

## **Asha Fellowship: A. S. Karthik Bharathi**

### **Site Visit by: Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston/MIT**

#### **Visit date: August 14, 15, 17**

I spent time with the Seed Narpanigal children and youth, which is part of Karthi's work. This is documented [here](#).

I also spent time with Karthi discussing ideas for expanding his work.

#### **Empowering and Motivating Youth**

A pillar of Karthi's work is empowering youth to help their communities. We had been discussing various possibilities of doing this outside of Karumbalai,. One of the events Karthi and I attended together during my visit was a book discussion. He had also come to Madurai for a book discussion the previous year. He enjoyed the discussions and felt that they could really open up people's minds. He felt youth were focused on mindless movie watching of Facebook stuff, and he wanted to give them an opportunity to explore other ideas and form their own ideas. This he felt was an essential step in helping youth become leaders in their own communities. Discussions on topics he felt was a vital missing piece, since colleges and universities no longer bothered with things like that (the obsessive focus was on exams and marks). He himself remembered how he grew intellectually when he was a student at American College (though sadly American College does not have such opportunities today).

He has been working with Kaleidoscope, an organization started by an American College professor (Professor Prabhakar) to work on Art for Social Change. Kaleidoscope organizes events that include book readings and discussions. (Note: In the months after my site visit Karthi was raised funds for an additional floor at the Kaleidoscope office to have a better space for book readings and discussions. This is an exciting step, his idea of a place/center for such discussions is taking shape.)

(I had a joint meeting with Karthi and Professor Prabhakar during my visit. We discussed three possibilities of future work: (1) Youth run study centers in the villages in 5 km radius outside Madurai, another project I know has had some good success in running one such center, the five girls who run it have had a tremendous impact on the education levels in the village. (2) Career Counseling for Youth. Prof. Prabhakar mentioned that so many are completely high school and attending college these days, but they have no clue on how to select a course and how to pursue a career. They have virtually no guidance available to them, especially if they are first generation learners or the first in the families to go to college. (3) Training for government school teachers. I felt (1) and (2) was more directly in line with Karthi's special skills and goals, and his work with Kaleidoscope is part of that.)

## **Working with Government School Teachers**

Karthi also feels strongly that government schools should be strengthened, but we have not yet arrived at a model that works in the region with the resources Karthi has available. Still, in pursuit of that goal, during my visit Karthi organized a meeting with several leaders in the field of education in the Madurai area. Some of the ideas that emerged have to be pursued.

## **Tribal Issues**

Karthi has to come too Mr. Dhanraj, an activist on tribal issues. He has been exposed to the special challenges tribal children face. Later in the year Karthi conducted some camps for youth from tribal villages in Coorg district in Karnataka (one of the areas Mr. Dhanraj works in), with the goal of encouraging and guiding youth to help their communities.

## **Working with CESC**

Karthi has also begun helping CESC more, working in their project area to empower youth to help their communities.