission despite the obstacles placed in the way of EG's existence. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies. This has contributed to the funding bodies.
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we CHOOSE to celebrate diversity, today and everyday.

#LOVEISLOVE
STORY OF EQUAL GROUND

GENDER EQUALITY IN TAMILNADU

The Government of the Union Territory of Puducherry has been at the forefront in ensuring gender equality in the region. In 2019, the Tamil Nadu State Government passed the Gender Equality Act, which aims to promote gender equality and protect the rights of women. The act covers various aspects such as education, employment, and health care.

In addition to the act, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also taken several initiatives to empower women. These include the establishment of women's shelters, the provision of legal aid, and the promotion of women's entrepreneurship.

The Government of the Union Territory of Puducherry has also taken several steps to ensure gender equality. These include the implementation of the Gender Budgeting system, which allocates funds specifically for women's empowerment programs.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has also been working towards the elimination of gender-based violence. The state has implemented various schemes to provide support to victims of violence, including counseling and legal aid.

The journey towards gender equality in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry is ongoing, and the Government is committed to ensuring that women are treated equally and have access to all opportunities.

LGBTIQ Rights

The Tamil Nadu State Government has taken several steps to protect the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTIQ) community. These include the implementation of anti-discrimination laws and the provision of legal aid to LGBTIQ individuals.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has also established several organizations to provide support and resources to the LGBTIQ community. These include the Tamil Nadu Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons' Welfare Council and the Tamil Nadu LGBTIQ Rights Forum.

The Government of the Union Territory of Puducherry has also been working towards ensuring the rights of the LGBTIQ community. The territory has implemented several schemes to provide support and resources to the community, including the establishment of the Puducherry LGBTIQ Rights Forum.

The journey towards ensuring the rights of the LGBTIQ community in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry is ongoing, and the Governments are committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated equally and have access to all opportunities.
COMMONWEALTH EQUALITY
NETWORK

STORY OF EQUAL GROUND

EQUAL GROUND IS 15!
At The Silkroad, we are truly an international company. From our Showroom, based just outside London, we source the best of European design and craftsmanship and install it around the world. Whether you are in Sri Lanka, Dubai or The United States, we provide a seamless streamlined service for our clients from design, through to procurement and installation. Members of our team will be on hand at every stage of the process and will work with you to design a home which compliments your needs and reflects your personality.

We are currently working on a number of properties in Sri Lanka, apartments, houses and hotels and would be happy to arrange a consultation to discuss your requirements.
Located in one of London’s most prestigious neighbourhoods, in an Edwardian Mansion block only a stones throw away from Kensington Palace, our brief was to create a tranquil home to allow our client to escape the hustle and bustle of modern day London.

At The Silkroad, we believe that first impressions are everything and we only have one chance to create the wow factor. Upon opening the front door, you are immediately greeted by a bright open space, perfect for entertaining and welcoming guests. We needed the apartment to feel like a home and to reflect our clients personality, which was achieved through subtle Eastern influences to reflect his family heritage.

From the entrance lobby, your eye is immediately drawn down the long open hallway, which is lined with textured wallpaper to give it the feeling of pure luxury, whilst also being durable and practical for a family with young children.

Particular emphasis was placed on the lighting to subtly divide the large open plan space into functional zones, whilst highlighting many of the original features of the building.

The main entertaining space was divided into three sections with the focal point being the bespoke arabascato marble fire place, created by local British Craftsmen and designed by our in-house design team. We accessorised with a bespoke sofa and handmade curtains in the seating area and button back dining chairs in a herringbone fabric to further soften and warm the space. One of the major pieces of interest was the contemporary chandelier which hangs over the dining table taking advantage of the room’s proportions. The semi-formal design was completed with some cocktail stools positioned at the marble clad island, perfect for some pre-dinner welcome drinks.
20

EQUAL GROUND IS 15!
Story of Equal Ground

- LGBTIQ+ organisations often feel isolated and vulnerable. LGBTIQ+ 
  communities in the region have been facing discrimination, 
  marginalisation, and violence for years.

