

PUVIDHAM

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

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

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

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INTRODUCTION: Puvidham Learning Centre is now 14 years old and the methodology and curriculum that has evolved is completely stress-free for both the children and the teachers. All our teachers are local youth who have struggled to finish their studies due to financial limitations. These individuals have now learnt English and are learning their concepts all over again with the children. Our bilingual content and emphasis on discussions and writing, in the local language till the 3rd level and in English thereafter, enhance the



understanding of the children. There are no exams and the evaluation is a personal interaction analysis by the teacher. We do not have any subject teachers. One teacher is supposed to take the class through all the modules, activities and experiments, guide all the discussions and encourage art work too! This builds a close relationship between the teacher and the student and the learning is a response to verbal enquiry. The children are encouraged to share their observations and thoughts. The children are free to ask questions and construct knowledge at their own pace.



CHANGES: As we were moving through the modules, namely Sun, Water and Earth, we began to feel that the scope of the school was to reach out to the village and to make change happen actively instead of hoping for it sitting in our campus. The values we were trying to inculcate in our children must reflect in our work with our village. *The*



surrounding society is a reflection of the school. So in the second semester we started to do extension work in the village. The 7th and 8th children



conducted a survey about the reasons why millet farming needs to be the way to go ahead. We are cleaning the village of plastics and collecting and segregating plastic for reuse. We provided 2 to 3 seedlings for all the children to plant near their houses. Many herb plants like aloe, adathoda and bishop's weed were given to the children to plant around their homes and thus encourage them to use these as first medicines in cases of common cold, fever and indigestion.

FOCUS ON LEARNING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT The main aim of starting a school in which the curriculum is based on the five elements that make up the universe, organic farming and environment awareness was to give the children a pride in their village. In the village life is of better quality. Whatever the market forces, farmers have freedom and control over their own life because they can grow food. To emphasize this difference, we decided to do a survey of farmers many of whom have been travelling to Bangalore for work. The survey also focused on the change in cropping pattern and health of the soil and humans. The children of class 7 and 8 did the survey under the guidance of Meenakshi along with Tamarai selvum, an intern from Azim Premji University doing his MA Education. From the survey it was evident that one of the reasons farming is losing its charm is that the rain pattern and quantity has changed. The children suggested that perhaps it was good to go back to older dry land farming practices and growing crops like millets. The impact of use of fertilizers and pesticides on the soil and their



own health is a matter of concern too and organic farming now makes sense! We are now conducting a survey focusing on the water problem and suggesting water conservation measures and tree planting on the hill slopes. We had the 5th and 6th standard children marking contours using an 'A frame' to make stone bunds to trap soil and limit soil erosion. These skills we hope will help the children to address the problems in their own farm lands.

YEAR 2013-2014: The 12th results and 10th results have been declared and all our students have cleared the exams. Some of them have good very good marks. Valli was the highest in the 10th as she scored 451/500, while the lowest was 321. The 12th level highest this year was 794/1200 while the lowest was 628.

Other school activities



Plastering the stage with soil cement, giving a lime wash and decorating it

Voting for their leaders- Secret Ballot



Making masks for the cultural

Honouring our mentor Mr. Manickam

All made up for the culturals



A drama about animals

Teaching stick dance to the Natraj Gurukul

Making greeting cards with dried flowers



A new hand pump at the hostel –Mr Suresh

Painting with natural colours made by the children themselves

Living art done by 5 year olds



hot water boiler stove designed and constructed by 7th class in the hostel.



Art using leaves and pencil shavings



Making pictures with dried flowers

EXCURSIONS Since the focus is on giving children experiences that will last a life time and define their attitudes towards the environment, society and individuals and increase their concern and care for all, travelling is on high priority list. We like to take our children to other schools where the values that we emphasize are shared and practiced. When the children hear about the same concerns from many sources they tend to believe that they need to focus on these and be change agents.

1. In the first semester we were short of funds and therefore thought we would not take the children on long outings. So the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th went for walks in the forest nearby and to see the check dams and other water holding structures in the area. They took notes and wondered what would happen if we could hold all the water and not allow any to go to the dam! Is it possible to recharge wells locally using farm percolation tanks?



