



# FORWARD AND BEYOND

Annual Report 2020-2021



## CEO'S NOTE

Last year was eventful and dramatic. It felt and looked different.

At NalandaWay, it has been extremely busy and demanding for all of us. In the last twelve months, we have supported over 700,000 children directly and 50,000 more through partnerships with other civil society organisations.

In this report, you will read about our various projects which supported children affected by the pandemic from the poorest districts in India. Our projects have helped them learn, be creative, and feel hopeful.

Each one of these projects and initiatives helped more children feel *hopeful, resilient, and fearless*. Each one was made possible by your support.

Grateful for your support. Thank you.



With love,  
Sriram Ayer  
Founder & CEO  
NalandaWay Foundation





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# NALANDAWAY CHILDREN'S CHOIR



 CHENNAI & DELHI

“Music can change the world because it can change people” – Bono

## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

Classroom teaching of music through experiential means has always been the most prominent intervention on this project. In 2020-21, we were forced to work around the Covid context to continue putting music as the focal point of inspiration, expression and learning. We lay greater emphasis on developing self-esteem, language skills and creativity while reducing stress.



Though there were obvious technological and device access issues, through the sheer determination of the staff and teachers, classes were arranged and a new format of engagement was born.



The children managed to put on a great show at the virtual 'I for India' Covid Fundraising event, the 25th-anniversary celebration at the American International School Chennai, and the choir rendition of Vande Mataram with renowned singer Bombay Jayashri.



*Vande Mataram with Bombay Jayashri*



*I for India Covid Fundraising Event*

## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT

The backdrop of Covid ensured we had to think extra hard for the safety of the children. Alongside, we also had to ensure the choirs didn't miss a beat and continued to be a source of inspiration. The new online learning methodology made it necessary for all of us, including the children, to go the extra mile. While testing our individual and collective resourcefulness, we found newer ways to learn, connect and grow. The children were able to learn and grow collectively. The purposeful and contextual tasks we had set for them, were able to build new skills in them. And most of them arrived at a point of improved articulation.

Internally understanding how the project is faring, is one of our key motivations. This year we interacted with the family of 15-year old Samaya Ishwarya. And here's what they had to say –



We never knew Samaya is so gifted in music until her experience with NalandaWay. Her expressive self seems to have opened up, she is learning better and music has become a source of joy for her.



Online music lessons -  
Kodungaiyur students



Arunodhya Shelter Home

52

STUDENTS

15

SESSIONS PER MONTH

20

SONGS LEARNT

3

ONLINE PERFORMANCES

**“I can't think of any better representation of beauty than someone who is unafraid to be herself.” – Emma Stone**

## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

Bringing in various mediums of art, Sakhi has focused on self-development – physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological – in the '20-21 timeframe. Art, craft, theatre and storytelling have come together to make learning fun. Topics that have been covered experientially and extensively are Emotions, Self Defense, Empathy, Menstrual Hygiene and Leadership Skills. The effect was wholesome and expansive learning across dimensions such as critical thinking, creative decision-making and conscious creation of safe spaces.

## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT

The Covid-19 situation made it challenging for the teenagers under the programme to be regular with their attendance. The programme also faced challenges around human resources. We provided stationery materials, data recharges for online sessions and collaborated with institutes to offer the programme. By exploring various life themes, our learning modules enabled consistent change of perception not only among the teenagers but also their families. As a consequence, we noticed distinct positive changes in their self-confidence, resourcefulness and ability to take on life as it comes.

When we spoke to Saba, who is a beneficiary of the programme, this is what she had to say –

“

**The self-defense sessions have been really useful. Now, I have a way to tackle the old uncle in the neighborhood who harasses girls like me.**

”



Art lessons



Experimenting with salt art



Science class



Yoga lessons

25

ADOLESCENT GIRLS REACHED

100

SESSIONS WITH GIRLS

50

NEW ACTIVITIES





“Your inner strength is your outer foundation.” – Allan Rufus

## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

Having worked with the marginalized populations of Ambedkar Nagar in Vilankurichi, Coimbatore, we have consistently seen the toll social exclusion takes on them. While all our former attempts have been about enabling this group of people to challenge their state of poverty, in '20-21, we specifically focused on a group of adolescent girls. We launched the Scholars project to offer creative outlets of learning and processing through internal mentoring sessions and modules by external resources. From their physical wellness to emotional wellbeing, and extensive academic subject support to identity development, the project was able to cover wide ground.