- LGBTIQ+ activists in the region have been fighting for 
  equality, but they face many challenges.

- CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) 
  has made progress towards ending discrimination against 
  LGBTIQ+ people in the region.

- ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and 
  Intersex Association) has been working towards 
  greater equality for LGBTIQ+ people worldwide.

- LGBTIQ+ organisations around the world continue to 
  face challenges, but there is hope for progress.

- LGBTIQ+ activists in the region are working towards 
  greater equality and protections for all.

- Equal Ground is 15 years old, and we continue to 
  fight for a world where everyone is free to be
  who they are and to love whom they choose.
The Tamil text is not provided, but it seems to be a continuation of the content from the previous page, discussing the story of equal ground. The text likely includes detailed narratives or arguments related to the topic of equality and social justice, possibly focusing on the experiences and challenges faced by marginalized communities. Given the nature of the content, it's likely to involve discussions on social issues, historical perspectives, and the evolution of policies or movements towards equality. The content would be expected to be rich in cultural, historical, and social references, and may include personal anecdotes, policy discussions, and calls to action.
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riting this piece on the fifteenth anniversary of EQUAL GROUND, not long after the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka, results in a myriad emotions running through me. Sri Lanka is a country that is truly multi-cultural and the tragic events fueled by hate, exclusivism, prejudice and racism have an impact on every single citizen. No-one is immune to anything that happens to even some of the people. We are all bound in grief, just as we celebrate together in joy.
It is with this backdrop that I write as a former trustee of EQUAL GROUND, the premier organization that works for the rights of the LGBT community in Sri Lanka. Perhaps, because of the environment in which I grew up, for much of my life I was never aware of the hostility experienced by those of a different sexual orientation. While it was never openly discussed it was certainly never denigrated and there was an air of acceptance of those we knew among our family and friends who had partners or ‘special friends’ they lived with.

Perhaps, it was this attitude that led me to the belief that regardless of whom one loves, everyone has the right to love, the right to live together as a family, the right to be acknowledged as a unit and to enjoy all the benefits and privileges accorded to others in society.

However much society may accept it or not, ultimate acceptance is when the country or state you live in legitimizes your unions and bonds of love be it in marriage or setting up homes together. It is a right that should not be denied to anyone regardless of gender or ethnicity. Sadly, the Sri Lankan state has still not accepted these rights as legitimate. And that’s why EQUAL GROUND is so important in our country.

I had known Rosanna Flamer Caldera for a few years before she started EQUAL GROUND and it seemed fitting that she had finally found her raison d’être in a subject so close to her heart. She invited me to join EQUAL GROUND as a trustee in 2006 and it was an honour and a trust (befitting the title trustee) that I was happy to accept.

On the fifteenth anniversary of EQUAL GROUND, it gives me great delight and happiness that I have seen the organization grow from strength to strength and be a beacon of light not only for the LGBT community but also for the rest of the country. It is my strong belief that if some citizens are not able to enjoy the protection of all their rights, then it is not a just society that prevails. Thus, the reality of EQUAL GROUND, the very longevity of its existence ensures that we as a country are certainly on the right track, even though the road may be arduous and fraught with speed bumps and potholes.

With the wonderful work that EQUAL GROUND engages in, be it awareness, workshops, engaging with governments to decriminalize, and offering legal and social support, it is vital that such an organization is encouraged and supported in Sri Lanka. In the bleakest of times, there are those foundations and people that will always show that the cloud is not that dark, that the storm is not that fierce and that over and above it all, calm, peace and justice will prevail. I wish for EQUAL GROUND, all its members, past, future and present, that one day in the not too distant future all citizens of this country will enjoy every security, freedom and expression that is guaranteed by virtue of us being human. The freedom to love, the freedom to live, and the freedom to be!

With love and in celebration!

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My time as an EQUAL GROUND trustee was an inspiration.

I live in Whalley Range, Manchester, with my husband and last weekend - along with a small but passionate group of residents - we held our first LGBT+ Pride event.

