

Asha Fellowship: A. S. Karthik Bharathi

Site visit by: Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston/MIT

Visit date: July 9, 10, 11

During the visit I focused on following up on fellowship activities discussed during the previous visit and subsequent conversations. They are documented [here](#).

Empowering Youth

I visited the Kaleidoscope center that Karthi worked on with Prof. Prabhakar. It is a beautiful space on the rooftop of a building. Even on hot days, the space is breezy and pleasant. They organize book readings, discussions, and various events at the center. In the last year, Karthi has organized small art camps for children, job interview workshops for youth, discussions, and so on. They use that venue for many events they organize.

The venue was funded by a donor.



Book reading and discussing at Kaliedoscope



At Kaleidoscope, during my visit



Book discussion with my mother, during my visit, at Kaleidoscope

My mother is an author, and Karthi organized a book reading on one of the days of my visit. The youth who attended asked many good questions.

On another day Karthi organized a religious harmony meeting at the Gandhi Museum, a theme connected to my mother's latest book. Karthi feels that many fundamentalist leaders are influencing students, and students don't have an opportunity to hear other points of view. He invited leaders from the major religions – Hinduism, Islam Christianity, Buddhism. The moderator was excellent. I was impressed with the overall arrangement. I was more impressed at how he was able to get students from five different colleges to attend. He sent invitations to the colleges, and students came from departments such as Sociology and Social Work. The principals feel this discussion time is a good addition to the curriculum and college work, so they send the students during the regular class time for these discussions. I was very impressed that he could get students from colleges (overall attendance 80) to attend a discussion. I felt Karthi

has really grown in the role of someone who provides space and time for youth in Madurai to be exposed to various topics and to think critically.

[Working with Government School Teachers](#)

This is a theme that we have repeatedly come back to. Karthi and I are both keen on improving government schools, but we have not come up with a good model. Karthi had an idea of posting on Facebook that youth from Seed are willing to come and teach at the government schools. Four government schools responded to take them up on their offer! Arun and Elavarasi, long time members of Seed will be teaching English at these four government schools. As we have seen in other government school projects (like [REWARD trust](#)), lack of teachers is a big reasons why the government schools are failing. Schools go an entire year with a teacher for a subject. I was happy to see the school HMs respond to this. I think this was a very innovative idea by Karthi. I am keen to follow its progress.

Arun and Elavarasi are supported by “Friends of Madurai Seed” from Switzerland. They are part of the youth team who want to do something to help. Arun gave up his job in Chennai looking for something more meaningful to do, and is now in Madurai working with Seed and is a big help to Karthi and Elavarasi.

[Other Activities](#)

The work with the Sevalayam hostel continues to grow. One of the activities he organized is the Space day with another organization where the children get to go into a tent and see a simulated night sky. Students have also a Science camp in a nearby town. These are just two of many activities. Karthi is good at connecting with other groups like this and using their services for the benefit of children in Madurai.



Students eager to see the simulated night sky in the tent.

He continues his work with “slow learners.”

He has also identified and encouraged the talent of a couple of youth in photography. He sent them to a photography workshop. Their photographs are impressive. Below is a sample.



By Vicky



By Anand