

## **Aralu-Belaku and Aralu-PPC Site Visit Report (Jan 6<sup>th</sup> 2016)**

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### **Project Background**

Aralu is an NGO based in Karnataka state. The focus of the NGO is a) community development within the Dalit population in villages b) ensuring education of the children in the Dalit communities. Asha Chicago is currently working with Aralu by providing necessary funding to enable education and a mid-day meal to children (ages 3-6) in a Pre-Primary Care Center in Yedlapur village. Asha Chicago also supports a residential home for about 20 children in the Belaku center. The children who are primarily from the Dalit communities come from a variety of backgrounds including single mothers who work for minimum wage, parents who are unable to provide basic care for the family and in some instances children who do not have parents. While Aralu-PPC and Aralu-Belaku are separate projects, they are managed by the same project partner, Mr. K.T. Meril.

Our project partners Mr. K.T. Meril and Mrs. Sunithi are an integral part of the Aralu NGO.



### **Sunithi and K.T. Meril**

This year Aralu Belaku residential home has 20 registered children. The students study in the local government school in grades ranging from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>. Unlike the previous years, when there were equal numbers of girls and boys, in 2016 there are 16 girls and four boys in the residential home. Ever since the inception of the Belaku project, all the children enrolled in the government have finished their schooling up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. We expect to maintain the same status this year and in the future.

The following students completed SSLC (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and have joined PUC in the local junior college in Bidar.

| Name                   | Present status                      |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Kaveri D/o Dasrah      | Joined for I <sup>st</sup> Commerce |
| Pawan S/o Tukaram      | Joined for ITI                      |
| Kalpana S/o Shanker    | Joined for Arts                     |
| Prashanth S/o Swamidas | Joined for Arts                     |
| Surekha D/o Sailu      | Joined for Arts                     |
| Sachin S/o Manohar     | Joined for ITI                      |

During this site visit, I got a chance to meet 5 students who went through the Asha Chicago-sponsored Aralu-PPC and Aralu-Belaku centers, successfully graduated and are currently pursuing further studies in local colleges. This was truly a special occasion. The gathering of students included current students at Belaku, ranging in grades 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> as well as the alumni. The alumni of Belaku shared their postsecondary school experiences with the current students as well as the importance of education.



Front Left to Right: Suhasini, Sridevi, Jayamani (B.A. 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

Rear Left to Right: Robin (LG Technician), Sachin (B.Com 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

Three students, Suhasini, Sridevi and Jayamani are currently enrolled in a government college in Bidar and stay in the government hostel. All three students are in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year BA and have expressed an interest in teaching as a career path. Robin has been working as an AC repair technician in LG, Bangalore, for the last two years. Sachin is currently doing his B.Com. He is developing computer skills and also works part time in an internet café in Bidar. One of the most fulfilling outcomes of this trip was the knowledge that a majority of the female Belaku students are being allowed by their parents to pursue further education when they could have easily been married off at a young age. However, this is not always the case. I am aware of at least one instance of a Belaku student who was married soon after completing her 10<sup>th</sup> grade;

her husband subsequently left her with a child and disappeared. With no source of income, she had to go back to her mother in the village. Mr. K.T. Meril is currently trying to find a job for this young lady in Bidar.

During the PPC visit, I got a chance to meet a few mothers of the PPC children. It was an interesting conversation, though somewhat awkward, as I could not speak Kannada and had to rely on Mr. Meril to translate. They conveyed their appreciation of Asha's support for PPC. These mothers work as laborers or tailors. The husbands usually work in Hyderabad as construction workers and visit once in 2 or 4 weeks. There were also cases of alcoholic husbands who spend most of their wages on liquor. Mr. Meril tries to talk to them, but convincing them to bring home their income for the benefit of their families rather than spending it on liquor is an uphill battle. Upon asking if there are any further questions, a mother piped up and asked if I can find her a job as she has completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Obviously she stumped me, but I think she was dead serious, and the question certainly was a good conversation starter. For example, there is a computer in the Belaku center; could she learn some basic skills such as data entry? She was willing to learn skills and perhaps find a job in Bidar. But these ideas are easier to throw around than to put into practice. Any future project would require a steward who would work closely with a partner. Another mother said that she had been diagnosed with HIV and she was very worried about her children. She is currently taking medication. Mr. Meril will make arrangements to have the children tested.



With a view toward community development, Aralu also works closely with families of children to bring awareness of efforts to eliminate child labour, ban child marriage, fight human and child trafficking, improve women's health and participate in MNREGA. Aralu also works with mothers to bring awareness of the concept of microloans. Aralu periodically brings local bank officials to the villages to provide information on the process of applying for loans.





About two years ago, the roof of a meeting hall (not the residential home itself) was blown away. The project partner has been requesting funds to have the roof installed with a budget of \$1900. We discussed a few ideas about using the meeting hall as a possible venue in the village for ceremonies, etc., for a nominal fee to help attain as much self-sustainability as possible.

The Belaku center also has four female buffaloes. Mr. Meril has a plan to use them for dairy needs at the center to alleviate some costs but that will take at least two to three years.



In summary I was happy with the project. I believe strongly that Asha's goals are being met. The following are some areas in which we can make an impact:

- a) Provide any good teaching tools to enhance and broaden the children's minds especially since the center has a computer
- b) Possibly fund the purchase of printer and make the center an income generating source in the village
- c) Teach computer skills to students as they enter the junior college world for further education.
- d) Fund rebuilding of the roof for the meeting hall which may be used for functions in the village and possibly generate some income for the Belaku center.