*Key dimensional areas*

## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT

Unlike other years of operation, in the '20-21 timeframe, Sakhi Coimbatore came up against the Covid-19 pandemic and its challenges. The chief among them was that the girls couldn't show up for sessions. Many of them are breadwinners and caretakers, making it difficult for them to multitask under duress. The pandemic also brought them up against space constraints given the online method of working. We decided to work with the challenges instead of against them by

- Arranging for Android phones wherever necessary.
- Organising materials and data cards to help ease technical difficulties.
- Creating in-person engagements with safety precautions.
- Paying regular visits to the community and parents to keep up engagement.
- Identifying relevant academic facilitators.

The Scholars project has had an all-round impact on the adolescent girls. From understanding themselves more deeply to being exposed to learning around



health and self-defense, the project bridged their cognitive, physical, emotional and social sides. As a consequence, we saw their concentration, attentiveness and self-introspection levels rise considerably.

Sandhya, who studies 9th standard at the Kanya Gurukulam Government School, says,

“

To understand the importance of self-awareness, self-care and self-worth, has been deep for me. It has strengthened my mind, body and spirit.

”



*Orientation for the Scholars project*



*Rapport building sessions*



*Distribution of phones for virtual sessions*



*Planting trees for Daan Utsav*



4 MONTHS

18 ADOLESCENT GIRLS REACHED

50 SESSIONS

“Women and girls should be able to determine their own future no matter where they're born.” – Melinda Gates

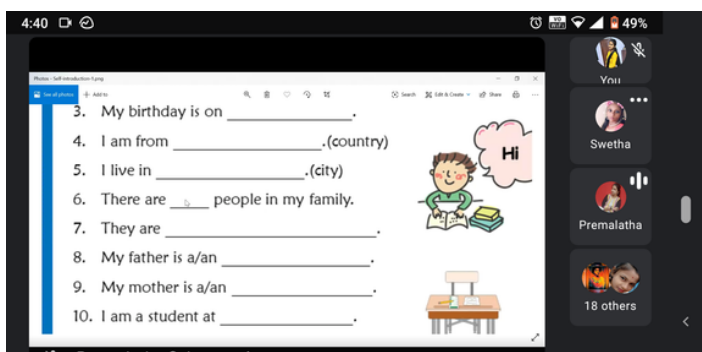
## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

During the '20-21 timeframe, we took a holistic approach to offer academic support, learning around physical, social and cognitive development as well as numerous outlets through various forms of expressive arts. The intent was to establish a process of all-round development that exposed the girls to various forms of learning and understanding. The larger objective was to create a space where they would grow more aware, resilient, healthy and confident as individuals.

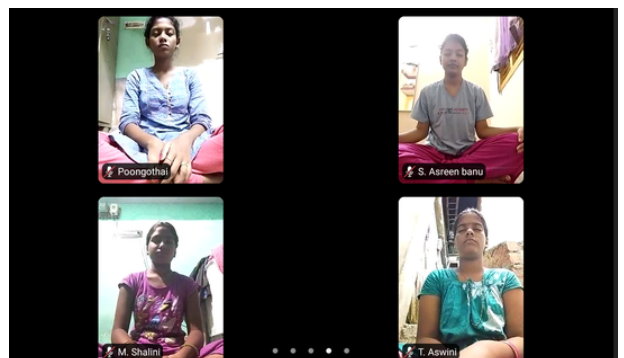
## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT



Much like the other chapters of this programme, Chennai one too was affected by the pandemic. Attendance was an issue and so was the children's availability for online classes, given the lack of tech and digital access. To address this, we got all the stakeholders (parents, tutors, children and heads of the schools) together in a feedback session. We set up conversations with every child and gave them select responsibilities that put their learning into their own hands. While measuring the effects of the programme, we found that the children have grown more comfortable with technology. They have learnt to give presentations even as their comfort of giving and receiving feedback seems to have visibly improved. When asked questions, the girls also exhibited higher empathy levels towards one another as well as other stakeholders.



