Hi Sharada and Kirthi! Well it's been almost 4 weeks since I first arrived here at Puvidham, time flies! So much has happened and so much has been learnt! I'm very grateful for all my experiences here and for being welcomed so lovingly into the Puvidham community. I'm thankful I found ASHA for Education and was able to be linked to this amazing opportunity.

I've taken some notes during my time here to try and answer your questions the best I can. These are just my opinions on how I think Puvidham operates as an organization.

1. What do you think Puvidham does well perhaps things that other schools/NGOs could also adopt?

**STANDING BY ITS NAME**
* Since being here, I've come to see the organization truly stands by its name 'love for the earth' with a holistic approach to understanding, appreciating and nurturing the environment and through this mandate, ensuring that the children are always aware of the interrelationship between us and nature (whether consciously or not).

It is the 'Puvidham' school. Through simple yet effective ways, even from a young age, the children have a 'love for the earth'. In terms of food for example, the children learn to enjoy healthy natural foods and not processed pre-packaged foods. They are served biscuits made of ragi, not only good for fiber and energy but in support of local millet crops, they enjoy raw food with varieties of sprouts served at the end of the day and even spoonfulls of spirulina, a known super food. In terms of medicine, the school ensures that knowledge of native plants for medicinal uses are not lost to future generations through using natural remedies and ointments for the children - neem leaves, aloe vera, salt water, guava leaves and turmeric just to name a few. In terms of native wildlife, the children have a deep understanding and appreciation of nature, on going for walks with them they name the native plants and birds with ease and really appreciate how beautiful they are. They also learn responsibility and have a nurturing attitude towards the animals on the farm, being involved in and responsible for the cleaning, feeding and caring of the chickens (and now chicks!) cows and rabbits. The buildings at Puvidham where they learn and play, run off solar energy, are made of thatch and mud, the toilets harvest natural compost and waste water is used for the plants and trees. These things may seem like simple ideas, but for me who went to a primary school in the suburbs which had none of these ideas, these aspects really surround the child in nature and help to grow their understanding and appreciation of it.

**GREAT TEAM AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT**
Starting with Meenakshi, who has opened her doors to me and to many people in this community, someone with a great energy and strong moral fiber, always on the go yet always having time for people, a strong woman who jokes and laughs a lot but also makes sure things get done. She is very passionate about what she does which I see is very important for an organisation, she is a great inspiration and I have learnt a lot from her. The teachers here are all dedicated and hardworking and have great relationships with the students and with each other. To the children and to each other they are "akka" or "anna" brother or sister. The team is made up of locals and past students, which really emphasizes the sense of family and community here and therefore reflects on the way the students are with each other. It is more like a family then a group of people who come together each day to work. Work around the grounds is evenly shared amongst everyone which gives a sense of pride and responsibility in the school. Everyone has their own jobs and areas to take care of each day from sweeping to collecting dead leaves to cleaning the toilets to cooking the end of day meals. Also to underline that listening is always valued here. The teachers listen and value the opinions of the students and there is not this authority figure who's word is final - the students discuss and share what they think and they are listened to. Meenakshi always has her doors open to students and members of the community, there is a lot of transparency in the organization, everything is out in the open and nothing goes on behind closed doors.

NETWORKING - VISITING AND BEING VISITED
*Since I have been here I have seen many visitors coming to see Puvidham, Meenakshi's doors are always open. From teachers of other schools to parents of prospective students to college students studying architecture or environmental studies. So too, Meenakshi often visits other schools and project sites to learn and gain insightful knowledge. By sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas the organization can grow and adapt. A nice initiative for the students is their tours to other schools in Darjeeling, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. The students stay for 20-30 days in partner schools and are immersed in the curriculum and stay with host families or at the schools. This is good for the students to get exposure to other places in India and to have new and different experiences. While I was here I also got to see the students rehearsing and finally performing for a cultural dance and drama at a high school one hour away. The students spread their message of 'love for the earth' with their performances about environmental degradation. The teachers will be going to visit Auroville too see how a community based around the environment works and then will have a nature camp to become more sensitized to nature and to better learn to observe and appreciate it. There is always something to be gained and shared.

2. What you think Puvidham could improve on?

It took me some time to think of ways that the organization could improve since this is the only organisation of its kind that I have been a part of and have been able to see and understand its inner workings.

One idea that could be developed more in the future here at Puvidham is training and mentoring for students to be employed within the community once they are of working age. The students leave to join mainstream education after the 8th standard and the hopes are that the fundamental base of this ecological education is instilled in them and from then onwards they are able to determine their own future. Two previous students are now being
employed at Puvidham, one as the UKG/LKG teacher and another as the driver of the school van and responsible for general maintenance of the school. A future goal would be to have a plan or system in place for even more local rural employment opportunities to be open to the community. The school provides an education where children become sensitized to the needs of their environment and to the community around them, but they also need prospects to put this sensitization and understanding into practice.

While they are at the school, the students are a catalyst for change within the community, why not also after they have completed their education? Developing continuity in the plan to protect the regions livelihood and the environment could be the next step. Having a place where older students can learn skills and trades relevant to the area and then from there, be a part of environmental activities that not only provide an income but also contribute to the community such as sustainable building or handicraft work is needed.

I'm still working on a report of my own experiences here and my understanding of Puvidham as a school with its place in the ecological revolution. I plan to finish this within the next couple of weeks.

I'll send through the report with pictures once its ready!

All the best,
Lyla