

This site visit is conducted in April 2008 by Dhurka Natchiyar Chinnaiyan, an Asha Chennai volunteer.

Vidyarambam Trust - Nagapattinam district

Vidyarambam operates in many villages in Nagapattinam district. Depending on different age group children available in a village, any or all of the below centers are run in a village.

- Pre-primary center - Children of age group 3 to 5
- Remedial course – Junior (Class 2 and 3)
- Remedial course – Senior (Class 4th to 6th)
- Library
- Village Development committee

Two of the district coordinators, Miss Kavitha and Mr.Ravichandran helped me visit 5 villages spread around Mayilladurai area.

1. T.Mellakadai

T.Mellakadai is around 20 kms from Mayilladurai. The pre-primary center here is run in a corporation school. The headmaster of the school has given a class room for running the center.

The tutor here has done teacher training course and is quite active and expressive. The 19 kids could introduce themselves and their family members in English. The activities for the children vary from physical exercise to a variety of simple, easy to use education materials including,

- ⇒ Identifying alphabets, both English and Tamil.
- ⇒ Matching cards with flowers, animals, vehicles etc., with a small description about them.
- ⇒ Filling different shapes with tamarind seeds.
- ⇒ Number cards and counting beads.
- ⇒ Matching sounds heard from different boxes.

2. Karaikondam

Karaikondam is much smaller than the other villages and the pre-primary center is run in the tutor's house. The tutor here has studied 12th standard. Children were able to write their names in Tamil and English, narrate stories and sing rhymes.

A library is also maintained by the tutor in her house. The library has roughly about 120 books in English and Tamil. School going children, who could read are issued books based on their interest and are also checked if they have actually read the book

by asking them to comprehend the story while returning the books. Parents who could read are asked to read the books for kids who could not read yet.

They maintain an interesting system for tracking the books and for increasing the interest among the children. They are issued library cards in different colors based on number of books they have read: Blue card for 1-10 books, Orange card for 10-20 books and Red card for above 20. This seems to create competition among the children as to who gets to the next color card faster.

3. Peravur

The Remedial Course – senior center here had students from 4th to 6th class who are identified as poor performers by the school and by the Vidyarambam evaluation procedure.

I have to say there is a significant improvement in the children's reading abilities and math skills. A 3rd standard child, who couldn't in fact identify Tamil alphabets in October, 2007 (when the course was started) could read passages with a pause now. Children who couldn't handle multiplication and division when they joined could do multiplication and division of up to 4 digits. One could sense a feel of confidence in the children by the number of students volunteering to answer the questions.

The tutor here has done teacher training and the center is run in one of the class rooms of the local school.

4. Kokkur

The Remedial center here is run in the tutor's house. Each student is given special attention to improve on areas they lack in easy to learn methods. They maintain a syllabus for Maths and Tamil. Training materials involve story cards, number charts, Multiplication charts etc, some of the materials are in collaboration with "Read India" program.

5. Nallaavur

The pre-primary school and the remedial course (senior and junior) are conducted in respective tutor's house. One tutor have studied 12th and other two have done degree courses.

I was surprised to see a 5th standard child narrate all states and capitals. I was told that she could also locate the states in the map. I did not interact with many students since it got quite late.

The Village Development Committee meets once in a month at an elderly person's house. He is the committee head and helps resolve problems when some parents in the village refuse to send the children to school, if any.

Parents were very happy to see their children improving in studies. They claimed that their children are performing better after attending the remedial courses.

Every center maintains attendance registers and all of them had 90- 95% attendance. All of the centers functions after 4PM (after the school closes) for at least 3 hours. Registers for Library movement and tracking student performance are also maintained.

I met 7 tutors, 1 Assistant coordinator and 2 district coordinators. The entire team works with great passion and there is a real sense of responsibility. The coordinators grow up from being tutors and assessors and some of them travel by bicycle around different villages for inspection. All are energized and enthusiastic about their work.

Many centers are closed for the current year and the next sets of centers are beginning from July and Vidyarambam is planning to expand its presence to many more villages in the coming year.

Overall, the visit has been very interesting and all the children I came about sounded enthusiastic and motivated. Parents were happy to see their children improve in studies and like to see their children shine in their career in various fields and not just confined to agriculture.