Asha Boston met with the Deenabandhu team on July 13, 2021. Asha Boston has worked with Deenabandhu in the past, but not all volunteers were familiar with them, so Prajna gave an overview of Deenabandhu’s start and their activities. Prof Jayadev had started the organization while teaching in Chamarajanagar, with a children’s home for boys. This has since grown to include a children’s home for girls, a school for children from surrounding villages, and an experiential Science teaching program in government schools in the district which has also expanded to Davanagere district in central Karnataka.

Prajna highlighted how “Asha has always been there.” Asha has been able to partner with them several times when they started a new project, and also when they were in a difficult funding situation. The relationship between Asha and Deenabandhu is one of friendship, built on mutual trust and affection.

Currently Asha Boston will be helping with the support-a-child needs at Deenabandhu.

During the first wave of Covid Prajna completely locked down the campus. No one was allowed inside, and provisions were dropped off outside the gate. They successfully avoided anyone getting sick. Unfortunately in the brutal second way Covid came to Deenabandhu. (We are still flummoxed by how
this could have happened, because the campus lockdown had continued.) 40 children and 7 staff members (about half of everyone on campus) got infected, with symptoms of fever, stomach upset, vomiting, and so on. They got everyone tested, and those who tested negative stayed on campus, and the others moved to buildings they own outside of the residential campus (like the school). The cook tested positive, and she was isolated as well. The former students of Deenabandhu, many now living in Mysore and Bangalore, swung into action. Even though they were not vaccinated, they came to the campus, stayed in the residential part of the campus (which was earmarked for everyone who tested negative), and took over the kitchen. In a week or so everyone fully recovered. Only one staff member was briefly hospitalized for oxygen. We are very happy that everyone made a full recovery.
Children recovering from Covid
Covid treatment

Former students helping out
The school has now been closed for over a year. The teachers have figured out a way to make things work. Worksheets are given out weekly (parents come and pick up the worksheets, they are staggered by class so that they come to the school for the pickup on different days in the week), and teachers send out videos and other material on WhatsApp. They also have live classes and discussion sessions on WhatsApp. At the beginning they went on an aggressive campaign to ensure that they had a smart phone number for every student. If the student’s family did not have a smart phone, Deenabandhu helped locate a smart phone with a neighbor or relative. So every student was reachable via WhatsApp. The teachers have really stepped up to enable each child to continue learning during this difficult period.

The government schools are closed, but the training of the government school teachers continues on Google Meet. Deenabandhu staff continues to explain to teachers how different Science concepts can be explored with hands-on work, and the sessions have been well-attended, much to our delight.

Oracle gave an additional grant in the second half of last year which they used to create a Science Gallery, which is a Science museum for children. This houses a lot of the hands-on apparatus they have designed over the years (with local materials) for learning Science. As an example, a fantastic outcome is detailed here: https://boston.ashanet.org/2020/12/20/a-do-it-yourself-telescope/

Teachers Workshop conducted online

At the residential children’s home, students have shown remarkable creativity in the year of Covid. Freed from the regular classes focused on the syllabus, the children have gone on to create their own videos, motorized toy cars, and more. These are lessons we must learn in the post-Covid era.