*Workshop for Communications skills*

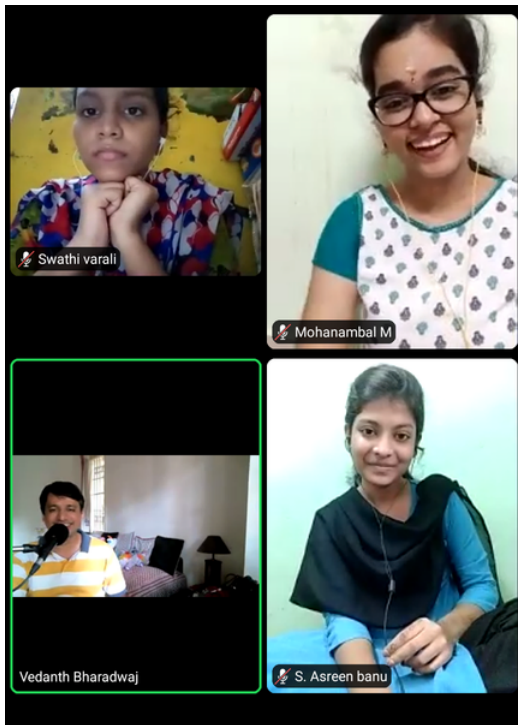


*Online yoga lessons*

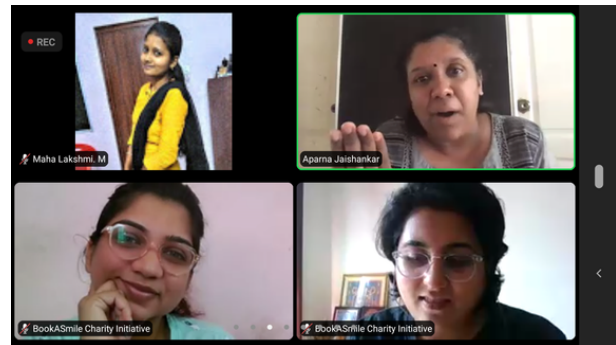
Vimala, a science teacher at the Chennai Girls Higher Secondary School (Perambur, Chennai), when asked, spoke of the changes she had seen in the girls who are part of this programme:



The interventions have been introduced at a time when the girls are entering their teens. If the right influence(s) can be made part of their learning at this time, the later benefits will be high. I can notice how well the girls under the programme are doing. They are more engaged, aware and confident.



Online music lesson



Storytelling workshop

24

ADOLESCENT GIRLS REACHED

35

ONLINE SESSIONS

315

IN-PERSON SESSIONS

48

NEW ACTIVITIES/TOPICS EXPLORED



**“Stories are memory aids, instruction manuals and moral compasses.”**

**– Aleks Krotoski**

### WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

Within the larger objective of helping 3 to 6 year olds in anganwadis attain better pre-literacy and pre-numeracy, '20-21 meant a larger challenge. To work around the pandemic, we extended our regular intervention to be delivered differently.

In the first strategy, we worked with a Noida based radio station to deliver the lessons through stories, which could be aired to the children.



In the second, we arranged for portable USB speakers loaded with stories and supplementary workbooks, so that the children could learn from the comfort of their homes. Alongside, our coordinators kept constantly in touch with parents to get updates.

### HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT



In the '20-21 timeframe, as with all our other projects, Gutar Goo too had to measure up to the Covid-19 challenge. This made it necessary for us to realign the process by creating assessments for parents and caregivers.

In the face of the pandemic, as the Anganwadis identified as learning centres had to shut down, we created a learning method that would help lessons continue. We could bridge multiple gaps with the learn-at-home model and saw distinct improvement across multiple areas: listening, comprehension and articulation.

The careful selection and dissemination of stories also meant children were exposed to age-appropriate content. The greater involvement of the parents and caregivers because of the orientation we brought in, ensured a deeper learning process.