2. In early October the children from 5th to 8th were invited to Chennai by **Selvaraj Ayya** of **The Siddha Consciousness Research Foundation** to put up their exhibition called "Man Made God Or God Made Man". The exhibition aims at rethinking the concept of God.

3. Early in December we went to **Vidyavanam** School in Annaikati near Coimbatore with the 7th 8th classes. **Premaji** and her school are mesmerizing! The children had a great time working to make their school day a success. We also visited the Bio Diversity Centre.

4. In February the children of the 3rd, 4th and 5th went to **Aalampannai** Shankar and Rams place in the **Kalyaran hills**. They stayed there for 3 days in tents. Rajeev and his wife who have a farm where they look after horses are very keen on bird watching. They joined them there and took them to the beautiful hill close to Aalampannai where there is an old forest and lot of Bamboo. The experience was awesome and the children came back with a resolve to plant trees and create forests.



5. The children of the 1st and 2nd level were invited **Mr Shankar** of **Mallupatti**, around 60kms from Puvudham. They visited the farm and climbed the Durgam fort nearby. Mr Shankar and his family gave them a wonderful feast and shared their experiences.



6. From the 15th of March to the 10 of April the children of class 6,7 and 8 travelled to Darjeeling Nataraj Gurukulam. They trekked on the Himalayas and saw the glorious Rhododendrons. They were hosted by two tea estates and looked after well by Guruji who in his 65th year trekked 45 kms in three days with the children.



Visitors and Interns

1. Many visitors visited the school and hostel and helped out with the food expenses. The low cost earth constructions at puvudham are interesting for a lot of visitors.

2. Two visitors from Auroville, **James and Yumi** who also practice Auto Urine Therapy heard about our school and spent one week sharing their own experience with the children. We have been practicing AUT for the past 22 years. Our school and hostel children use AUT in combination with other herbal medicines to heal themselves. He also taught the children juggling and balancing odd objects on the chin.



3. A group of artists from Chennai, came to puvudham at the behest of **Suresh**



Kumar, the manager of The South Indian Bank Dharmapuri and **Geetha**, his better half. The Yadhumaagi art workshop from December 11th to 13th was a great success with around 100 children from 4 villages attending the workshop. Puvudham provided them with millets for lunch and ragi biscuits and multigrain kanji for tea breaks. The children made masks using newspaper and decorated the stage with coloured paper cutting tessellations. They also performed dances and plays in a

short cultural program.

4. From January 24th to 26th Puvudham hosted the CONSERVATION EDUCATION network retreat. Round 15 eminent persons from different areas of environmental work attended the workshop. The puvudham team provided them with traditional millet preparations. The network members have promised to help puvudham in the extension work for tree planting in our region. We all went to Hogenekkal sanctuary on the second day and walked in the forest of huge Arjuna Terminalia trees and swam in the river.



5. Mr Vinod from ISHA Vidya visited the school in March after which Meenakshi visited their school which is around 18 kms from Puvudham. As a follow up the principal and teachers of Isha vidya school Samysettipatti visited the school. They expressed a desire to have some of the learning material we have made. We have promised them the material and started the production as soon as possible.
6. Tamaraiselvum from Azim Premji University spent 3 weeks helping with the survey in the villages to help the villagers to decide to do organic farming.
7. Lyla Calsina from Australia spent around a month with the school children teaching them English and math. She also went with them to help collect plastics in the village. She also helped them practice for a cultural performance in Dharmapuri.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS, MEETINGS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

