

PUVIDHAM

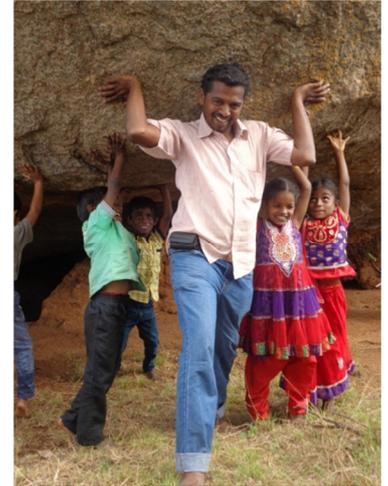
Creating self-reliance and an understanding of options in young minds

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

Puvidham , Nagarkoodal village, Dharmapuri, 636803. Tamilnadu, INDIA.

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INTRODUCTION: Our endeavor for the last 15 years has been to understand how we can retain the innocence, ingenuity, sensitivity, truthfulness, honesty and essence of childhood in the children at school. At the same time we have had to deal with the fact that all these children are from emotionally disturbed and economically stressed families. This has meant that we have had to work with the children to make them responsible and independent while retaining all the other qualities of childhood including the natural learning instinct of the child! And we learnt how to do this from the children themselves! By observing their interactions, focused attention and natural happiness.....



This year the preschool children were looked after by Pacchiamma for the first three months. When she got married and left us, Amudhamozhi took over. She had come to admit her daughter in 1st. After listening to her problems we felt she should not be separated from her child and so offered her a place in the organization. She is now a fulltime warden at the hostel also. The little ones are flourishing under her loving care and thoughtful conflict management skills.

The 1st and 2nd which was Senbagham's class was taken over by Gunavati who joined us in August after Senbagam passed the TET exam and got a job in a government school. Rameshwari has been with the 3rd and 4th, while Madhavaraj performed wonders with his class of 5th and 6th doing a lot of soil and water conservation work and tree planting. Meenakshi and Kuppusamy were with the 7th and 8th trying to expand the school to the village! Jothi had undergone a carpentry training organized by Mr. Ravi Kumar from the wood institute at Bangalore and did wood work with the older children. The total number of students was maintained at around 98. Palaniamma and Tavamani cooked in the hostel and tended the vegetable garden while Ramesh was the boy's warden and did the watering and maintenance work at the farm and hostel.. We bought a second hand tempo traveller which is a 20 seater. Now two vans pick up the children from a radius of about 8 kms Jothi and Kuppusamy were responsible for the vehicles and drove the children to and from school every day!



CHANGES: Last year after we decided to engage in working with the village we have found the people responsive. The village extension work has resulted in three women's groups who are engaged in soap making, millet farming and sheep rearing. The continuous plastic picking has resulted in more awareness and now we have begun to give children INR 5/- per kg of plastic bags or bottles they collect and bring to us. This has further provided incentive to house wives to collect their plastic waste rather than throw it on the street. We have created a huge nursery of herbs and local species of trees and shall plant it in our new land and also provide plants to the children for their birthdays and festivals!

Year 2014-2015 some glimpses:



Annual day performance 1st and 2nd



A new style with traditional kolaataam



Honoured by the theosophical society at Dharmapuri



Using stones to mulch and prevent soil erosion



Trenching to allow percolation of water



Silent walks in the forest created over the last 22 years at puvudham



Abundance of vegetables and grains! The new land that we bought for the hostel has been very kind!



Celebrating abundance at the old hostel at pongal time - cooking in new pots and thanking nature!



Experimenting with earth housing and trying out different stabilizing agents for adobe blocks – a project for the 7th and 8th

VISITORS: The number of people visiting puvudham and sharing their



lives with the children has indeed made a major impact on their world view and confidence! Whenever anyone arrives the children are eager to know about their lives and boldly ask them questions which come to



their mind. This is very welcome for the visitors as they are happy to have an audience so delighted to hear about their experiences.

- Ranjit kumar, a trainee doing development studies from Azim Premji University came in April and helped the children to continue the survey of the previous year asking the people to come together in groups and start some economic activity.
- Mr. Suresh Kumar of Vanamitra came in July and started the environment interaction through observation only. He taught the children of 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th the difference between seeing and observing. He guided the children to relate with nature and experience her pain and apologize to her for the insensitiveness of the adults. We all hope that they would endeavor to protect and work with nature.
- In October we had 42 persons from a group called Aindhinai who came down to help plant tree saplings and spent time understanding the methodology of the school.
- Kalyani Dinesh came from kadiri to teach the women's group how to make millet products for local markets.
- Selvaraj came from sithilingi to teach the women's group to make soap.
- Meenakshi attended a workshop to explore the role of art and free will in learning at SADHANA



School near Pune. Later Jinan, Reva and Ranjana came to Puvudham and along with Meenakshi and Madhavaraj visited AKSHARAVIDYASHRAM another school wishing to incorporate organic farming and traditional crafts and arts alongside evolving a sustainable community on their campus at Cudallore.

