

# SLACD NEWSLETTER



## IN THIS ISSUE

🌸 MESSAGE FROM  
THE PRESIDENT

🌸 COUNCIL

🌸 SLACD-SANBEP  
CONFERENCE

🌸 ARTICLES

🌸 UPCOMING EVENTS

### **SLACD – SANBEP CONFERENCE**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress of SLACD and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of SANBEP, held in collaboration with SLCP, took place on 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> January 2026, at the Grand Ballroom of the Radisson Blu Resort, Galle, Sri Lanka. The conference was conducted with great grace, enthusiasm, bringing together clinicians and researchers, and professionals dedicated to child development.

# CONTENTS

🌸	Message from the President -----	01
🌸	Council -----	02
🌸	Main Congress -----	05
🌸	Climate Change and Children with Disabilities: Ensuring No Child is Left Behind -----	06
🌸	Latest Updates -----	08
🌸	Creative Piece -----	09
🌸	Photograph of the Issue -----	11
🌸	Upcoming Events -----	11
🌸	Call for Submissions -----	12



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Early Action, Inclusive Systems, Lifelong Impact

Dear Members and Colleagues,

It is with great humility and a deep sense of responsibility that I write to you as the newly elected President of the Sri Lanka Association for Child Development.

SLACD has always been more than a professional body—it is a vibrant, multidisciplinary community united by a shared commitment: to ensure that every child in Sri Lanka has the opportunity to achieve their full developmental potential, with dignity, inclusion, and equity.

As we begin this new chapter, our work over the next two years will be guided by the theme: **Early Action. Inclusive Systems. Lifelong Impact.**

This reflects not only our priorities, but also our collective vision for children and families across the country.

Early Action will focus on strengthening early identification and intervention. We aim to develop contextually relevant early intervention packages and expand parent empowerment initiatives, including caregiver training programmes such as Caregiver Skills Training in regions like Ratnapura and Galle. Acting early means preventing gaps before they widen and supporting families when it matters most.

Inclusive Systems will remain central to our approach. We will strengthen collaboration across health, education, and social services through regional initiatives, multidisciplinary clinics, and regular continuing professional

development sessions. Expanding services beyond major centres, supporting regional teams, and promoting inclusive preschool education will be key priorities. We also look forward to advancing infrastructure development, including the proposed centre in Kurunegala, to enhance access and capacity.

Lifelong Impact is the outcome we strive for. By embedding early action within inclusive systems, we can create meaningful and sustained change in the lives of children and their families. To support this, SLACD will strengthen its research and knowledge translation efforts, promote locally relevant evidence, and revitalise communication platforms such as the SLACD newsletter to keep our community connected and informed.

Colleagues, the strength of SLACD lies in each of you—your expertise, your dedication, and your willingness to collaborate. My commitment is to listen, to connect, and to lead with clarity and purpose. Together, let us continue to build a future where every child is seen, supported, and included.



Dr Dilini Vipulaguna,  
President- Sri Lanka Association for  
Child Development (SLACD)



# COUNCIL



## SLACD AGM Signals Progress in Child Development Care

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Sri Lanka Association for Child Development (SLACD) was held alongside its 7th Biennial Congress on 29–30 January 2026 at the Grand Ballroom of the Radisson Blu Resort, Galle, marking a significant milestone in the organization's continued commitment to advancing child development services in Sri Lanka. Convened during the joint SLACD–SANBEP Congress, the AGM brought together members from across the country in a spirit of reflection, progress, and renewed purpose.

The congress itself commenced with a dignified inauguration ceremony graced by Chief Guest Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Mass Media, and Guest of Honour Prof. Ehsan Ullah, President of SANBEP. The opening session featured addresses by Prof. Aruna de

Silva, President of SLACD, and Prof. Pujitha Wickramasinghe, President of the Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians (SLCP), while Dr. Arnab Seal, President of the International Alliance of Academies of Childhood Disability (IAACD), offered a valuable global perspective on strengthening services for children with developmental needs.

