Kalkeri Sangeet Vidyalaya – Site Visit Report
by Sadhana Kyathapalla

I had the opportunity to visit Kalkeri Sangeet Vidyalaya ([www.ksv.org.in](http://www.ksv.org.in)), in Dharwad District, Karnataka on March 5, 2017. The visit came about in response to their application requesting funds from Asha Boston. There had been a pretty extensive telephone conversation between Asha Boston volunteers and Adam Woodward, Director at KSV on February 14th following their submission of all necessary documents.

Unfortunately, the only day that I could visit was a Sunday, so I did not get to see the classroom in action, and did not get to meet any of the teachers, or go inside any of the classrooms. As already noted, this is a residential facility, so I was able to see and talk with the children.

The first thing that struck me was the vernacular architecture of the place – situated within the forest grounds, it feels one with the surroundings.

The next thing that struck me was the self-sufficiency and environment friendly practices of the place. We (I had gone with my mother) arrived during lunchtime. Kids who had finished lunch were washing their plates – they use ash to wash the plates with and have a pail handy at the wash area to put any remains from their
plate which was being snacked on by a calf! They had tied coconut shells on a string along the length of the sink area to hold soap.

Food was served in a large hall in the center of the premises. The hall was expanded a few years ago such that it now accommodates all the residents at the same time. This hall is also used for performances, school meetings, etc. Everyone sits on the floor on long mats. The wardens were serving. It was a simple meal of rice, daal, a whole lentil curry, and chutney – very delicious.
There was an easy camaraderie amongst the kids, the wardens, other support staff and several volunteers that were there. Adam knew all the kids by name and the kids all knew and were very free with Adam, as they were with all the staff. The wardens who were serving were very friendly – I don’t think they knew who I was, it seemed like a genuinely open and curious sort of friendliness and hospitality. One of them who looked particularly young (in reality she had done her Masters and was ~23) invited us to go see her residence hall later. Adam and I talked about the school, origins, students, parent engagement and such over lunch.

The focus of the school is Hindustani music – vocal and instrumental, Classical dance – Kathak and drama, along with following the Karnataka State’s SSLC syllabus, with classes up to the 10th standard. They accept students from villages within about a 30 km radius. They find this is the sweet spot where parents can still come on a regular basis to visit. Anything farther would not be conducive for frequent visits. As far as taking students from the Kalkeri village, which has its own government school, they have assured them they will take no more than 3 students from the Kalkeri village. When they first started, they accepted kids of different ages, which meant starting in different grades, with different proficiency levels. 68 students have completed the SSLC exam thus far, scoring an average of 66%. Adam suggested this was a direct result of kids who started at higher grade levels without the necessary skills. 7-8 years ago they switched to taking in students only at the 1st grade level so skills could be developed uniformly. The most recent SSLC results had a highest score of 92%. In addition, they currently also have 37 students who are going to college. Class sizes are about 20 students on average.

They hold parent meetings twice a year. They hold performances on the last Sunday of the month where the students perform for 2 hours and they have professionals perform for 1 hour. Since it was a Sunday, there were some parents who had come to visit their children and my mother chit-chatted with them.

The parents felt very fortunate that their kids had this option at KSV, but my mother was impressed by how confident and self-assured the kids were, talking to her and discussing their future. Since we come from the general North Karnataka region,
her experience has been that kids are generally very reticent and mostly answer, “I don’t know”.

Apart from music and the SSLC curriculum, the children are also engaged in sports activities and other extra-curricular activities, like debate. The school is composed of 6 houses, named after music gharanas. They conduct Sports Olympics, Debate Competitions, Music Competitions and track academic performance amongst the gharanas within the school. The main hall tracks the running tally of points of each of the gharanas. Last year, one of the girls competed in Long Jump at the State level!

There are 13 staff members in the academic department, 4 of whom have been there over 10 years, and 3 for over 5 years. Grades 1-7 have no exams, but they do continuous evaluations and provide remedial access as necessary. They start exams from the 8th grade onwards so that the students get comfortable with test taking and are well prepared by the time they need to take the board exams in the 10th grade. Grades 1-4 have a class teacher who teaches all the subjects for the class. Beyond the 4th grade, there are subject teachers. They partnered with the Teacher Foundation in Bangalore and engaged with them for a year, with an initial audit, implementing the program and a final evaluation. They facilitate teacher training for their teachers to allow for different teaching techniques for the different learning styles, and different evaluation methods. The challenges they face are staff retention – 3 years ago, 3 vocal teachers left at the same time, typically because they get a government appointment which provides a higher salary and job security. KSV pays their teachers between Rs. 5,800/- whereas government salaries for teachers are ~Rs. 15,000/- (although they are required to work 8 hrs a day whereas the KSV music teachers only teach at the school for 3 hrs). Another matter of concern is the quality of the education overall, preparing to become qualified teachers: after a cursory B. Ed or so, they are qualified to teach whereas Engineers go through a more rigorous program, and yet, these are the folks who are laying the foundation for future engineers!

Adam commented that he has been following the report put out by Pratham about the State of Education in the country, and while he is discouraged that the needle hasn’t moved much overall, the progress they have been seeing with their kids is remarkable suggesting they are on the right track.

Adam arranged for a short performance by the students – they started with some vocal songs, with tabla and harmonium for accompaniment, then moved on various instrumentals and finally, some dance.
All the students who performed were engaged, and happy to be performing. While the whole performance was very good, it was also very interesting to note there were 2 girls on tabla, an instrument generally dominated by males. Some of the students in the upper grades expressed an interest in continuing their current passion – instrumental or dance, into college. The kids are exposed to all areas of the arts in the lower grades, but must focus on a particular aspect as they get to the higher grades.

Although we could not see the classrooms, we visited the residence halls. The students are divided into different residence halls based on age and gender. The girls blocks are on one side of the campus and the boys blocks are on the other. The
kitchen, central Hall, classrooms and other general areas are in between. The accommodations are simple like the campus in general. The construction is all local materials, and vernacular in nature – walls of mud and cowdung over wooden posts, local stone slabs for flooring in areas, etc. The children sleep on mats on the floor. They each get to bring a trunk, which is stowed on shelves. There are 2 wardens for each hall and a volunteer. The halls also have a bath area, but the toilets are located outside. The younger kids are helped during bath time, with the warden / volunteer washing their hair on Sundays – it's conducted like an assembly line 😊. The warden’s “room” within the residence hall also has some books which the wardens read to the younger kids, or the older kids help themselves to. They have some staff from the village who come to wash the younger childrens clothes, but the older children take care of this themselves. Similarly, residence hall chores are posted on a board within the hall and children are assigned to different tasks, like sweeping, tending to the garden, etc. They have solar panels that generate much of their energy needs, as also solar hot water supply. Although the general North Karnataka area has seen severe drought in the past several years, currently water supply is not too much of a problem at KSV due to 2 lakes on either side. Since this was getting to the end of the school year, one of the wardens pointed out that the mud walls were getting brittle and beginning to chip off – part of the routine maintenance during the summer time. Adam also mentioned they are trying to acquire a larger parcel of land and move the school there and this holds them back from putting in major resources and effort in upgrading this place.

One of 3 units planned and built by volunteers – some of the “pukka” structures in the campus.
One of the classrooms (solar panels in the background).

Girls practicing their flute.
Housing for the volunteers.

Overall, this was a very impressive institution, primarily from the point of view of how the kids carried themselves – they truly believe the world is their oyster and all possibilities are open to them.