

Rural Development Trust

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June 19, 2025

Asha for Education

Please check the following that you were able to ascertain during the site visit.

A. Operations

- ☒ ~~What does a typical day look like for the children in school and hostel ? What about weekends ?~~
- ☒ ~~General well-being of the children – do they look happy there in the school ?~~
- ☐ Quality and nutritional value of food being served in the hostels.
- ☒ ~~Is the learning and progress of the students on par with expected level~~
- ☒ ~~For special needs, customized plans for each student?~~
- ☒ ~~Girls – boys ratio, hostel facilities, wardens, safety?~~
- ☐ What do the children who graduate from the project do?
- ☒ ~~Staff and Teachers – do they think it is a great place to work?~~
- ☐ Is the student list accurate on the field vs. what has been shared ?
- ☐ Is the teacher and support staff list accurate on the field vs. what has been shared?
- ☒ ~~Is attendance being taken for both students and teachers/ support staff?~~
- ☐ Drop out rate of students?
- ☒ ~~How do they recruit the teachers and support staff?~~
- ☒ ~~Is there a nearby school or project working on a similar focus area ?~~
- ☒ ~~Do they deny access to education for a student from an underprivileged background?~~

B. Financials

- ☐ Is the project partner maintaining a good record of all transactions?
- ☐ Is the project partner doing cashless transactions?
- ☐ Are the salary payments being made on time?
- ☐ Are the salaries in line with the budget line-items?
- ☐ Does the project partner have accounting software or is it vouchers and handwritten ?
- ☐ Any new programs being added?
- ☒ ~~Any new hiring needs?~~
- ☒ ~~Attrition rate of support staff and teachers?~~
- ☒ ~~Sources of funding ?~~
- ☒ ~~Is the project partner charging fees for beneficiaries?~~
- ☐ Is the fee nominal and in-line with the region?
- ☐ Do they have dropouts because of a student not being able to afford the tuition?

C. Surveys

- ☒ ~~Please check with a few students on the project~~
- ☒ ~~Teachers and Support Staff~~
- ☐ Parents of students
- ☐ Other board members

D. Next Years

- ☒ ~~How has Asha support helped them?~~
- ☒ ~~Plan for the next 5 years?~~

Any comments or concerns from the site visit that is a matter of serious concern for Asha?

I initially had difficulty connecting and organizing a date to travel to Rural Development Trust offices, but once I made the connection it was a little easier. They had not wanted me to visit during the holidays since all of their programs weren't running at the time. I finally organized a time and traveled to Thirupporur where the Rural Development Trust has offices.

I met with the staff. They had 4 staff who were managing the project including identifying areas that require help, identifying children that need help, finding and hiring teachers, distributing materials and such. The tuition teachers mostly work in their villages after school, so they were able to come to the office in the morning, although they don't visit the office in general.

I also met with about 15 teachers. The teachers mostly come from the same villages where the tuition centers are located and belong to the same economic and cultural background. The tuition teachers mostly work in their villages after school, so they were able to come to the office in the morning, although they don't visit the office in general. They talked about what they do in the tuition centers and how the program was helpful to the students in their villages. Some of them talked about specific students and how they were proud of their work.

I met with the students who were learning to use computers in one of the rooms in the office. They were learning the basics of digital literacy including document creation, using spreadsheets and such. Asha Chennai has developed an extensive curriculum and courses for computer science education and I offered to help them improve their offering, however they haven't taken me up on the offer. They could benefit from additional help in computer education.

I also met with students who were learning tailoring. Most of these students were either early in their college education or just getting ready to go to college after high school. They were there for about a month or so during the holidays learning additional skills that could help them make clothes for themselves and for their friends and families. They did talk about this leading to a profession, but no one seemed to be making a career out of it.

We then went to another location that was owned by one of the staff which was about 5 kilometers away where they had another tailoring training center where most of the women were slightly older with families and children. They were also mostly making clothes for their own consumption. Some of them seemed to be there for many months learning and stitching.

We traveled to Alathur where the Rural Development Trust was renting a building from Bharat Scouts and Guides organization, to help special needs children. They had a teacher who had some background in helping kids with special needs. Each of the students had slightly different needs and their parents or guardians were also there. I also met with a few children who didn't have parents or had been abandoned. They were being helped as well.

We then had lunch and waited in the office till school was out. At which time we went to 5 different tuition centers. The students were all there doing their work and asking for help when they needed it. It seemed to be a place where they could have some focus without being disturbed. The children generally seemed happy to be there.

We also visited a location where we met with some adults who had no one to help them or take care of them, some of whom also had special needs. They were being given rice and staples to help them live. It seemed like the Rural Development Trust had people who would visit them once a month or so.

We finally visited a village that was occupied by the Irula community. There were a few students there, but some of the parents were there as well. They were all living in huts but the Rural Development Trust said that they had helped the community get government benefits and got them land to build houses on. There was a lot of construction which they said would be occupied by the community once it gets built out.

Would you recommend support for the project?

I do think that they are providing a valuable service to the underprivileged communities in the area and it seems the money is being spent well. The teachers themselves find the salary they get very useful in addition to providing a safe environment for the kids. It would be better if they can train the teachers to be more effective with educating the children. The kind of help the kids get is enough just to sustain themselves, but not much room for progress. It doesn't look like the organization is getting funding from elsewhere which they should be encouraged to do.