

PUVIDHAM

Creating self-reliance and an understanding of options in young minds

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

Puvidham , Nagarkoodal village, Dharmapuri, 636803. Tamilnadu, INDIA.

www.puvidham.org. Ph.04342291100& 09600491176. puvidham@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION



Puvidham learning Centre started its journey in the year 2000. Our first batch of students has finished their degree and has settled down in good jobs. Not only the ones who finished their degree but even the ones who did not have the means to continue their education have managed to do well and are continuing to visit the school and make us feel proud of their achievements.

But our aspiration that the children connect with the importance of their village and their role as farmers has not been able to stand the pressure of change. Most of the children are now in cities and hope to live there forever. Our objective that these children should do well for themselves in their native land and live a good life here using their skills is not likely to be realized. The reason for this is not that they are not interested in farming. The reason seems to be the financial advantages of not taking any risk with the caprices of the climate and crop production. It is much safer to go to work for someone else be it another farmer or industry.

Is this our failure? We don't know yet what the long term results of our work will be but as of now we have to come to terms with the need of every individual to improve his/her lot. So regardless of what our children do and where they live we feel proud of their achievements and share their joy in their prosperity.

CHANGES:

Our idealistic approach to farming and migration has undergone a change with the observation of the climatic difficulties and typical poor soil conditions of this region. There is hardly any rain and the ground water has vanished. Moving to cities or towns seems to be the only solution for the extremely poor. We are trying to grow some food and vegetables but it is a difficult task with the water situation and the pest increase due to overall shortage of food. There is a major threat from wild boars. We have spent 20,000/-Rs on a solar fence to keep the wild boar at bay yet they broke into our paddy field one day due to low voltage in the earth wires. The other menace is the monkeys. Bananas and Papayas seem to



be their favorite food. They are not deterred by solar fences. They travel by the high way swinging from tree to tree and destroy all crops. Small farmers cannot afford fences. They spend all nights watching for the wild boars and all day running after monkeys. In short people are getting tired of the business of farming against all these odds.

In our school in June 2012, the hostel children started a vegetable garden after a good beginning with spring rains in May. Then the rains failed completely and we ran out of water. So the whole garden of young plants dried in front of our eyes. At that time a few kids expressed their feelings about farming in a very sad way. They said farming can be only a hobby not a livelihood. And we had no words to disagree with them.



electric fence for wild boars



Vegetable garden

FOCUS ON LEARNING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT



Growing vegetables in bags

This change in attitude towards farming as an occupation, at least, in this part of the country, under these circumstances seems inevitable. Our new curriculum, through which we engage with the children, focuses on observing the surrounding environment and the behavior of the elements to encourage an awareness of changes in the environment and our responses to them. This includes working with plants and animals and a lot of art and craft activities like weaving, knitting, embroidery, tailoring, painting, clay work and origami. It also includes performing science experiments and observing the behavior and physical properties of the elements that make up our living environment. It makes the children have

concern for other living and nonliving elements in our environment and instills in them the confidence that they can learn by their own observations and express their observations in

their own words.

In August 2012 when the rains failed completely they expressed the futility of trying to farm in our region and then began the discussion as to what they would prefer to do. All of them thought even quarrying work was better than farming!

YEAR 2012-2013

This year all 5 children of our school who appeared for the 12th board exam have passed. Selvaganapathi scored 1064 on 1200. Ravi scored 858. All the others have scored above 50%. The 10th results are yet to be declared.

This academic year we started with Pacchiammal taking care of the 25 children of LKG and UKG. Meenakshi was looking after the 19 children of 1st, 2nd and 5 children of the English medium 7th and 8th. Rameshwari was with 18 children in the 3rd and 4th. Senbagham was looking after the English medium 5th and 6th group of 18 children. While, Kuppusamy was looking after the 7th and 8th Tamil medium group of 9 children. All the classes started with the curriculum we have prepared and went through the first three modules of Sun, Water and Earth very enthusiastically. This was followed by the excursions to further the learning through visiting a Dam and a forest and forest product resource centre at MMHills Kollegal district.

