Sangamam Rajatalab Visit (13th, 15th & 16th December 2023)
- By Mrs. K. Komalavalli, Project Steward.

Myself, Ms. Sujatha (Co Steward of the project), Ms. Vidhya Arun (Asha Volunteer), Nithya(daughter of Sujatha) reached Varanasi on 12th evening around 5pm. This is my second visit to the project this year, others were visiting for the first time. We were received by Mr. Suresh, Co-Ordinator Rajatalab Project. We reached Asha Trust Ashram, the nodal office of the Trust at Nagepur , where we stayed for the rest of the trip. We were treated to a delicious dinner and breakfast the next morning at our coordinator Suresh's home.

Since we had enough time, we decided to visit as many schools as possible in the project and observe all the Teachers teaching at the respective schools they handle. We managed to visit 10 schools (we support 12 schools all in Arizilines block). It being winter, in many schools regular classes were held in the space outside the school for the students to enjoy the warmth of the sun.

School Visits :

We mostly started our visit by talking to the HM or the Incharge about their views on our support and our teachers, any other NGO presence in the school, details about the school strength and number of teachers and lastly about their requirements to improve the quality of education including infra.

Reception for Asha Program:

In general all the schools were very much happy and appreciative of our computer science initiative. The fact that we are sending a well trained teacher at least 3 days a week, have a curriculum in place, distributed Study materials and most importantly that the support is FREE ! impressed them much. The increase in the enrollment after our support began in the school was very much acknowledged and appreciated.

The students were very enthusiastic to learn computer science. We could see the happiness and pride when we asked about what they were learning. Few girls in class 8th of Harsos PS expressed sadness that they will be leaving the school this year and will miss the computer classes. During our visits, though we couldn't meet any parents, the staff said they were equally happy. We were fortunate to meet an ex-student of Harpur PS, who had benefited from our program and got her feedback.

Requirements of the schools:

All the schools wanted more systems. They all are ready to convert a room into a computer lab to accommodate the systems and keep it safe. Next common request, mostly from the primary schools, was desks and benches. It was indeed pitiable to see the students sitting on torn sacks

in this cold weather. The school staff said one reason many parents prefer private schools is the absence of this infra.

The staff of Kajauri CS wanted us to provide a Bus if possible!!! 🙆In their opinion, a school bus and Primary sections with desks and benches combined with our Computer program can beat the competition from the private schools completely !!

Other NGO presence:

Apart from **Nanni Kali** , In a few schools (ex. Harsos, Khajuri) **NGO Vidhya Shakthi**, based out of Bangalore, have donated projectors and conduct online classes in Science and English for classes 6-8 in the mornings.

GuruShala It is an initiative implemented by Pratham Education Foundation. A Teacher comes to teach Maths & Science to upper primary classes.

Agastya International Foundation
They mainly focus on teaching Science through hands-on experiments. They have mobile science lab which comes to the school 2 times a month.

The schools we visited with brief details and our observations of the teachers :

13th December

The first school we visited was CS Harsos. It's situated amidst fields. The school strength is 625 with 26 teachers .The school has set up a computer lab with the desktops Asha had given them.

Mr. Ajay kumar is our teacher there.He is one the senior most teachers. The girls from 8th std were present in the lab, half the class was doing programming in Scratch and the other half were involved in the unplugged Cup Activity. Most of the girls were acquainted with the basics of scratch programming and were able to modify the code when asked to change the direction(s) of the sprites.
In the classroom besides the computer, the boys were involved in unplugged activity.

Next we visited PS Rampur. The school strength is 170 with 1 HM and 6 teachers. This school was established in 1931 and is one of the schools, where our support began recently. The school has no computers, but the HM is ready to convert a room into a Computer Lab if provided with systems. Over there we observed Mr. Ritvik Kumar, one of our new teachers teaching GCompris in class 4. According to our curriculum students get to work on OpenOffice , but since our support started only two months ago and the kids had no exposure to Digital literacy /computers till now, Ritik had started with GCompris which will make the kids familiar with navigation.

We visited Bhikharipur PS next. This School was established in 1911, probably it's one of the oldest Govt schools in that area !!! Total Strength of the school is 156, total number of teachers: 1HM, 5 teachers and 2 shiksha mitras.

Our support to this school began in April this year. Mr.Ayush is our computer teacher over there. He was explaining custom animation in Powerpoint to class 5 students. Mostly the regular students were acquainted with the basics of computer and PPT operations. They were able to animate text and images. He engaged the students without laptops , with Maths Kit.

