

## Virtual Meetings with Karthi

By Melli Annamalai, June 2022

Following is a summary of various discussions with Karthi over the last year.

- He has kept the centers going in extraordinary times. Student strength has been maintained at 2/3 to 3/4 of the original strength. Extensive extra curricular activities are continuously conducted. Karthi feels these are important for the students to feel they are participating in something together even when schools are closed.
- Lots of Zoom (now Google Meet) sessions were organized with various experts around the world. For example during Navarathri they had 10 days of women speakers. Karthi raised funds to equip the center rooms with digital equipment like a large screen. One of the larger rooms has been particularly set up for such digital interactions.
- Story telling: A local bookstore conducts sessions (virtually also) for a fee. They have providing their services at a discounted rate for children. They have excellent ways of telling stories and the children are very engaged. They also do puzzle activities with children. It is unclear to me whether there is enough value in this to engage an outside organization to do this. Perhaps I should participate in one event sometime.
- The caste distribution of the Seed Narpanigal centers reflects the caste distribution of Karumbalai. This is a major achievement. It is always the case that with any new initiative, government, private, or by an NGO, those that are slightly better off (and they tend to be slightly higher up the caste hierarchy) are able to use the benefits more. They are poor too, but being slightly better off can make a difference in whether the children are regular, whether or not they can study at home (whether a small space and light is available), etc. Now after some years, Karthi is very happy to have achieved the caste distribution in the centers that is in the surrounding community. This means that the most disadvantaged children also can benefit from the centers.
- Karthi used some donations from former students to help with regularizing the land held by six families of slum dwellers. This is a very complex (and corrupt) bureaucratic process, but if he is successful the impact for these families is life changing, because now they would own a small property.
- Karthi has repeatedly lamented the dilution of the exam standards in the context of the pandemic. The goal is passing the exams, rather than learning. He feels society has a whole has moved on from learning, and is focused only on the exam marks. And the government, because it has relaxed so many things in the way exams are conducted, has created a feeling among students that you will pass the exam even if you don't go to school/skip classes a lot. So children and youth use the time to take on other odd jobs, and just take the exam to pass it and get a certificate. We have to continue doing our part to ensure students are actually learning.
- A former student helped route CSR funds from his company to Seed. This had to be used for capital expenses, so Karthi has chosen to create an early childhood center, which will be a new

center. He is very proud that he was able to convince the company in Tamil that this was a good use of the funds (often this requires English skills). The former student came to the inauguration with family. It is good to see such alumni involvement. Some videos on this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcS0vsaksII>

<https://youtu.be/5viZTuaAmaM>