Here's what Mansimar Kaur, the Programme Manager had to say about the changes and challenges involved in the facilitation of Gutar Goo:



“

The launch of the program coincided with the first pandemic induced lockdown and that presented before us a huge challenge but also an unprecedented opportunity. Apart from our inherent objectives of achieving school readiness and improved comprehension skills amongst children of anganwadis, we also had to address the limitation presented by digital inequality and lack of access to gadgets and internet. Use of community radio and portable USB speakers proved to be an effective strategy to reach out to the community and make an impact through stories and art.

”



*Field co-ordinators with students*

17

**CHILDREN REACHED & WORKBOOKS AND USB SPEAKERS DISTRIBUTED**

30

**AUDIO STORIES PRODUCED**

50

**REMOTE FOLLOW-UPS WITH FAMILIES**

*“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”*

– W.B. Yeats

### WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

While the programme originally had its pilot as a technology-led learning methodology, during the '20-21 timeframe, we had to create other strategies. Our interventions included classes delivered through phone calls and when possible, delivered through direct engagement between teachers and students. Going the extra mile to heighten engagement of every stakeholder, deepened the way children learnt.



### HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT



The intervention was given a timeframe of 3 months, during which we organized 25 sessions for around 150 students. The sessions were divided between reading, writing and speaking to develop proficiency in the children. We targeted the age group between six and eight years and brought in a number of fun goals that kept things engaging and interesting. As a part of this intervention, we taught:

- Greeting phrases such as Good Morning, Good Night & Thank You
- Phonetic sounds of the 7 letters S, A, T, I, P, N and D
- Sight words (about 28 of them!)
- Three and four letter words to read and write
- New words containing the 7 letters
- Words that describe Body Parts, Household Objects, Family Members etc.
- Simple sentence structure so that a child can use one to describe themselves

Due to direct interventions, children have been found to respond and engage more. Involving parents has enhanced the parent-child interactions while improving the focus of the children. The three-month intensive has also prepared the children to be more equipped for their return to regular classes at school.

Mohammed Azim's parent (Mohammed Azim studies at TMPS Selaiyur, a school that actively incorporates Fundango in its curriculum) said,

“

I have seen my son pick up words on the basis of sounds. To my delight, he has been trying to read shop banners as well making connections between different sounds and words.

”



*CPS Bazaar Road, Chennai*



*Learning about body parts*



*Children with workbooks*

3

**MONTHS**

25

**SESSIONS WITH STUDENTS**

150

**STUDENTS REACHED**





*“Let the child be the scriptwriter, the director and the actor in his own play.” - Magda Gerber*

### WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

Learn from Home was initiated in September 2020 to be concluded in December 2020. It was a direct consequence of NalandaWay's many innovations to counter the effects of the pandemic. We wanted to explore and measure a self-taught and self-directed pedagogy as part of this programme. To enable this, we offered every child workbooks and art supplies to last the entire three-month period.



### HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT



We realised that the only way this programme would attain success was to involve not just students, but also their parents. We created outcomes that would span multiple stakeholders. We focused on social and emotional learning so that the children could improve upon their connection with their immediate and extended families. Along with that, we also stressed particularly on parent-child engagement. We found means to communicate that we had not used before. For children who had digital access, we used WhatsApp to send activities and to-dos. For the rest, we liberally used SMSs.

**Overall, we distributed 28,386 learning kits.**

When we measured results, we found more than 50% of the children across the targeted age groups (between 6 to 8 and 9 to 11), completed the activities. Similarly, we found a majority of the students showing greater ease in articulating their feelings and thoughts after the three-month period. It was a clear indicator that both their self-awareness and verbal dexterity had improved.

One of the parents we spoke to for feedback, had to say the following:



“

The workbook content is brilliant and I have seen how it keeps my child engaged. The activities also serve as a stress-buster for us.

”

*Material Distribution at PUMS,  
Nolambur, Chennai*



*Material Distribution at PUMS,  
Shahjahan Nagar, Coimbatore*



28,386

CHILDREN REACHED & LEARNING  
KITS DISTRIBUTED

25

ART ACTIVITIES



6000

WHATSAPP MESSAGES RECEIVED

20

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED

**“It shouldn't matter how slowly a child learns as long as we are encouraging them not to stop.” – Robert John Meehan**

### WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

We created this programme as Phase II of “Learn from Home”. The intention was to apply the learnings from the previous phase to build something more engaging. The students targeted through this phase were the ones who exhibited continued interest in the offered materials. To enable high and consistent engagement, a second round of intervention was brought about.



### HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT



Having seen the students already fare well in interpersonal engagement and foundational learning concepts, in this phase we introduced more complexity. The learning material involved working with humanistic traits such as kindness and gratitude with children from 6 to 11 years of age.

We also created greater emphasis on digitally driven engagement with them, which included WhatsApp messages and SMSs. We set in place a number of coordinators who sent the material through SMSs and also made clarifications over the phone. We extended additional support and guidance to the children through phone calls. For those who had lost the workbooks from the last phase, we arranged for new workbooks.

When we evaluated the effects of this programme, we saw that almost 62% of students had found the workbooks easy to understand and use. We also noticed a considerable increase in gratitude and kindness in the children, when we asked them relevant questions. What we could clearly notice was how their perceptions and behavior have changed towards immediate family and teachers.

Here's what one of the parents of a child studying at CMS NS Garden had to say about the programme

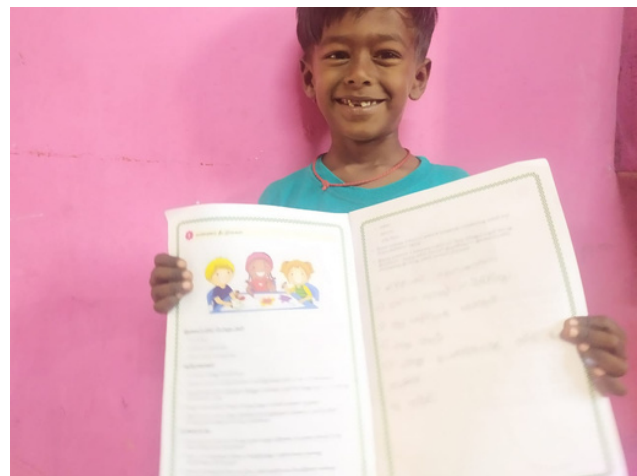
“

The pictures and greeting cards my son had were so nice. “Thank you and Be kind” are some of the messages he has learned . All this makes him feel happy and he is doing it daily, he has started saying thank you and welcome. He is so happy doing the activities.

”