Then there were more excursions and both teachers and students had the opportunity to explore new places and



interests. December is our crafts and arts special month and we started the preparations for our annual day. The children made calendars and greeting cards for their friends at La Perle school Canada and for presenting to our donors.



Key hanger

Working with natural materials The craft work took on a new dimension with the baking oven and the laddu flour sent by Dinesh and his team at Kadiri in A.P. The children regularly baked whole wheat bread and mixed ragi and wheat flour biscuits. They also made laddu's with the mixed millet flour and jaggery.



Making laddus

The children also made key hangers using the embroidery work they did and doing wood work to make the frame. They also explored various models of airplanes along with other origami work. We have enough thread spun by the children to make one hand towel and we hope to make more thread and then take it to a weaver to make hand towels. Children of the 7th and 8th learnt to sew on the sewing machine. They also knitted scarfs.

This year we learnt that making high compost beds using dried leaves, sticks, charcoal, ash and the compost from our composting toilets is the only way to grow food in this dry and soilless condition the children spent a lot of evenings collecting leaves and sticks.

The annual day function this year involved a wonderful kollattam dance to a Tamil film song about

the rain. The older children performed a play about the Panchayat elections and the corruption there in. Three of the children did a special performance rotating a stick and with balls hung from strings dancing to music. Senbagam our 5th and 6th teacher was the inspiration for the performance and It was a great success. Mr Manickam, the President of the Theosophical society of Dharmapuri invited the children to perform the same for their Annual function at Dharmapuri.



End of December saw us shaken in many ways. Pacchiammal left because she wanted to study and prepare for her TET (Teacher Eligibility Test) exams. Then in January Rameshwari decided to join classes for the same. She made it very clear that to work with our curriculum she will have to put in a lot of energy and she did not have the time for that since she herself was busy studying. She decided to revert to using the government text books in the class room. Since Pacchiamma left, Meenakshi decided to take class for the LKG and UKG and 1st and 2nd during the week and decided to work with the 5th and 8th during the weekends. Then we asked Madhavaraj who was a teacher with us earlier to see if he could help with some classes. In February he decided to come back to the school fulltime and look after the 1st 2nd and take Tamil class for the 7th and 8th English medium group. So in February we were able to continue with the curriculum we have prepared for the lkg, ukg, 1st, 2nd, 5th and 6th. In March Rameshwari decided that she needed to take off completely to continue her study for the TET exam and so we had to go back to the text book mode.

EXCURSIONS

This year we have spent a lot of energy in making contact with friends and visiting them to learn from them.

- We went to Marudam Farm school . Arun and Poornima , Govinda and his family were very accommodating and we hope we can take some children there every year to see the wonderful forest Govinda and his team have created.
- After the cyclone that hit the east coast, we were very concerned about our friends, Bernard and Deepika, in Auroville. We were unable to visit them then because of the



school work so we went in May 2012 to do what we could to help clear up the damage caused by the cyclone. We helped clear up branches and trees that had fallen. It was a great experience to see the work of regeneration they have done. We also learnt how to enrich the soil in small parts and grow food on small but intense beds.

- Meenakshi went for a conference in role of environment education at IISC campus organized by ATREE and the Conservation Network. Then went for the retreat at Timbucktu near Dharmavaram in AP. It was good to connect again with the school and with Babloo and Mary who have been long time friends. Our school children had been there in 2008 and learnt the KOLLATTAM. They have made many adaptations to the basic steps they learnt and still perform the dance to different songs.



Looking for birds

- Harisha from ATREE was kind enough to have our children of class 5 and 6 to visit MM.Hills in Kollegal, where he works. The trip was a great success. Harisha helped us to update our herbarium. The children's interest in birds and other wild life has taken a new form. It is one place we plan to visit every year.
- The visit to The Crocodile Park in Chennai was also very fortunate for the children of the 7th and 8th class. Their experience handling snakes and baby crocs will be with them as special memories of their time in Puvudham.
- The same group also had the opportunity to go to Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh for a period of 25 days and stay with Amit and Jayashree at Adarshila and Deven and Sudhi at Manthan. They have a treasure of experiences to keep their spirits on the top. They will be going to other schools for their 9th and we send them off with love and best wishes.
- 12 children went to Agumbe Rain Forest Research Station in Karnataka for 3 days. The different forest and soil of the region intrigued them and there was broadening of the understanding of climatic regions, types of forest and soil conditions and wild life peculiar to the region. They came back to do a project on the climatic regions of the world.
- The little one's 1st to 4th went to Hogenekkal falls and visited the crocodile park near there.



