

Shaaron Jehovah Trust Site Report 2023-2024

Date: 27th July 2023

Time: 10pm CST

Attendees:

Prema (Principal and Founder)

Asha Volunteers:

Rangakrishnan Srinivasan (Chapter Projects Coordinator)

Subra Nathan (Chapter Treasurer)

Mohit Sood (Chapter Coordinator)

Alisha Kulkarni (Project Steward)



*This site visit report is prepared by Alisha Kulkarni, the project steward.
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Overview

Shaaron Jehovah is a school in Rajapalyam, Tamil Nadu for physically and mentally disabled children primarily from poor socio-economic backgrounds. This school was established in the late 1990s by Ms Prema and continues to be run by her to this day. Currently, the school caters to 45 students out of which only 32 students show up regularly. Most students are provided transport by the school and live within 7km-30km of distance from the school. A number of activities and facilities are provided to the children ranging from academic training to free lunch, physiotherapy, speech therapy and vocational training for older students. Although they have teachers and staff for all these activities, the staff count is either insufficient or irregular. Currently, the student:teacher ratio is 8:1/10:1 but they are aiming for 5:1.

About the visit

We arranged a zoom call with Ms Prema during early school hours. She took us around to show us all the amenities, equipment and introduced us to some of her staff members and students. We got a glimpse of the various facilities at the school like the physiotherapy room, kitchen, junior school classrooms, senior school classrooms, occupational therapy room, terrace area, washing area, toilets and the common area where students had various programs and lunch was served. All in all, there are 9 rooms in the building.

Most students arrive in school before 9:30 am by the autos provided with the exception of 3 children who are dropped off by parents. Their regular days begin at 9:30 am with a prayer and some warm up exercises. This is followed by academic classes till 12:30 pm. The academic classes are held separately for students of different grades and mental abilities. Lunch is served from 12:30-1:30pm in the common area. Some of the students eat on their own but some need to be fed by staff. Staff members have been trained in the field of educating/training the special children, and are doing the job soulfully. This is followed by a personal grooming session for the next 30 minutes. The rest of the day is spent in activities such as coloring, indoor/outdoor games, doll making, greeting card making. The senior most students are provided with vocational training during the afternoon that can help them graduate and look for employment. The school day ends at 3:00 pm.

Their primary mode of transport is autos. Right now, they have about 2-3 autos. They also have a low mileage van provided by the government that they use for school trips.

Immediate Challenges

- Ms Prema has been single handedly running the school for several years now. There is a need for a new admin who can support her which would involve additional funding sources. This concern has been raised during previous virtual visits as well but there has been little to no success in identifying a sponsor to date.
- Staff members often leave due to better job opportunities or lack of competitive pay, increase in salaries may incentivize staff to stay
- It's been a challenge to find helpers who would assist these children in toilets or toilet train them. As of now, Ms Prema and Jothimuthu.
- Most children who study here pay no fees even if they can afford to pay for meals or transport. This increases the overall financial burden on the school and as of now Ms Prema does not have any other sponsor.