1. In November Meenakshi attended a 5 day workshop on **Life Based Open Learning Resource Generation** Organized by the Nai Talim Samiti in collaboration with Seva gram Wardha and Azim Premji University in Ahemdabad. It was an exercise in looking back at Mahatma Gandhiji's idea of education while working and creating products that are useable including work like farming, construction, carpentry, tree planting and conservation, water harvesting and waste management etc.
2. Meenakshi was invited to give a talk on the changes that need to be incorporated in to Bangalore in the **Citizen Art Day** organized by the students of **Srushti Design Centre** at Bangalore. She was able to share the work that is being done at puvudham towards freeing education from the shackles of memory and liberating the children through meaningful work, free thought and purposeful action towards maintaining their surroundings and their relationship with nature!
3. Two groups **Talirgal** and **Aindinai** together organized an **Alternative Lifestyle Meet** in Dharmapuri on the 22nd of February. Alternative education was one of the focuses. Meenakshi was asked to speak on the banes of the contemporary education system.
4. Meenakshi also attended the **Economics of Happiness** meet in **Bangalore**. The discussions hovered over the local and global economics. All agreed that we have to go back to local economics for sustainable development.
5. Our school Proposal was renewed for another three year period.
6. Our 80G and FCRA reports have been regular and the departments seem satisfied with them.
7. Two of our long time teachers Rameshwari and Senbagham have been **included as our trustees** last year. As requested, Mr Rajgopal has been relieved of his trusteeship due to ill health and Ms Lalitha Sankaran from Chennai has taken his place.



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS

- ASHA for Education London has supported the puvudham children for the last 13 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.
- 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. His son in law is a magician and performed during our annual day tricks which left our mouths open with awe!
- 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.
- Mr.Ashwin from Delhi, Suja Thambiraj from london, Dr.Anita and Dr. Balaji from Dharmapuri, Mr.Arvind Srivaths from Chennai, who have been our long time donors for the Foster Care Project-Little Drops to fund the food board and education of children who are in very difficult economic situations.
- Mr Vellore Gopalaratnam has formed a Puvudham support group and is intending to support our village extension work. They have already provided the first installment of funds. These funds will be used to build a proper wood workshop to create learning material for children
- Priyanka Nair, a student in US has raised funds to buy a weather station for Puvudham. She will be consulting with Anand Chandrasekhar to transport it to India by September 2014.
- Tim and Meher Dickinson from Canada have been donating to our corpus. We are very thankful for their support.

PLANS AND NEEDS FOR THE COMING YEAR

- In the coming year we plan to extend the learning from Puvudham to other students. We plan to set up a Bio Region Resource Centre to educate children about the local environmental conditions. We need to build a structure where we can put up maps, and models of various water harvesting structures. Models of soil erosion and methods of prevention of soil erosion etc.
- We plan to start a nursery of local herbs, indigenous tree species to plant in the farms of local farmers.
- We plan to set up a weather station to keep record of the temperature, rainfall, pressure and other climatic variations.
- We already have a lot of experience in low cost environment friendly architecture. We plan to extend the technology to the local youth who are aspiring to be masons.
- We need to buy low tech equipment for wood work and build a work shed and a store. Jothi (our craft teacher and driver) has been going to a local carpenter to learn carpentry. We need one more person to help with the painting and finishing.
- We need to purchase a bigger vehicle to transport children to school. We are looking for a second hand vehicle and hope to find a good vehicle for a reasonable price.

The path ahead is misty but intriguing. We have always been cautious of development activities. We feel that real development is that which is sustainable. The meaning of Sustainable development is not that we go on having more things weather or not we need them. Sustainable development is when the people make a conscious choice to be free of the consumerism madness that is spreading like a plague and depleting the



earth's resources at an alarming rate.

With this view of development our task is to make young people aware of the effects of their choices. In the rural area where migration is rampant, we try to bring them to compare the life in the city with the life in the village on quality of life and not on quantity of money alone. Like the bee that gathers nectar from many flowers pollinating flowers incidentally, we plan to gather people and take the people of our area to other areas where sustainability is being practiced to spread the idea of contentment in life with minimum comfort rather than competing for extravagance.

Puvudham is a registered trust and can accept donations from India and abroad, and issue a tax receipt accordingly. For enquiries regarding donations, please e-mail puvudham@gmail.com or call **09600491176, 9585759184**. Please make donations in the name of Puvudham Rural Development Trust. Thank you.

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