- Vellore Gopalarathnam from IIT Chennai, who has been supporting the village extension program, visited us in April. The 7th and 8th children learnt how to make presentations and under his guidance created a power point presentation about puvudham. Through the presentation they have expressed their concern about the environment and the consumer mindset.



Experiments on the farm, checking growth rate, germination rate and insect numbers!

On the whole we have become more and more convinced that our children are learning more because they are happy and are able to exercise their free will with responsibility and care for the other.



This was evident in the surprise that many of the visitors expressed at the reading ability of 1st and 2nd class and the understanding of interdependence of all life forms and the social and environmental responsibility that the older children exhibit.

EXCHANGE OF STUDENTS AND TEACHER TRAININGS:

- In late april Meenakshi travelled to Vijaywada on the request of Mr.Parimiji of Living Vikasa Vidyavanam to share with their teachers our methodology of allowing the children to lead the class. She shared with the teachers a discussion about the early learning experiences of any child and implored them to allow the same individual learning pace and system that the child follows in its early childhood and infancy.
- In August all the puvudham teachers went to ATREE's project at MM hills to learn more about regeneration of land and forests. Harisha was very kind and shared a lot of knowledge about edible plants. He subsequently made a visit to puvudham to help us identify wild edible plants and enhance our food security and grow food easier with the local biodiversity.
- 40 children and five teachers from Timbucktu arrived in October for a student exchange and stayed for three days. They learnt to use the composting toilet and shared our simple millet meals. We took them to Billigundu forest and Hogennekal. We also had discussions on their perceptions about our activities and methods.
- Our children went to Imlee Mahua school in Kondagaon in Chattisgarh. They spent 10 days with Prayagji and the students living their simple lives and understanding the interdependence of life in the forest. They came back and enacted a play for our annual day about the beauty, simplicity and fulfillment of life with our electricity and consumerism.
- They also visited Living Vikasa Vidyavanam at Vijaywada and spent 10 days there on the farm school reinforcing our viewpoint of sustainable community living being the only solution to the world economic crisis. Puvudham kids taught them the folk dances that they are so good at.
- In November 15 children of the 5th and the 6th class went for an art workshop at Marudam Farm School at Tiruvannamalai for one week. They learnt different crafts using the bounty of nature and enjoyed sharing experiences with the children there.
- In early January Anu came with their teachers from TULIR at Sittilingi to learn about our way of dealing with the business of learning. The major focus was on the role of fearlessness and straightforwardness of the teacher in helping the children to have an enquiring mind and experimental attitude.
- 10 students and two teachers from Living Vikasa Vidyavanam came to puvudham in February and spent around 10 days sharing our simple millet meals and visiting Durgam fort and Billigundu forest before dawn to watch the day creep into the darkness of the forest waking up all the birds and plants.
- In March the 7th and 8th children went to Paathashala at Kanchipuram for their festival called Katral Kondaatam. They developed an exercising cycle which produced electricity to run a fan and a light as it was being used. They also put up their exhibition- Man made God OR God made Man, sharing the perspective that following a frugal life was the essence of our belief that nature is the creator and we have to respect every living and nonliving object around.
- 70 government school art teachers came for a one day exposure to understanding the role of art as a medium of understanding concepts for the children and as an evaluation tool for the teacher to understand the learning difficulties of the children. Drawing is the medium of expression of observations about the world as seen



by the children and there is no good drawing and bad drawing. Every child can draw what they see and correct their perceptions themselves over a period of time exhibiting change in understanding and maturity of the mind. Art should not be taught ! Only rendering techniques should be practiced with the children by the art teacher and we would be surprised at how the children glow and grow as a result of our appreciation of their searching attempts! We shared with them the drawings of our children and they were surprised at the variety of perceptions and the strength of the strokes.



With all these visitors and exchanges we shared our curriculum material hoping that it may help them to see the emphasis of learning of dispositions and positive attitudes at Puvudham as against the learning of concepts and facts in other schools. We believe that we have managed to find the solution to all learning difficulties by trusting the child to do

his or her best while the teachers attempt to be honest, sincere and caring towards the environment and the community!



EXCURSIONS AND EVENTS: This year the children of the 7th and 8th went to many places and had the most memorable experiences of their lives! The exchange programs were a phenomenal success. The 5th and 6th went to COOP Forest and trekked to Nagavati Dam. They had a good swim in the Dam and spent the remaining time cleaning it of plastics and glass bottles.



The children of 3rd and 4th went to Krishnagiri to Mr. Babu's farm and to the nearby fort. They spent time understanding how some of the farmers use gravity for irrigation with water from the fort ponds. They stopped at the Krishnagiri Lake and enjoyed swinging and watching the water birds. Mr. Babu is

a horse trainer and the children were very excited about riding. Next year when they are older they want to go riding!



The 1st and 2nd class children went to Durgam fort in March. They all woke up at 3.00 am got dressed on their own and climbed the fort to the highest rock! They were so excited to see the size of familiar objects become smaller and smaller as they went up. This was reflected in their drawings after they came back.

Mr. Suresh, the manager of South Indian Bank, organized a fire fighting demonstration for the Puvudham school children. We decided to share it with the nearby government school. The fire brigade came with their fire engine and all the children were delighted and educated about the first aid and prevention of fire.