They tried catching fish using towels, played in the water and in the nearby park. They had a long sip in the waters of the Cauvery. They had many questions about why there was so little water. The discussions hinged about lack of rain in the last few years. And it was decided that people need to plant more trees. And the children all decided to plant trees around their houses. They started with some herbs like Oamavalli and Adathoda. We have a small nursery where we have some saplings and these will be given to children when the rains make their appearance.



Catching fish

VISITORS

This year we had a lot of local persons and relatives visiting the school and sharing their skills with the children.

- The Collector of Dharmapuri visited our school and was very generous with her time and spoke encouragingly to the children of the NCLP group. This year Selvaganapathi will be receiving an award for exceptional performance in the 12th board exams.
- Mr Ashok of the Mahatma Gandhi Narpani Club spoke to the children about the work of their organization. He spoke to children about divergent thinking and the advantages of being able to look at problems from different angles.
- Venkatachalapathi and Raju work in titan watch company and have a small concert group called Aananda Geetham. They came to the school with master chandru on The New Year and sang some memorable songs to which the children of our school also danced.
- Mr Jagannaathan and his family from Dharmapuri visited the school and provided a treat for the children while sharing with them their achievements and encouraging the children to dream. The children presented them with one of their key hangers.
- Mr Ramesh and Meera along with Murli and Raji and Mr Sridhar and his family who live in the U.S spent time with the children. Sruthi Ramalingam sings very well and she ended up teaching them one song and learning 2 songs from them to share with her friends. The children also presented them with one of their Key Hangers. She also made a very flattering presentation on Puvudham.
- Mrs Jayashree who is our contact in La Perle School, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada also sent us a presentation prepared by her daughter. The children there have been recycling cola cans to collect funds to send to Puvudham children. The children of Puvudham have made some friends bands and cards to send to their friends in La Perle.

- Anand, Moe and family spent about a week at Puvudham. Sriram and Radha were with us for around a week and have encouraged the work by making contributions to the trust.
- Mr A.K. Manickam has been visiting with his Group of Friends bringing us a lot of joy and richness through his talks on Theosophy.
- Mr. Kannan visited on behalf of Asha London in January. He was also very generous with his appreciation.

OFFICIAL BUSSINESS

- The school fee approval committee had another hearing for the approval of minimum fee for the school children. The fee we asked for has been approved.
- Under the JJ Act now we have to upload the information about the number of the children and their complete profile on their on line site. This was successfully completed.
- The process of renewal of approval for the school has been started and we hope to be able to finish it by mid-august 2013.
- Our 80G and FCRA reports have been regular and the departments seem satisfied with them.
- Two of our long time teachers Rameshwari and Senbagham have been included as our trustees. Mr Rajgopal has asked to be relieved of his trusteeship due to his ill health and we are looking for another trustee to be able to take his place.



A 6 year old performs an experiment on air pressure.

OTHER NEEDS

- The vehicle we bought last year to be used as a school van needs improvisation to be able to transport more children. As of now 15 children travel by the van. Next year we expect around 10 more children from the same village. We need to make a carrier on top to keep the bags so that more children can be accommodated inside the van.
- We need to deepen our well as the water table has gone down and we do not have enough water to supply to the school and hostel. We also need to build an overhead tank near the school so that we can receive the water from the Cauvery River which shall be supplied to us when the Dharmapuri Drinking Water Supply project is complete. This will bring down our expenses on water considerably.
- We also need to invest in a new UPS and Batteries. The school is running on solar electricity but we have back up from the mains electricity for rainy days. The old ones were bought 5 years back and have done their best so far. We need to give children computer time. It would also be nice if we can source second hand laptops and use them instead of desk tops which use more electricity. We have one and it would be nice to have at least four more. Then all the children can get about an hour a week with the machines.
- We need to build a car shed for our vehicles.
- We also need to repair the guest house and put in proper mesh windows and paint them. The compound wall around the guest house has fallen and needs to be rebuilt.

