

## **Site Visit Report: Senchiamma School, Thiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu**

Shanthi Sravanakumar (shanthi dot sravana at gmail dot com)  
Samhita Karnati (samhita dot karnati at gmail dot com)

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It was a typical hot day in Chennai and we followed Suganthi of Bharathi Trust suggestion and took a taxi and reached her house in Thiruvallur around 11am. The field staff, Murali was waiting for us there and took us to SENCHIAGRAM in an hour. We had taken some chocolates to give to the children. In a near by bazaar, we also picked up a lot of bananas. It took us about 45 minutes from Thiruvallur to SENCHIAMMA SCHOOL. Road was quite good for most of the time, however the last ten minutes of the trip, it was pretty muddy and bumpy. There were about 25 kids attending the school that day, ranging from 9 months to 6 years. They had just finished their lunch and few young kids were taking a nap. The older kids were eager to meet us and greeted us along with their teacher, Mariamma, as we entered the school building. It has a long rectangular room with grill all along one wall, making it pretty airy. There is a small kitchen adjacent to this room with few utensils and a stove to cook. The teacher told us that they have been able to provide a simple meal of rice, lentils and some vegetables every day for lunch. Most of the days they are also giving the children few dates (or some seasonal fruits) and peanuts. The tin roof was pretty bad and clearly needed work.

The children sat in a circle with their teacher and were eager to show us what they are learning. They sang few songs and recited the alphabets and numbers. When asked to identify the Tamil alphabets and numbers, few older kids could do that well. We also met 3 kids who used to study in this pre-school and have moved on to the Government elementary school. We went around the circle and asked them what they want to become when they grow up. There were answers like police, doctor and teachers. It was so heart warming to hear the children aspiring to become productive citizens from a village where the literacy rate is zero.

As we were leaving the school after about 2 hours, we also talked to the village head who visited the school. The children came outside with there teacher and bid us good bye.

On 7/23/14 evening around 7pm, Shanthi met Siddhamma in Chennai at her residence and explained in detail about the visit. She said that the Irular children have been eating reasonably well and able to go to school and study, thanks to the funds from Asha, Seattle. When I raised concerns about the roof construction, she said she has been busy the past few months and will definitely finish the construction before the rainy season. It was nice of Siddhamma to spend some time in spite of her hectic schedule.