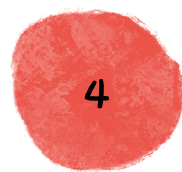
Certificate of Kindness



Child with workbook



Practicing gratitude using 'Thank You' cards



**MONTHS**



**CHILDREN REACHED**



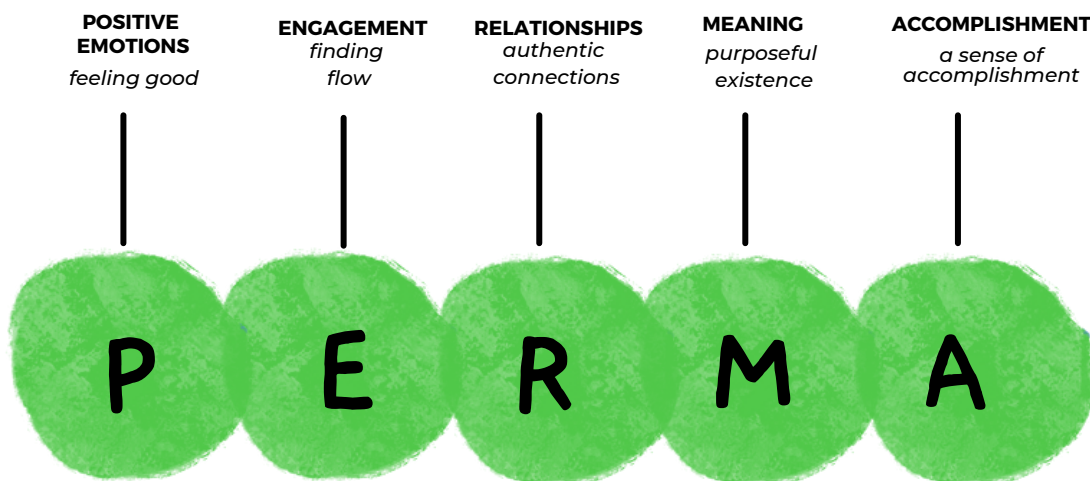
**ART ACTIVITIES**



“I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework.” – Lily Tomlin

## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

While we have been working extensively on the expression and education of children, during the pandemic, it became apparent that teachers had to be addressed as well. This inspired us to create this programme as a short-term intervention. We made the decision final after conducting a survey where teachers clearly stated their need for expression and wellness. We used Martin Seligman’s PERMA model to set the framework, from which we used the first three pillars – Positive Emotions, Engagement and Relationships – for the sessions.



Activity: Gratitude Tree



Activity: Emotion Poster



## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT

Spanning the first three pillars of the PERMA model, we scoped out the programme to create heightened self-awareness among teachers. The idea was to enable them to notice how their personal inner states are responsible for how they engage with their students as well as their professional role.

*For Positive Emotions, the goal was to:*

- Recognize emotions associated with a sense of achievement
- Record happy moments in general

*For Engagement, the goal was to:*

- Immerse themselves in arts-based activities
- Surrender to a “process” as part of the activities

*For Relationships, the goal was to:*

- Practice nurturing healthy relationships with people around



The pandemic and the oncoming elections made it difficult for us to align with the schedules of the school teachers. As a result, we were only able to complete the Positive Emotions phase of the programme. Working with the Positive Emotions pillar, teachers found the right tools to experience and practice mindfulness. Most of them also exhibited new found ways of articulating their stresses and coping mechanisms.

Kavita who teaches Grade 1 at the Little Flower Convent School and went through the programme, said:



The pandemic has been a source of extreme stress for me. This programme has enabled me to identify my own emotions and work out relevant forms of coping.



200 TEACHERS

4 SESSIONS

600 ART  
ACTIVITIES

“It is vital that when educating our children's brains that we do not neglect to educate their hearts.” – Dalai Lama

## WHAT 2020-21 LOOKED LIKE

In 2020, 9,00,000 children were to appear for their 10th standard board exams across the state of Tamil Nadu. Among them, 6,20,000 children hailed from several disadvantaged communities. It is for this population that we created this programme, as it became clear that they were under severe stress because of multiple factors. From families losing jobs to a lack of space at home, these children were encountering challenges that made it significantly more difficult to focus on their studies.

## HOW WE MADE THE YEAR COUNT

Take it Eazy was initiated on May 17 for an entire month, concluding on June 16 2020. We created a number – 9266617888 – on which every student could place a missed call, after which an automated call would be placed back to them. Through this, the story of the day would be played out. Our idea was to nurture the mental and emotional wellbeing needs of the disadvantaged children. Through the stories over a month, the character of 15 year old Pavitra was brought to life. Her experiences, interactions and approach came together to create relatability and resonance among the children.



The programme was able to reach 32,748 active listeners. During the one month duration, we received 1,22,072 calls and 6028 voice notes.

After the programme, our evaluation revealed that the children's overall wellbeing had considerably gone up. They showed greater resilience, improved decision-making and problem-solving abilities, better social skills as well as heightened gratitude. On the flipside, many of them reported that with the exam cancellation, their concerns around their immediate future had increased.

A 15-year old boy from Pudukottai who we spoke to, said:

“

I learnt a lot through the programme, mind relaxation... I also made notes, under each date, I wrote what was told in that episode. They talked about a lot of things... about child abuse, about helping others in the house, locus of control, about self-respect. They also spoke about unity, not to fight with others... I remember this during fights, I feel relaxed.

”

30 DAYS/EPISODES

1,22,072 CALLS RECEIVED FROM STUDENTS

6028 CHILDREN'S VOICE NOTES RECEIVED

32,748 ACTIVE LISTENERS

THANK YOU FOR READING THE  
NALANDAWAY ANNUAL REPORT  
2020-2021

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PROJECTS:



[www.nalandaway.org](http://www.nalandaway.org)