Amidst this vibrant academic gathering, the AGM provided an important platform to review the activities and achievements of SLACD over the preceding term. Key areas of focus included progress in early identification of developmental delays, strengthening multidisciplinary care, and expanding training and advocacy initiatives across the country. Members engaged in constructive discussions on future directions, emphasizing the need for inclusive, evidence

evidence-based, and family-centred approaches to child development.

A highlight of the AGM was the appointment of the new SLACD Council for the upcoming term. The newly elected office bearers and council members represent a diverse group of experienced professionals committed to further strengthening the field of child development in Sri Lanka. Their leadership is expected to build on the strong foundation laid by previous councils, with a focus on enhancing clinical services, promoting research, and fostering regional and international collaborations.

The council appointment ceremony was conducted with due formality, reflecting the professionalism and unity of the SLACD



membership. Members expressed confidence in the new leadership and its vision to address emerging challenges in child development,

particularly in areas such as neurodevelopmental disorders, early intervention, and inclusive education.



The AGM and council appointment formed an integral part of a congress that brought together regional and global expertise, reinforcing Sri Lanka's growing role in the field of developmental paediatrics. As the congress concluded, there was a shared sense of optimism and determination among members to continue working collaboratively towards improving outcomes for children and families.

With renewed leadership and a clear strategic direction, SLACD is poised to further its mission of ensuring that every child in Sri Lanka has the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.



## Office Bearers 2026/2028



### **President**

Dr. Dilini Vipulaguna



### **Vice President**

Dr. Gayan Udara Sampath



### **President Elect**

Ms. Samanmalee Thennakoon



### **Patron**

Emeritus Prof. Hemamali Perera



### **Immediate-Past President**

Prof. Aruna de Silva



### **Honorary Joint Secretaries**

Ms. Priyanwada Wijayasinghe

Ms. Ayendree Seneviratne



### **Honorary Treasurer**

Prof. Ishani Rodrigo



### **Honorary Assistant Treasurer**

Dr. Thilina Munasinghe



### **Council Members**

Prof. S. Sivayokan

Prof. Aruna De Silva

Prof. Imalke Kankanararachchi

Dr. Amila De Silva

Dr. Phirarthana Kamalanathan

Dr. Thilini Lokubalasuriya

Dr. Pavithra Godamunne

Dr. Sulfica Mohideen

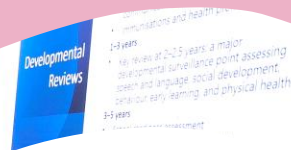
Ms. Sujatha Gunawardana

**Become an SLACD Member**

[Click Here](#)



# MAIN CONGRESS



## Keynote Highlights

The main congress brought together leading experts to discuss the future of neurodevelopmental care, latest research and strategies to improve outcomes for children.

## Scientific Symposia

A series of nine symposia formed a central component of the scientific programme, covering a wide range of important themes in child development and neurodisability. Topics included child development, safe and resilient childhood, education and inclusion, and more. These sessions



brought together global experts who shared current evidence and innovative approaches to improving care for developmental challenges.

## Free Paper Sessions

The Free Paper Sessions showcased a diverse range of research presentations, bringing together studies from multiple regions across Sri Lanka as well as neighbouring countries. These sessions provided a valuable platform for researchers, clinicians, and students to share their findings, exchange ideas, and engage in critical discussions. The presentations spanned various aspects of child development, disability and mental health.

## Inspirational Voices

Our guest speakers delivered powerful insights into contemporary issues in child development and neurodisability through a series of thought-provoking symposia. These inspirational voices enriched the congress with global and regional perspectives.



## Shining Stars

The Star Kids awards was a truly inspiring segment of the congress, celebrating the courage, resilience, and achievements of children living with disabilities. This session served as a powerful reminder that with the right support and opportunities, every child can shine and reach their fullest potential.



# CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: ENSURING NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND

*By Neelima Chopra, Program & Partnership Specialist, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), and Sheldon Shaeffer, Chair, ARNEC Board of Directors*

Climate change is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is already shaping the lives of children across the world. Across Asia and the Pacific, families are experiencing repeated floods, cyclones, droughts, and heatwaves<sup>1</sup>. For young children, these events are not temporary disruptions; they shape the conditions in which they grow, learn, and develop.

Children today are growing up in what many experts describe as a 'polycrisis'<sup>2</sup>, a convergence of overlapping challenges including climate change, post-COVID recovery, economic instability, and conflict. These pressures are deepening inequalities and placing increasing strain on families and the systems that support young children. Despite contributing the least to climate change, children bear some of its most severe consequences<sup>3</sup>. Nearly one billion children, almost half of the world's children, live in countries at extremely high risk from climate impacts where climate shocks are becoming more frequent and cumulative<sup>4</sup>.

The implications for early childhood development are profound<sup>5</sup>. Climate-related disruptions threaten the essential conditions children need to thrive: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early learning opportunities<sup>6</sup>. Crop failures undermine nutrition, pollution and disease outbreaks affect health, disasters disrupt caregiving and learning environments, and

displacement destabilises children's sense of safety and belonging<sup>7</sup>.

Within this context, children with disabilities face even greater risks. Yet they remain one of the most invisible and overlooked groups in climate policies and disaster responses. As climate shocks intensify, addressing their specific needs has become increasingly urgent<sup>8</sup>.

Young children with disabilities often depend on assistive technologies, specialised healthcare services, and consistent caregiving support. During disasters such as floods, cyclones, or heatwaves, these systems are frequently disrupted. Assistive devices may be lost or damaged, healthcare services interrupted, and access to medications or specialised care limited. For children who rely on these supports, even short disruptions can have serious consequences.

Children with intellectual or cognitive impairments face additional challenges during emergencies. They may struggle to understand warnings, recognise symptoms of illness, or follow evacuation instructions. Certain medications can also increase vulnerability during extreme heat. Disasters and displacement can trigger anxiety, trauma, and post-traumatic stress, while specialised mental health services often are unavailable.

Caregiving systems are also placed under significant pressure during crises. Many children with disabilities rely heavily on caregivers for daily activities and protection. When families are displaced or resources become scarce, caregivers may struggle to meet these needs, increasing risks of injury, neglect, or inadequate care.

Despite these vulnerabilities, children with disabilities (and, in fact, virtually all persons with disabilities) remain largely absent from climate planning. Only a small proportion of national climate adaptation plans currently include their needs. Without deliberate inclusion, climate responses risk deepening existing inequalities.



Photo Source: A Call to Action: Flooding and Early Childhood Development <https://arnek.net/node/465>

Addressing this gap requires stronger investment in inclusive early childhood development (ECD)<sup>9</sup>. The early years, from birth to eight, offer a critical opportunity to strengthen support systems, build resilience, and protect children's development. Governments must prioritise accessible and inclusive ECD services that integrate health, nutrition, social protection, and early learning. Disaster preparedness and early warning systems must also be designed to be accessible for children and families with disabilities.

At the same time, communities and caregivers need training, resources, and support to provide nurturing care during climate-related disruptions. ECD programmes can help prepare children for a changing world by fostering adaptive skills such as resilience, problem-solving, cooperation, and environmental awareness<sup>10</sup>.

Equally important is ensuring that children with disabilities and their families are meaningfully included in climate decision-making. Climate policies and programmes must integrate disability considerations and promote leadership by people with disabilities. This includes recognising the unique vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities, actively involving them in decision-making and emergency planning, and ensuring that information and communication are accessible to everyone in all situations. Climate action should also prioritise the needs of women and girls with disabilities, support inclusive research and data collection, and establish dedicated funding mechanisms to advance disability-inclusive climate action<sup>11</sup>.

Ensuring disability-inclusive climate action is not optional, it is essential. By strengthening inclusive early childhood systems today, we can better protect children with disabilities and help them build the resilience needed to thrive in an increasingly uncertain climate future.

