

# **Payir Site Visit - June 17<sup>th</sup> 2012**

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**June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012**

## **Getting to Thenur, Tamilnadu & Payir**

Similar to our visit last year, myself and Sanketh met with Dr. Sitharam, her husband Dr. Jorg & her two wonderful daughters, Anusha & Kavina, at her parents' house in Srirangam, Tamilnadu. After a wonderful breakfast at their house, we headed to Thenur, Tamilnadu, where Payir is housed, at around 8:00 am in Dr. Sitharam's SUV. The hospitality extended by Dr. Sitharam's parents was most welcoming and made us all feel at home. Along with Mr. Kumar, the Asha UFlorida members arrived at Payir around 9:15 am. We were welcomed at Payir gate by Mr. Senthil and Dr. Palani Ramu, an Assistant Professor at IIT Madras and a former Asha UFlorida resident.

## **Recent 10<sup>th</sup> standard results – Intervention program activity**

As first order of business, a short meeting was arranged at Senthil's house. The meeting primarily focused on the recent 10<sup>th</sup> standard results of the high schools catered to by Payir's government school intervention program. The concern that 10 students out of 44 failing to pass their 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam was discussed at length. Social science and mathematics were identified to be the two subjects in which the students failed the most. It was conveyed to Asha UFlorida folks that Mr. Pachiamathu was focusing on training the failed 10<sup>th</sup> standard students to fare well in the upcoming re-exam on June 22, 2012. The training staff led by Mr. Pachiamathu, expressed faith that at least 9 out of 10 students would pass their 10<sup>th</sup> standard re-exams. Some of the reasons identified for a poor performance were as follows:

1. The headmaster (HM) for Thottiapatti school didn't care much for students or the school results. Additionally, the HM didn't cooperate with the intervention staff of Payir.
2. During the past year, the state introduced a common syllabus across boards, which focused on conceptual learning. This change in the approach towards learning was not very well adopted by the students of the government school.
3. The teachers also indicated that a basic understanding of the concepts leading towards the preparation for 10<sup>th</sup> standard was missing.

The short meeting was concluded for a tiffin break. The group proceeded to discuss the recent evaluation meeting held to assess the overall education program at Payir for the past 2 years or so.

### **Discussion of meeting held to assess the education program of Payir**

The group proceeded towards the learning center to discuss the assessment outcomes of an evaluation meeting held recently. The evaluation activity was primarily overseen by Mr. Karthik, who had interned with Payir in the past as a student of Bishop Heber College (Trichy, Tamilnadu). The evaluation meeting primarily identified the significant activities conducted as part of Payir education program. Since the meeting was held only a day after the recent 10th standard results were announced, the 10 failures were one of the primary focus points. The evaluation meeting was attended by all support staff and student performances, which included those who fared well, moderate and underachievers, were discussed. As part of the report, the following activities and accomplishments were identified as the highlights of the program:

1. Intervention program for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard students.
2. Handwriting evaluations
3. Conducting laboratory experiments to facilitate better understanding of theoretical concepts.
4. Breakfast program, which resulted in relatively more active students, more attendance and better learning ability.
5. Intervention w/ parents initiative
6. 2010 health education initiative
7. E-learning initiative
  - English language use was taught at Chutti school through this initiative
  - Special classes were conducted for imparting painting skills and general knowledge
8. 2010 summer camp
9. Activity based learning (ABL) training was imparted to 4-5 teachers (most of the teachers have gone through ABL)
10. Evening tuition for 3 villages (2010)
  - 35-40 students for Tottiapatti school
  - 25-30 students for other village schools
11. Annual cultural program for 3 years (w/ support from Dream India)
12. Nutritional program initiated for Chutti school
13. Karate kids from last year went to district level competition
14. Professor Shiva's NSS initiative to train the trainers

15. 100% pass results were achieved from the intervention program for government schools
16. Small savings program initiated for children
17. Infrastructure development initiative
18. Science experiments were conducted for children – Learning has improved as a result of conducting science experiments
19. Initiative to produce and market handicrafts, which include floor mats, purses, wallets, handbags, stationery holders, yoga mat bags & much more.
20. An e-learning initiative was started at Tottiapatti school.

The assessment meeting also evaluated and identified some of the problems being faced by Payir with regards to their education program. Among the problems encountered, the following were identified and listed:

1. Cooperation from government schools has again started to decline and the intervention initiative is being hit hard.
2. A sense of responsibility is lacking from parents with regards to their children. Parents are reluctant to understand and influence the well being of their kids.
3. The children identified as slow learners who attend special coaching classes are dropping out

The assessment meeting also identified positives and encouraging observations and recognitions. Among them, the following were identified and listed:

1. The school strength is increasing in Nattakada and other schools.
2. Among the 78 high schools in Payir district (Perambalur), the work done at Nattakada was recognized as an achievement by the district collector.

Senthil and his staff also made the following noteworthy comments during the meeting:

1. The official teacher to students ration has been identified as 1:35.
2. It is critical to continue the investment, with regards to time and effort, in (i) health education and (ii) handwriting training.
3. Perambalur is the largest mining district in the state of Tamilnadu, which needs to be exploited for supporting schools and education.
4. Due to efforts from district coordinator (Senthil), 27 schools are currently adopted by 7-8 companies.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:**

The intent of the site visit, which was to understand the progress of Payir's commitments towards education of underprivileged children was evaluated. Although, the efforts of Senthil and his team are highly commendable, it was a concern to realize the ill effects of trying to overachieve as an organization. The team is stretching out the funds being made available to support education and the well being of a large group of children and the local staff. While the short term implications may seem encouraging, the long term implications of such practice can be disheartening for the teachers and staff of Payir and disappointing for the children. To address this issue, it is recommended that the team at Asha UFlorida (Gators for Asha) asses this from a practical perspective and recommend guidelines and a process to Payir for a long term success.