Dammy (Damayanthi Premathilake)**– a lesson in serendipity**

Some occurrences in life are described as serendipitous, a word derived from 'Serendip', an historical name for Sri Lanka, the place of Dammy's birth. Mostly we understand serendipity to mean a fortunate happenstance; that you just happen to be in the right place at the right time. However, it involves more than just luck. It requires an ability to notice and recognize opportunity as it arises and then to act upon it. As such, it is a fitting descriptor on all counts when talking about Dammy, for she has taken the ancient name of her homeland and applied it brilliantly to the present in her adopted country.

Dammy and her family migrated to Australia in 2020. The move was prompted foremost to secure a stable future for her two children, daughter Bhagya and son Umesh. Life in Australia with its effective social welfare systems of health care, pensions and education held the promise of providing this, whereas the political instability in Sri Lanka did not. Her daughter Bhagya had already set her sights on studying medicine here. However, when they discovered it would take Bhagya 10 years or more to gain permanent residency in Australia if she came on a student visa, Dammy and her husband decided to apply for a Family Regional Skilled visa for them all to relocate. This route shortened the process to four years, and they became permanent residents in 2023.

L: Dammy & her family in 2020 *R: Dammy and her children, Umesh and Bhagya, 2025*

While she misses her relations in Sri Lanka, a country she loves and was sad to leave, Dammy was very excited about coming to Australia and is happy living here. Although her brother had been living in Melbourne since 2002, she had never visited before the move and when she first arrived, she really didn't know what to expect. As she knew they would be living in a regional area, not a big metropolitan city, she remembers being worried she would not be able to find the spices she needed for cooking Sri Lankan dishes and packed a suitcase full of them to bring with her. However, she discovered she need not have worried; she could find all she needed in Launceston. While Launceston's Sri Lankan community is small – about 450 families – they are active in procuring things they miss from their homeland, such as food and friendship, and to cater for their

spiritual needs, a Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist Temple was recently opened in the suburb of Waverley.

Ironically, neither Dammy nor her husband have used the skills that qualified them for their visa to Australia. Her husband is an international Civil Servant and works overseas on four-year contracts with UNICEF as a water and sanitation hygiene specialist (WASH). He was based in Timor Leste when the family moved to Australia, and he is now in his second year in Fiji, only visiting his family for a couple of weeks twice a year. Dammy held a degree and worked in Human Resource Management for seven years before her children were born, but her qualifications were not recognized in Australia, and she was told she needed to complete an additional HR diploma to work in the sector here. The problem was to do this would take too long. It would take a year and a half to complete the diploma, but to meet their temporary visa requirements she needed to work a set number of hours and earn a set number of dollars. It was time for a career pivot. After investigating what jobs were available that met their visa criteria, Dammy completed a certificate in Aged Care and Disability in Individual Support, and in a ceremony in Hobart she was awarded the best student out of 405 non-vocational traineeships in Tasmania.

Working in the care sector has been a turning point in Dammy's life, and it has been a good fit for her. She had spent years living with her in-laws, caring for her mother-in-law who had survived three types of cancer over a 30-year period, and a brother-in-law suffering from schizophrenia. And although many Sri Lankans she says look down on these sorts of jobs, Dammy feels blessed with her work. Her first job was working in aged care at Aldersgate Aged Residential Care in Kings Meadows. As nursing homes have only recently emerged in Sri Lanka and are only available to those who could afford them as there is no government funding, she found working in one interesting. Her move to the disability sector began in 2021, which was when she first met Ben Greaves, who was then the case manager of her first participant Pat. When Pat became a client with adaptCARE after Ben established the company in 2023, she contacted him for a job so she could continue looking after Pat until her family made the move to Melbourne.

Dammy has made herself available to work every hour she was given. With her husband based overseas, this has been possible because Dammy's mother lives with her, helping out with the housework and children. After 13 years out of the paid workforce while raising her children and looking after extended family in Sri Lanka, Dammy has loved earning her own money again and having the financial freedom needed to bring her family together, such as meeting up in Sri Lanka in April 2026 to celebrate her mother's 80th birthday. It has also helped her put down new roots in Australia. Within two years of arriving, in September 2022, she bought a house in Youngtown. Her husband flew in from Timor Leste to help with the move. In 2023 she bought another house, this time in Melbourne, in readiness for them to move there at the end of 2027 when her son finishes high school and her daughter starts her medical degree.

Finding the picture-perfect future home she wanted in Melbourne was no easy task when you live and work full-time in Tasmania. How Dammy went about this says a lot about her drive and determination. First, she scoured the properties for sale and lined up house inspections. She then made two trips to Melbourne on two subsequent Fridays. She took the first flight out of Launceston in the morning, booked an Uber to meet her on arrival in Melbourne and asked the driver what he earned in a day and then offered him more to drive her from one house inspection to the next before taking her back to the airport to catch the last flight home. On the first Friday she looked at 19 properties in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs. On the second Friday, with the same Uber driver, she visited 21 houses in Melbourne's western suburbs. Of the 40 houses she

saw she only liked two or three of them; she ended up buying a five-bedroom, three-bathroom house in Rockbank, a new housing development in Melbourne's west.

L: Dammy with her mum *R: Dammy's new home-to-be in Melbourne*

Dammy says she will miss living in Tasmania. Although she grew up in a hot climate, she loves Tasmania's cold weather and the free air conditioning it provides. Autumn and Winter are her favourite seasons, with 10-15 degrees being her ideal temperature range. Although her son shares her love of the state and its cold climate, she knows her daughter is ready to spread her wings so she is looking forward to the move and to whatever that may bring either by design or serendipity.