With the support of The Arts Council and other local businesses and LGBT+ organisations we were able create a fantastic weekend of live music and entertainment. Saturday kicked off with a parade through Whalley Range and we opened the day with a speech by Afzal Khan MP.

Rosanna and her work with EQUAL GROUND played a big part in the day. My husband and I were lucky enough to experience our first Colombo Pride last year and we were left with the feeling that we had to do more at home.

We have a strong LGBT+ community living in Whalley Range and the surrounding neighbourhoods and wanted to demonstrate the contribution that we can make to our vibrant and creative suburbs. Although things are better than ever before, we can’t take our rights for granted, and we are aware that some people have anxieties about equality and we felt it was important to demonstrate that the LGBT+ community locally is something to be celebrated not condemned.

Sadly, we are aware that some parents locally are concerned that children in our schools will be taught about LGBT+ families and we wanted to allay their anxieties by informing their thinking with our first community Pride event. Hopefully the first of many!

Thank you Rosanna / EQUAL GROUND
In celebration of 15 years of activism and service to the community, EQUAL GROUND celebrates its Anniversary this year with a Gala Reception and Awards ceremony in recognition of the many Allies who support and champion equality in Sri Lanka. Awards this year, will be bestowed in the categories of Business, Health Care, Education and Human Rights, with a special category honoring an Ally who has supported the organisation as well as the LGBTIQ community, well beyond the 15 years that EQUAL GROUND has been in operation. The idea of these awards is to create awareness and promote equality for all sexual orientations and gender identities/expression in a country that marginalizes and discriminates blatantly, getting people to think how they can be involved in promoting equality, how they can create accepting and diverse environments and how they can alter the current mindsets to think EQUALITY.

We are proud to announce the winners of the EQUALITY WARRIORS AWARDS for 2019:

**Lifetime Award:**
Mrs. Mystica Flamer-Caldera

For the many years of unwavering support as a parent and friend of the LGBTIQ community. She has shown her love and encouragement in so many ways for EQUAL GROUND and the many LGBTIQ persons who befriended her over the years.

**Business Award:**
Mr. Bazeer Cassim

For the more than 7 years of support to EQUAL GROUND and the LGBTIQ community particularly for Colombo PRIDE. Mr. Bazeer Cassim is the Group General Manager of Mt. Lavinia Hotel who is the hospitality partner for Colombo PRIDE since 2012.

**Education Award:**
Mrs. Elizabeth Moir

For the many years of support for LGBTIQ students at her school. Mrs. Moir is the Head of Moir International School and has collaborated with EQUAL GROUND for past 4 years, educating and sensitising students on LGBTIQ identities and issues.

**Health Award:**
Dr. Shreen Wilathgamuwa

For the many years of counseling and advising the LGBTIQ community. Since 2008 Dr. Shreen has been a beacon of hope to many LGBTIQ community members who have no only sought her advice on medical issues, but also on personal issues. Her partnership with EQUAL GROUND spans more than a decade.

**Human Rights Award:**
Mrs. Sandya Eknaligoda

For showing grace and strength and giving her support to the LGBTIQ community even through many adversities.
2019 නිවර්තන මැටයෙන් යොදා විශේෂව කොටස යනුවෙන් ද යොදා කොටස මතම පුළුල් පෙන්වා වේ:

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சமூக பொழுதுபோ也同样

2019 இல் அவர்கள் சாத்துக்களத்தின் பின்புறச்சொல்லாக அரிய்லியின் புகழில் பணியாதும் சிலையானது.

கல்லையானது:

LGBTIQ குழாய்ச்சிகள் என்றும் சிறிய வரண்டர்கள் மாதும் குழாய்ச்சியான நெய்வல்லுக்கான அரிய்லியின் மரபொன்றியானது. ஆனால் அவர்கள் வித்யாசத்தில் இருந்த குழாய்ச்சியின் முழுவதும் முடிய்வியல் என்றும் LGBTIQ குழாய்ச்சிகள் என்றும் அறியப்பட்டது. என்றாலும், அவர்கள் என்றும் குழாய்ச்சியின் முழுவதும் முடிய்வியல் என்றும் அரிய்லியின் மரபொன்றியானது.

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