After returning from Imlee Mahua, the children of 7th and 8th were very keen on going for a cycling trip. Since the region is hilly and the mud tracks thorny we were hesitant. Finally in March Mr. Manickam, a guest who is an ardent cyclist took them for a 15 km cycling over the hills. They had a great experience including punctures and pushing the cycles uphill.

As a part of our decision to create a food forest with the guidance of Harisha we surveyed and located all the trees on the 6 acres of land. We have to still put the drawing on the computer and count the total number of species and number of each species. All the children from the 5th to 8th participated in measuring and triangulation for the survey. The 7th and 8th kids plotted the drawings on chart paper. They learnt a lot of things about the properties of triangles and how to draw triangles.



The 7th and 8th children were invited by the Vividha Bharathi to perform a radio program for half an hour. They sang songs and performed skits expressing their concern for the health of the people and the environment in 2030. It was a wonderful experience and their parents are proud of the event whenever it is broadcast.

Meenakshi was given the life time service award by the Lion's Club of Dharmapuri. She was invited to speak in the Government arts college for the women's day celebration and was honoured. She was also invited for few NSS camps to talk about her concern about the environment and to share her ideas as to how individuals could make small changes in their lives to reduce their carbon footprint! She also attended several network meets including the alternative education network at Hyderabad, Art in education seminar at Pune and Vikalpsangam meet at Madurai. Madhavraj and Rameshwari attended the Nai Taleem meet at Gandhi Ashram Dindigal to help prepare material for including productive work in schools.



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS

- ASHA for Education London has supported the puvudham children for the last 14 years. We greatly appreciate Sharadha Sunder our steward for her concern and kindness in talking to us regularly to learn about our problems and successes. We also welcome our new steward vidya with love and happiness.
- ASHA for Education Silicon Valley has been supporting the puvudham children since 2007 and our steward Keerthi has been most encouraging in the help they have extended.
- U.K Puvudham Support Group in London led by Mr.Harminder Singh as President and Ranjan Chaudhuri as Treasurer have been supporting the supply of Millets through Earth 360 at Kadiri run by Dinesh and Kalyani.
- Our local Support Group led by Mr.A.K. Manickam called UDAVUM ULLANGAL has been kind in finding funds for supply of Ragi to the hostel regularly. Our mentor Mr.A.K.Manickam needs special mention as he has brought us contact with a wealth of kind hearted people who have donated towards the books and other stationaries for the children.
- Our family including Sridhar and Usha, Murli and Raji, Anand and Moe, Arvind and Ashwin who are in the U.S have been very kind and made large donations to the Corpus funds of the trust. Sriram and Radha, Jayashree and her family who live in Canada have also been very supportive by doing a lot of extension work on behalf of the children of Puvudham and have

been regular contributors to our Corpus. Ravi and Chitra from Bangalore have been providing Ragi and funds for purchasing green gram for the sprouted snacks. Ravi also organized a work shop for Jothi our craft teacher for wood work at the wood institute of india in BANGALORE. He is helping us procure a small lathe machine so that our puzzle making unit will be able to produce better quality products.

- Suja Thambiraj from london, Dr.Anita and Dr. Balaji from Dharmapuri, Mr.Arvind Srivaths from Chennai, Morgana and Astrid from Germany have been our regular donors for the Foster Care Project-Little Drops to fund the food board and education of children who are in very difficult economic situations. Tim and Meher Dickinson from Canada have been donating to our corpus. We are very thankful for their support.
- Mr Vellore Gopalaratnam is continuing to support our village extension work. These funds will be used to support the women’s group to slowly develop income generating activities of their convenience.
- Priyanka Nair, a student in US had raised funds to buy a weather station for Puvudham. It was delivered by Umesh’s mother and awaits mounting and regularizing as yet because of the various problems with the hostel.

UPDATE ON THE HOSTEL CONSTRUCTION:

We still need to finish our hostel building. We have finished the concreting of the ground floor and the kitchen is almost ready.



We just need to finish the Loreno stove(mud fireplace) for cooking! The children will be staying at the school campus itself and we shall be able to shift in by July. The built area is around 1350 sqft. The room for the girls will be another 600 sqft. We decided to not construct a dining space but instead



create open to sky platforms around the building for using as dining area which we shall cover with a trellis of wood and creepers. So the area of the construction has reduced to 1950. The finishing work and the work on the first floor for the girl’s dormitory can be done only if we find funds for the same.

PLANS AND NEEDS FOR THE COMING YEAR:



Schools like ours are becoming more and more isolated with the commercialization of education. While at the same time much curiosity has been generated and there are more and more people wanting to move away from the beaten path. We are working with different groups to network and share our experiences so that more youngsters are inspired to think differently! We are also looking forward to start our herb garden and environment education and health resort in the old hostel land! where

we hope to teach the visitors simple skills like spinning, weaving, clay work, painting, organic farming and cooking different recipes with millets.

Puvudham is a registered trust and can accept donations from India and abroad, and issue a tax receipt accordingly.

Please e-mail puvudham@gmail.com Please make donations in the name of

Puvudham Rural Development Trust. Thank you.

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