To learn more about ARNEC's initiatives on ECD and Climate Change, read more here.

<https://www.climate.arnec.net>

## References

1. IPCC. Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; 2021. Available from: <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>
2. Shaeffer S. Young children and the “polycrisis”. World Education Blog. 2024 Jan 11. Available from: <https://world-education-blog.org/2024/01/11/young-children-and-the-polycrisis/>
3. UNICEF. Children's climate and environment risk index (CCRI). 2019. Available from: <https://knowledge.unicef.org/CEED/resource/childrens-climate-and-environment-risk-index-ccri>
4. UNICEF. The climate-changed child. 2023 Nov 10. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-changed-child>
5. ARNEC. Most vulnerable to most valuable: a scoping study to put young children at the heart of climate actions and environmental protection. 2018. Available from: <https://arnec.net/resources/arnec-resources/most-vulnerable-most-valuable-scoping-study-put-young-children-heart-0>
6. Nurturing Care. Nurturing care framework for early childhood development. Available from: <https://nurturing-care.org/>
7. Levy BS, Patz JA. Climate change, human rights, and social justice. *Ann Glob Health*. 2015;81(3):310–322. doi:10.1016/j.aogh.2015.08.008
8. Alexander M, et al. Climate change and disability. Academic Press; 2025 Jun 1.
9. ARNEC. ARNEC. 2020. Available from: <https://www.climate.arnec.net/>
10. ARNEC. From risk to resilience: communications and advocacy toolkit. 2025. Available from: <https://arnec.net/arnec-reesources/risk-resilience-communications-and-advocacy-toolkit>
11. SPARK. Climate action: eight ways to include people with disabilities. Available from: <https://sparkinclusion.org/learningcentre/climate-action-eight-ways-to-include-people-with-disabilities/>



# LATEST UPDATES

by Emeritus Prof. Hemamali Perera

## Evidence-b(i)ased practice: Selective and inadequate reporting in early childhood autism intervention research

Micheal Sandbank, Kristen Bottema-Beutel, Ya-Cing Syu, Nicolette Caldwell, Jacob I Feldman, Tiffany Woynaroski. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241231624>

Many studies on early childhood autism interventions are not properly registered, incompletely reported, or never published, raising concerns about selective reporting of positive outcomes and highlighting the need for greater transparency and better research reporting practices.

## Spoken language outcomes in limited language preschoolers with autism and global developmental delay: RCT of early intervention approaches

Connie Kasari, Stephanie Shire, Wendy Shih, Rebecca Landa, Lynne Levato, Tristram Smith. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2932>

Minimally verbal preschool children with autism and global developmental delay can make significant language gains with early targeted intervention, with outcomes influenced by baseline social communication and receptive language abilities, highlighting the importance of individualizing intervention approaches.

## Social cognition in autism and ADHD

Sven Bölte. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2025.106022>

Social cognition differences are present in both autism and ADHD, with distinct underlying mechanisms—implicit social processing differences in autism and executive function-related difficulties in ADHD—and these abilities can improve with age and targeted interventions.

## Hyperfocus: the forgotten frontier of attention

Brandon K Ashinoff, Ahmad Abu-Akel. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-019-01245-8>

Hyperfocus—an intense absorption in a task seen in conditions such as autism and ADHD—is poorly defined and understudied, highlighting the need for clear definitions and further research to understand its cognitive and clinical significance.