HM was on maternity leave, we met the In charge and other staff. Appreciating our support they gave us information that around 10 students have joined the school after the news of computer science class spread by word of mouth. Their requirements were Projector, water cooler and more systems.

In the evening we all visited Sarnath. We explored the oldest site museum of ASI and the excavation ruins but missed the Light and Sound show as it was under repair.

On 14th we visited Mirzapur Project , details of the site visit are in a separate report.

15th December

We started our visit with Harpur PS.School strength is 223 and number of teachers are 7 including the HM and two shiksha mitras. A small room has been converted into a Computer Lab. Mr.Maitur Rehman, our teacher was in Class 5 children teaching about slides transition and custom animation. I asked the children to animate the slides slowly and fast ,few students were able to do that with little help. Most students were familiar with basic operations of PPT .

We met Ms. Anuradha, an ex-student of the school and with her permission we shot a video of her feedback. She was happy that she got an opportunity to learn Tux paint, Math and much more due to our support. The school where she is now has computers but they don't teach the students. She misses computer classes!

https://photos.app.goo.gl/vnAzPyAGvkntLoyr6 - Anuradha Feedback Video.

We visited Pratappur CS next. Total number of students is 399. Total number of teachers is 12 including HM. This Village is situated on the border of the Varanasi & Mirzapur districts. Two of our teachers teach here - 1-5 is handled by Mr. Krishna Kumar Maurya, one of our new teachers and 6-8 is handled by Mr. Armaan, one of our old teachers.

We observed Mr. Krishkumar handle class 2. He had only his laptop with him and was engaging the class in GCompris very efficiently. He kept passing the laptop to the next desk of students as soon as one set of students were done with the task. He was engaging the kids without a system by making them do math work from their school curriculum. It was very good to see a new teacher using the limited resources to the full extent and simultaneously engaging all the students.

CS Khajouri ,near Pratappur school was the last school we visited that day. This is also a new school in our support program. It's a very spacious school with a small patch of the ground dedicated to growing vegetables. The school has an Incharge with 9 teachers and 1 shiksha mitra.Lab possible as spare room is available.

Vidhya Sakthi, A Bangalore based NGO works here with girls. It's here the staff requested buses to fight competition from private schools.
Mr. Ali, one of our oldest serving teachers and also the lead teacher, has been teaching there since October, handling class 8. It being a new school, class 8 students were working on PPT. I asked them to animate the text and images, most of them did it. Due to a shortage of staff on that particular day, He was simultaneously handling 6th and 7th in another room. They were writing codes for the unplugged Cup activity.

That evening we went into Varanasi town. After darshan at Kashi temple we witnessed Ganga Aarthi on the ghats,

16th December

It was our last day in Varanasi, it was decided that we will observe Mr. Araman at MehendiGanj UPS and Mr.Abhay at Hardattpur PS and make a quick visit to Mehendiganj PS and Jagatpur schools.

Mehendigunj is a school where our support has been given since the project began. They have received 4 desktops from us but unfortunately due to safety concerns the HM had returned the systems. Araman was in class 8.Students were learning about PPT but most of them were not even aware of the term "Slides!".Only one student was able to answer my question on how to find the storage capacity of the system. Only a handful knew how to create a folder.There was no satisfactory reply from Araman on why the students were lagging so much.

After a quick visit to Mehendiganj PS which is in the next compound, we reached Hardattpur CS. Mr.Abhay was the last teacher that we observed on this visit. He was at the computer lab with a part of class 3 students,which had been set up in the corner of the HM room itself due to shortage of space.The Lady HM who was on leave is one of our motivated HM's.

Kids were working on Tux Paint. I asked them to make shapes and they were all able to do it. Surprisingly some kids knew how to work in OpenOffice Text document files too. Abhay was also engaging the other kids in the classroom with Maths worksheets from Asha Kanini.

Later we had a meeting with teachers at the project office at Rajatalab. I Talked about the happenings in the Chennai Chapter and also gave feedback on the observations to the teachers.. We were happy that our teachers had taken the feedback given to them during the last visit by Rajaraman sir and followed it up earnestly.

Later on the way to the Airport, we met Vallabh Ji at Asha Trust Office at Kaithi village. He was happy and appreciative of the work done through both our projects. We interacted with students at the Kaithi center. He also showed us the new Computer Lab set up there. Our teachers Ali and Ajay had installed Asha Kanini in those systems a few months back. We reached Chennai on the 16th night. It was a very fruitful trip.

Click here for more photos from the visit : https://photos.app.goo.gl/iBuCmojpJnjttpP69