Site visit report to Kottur on 12th April, 2015 - Done by Jaya Suresh

Primary school

I visited the primary school in Kottur along with Saraswati . We met the HM of primary school first and mentioned to her that the purpose of our visit was to gather information about gypsy children in school and colony. The Mayor of Chennai had visited the Manigal project in Thiruvanmiyur and had suggested that a similar project of educating gypsy children be taken up in Kottur which has a large colony of gypsy families. Hence we wanted to explore the possibilities of starting a new project for gypsy children

We collected details about the school and gypsy children. The primary school in Kottur has about 270 children. The school has a HM plus five teachers. Teach for India has posted 4 teachers in school ,

There were 26 gypsy children on rolls. However on the day of the visit only three gypsy children were present. The teachers mentioned that many gypsy children come for one or one and half months in June and July and then drop out. We went to each class and noted down the names of gypsy children from the attendance registers. Also noted down the names of those who were regular and those who were absenting for long. In classes 3, 4 and 5, the gypsy children are treated as drop out children and taught separately under SSA program.

LKG

. . The school had 3 LKG teachers. An NGO has posted additional teachers and has donated a good collection of wooden toys and play material .Despite the good facilities only two gypsy children were availing the LKG services. The gypsy colony has about15- 20 preschool age children, we were told.

Middle and High school

The HM of this school said that 13 gypsy children were on their rolls, but they were not showing up regularly. She mentioned that she would welcome any initiative from us that will bring them to school regularly and give learning support. The school has been recently upgraded into a high school. However additional buildings have not been constructed. Hence there is shortage of space in school. Plans to have computer lab, science lab, math lab are pending as construction has not yet begun.

Visit to Colony.

Went to the gypsy colony. Many thought that Saraswati has come for next dosage of injections as she had earlier visited the colony in connection with Hepatitis B immunization drive. Told them that we are verifying information about school going children. We went to Uma, the Manigal teacher's house nearby. We showed the list we had collected from school. She knew the gypsy children and parents by name and she guided us to the houses. When enquired most children said they will go to school after they come back from Mylapore Thiruvizha. A few said that they won't go.

Many of the families have already started preparations to move to the Mylapore festival. Some were washing and drying the beads .Some were stringing chains in groups. One parent enquired about hostel admission. Some parents wanted help in LKG admissions. Decided to come another day and make a detailed survey of children in colony.