# CREATIVE PIECE

## Listening to Silence: A Reflection on “*Sorry to Bother You*”

by Phillie Atman

### Sorry to Bother You

Sometimes I am puzzling  
 Why not let you indulge in your starry night  
 Isn't this a kind of happiness?  
 Actually, you don't need to speak  
 If the world can listen to your speechless  
 Actually, you can remain quiet  
 If the world can understand your silence  
 But, I have to bother you  
 Keep searching  
 Knock on the door of your world  
 Let you know  
 Under your starry sky  
 There are sufferings  
 Birth, aging, sickness and death  
 Unsatisfied wanting  
 Being apart with loved ones  
 I have to bother you  
 Startle your gaze at the starry night  
 Let you understand this speechless world  
 Let you listen to the silence of this world

“Sorry to Bother You”, by Phillie Atman, captures the gentle voice of a mother speaking to her child with autism — a quiet conversation filled with love, patience and sensitivity for her child’s inner world. The poem becomes a reflection upon silence, connection and the particular way her child comprehends his inner world. For those of us who are working with autistic children and their families, this poem beautifully captures a core issue often seen in our practice. It depicts under a poetic insight, the delicate balance between a parent’s longing to connect with a child and the child’s contentment in solitude.

### **The Poetics of Silence and the Autistic Mind**

Atman opens with the line, “*Sometimes I am puzzling.*” This simple statement reflects an experience that is common when we work with

children with autism — the feeling of being puzzled or difficult to understand. The poet does not try to explain this difference away; instead, he invites the reader to dwell in this confusion, to sit with a curious mind rather than judgmental.

The image of the “*starry night*” appears throughout the poem as a metaphor for the inner world many autistic individuals inhabit— a place of peace, fascination, and sensory beauty. To “*indulge in your starry night*” is to dwell in this private landscape, where solitude is not loneliness but a form of happiness. It is a world that may appear distant or quiet to others, but one filled with meaning for the person within it. Atman seems to ask: must we always interrupt that peace with demands for verbal expression?

### **Speech, Silence, and Understanding**

Atman writes, “Actually, you don’t need to speak / If the world can listen to your speechless.” These lines raise one of the most striking aspects of autism, the recognition that communication does not always consist of verbal sounds. Autism questions our conventional hierarchies of communication, where the spoken word is privileged, and the silence is often devalued. Many autistic individuals experience challenges in using or understanding typical social communication, yet the world often fails to grasp the nature of their difficulty or the depth that lies within their silence. The poet’s repetition of “actually” conveys a gentle correction, as though reminding the world that understanding need not depend on verbal expression.

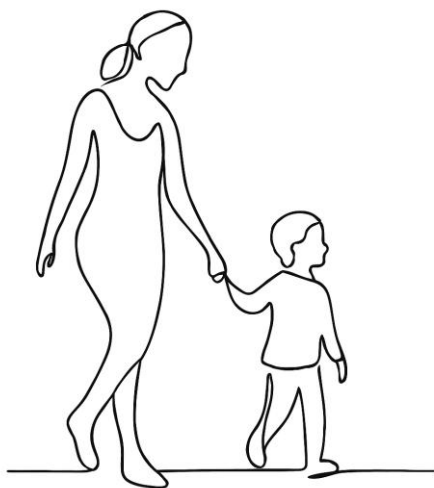
As practitioners, we often strive to teach communication, but Atman’s poem asks a deeper question: are we, as a world, capable of listening to silence? The phrase “If the world can understand your silence” is at once a plea and a



challenge. It suggests that the failure of understanding lies not in the child's silence but in the world's inability to hear it.

### The Ethics of "Bothering"

The phrase *"I have to bother you"* recurs with gentle insistence. It reflects on the internal stress felt by those who care for or work with children who are autistic. We must sometimes *"bother"* — to assess, and to interact, even when the child's peace lies in solitude or repetitive order. The poet's tone is apologetic but affectionate, knowing that intervention, however necessary, can disrupt a child's equilibrium. Thus, this phrase subtly questions the ethical balance and the practice of paediatrics in this context. How do we support development without erasing individuality? How do we *"bother"* with kindness — preserving the dignity and calm of the child's world to help him navigate a world that may not yet understand him?



### Universal Suffering, Shared Humanity

Midway through the poem, Atman expands from the personal to the universal:

*"Under your starry sky  
There are sufferings  
Birth, aging, sickness and death  
Unsatisfied wanting  
Being apart with loved one."*

These lines remind us that the autistic experience, though distinctive, is part of the shared human condition. The universal truths of suffering and loss apply equally within this *"starry world."* This passage bridges difference and sameness — affirming that autism is not an isolated realm but a variation of the human condition, equally touched by beauty and suffering.

