

## Thulir 2007-08 – Some reflections.

### Evening Sessions:

The evening sessions after school have been the oldest of Thulir's programmes. This continued in the past year too. As in the past years, sessions on basic Math and language skills; Science experiments; song and dances; General awareness , story telling, Art activities etc. were carried out.

- We had written in our report in March '07 that since we realised the benefits of working with one's hands (after a year of the Basic Technology course, we had seen that it improves children's academic performance too) we planned to **start “hands – on “ sessions for the evening group** of children too.
- We have done that this year – the younger children too – guided by our older students – Senthil, Perumal, Vinu, Rajamma and Devaki have been working on Saturdays and Sundays making things with their hands. On weekends, there being no school, the children come during the day time and have longer hours to carry out activities.
- **They have made:**
  - ① Recycled paper
  - ① Bamboo toys, Bamboo whistles
  - ① Bamboo key chains
  - ① Soap
  - ① Mud beads, Mud toys
  - ① Paper beads / jewellery
  - ① Paper models
  - ① Paintings
  - ① Wrist bands
  - ① the teenagers have made white LED torches that are very much in demand.
- Interaction with Visitors: This has been an important activity which has given a lot of exposure and confidence to our children. This year, apart from the usual short time visitors, we had a couple of visits by volunteers who stayed for longer duration. This was very useful and the children benefited a lot.
- **Attendance fluctuates a lot.** On an average about 20 children attend . A group of girls , aged 13-15 years old attained puberty have been stopped by parents from coming. Some children who have grown older have stopped coming to Thulir in the evening. They have moved to schools out of Sittilingi for higher classes.
- A new group of 5-7 year olds have started coming. There is also a group of about 12 [predominantly boys] of the age group 9 to 13, which is more regular, and stay for longer periods. They also show a lot of interest and enthusiasm in learning.
- The children have gained tremendously in confidence and they feel a ownership over Thulir- This fact was demonstrated in the cultural show they organised by themselves and put it up for an audience of 200 on Jan .1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Hand-holding of “ Basic Technology course students:**

- Further training for Senthil, Perumal, Rajamma, Devaki, Mohan, Balu was intended in the beginning of the last academic year.
- Senthil and Perumal went to NIOT Madras for further training in white LED technology and fared very well. They went to Timbaktu, Tumkur, Wynad ( Kerala) for exposure and work. Both their personalities have developed and their work and confidence has improved .
- Senthil has got admission in NIOS std XII and intends to study along with his work. He is currently on a 6 month training cum work session in another NGO called Payir started by a friend of ours also called Senthil in a village near Tiruchy.
- Perumal has a great flair for electronics and wiring , and has also been coached by us to complete his std X exams this year. He wrote and passed two subjects in October and has now written 2 subjects this week.
- Balu has gone back to school and has improved tremendously in his academic skills. He is writing his std X exams. He stays in Thulir and we coach him in the nights.
- Mohan has been doing electronics in Thulir besides studying for his std X exams. He is writing his exams this week.

### **Rajammal and Devaki**

- Rajammal and Devaki had come to us last year for 2 months for std X exam coaching. These girls came from very disadvantaged families and their parents had sent them after their exams for construction work to Coimbatore and to Tirupur. After a few months of it, we took them on , on a stipend so that they could learn and finish their std X and also help us at Thulir. They have also been learning various hands-on skills and basic language skills. Both of them love young children and so we have started training them to teach small children. Both of them passed their std X in October.

### **The teenagers' group doing their std X:**

We had a group of 7 girls and 4 boys wanting to write the one or two subjects which they had failed in this year. This group stayed in Thulir from 9 am to 4 pm.

As intended ,we taught them various hands-on skills. All of them started making LED torches, soaps, paper, bamboo articles, etc. We also had classes in basic languages, basic Math, environment and held several discussions on issues affecting them in order to set them thinking and being aware of these. We felt these sessions were more important than their std X coaching. Some of the issues discussed were – TV viewing, media, fear, education, suicide, addictions, romance etc.

Balu [who had completed Basic Technology course], and Indraprabhu [who had been coming in the evening] came to Thulir and stayed the nights to study. They were coached after evening sessions got

over, mainly during the nights for the class 10 examination.

**But the class X coaching was a very energy consuming , tiring , frustrating exercise.** All of them had been hardly taught anything in the last 10 years. We had to start at the four basic operations in Math and basic words (what, where etc.) in language. So we could only teach a few topics in each subject well. On the students' side, there was a huge resistance to our efforts to make them **understand** things. They would urge us to just help them memorise portions and tell them examination techniques. We don't agree with “**memorising without understanding**”. Finally with a bit of understanding and a lot of memorising they write their exam and pass! But their academic levels are **not** std X level. Though this seems to be a general trend in education in all mainstream schools in Tamil Nadu, we felt dissatisfied with this process.

With children who come to Thulir somehow passing their public exams, there is more and more demand, often during the last month or sometimes even a week before exam for coaching help. We have decided not to take any more such new students for just std X coaching! We would like to either provide skill training for 10<sup>th</sup> fail candidates or help only those children who have been coming to us regularly for a minimum of 2 years at least before we coach them for a government exam.

**But we are satisfied with the way this whole group has progressed in its general awareness, behaviour, skills development, singing and dancing etc.** All of them have **taken more responsibilities in Thulir like Accounts, purchases, organising events , taking care of visitors etc.**

### Other highlights:

- We had expressed a wish to make Thulir an open place where students could come and choose what they would like to learn. Last year's activities took shape with this spirit. Hence the serious class 10 exam coaching [even though we have had doubts about its usefulness], that happened; and many activities in the evening classes that were demanded by the children. But, **once we had a group of full time teenagers [of both sexes together], we had to spend a lot of our time and energy sorting out problems particular to this age group** – Problems they had with their parents , peer pressures,behaviour problems, pairing, dealing with parents, etc.
- **Guests were another area that took a lot of effort.** This year we had a lot many more guests. Our facilities for stay and food in the campus is still not organised properly in terms of facilities and human resources, and that has been frustrating. Sittilingi being a isolated Village with no facilities [guests cannot stay outside our campus or get meals to eat outside], this is a crucial area of need. In the coming year we hope to work more on this.
- **Anu's illness since Jan 1<sup>st</sup> has also been difficult.** It has been difficult to manage work, guests, and her treatment. In spite of severe restriction on her mobility, she has been managing her classes and has managed the class 10 coaching. She has improved a lot, though still not 100 percent well.

## **Future:**

Thulir will close its class sessions for the summer holidays break in May. We plan to make use of this break to plan next years activities in detail. Some possibilities we are mulling over are:

- Take a group of teenagers and work on alternate energy technologies - collaborate with Timbaktu, Kanavu etc. Organise vocational skills for them more systematically- produce things , work ,provide services.
- Train Rajamma , Devaki, and maybe one or two more interested teenagers in teaching small children. For this we have to first teach them basic academics, then teach them how to teach- take this group for exposure and training to other alternative schools.
- Start a pottery unit, jewellery unit with Vinu. who will be spending the coming year in Thulir.
- Evening classes – more focus on a regular group.
- Build , organise and equip a good kitchen and train cooks to cook for guests .

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