

SITE VISIT OF VADALUR KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

ON BEHALF OF “ASHA FOR EDUCATION ”

A site visit was organized and carried out on 26th June, 2010.

I arrived in Neyveli on 25th evening.

I was met by Mr. John Nelson and was taken to a lodging within the campus of Neyveli Lignite Corporation.

By 10 a.m. next day, Mr. Nelson, took me to his office situated in Vadalur, which is situated about 18 km from the hotel.

At his office, I was briefed about Mr. Nelson's organization and all the work he is carrying out.

Mr. Nelson, being a graduate of Engineering, has taken upon himself, the development of under-privileged, in rural areas in and around the village of Vadalur. He is an impressive, dedicated young man with a vision and energy. He has to his credit a lot of credentials and has personally met Dr. Abdul Kalam, our previous president, who himself is a proponent of village development and less privileged children. He is also associated with Dr. M.S.Swaminathan's rural development projects.

He also introduced me to Mrs. Malathy Kumar, a teacher of English language for a considerable time in different institutions, who is also involved in developing materials for the use of educating the under-privileged students, currently being the Assistant Manager with IL&FS.

A multimedia projection-computer developed by IL&FS was available. It has a built-in hard-disk with necessary software pre-loaded. The unit provides for external hardware and software usage. The impressive part was the projection system, which eliminated the use of a monitor. The projector can display on a white wall with good clarity and can cater to all the participants. The sound system also is sufficient for a classroom of 40 students. This is better than a black-board and chalk method. The audio-visual display makes a lasting impression on the students and will prove a better gadget in ensuring better understanding and memory usage.

The accommodation is a rented one.

The Organization is not running a regular school for any class.

A “C” programming class was in progress with a lady teacher. About 13 students were there including girls. I was told that the students were chosen from economically poor background and the recommendations of the school where they are studying now. The

teacher herself is well qualified. The course was for a period of six (6) months and a certificate was issued on successful completion. The course can help the students to a “basic” level of programming in that particular language. Further learning will be as required by the student i.e. depending on his/her career prospects. Four computers were available for the students of practice on.

I was later taken to a village named “Purangani”, 25 km away to a local school classroom. The school, classroom and surroundings are far from encouraging the students to study. I was told that the school has a strength of 60 students in all, studying in different classes. Being a Government school, the upkeep and maintenance are lacking. As it was a holiday, none of the teachers could be seen. I was introduced to a class of 12 girls and 2 boys, assembled to meet us, who have left school for want of passing 3 or 4 subjects in 9th or 10th standard. Mr. Nelson’s organization has collected the students in order to help and assure them that they can complete their previous subjects and join further classes of 11th and 12th eventually leading them to pursue graduate courses. I was told by the “Panchayat” chief that the students enrolled in the Government schools were poor children and affordable students joined private schools in the area. The assembled students were eager to learn English as they felt that it gave them advantage at par with private school students. Being from poor families, disturbed/separated parents and illiterate parents, the children found studying is hard and difficult to understand. Given the required encouragement and facilities, the children can be brought to a reasonable level of competence. The children could not believe that outside sources like Mr. Nelson’s could help them to come up in life.

As per Mr. Nelson, with his Organization’s efforts, about 10 children from 15 schools around the Vadalur village will be identified and suitable guidance will be provided to them.

We returned to the office at Vadalur and had a discussion with Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Malathy Kumar about the programmes. Both of them elicited good interest and are keen to bring about a change.

The visit concluded at 6:30 pm and I left for Chennai.

I would place these observations for you to ponder :

1. The Organization of Mr. Nelson is an individually run unit.
2. The Organization mentions that it is dealing with so many other aspects of village improvement and has partners – e.g. ISRO, Anna University, Infosys, Telecentre, Intel, Microsoft, India Development Gateway, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, IGNOU etc. To involve in all such fields a team of considerable members need to be present. It is not apparent how many paid or voluntary staff are available.
3. What is the basis of identification of needy students (apart from economically poor status).
 - a. Is choosing a student school suggested?

- b. What criteria are used to identify them?
 - c. Why only ten (10)?
 - d. What if more students are in the same category?
 - e. Preference for boys or girls?
 - f. Who will be responsible for the children, especially adolescent?
 - g. What is the level of teaching the Organization can support e.g. 10th or 12th standard?
 - h. Is it for the students who have left schools in the middle or continuing students?
 - i. What if parents don't agree?
 - j. How to control indisciplined children?
 - k. What written caution and agreement to be signed by the parent and student for joining the classes?
 - l. Since the classes will have grown-up students from higher classes, who will be responsible for their good behaviour?
 - m. What is "ASHA" interested in?
4. How many computers or projectors will be needed?
 5. How to optimize the usage of the equipment?
 6. Does the software cater to all the classes of students?
 7. What is the economics if the projection-computer caters to only elementary school students? Is the investment justified?
 8. Will the extra classes offered by the Organization meet with satisfactory attendance – as the children will be forced to more study hours without any entertainment or relaxation?
 9. Are there enough students to justify?
 10. Will the schools be happy to have the program of "Audio-Visual" teaching "once-a-week" at their premises, if the computer-projector usage is to be optimized?
 11. What happens if at the time of a school's presentation, the electric power is not available? Will the students have to wait till next week?
 12. Why can't the Government schools be prompted to buy the equipment themselves?
 13. How frequent and at what cost can the programs be enhanced or updated?
 14. Now that plenty of educational programs are available in the market, the cost of the equipment needs to be competent. Will buying a computer and projector separately incur less expenditure?
 15. Does "IL&FS" contribute to the upliftment of the students? Is it only interested in developing and promoting its products? What advantage is there in associating with them for this Organization? Are materials provided gratis?
 16. In the village classroom, there is written on the board that the school was started in 1951. Sixty (60) years have passed and no improvement is seen. Why? Shortage of teachers or students?
 17. Will the Organization be sustainable in different social and political scenarios?

18. Will the lessons given by the multimedia presentation be complementary to the existing school syllabus. Do the multimedia presentations follow the same concepts as of school curriculum?

In the foregoing, if “ASHA” is interested in providing only education to the students, the other aspects need not be considered. However, having mentioned so many activities in its hands and no proper staff to carry out, can indirectly cast doubts on the efficacy of the Organization’s intended purpose. Also, the resources provided by “ASHA” should be utilized effectively for that project only and not diverted to other activities.

A few photographs taken at the time of visit are also attached.

Special Note :

1. The members of “Saranalayam” seem to be from the same family.
2. The Aims and Objectives are mentioned on a general note. It should be clearly stated in what way this organization is doing it and it is not sufficient to say “Educational development of rural children”. All the SHG and similar projects mention it so. What difference will “Saranalayam” make in the development of village children? What is “Youth Development”? Specific projects should be given specific description. For example, it is mentioned “Children’s Club”. What will the club provide for children, other than educational assistance?