

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I visited schools supported by Kalanjiyam trust on the 16th of August 2017. Kalanjiyam is being supported by Asha Stanford and the project supports government schools in Latur and Marakkanam blocks of Kanchipuram Dist. Asha Chennai is also working with rural government schools in several districts including Kanchipuram Dist and I am broadly familiar with the state of these schools. I have 2 years earlier visited some of the schools supported by Kalanjiyam trust in the same area.

I visited their office at Palavakkam in South Chennai and from there went to the schools in their SUV. I went there with Mrs. Lakshmi and Mr. Raviraj, the trustees of Kalanjiyam trust.

One important thing to note is that their project period runs from June to May. They have not received funds for 2017-18. Therefore they have been running the project in a reduced manner for the last few months. I would strongly recommend to Asha Stanford that they fund such ongoing projects in a timely manner so that there is no disruption in the project. Kalanjiyam also submitted the proposal only in June. When asked why they said that when they submitted the proposal before the end of May couple of years back, they said that Asha Stanford told them, that the proposal can only be reviewed if the year end report of the utilization of the funds etc. is also submitted. Clearly they cannot submit this before June. If this is indeed Asha Stanford's policy, that should be changed. Kalanjiyam should submit their proposal by say March along with an interim report and the continuation or otherwise of the project should be decided by Asha Stanford by end of April.

Further Kalanjiyam mostly gets earmarked funds for specific projects and doesn't have non-earmarked donations. Therefore they are unable to keep the project running before the funding is received. The high school teachers have not been paid the last few months. The para teachers who are meant to cover two schools each are still covering only one school that they did last year. Some of the teachers who have resigned have not been replaced.

We first went to Thiruvadhur Higher Secondary School. Their project coordinator, Mallika also joined us there. Here are the details about the school,

Number of Students in classes 6 to 10 – 512

Number of Students in classes 11 and 12 – 535

Total number of students – 1047 reduced from about 1080 a couple of years back.

No of govt. teachers for classes 6 to 10 – 23.

No of govt. teachers for classes 11 and 12 – 3!!! Note only Postgraduate teachers can teach classes 11 and 12. Therefore even though there are enough and more teachers for the classes 6 to 10 they cannot teach classes 11 and 12.

No of teachers paid for by govt. but appointed through PTA – 7. They are paid a salary of Rs 7500 per month. Note they probably haven't cleared TET which is probably why they cant get a direct govt teacher job. Actually I am not sure if TET is the exam for higher secondary school teachers.

No of teachers appointed by REWARD – 2!!! I didn't know that REWARD also worked with this same school. It is weird that two Asha supported organisations/projects support the same school!

No of teachers appointed by Kalanjiyam – 5. They are paid a salary of Rs 5000. HM has upgraded a couple of them by making them PTA teachers paid a regular govt. salary of Rs 7500 per month and probably hope to get absorbed as govt. teachers if and when they regularize these teachers. Also the Kalanjiyam teachers have not been paid since May.

The school desperately needs continued support. They have brought in a Tamil teacher and have them listed in the Kalanjiyam rolls.

The teachers in Kalanjiyam rolls currently are,

Ramachandran – Economics.

Jagathrakshagan – English. I remembered seeing him last time I was here.

Vijaykumar – Biology

Prakash – History

Raghuraman – Tamil – The new person.

The results in 10th Std. is 83% pass and in 12th std. is 68% pass.

We then went and sat in Jagathrakshagan's class (12th std). This was a huge class with about 65 girls and 10 boys. I am not sure why there is this gender difference. Maybe boys are being sent to private schools. Anyway Jagathrakshagan was teaching "The Last Leaf" by O' Henry. He explained the story to them mostly in Tamil writing some of the words in English on the board. His own English had a lot of problems.

I then interacted with the students. When I asked them a question in English, "How did Behrman save Johnsy's life?", absolutely no one could answer it in English. That was a little below expectation. But then I asked them to tell me what I asked in Tamil and then also give the answer in Tamil. Even that was a major problem for the students. That was disappointing. I then interacted with them with basic questions and answers like "What is your name?", "How old are you?" etc.. Their English was quite weak.

After that we drove to PUPS (Panchayat Union Primary School) Zameen Endrathur. The school has 100 children and 3 government teachers. It had increased the strength from 98 to 100 this year. I met Devi who was the para teacher there and Nandini the computer teacher appointed by Kalanjyam. Devi was handling the weak children from classes 3 to 5. I interacted with the children in her class. I showed her how you can use clapping to teach Maths and enhance their ability to recognize patterns. She couldn't explain how she identifies weak children and what curriculum she uses.

She was sharing the classroom with class 5 as one of the teachers was absent that day. I also interacted a bit with the children in class 5. I tried to get them to tell me a story for a subtraction problem I wrote " $8 - 3 = 5$ ". They participated a little bit but were quite weak in Maths. But their interaction with me was good.

Nandini then showed me how she teaches computers. Note the computer teacher doesn't have her own laptop and only teaches children in schools that have their own computers. The children showed me what they could do with MS Paint. I quickly showed Nandini Tuxpaint on my laptop and recommended that it is more child friendly than MS Paint.

We then went to ADW-PS (Adi Dravidar Welfare Board Primary School) at Netrapakkam. The school had just 24 students. They had 36 students last year. Even now they have 12 students in 5th std and none in 1st std. The school is just imploding. I am not sure of the reasons. There are 2 govt. teachers. The Kalanjyam teacher, Bhuvaneshwari, had not been going to the school the last couple of months because she had a burn injury. Bhuvaneshwari was able to tell a little more about how she selects the weaker children and what she does with them.

Then we went to PUPS Palur. This was also a very small school. The children were about to have their lunch. So I didn't interact much with the children. The school has 21 children. It is down from 25 last year. The school has 2 govt. teachers. Kalanjyam teacher Prabha was also there. In this school the fall in enrollment was primarily due to reducing population itself. There are only 7 children in the area that sends the children to this school who are going to other private schools.

We then returned. We had lunch at Mahabalipuram and then got back to Chennai. Mrs. Lakshmi expressed an interest in working closely with Asha Chennai. I had a while back sent our teacher evaluation tests to her. She had tried

with the teachers at Chennai and found that they themselves found it difficult. So she did not try it on these para teachers. She was keen to get the contents we had put together for computers. Kalanjiyam sent one teacher to our office in Chennai to get the contents on 19th August.

Kalanjiyam is running a project in Chennai with support from Ford foundation. They were working with a few schools in Chennai. They were primarily dealing with weaker children. They had counselors trained by Madras Dyslexia Association. They identify dyslexics among the weaker children and use special methods to teach them. They are trying to use these methods in Latur as well. They also have placed subject teachers for higher classes where they are lacking.

She also expressed interest in teacher training done by Asha Chennai. They wanted to either send their teachers also to participate in that or have a session themselves. They were trying to find out about the trainers that we use.

On the whole they need continued support from Asha to sustain this project.