

I am Rajaraman Krishnan, a volunteer of Asha Chennai. I visited Senji on June 18th and 19th 2018. I travelled with my nephew and also go to do a little bit of sight-seeing at Senji.

After a lunch on the way we reached Kamagaram around 1:30 pm. We had newly made Annamalai a computer teacher for Project Thulasi. He was a regular teacher last year. Now he is teaching at 4 schools - Kamagaram, Kanniyampoondi, Kaatu Sithambur and Nallan Pillai Petral. On 18th he was at Kamagaram. I went to Kamagaram mainly to see him teach. I talked for a while to the HM. The school strength was dwindling as many of the people in the village were sending their children to private schools. Kamagaram has been consistently one of the best schools in the Assessments that Asha conducts. It is sad to note that such a school is facing problems with admission while many schools that do not do as good a job get more students. We may have to discontinue support to a fine school because the strength doesn't justify an extra teacher from Asha.

I then sat in Annamalai's class. He was teaching class 4 and 5 students TuxPaint. The children were very enthusiastic in learning computer science. Annamalai has been to Kamagaram only once till now. But even with that the children knew so much and remembered it well as well. He hadn't started teaching Maths and English to the children using our Asha Kanini App. I gave him a few pointers regarding that. I also tried my usual $400 + 3000 = 7000$ and what is $2076 + 3103$ to see if they understood place value well. The children for most part got it right.





After that I went to Anjalai's class. As always, the children in this school, esp. Anjalai's class were doing very well. She was teaching them shapes. I taught them a little bit about shapes using some sticks. Then children knew all the basic concepts very well. Only things like why is a parallelogram not a rectangle (I,e, opposite sides are equal - so why is it not a rectangle?) confused them a bit. Then when I asked them to tell me stories for addition problems and subtraction problems they handled it with total ease.



After that Asha teachers from nearby schools also came to Kamagaram. I took them and picked up some more teachers from Keezh Pennathur and then went to Seeyapoondi. We had organized a teacher meeting there. Most of the teachers had questions about the upcoming evaluation test we were organizing for all the Asha teachers. I answered these.



I then went with Paripooranam, the project Steward for Project Thulasi to one of the new schools - PUMS Melmalayanur. The school had still not assigned a specific class for our teacher Gnanasoundari. We insisted with the HM that she should assign a class for her. We insist that so that they do not end up using our teacher as a general resource to use when one of the government teacher is absent. The HM assured us that she will do that before the end of the month. There was general confusion in many schools because of the change in textbooks (1st and 6th stds) and change in teaching methodology for classes 1 to 4.

We then returned back to Seeyapoondi to continue the discussion with the teachers. Two new teachers were also there. We told them some of the key things we focus on - proper education as opposed to just completing the curriculum, proper assessment for the children etc. We didn't have time to interact with the tuition centre children. I dropped the teachers back at Keezh Pennathur and then went to our hotel room at Senji.

The next day another volunteer Venkat also joined me at Senji and we first went to Nallan Pillai Petral. We were glad that this school had increased strength. We sat in the 3rd std class that was being taught by Asha teacher Manimozhi. He was teaching English. As always we could notice that the level of English in the lesson was well beyond the level of the children. So rather than ask the children about the words in the lesson, I asked them about AT words like cat, mat, rat etc. The children had a reasonable vocabulary at that level. I also played a simpler version of "Simon says" with them. I asked Manimozhi to continue building their basic vocabulary as well as use the English lesson recordings that we have provided.

Annamalai was also there at that school. He then accompanied us to the other schools. We first went to Nagalampattu. We have a new teacher Priyanka here. We talked to the HM about assigning a class for our teacher. She was assigned class 3. The school only had two

classrooms and our teacher had to teach in the corridor. Not just that the corridor was also not cleaned properly and it was quite dirty. I pointed that out to the HM.

Priyanka was also teaching shapes to the children. I also showed these children the same things with sticks. They had more difficulty in understanding the points about the shapes. I asked Priyanka also to use sticks, a thread etc. to teach these concepts. She seems motivated to learn and improve.



Our next stop was Kaatu Sithamboor. This is a middle school, a bigger school and there was a lot of politics at the school. One of the senior teachers was suspended. Our teacher was also struggling a bit because of these internal squabbles. But the school was doing very well in terms of admission. Compared to the outgoing class strength of 26, they had admitted 26 students in class 1 and another 26 students in classes 2 to 8. These are children who have come to this school from other private schools! They now have close to 250 children and were having to manage that with just 7 govt. teachers and 1 Asha teacher. The HM requested us for one more teacher. We said we will consider that. They have a need for toilet facilities. We hope to do that through Project Sugadharam.

We then went to Kanniyampoondi. The HM, Mrs. Ramani had organized our lunch. She had cooked and brought us lunch! We had a very nice lunch. Like Kamagaram, this was also among the best schools as we have observed in our assessments. The HM is really motivated and stays back help weaker children after school hours and rarely leaves before 5:00 pm! Despite all this the children were being admitted to private schools and the strength of the school has dropped below 30! That there aren't many children in the village is also another factor. Mrs. Ramani was very upset regarding this. Here too there is a real possibility that Asha will have to pull out our teacher next year.

After the lunch we were interacting with the children as the teachers finished their lunch. Then we sat in our teacher Sasikala's class 4.

She was teaching them an English lesson. There were some pronunciation problems but otherwise she was doing well. We asked her to use the English lesson recordings we have provided.



We then went to Karikalampaadi. This was another school we have started supporting just this year. A new teacher Subha was there at that school. The HM was away at a meeting. We interacted with the other teachers at the school. As we talked about some basic things which are usually a problem at most schools, I interacted with the 5th std children to show the teachers what I was talking about. I did my usual $400 + 3000 = 7000$ demonstration and then asked the children to add 2076 and 3103. None of the children could catch the place value mistake and most of them had trouble with getting the zeroes in the right position. The government teachers were receptive to my feedback. I then went to Subha's class. She was handling class 1. She was doing a good job with the children. Since the children had just joined the school, we didn't have much to tell the children or Subha. This school was also doing well in terms of school admissions. The strength has increased from about 80 to about 90.



We then took our leave. On the whole the project is going well. Paripooranam has managed the expansion well and the new teachers also seem to be a good addition to our staff. With a new computer teacher, that side of our work should also improve over the year. We can continue to expand the project as funds permit.