



Culture, curiosity and the coconut tree: celebrating independence through the world around us

This issue's Cambridge Early Years Spotlight turns to Footsteps Preschool in Sri Lanka, the first Cambridge accredited early years centre in the country, a setting where learning is closely connected to culture, community, and children's everyday experiences. Here, the team brought **Understanding the World** to life through a meaningful Independence Day celebration, centred around one of the country's most recognisable natural resources: the coconut tree.

A national celebration rooted in everyday life

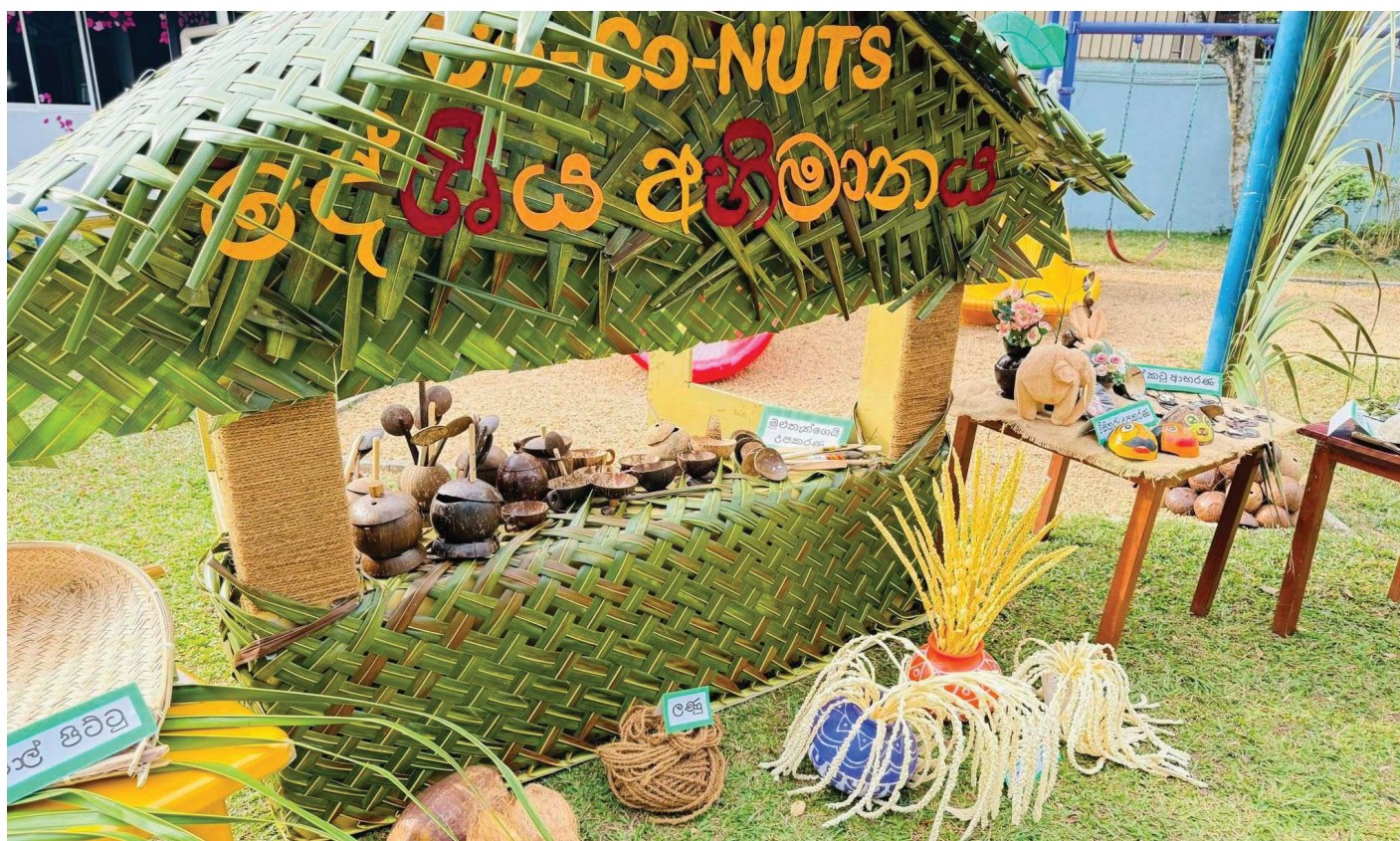
To mark the occasion, the learning focused on one central idea: exploring the importance of the coconut tree in Sri Lankan life, culture and community. Rather than approaching this as a topic to explain, the experience was designed as a day of

discovery, where every activity gave children a direct way into understanding something that is already part of their everyday world.

Throughout the day, children engaged in a range of hands-on activities that brought learning to life:

Sensory exploration: Children squeezed fresh coconut to extract the milk, exploring its texture and rich, familiar scent. Hands-on sensory experiences like this help young children connect with materials in a way that goes far beyond looking or listening.

Creative expression: Coconut shells became canvases for artwork. Children created their own pieces, discovering that natural materials can be transformed, and that creativity and sustainability can go hand in hand.



Culture, curiosity and the coconut tree: celebrating independence through the world around us continued

“From its roots to its leaves, every part of this incredible tree plays a role in our daily lives, culture, and heritage. And what better way to honour our nation’s independence than by teaching our children the value of our own resources.”

— Mrs. Fazra Irfan, Footsteps Preschool, Colombo

Culinary magic: The freshly extracted coconut milk was used to prepare food and make traditional coconut sweets. Cooking together brings culture to life in the most immediate way: through taste, smell and shared experience.

Learning exhibition: A display of products made from the coconut tree gave children a chance to see in real, tangible objects just how versatile this one plant is, and how central it is to Sri Lanka’s economy and daily life.

Traditional craft: Children decorated coconut leaves using traditional techniques, connecting with artisanal practices that carry cultural memory across generations.

Learning that starts close to home

This experience is a reminder that powerful early years learning does not require complex setups. By focusing on local context and everyday materials, children can explore big ideas such as identity, community, and the world around them in ways that feel natural and engaging.

At Footsteps Preschool, a single tree became the starting point for curiosity, creativity, and connection, showing how meaningful learning often begins with what children already know and recognise.

Want to share your own story? Submit your School Spotlight via the link in this newsletter — you could be featured in our next issue!