### Listening Beyond Words

The closing lines — *"Let you understand this*

*speechless world / Let you listen to the silence of this world"* — can be read with gentle irony. It is as if the poet shifts perspective to the autistic child's view: a world that calls him *"speechless"* and *"silent"* is, in fact, the one that fails to listen or to speak in a way that truly understands him. The poem thus reverses the lens — the silence lies not within the child, but within the world that does not yet know how to hear. The poet invites the reader, to shift from a model of *"correcting"* or *"normalizing"* difference to one of listening, presence, and acceptance. He uses *"let you"* rather than *"make you"* reinforcing the gentle approach suggesting that understanding cannot be forced; it must be allowed.

For those of us who work with autism, this is a significant reminder. Our task is not to fill the silence with speech, but to unpack the meanings it already holds. It is in this place of quiet listening, the connection occurs — sometimes without words, but never without understanding.

### Conclusion

Phillie Atman's *"Sorry to Bother You"* speaks across the boundaries of art and science. It invites practitioners and caregivers to see silence not much as an absence, but as another form of language. The poem's gentle tone mirrors the following observation we often make in our clinical practice: that the most authentic connection with autistic children occurs when we pause, observe, and simply share the quiet. In an era where communication is often measured often in words per minute, Atman's poem reminds us of the fact that the silence too has a rhythm - one that deserves to be heard.

### Dr. Buddhima Mannapperuma

Associate Specialist in Community Paediatrics,  
Teaching Hospital – Kalutara



# PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ISSUE

## Defined by Ability, Not Limitations!



Samudini's journey is a beautiful story—defined not by limitations, but by her strength, courage, and spirit. With every step, she continues to grow, learn, and shine in her own unique way. She has shown her rhythm and creativity through dance and crafts, she embraces life with joy and determination. Her achievements are not just milestones, but reflections of her resilience and passion. She inspires those around her—quietly, gracefully, and powerfully winning the world one step at a time.

Photo Credits:

Dr. A.S.Modaragama, Dr. A.D.I. Chathurangi  
Senior Registrars in Paediatrics - CNTH

## UPCOMING EVENTS



# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

## SLACD Newsletter

The Sri Lanka Academy of Child Development (SLACD) invites submissions for the upcoming issues of the SLACD Newsletter. We welcome contributions from doctors, therapists and trainees in the field of child development and disability. Submissions are invited under the following categories.

**1. General articles** - academically oriented articles on child development and disability.

Guidelines;

- 🌸 Maximum word count: 1000 words
- 🌸 Format: MS Word document
- 🌸 Tables/figures/images: Submit as separate files (maximum 2), with a minimum image quality 300 DPI resolution

**2. Creative Piece** - A non-technical, reflective, or narrative-based article/work of art related to child development and disability.

Examples include: Poems, paintings, cartoons, discussion on book or movie

**3. Photograph of the Issue** - We invite meaningful and impactful photographs that highlight the lived experiences and abilities of children with disabilities, engaged in everyday activities, enjoyable moments or celebrations of achievements

Guidelines:

- 🌸 Photos may include family members and caregivers.
- 🌸 A written statement by the sender that the informed written consent was obtained from the person/guardian to publish the image.
- 🌸 Submit a title that reflects the ability or achievement captured in the image.
- 🌸 Ensure high resolution (minimum 300 DPI).

### Submission Details

- 🌸 All communications should be addressed to Dr Buddhima Mannapperuma and Dr Phirarthana Kamalanathan, Joint Editors of the Newsletter.
- 🌸 Only electronic submissions are accepted via: [secretaryslacd@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryslacd@gmail.com)
- 🌸 Clearly indicate the category of submission.
- 🌸 Include author details and contact information.
- 🌸 Intellectual responsibility for pictures/articles submitted lies with the person submitting the pictures/article.