CHILDREN'S NETWORK

- Jayashree has moved to another job. So we will be losing our contact person at La Perle School. We do hope someone else from the school will take up interest in retaining the contacts between the children.
- Nataraj Gurukulam in Darjeeling were planning to send their children this year but could not make it due to political problems in the region. We also did not travel to their school for the same reasons.
- We went to Manthan in Rajasthan and hope that Deven and Sudhi will find the opportunity to come and visit us with the children.
- Adarshila Learning Centre is another place we hope to visit again and hope that Amit and Jayashree will come to Puvudham with some children from their school.
- Marudam Farm School will be a good school to exchange students with. We hope to work that out too.



Making ornaments with shells and sticks.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS

- ASHA for Education London has supported the puvudham children for the last 12 years and we greatly appreciate their concern and kindness in talking to us regularly to learn about our problems and successes. Mr Kannan who visited on behalf of Asha and provided us with a generous donation.

- ASHA for Education Silicon Valley has been supporting the puvidtham children since 2007 and our steward Sachin has been most encouraging in the help they have extended.
- U.K Puvidtham Support Group in London led by Mr.Harminder Singh as President and Ranjan Chaudhuri as Treasurer have been supporting the supply of Millets through Earth 360 at Kadiri run by Dinesh and Kalyani.
- Our local Support Group led by Mr.A.K. Manickam called UDAVUM ULLANGAL has been kind in finding funds for supply of Ragi to the hostel regularly.
- Our mentor Mr.A.K.Manickam needs special mention as he has brought us contact with a wealth of kind hearted people who have donated towards the books and other stationaries for the children.
- Our family including Sridhar and Usha, Murli and Raji, Anand and Moe, Arvind and Ashwin who are in the U.S have been very kind and made large donations to the Corpus funds of the trust. Sriram and Radha, Jayashree and her family who live in Canada have also been very supportive by doing a lot of extension work on behalf of the children of Puvidtham and have been regular contributors to our Corpus. Ravi and Chitra from Bangalore have been providing Ragi and funds for purchasing green gram for the pprouted snacks.
- Mr.Ashwin from Delhi, Ms Yamini Harikrishnan from Mumbai, Dr.Anita and Dr. Balaji from Dharmapuri and Mr.Arvind Srivaths from Chennai who have been our long time donors for the Foster Care Project-Little Drops to fund the food board and education of children who are in very difficult economic situations.



Making an information sheet on the nutritive value of vegetables and fruits.

PLANS FOR THE COMING YEAR

- In the coming academic year, we shall have 5 teachers for around 90 children. Meenakshi will be looking after the LKG, UKG and the 7th and 8th English medium group. Rameshwari will be with the 3rd and 4th, Senbagham with the 5th and 6th and Kuppusamy will take care of the tamil medium 6th, 7th and 8th.
- Our driver cum woodwork trainee, Jothi, has again left us for a better job offer. Madhavaraj will be doing this work and teaching the 1st and 2nd at the same time.
- Sabarimani has finished his BSc degree and will be going away for a while to work as a mason so that he can help his family come out of a big loan they have taken.
- A new young student called Sharad Kumar will now be looking after the hostel along with Ramesh who has finished his 12th this year and will be joining up to do his BSc in a nearby college.
- We hope to continue to grow vegetables, papayas and bananas in the hostel land. Our fruit orchard has started bearing fruit and there are custard apples and mangoes. We plan to plant lime trees and melons too.



Our team

Puvidtham is a registered trust and can accept donations from India and abroad, and issue a tax receipt accordingly. For enquiries regarding donations, please e-mail puvidtham@gmail.com or call **09600491176**. Thank you for your support.

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Postal address: Puvidtham, Nagarkoodal village and post (via) Indur, Dharmapuri ,Pin no: 636803. Tamilnadu. India.	