

## **Pneuma Trust, Madurai Trip Report Jan 5, 2018**

I am Venkat Ramasamy, a volunteer at Asha Chennai. I made a visit to the Pneuma project on January 5, 2018. Pneuma is an organization that receives funding from Asha San Francisco for 2 projects. One is an after school tuition program and the other is health education primarily for girls in schools. They also run a home for children who are extremely poor, sometimes abandoned and some who are children of HIV affected parents. This home was previously funded by Asha San Francisco but they are not receiving funds from Asha any more as they receive adequate funding from the Government and other private donors.

Here is a brief background of the projects.

### **1 Health Education**

This project is primarily aimed at educating school girls about sex and the issues relating to sexual health. India has a very prudish attitude towards sex and unfortunately, it is taboo to talk about it. In that sense, the effort to educate girls on such issues is of paramount importance because they wouldn't get the education anywhere else. However, this attitude also makes it difficult for this project to talk openly about the issues as the content is being regulated by school staff and Government officials.

### **2. After School Tuition Program**

This project is supposed to help the most remote rural villages in the vicinity of Madurai. These villages typically have a very difficult time getting someone for after school help. The purpose of the program is to provide an elder in the village to be an organizer to help the students study and also to teach the basics of different subject to these young children.

On January 5, 2018, I went to Madurai and reached there about 1 pm and met with a friend so I will have a meeting place for Pneuma trust to pick me up. Karuna who is the Project Coordinator from Pneuma trust came and picked me up at Kennett Hospital at 1:30 pm. We drove to the Pneuma Trust office in Madurai which was about 15 minutes from Kennett Hospital. I spoke with Paulin who is the Psychologist for about 30 minutes while she explained the projects and what their goals were for the projects.

Paulin, Karuna, Ajay (a helper) and I were ready to go to a school for the health presentation. Karuna and Ajay loaded the car with a speaker, screen and a couple of visual charts to Mettupatti Higher Secondary School, Allanganallur, Madurai. We arrived at about 2:45 at the school and Paulin went and talked to the HM who organized a classroom and invited children who were in grades 9 and above. There were about 80 or so children with an almost even number of boys and girls.

Ajay setup the screen and projector and Karuna took over the presentation. The presentation was a YouTube video that talked about the importance of the environment and what we need to do to protect it. Karuna then paused the video and asked questions relating to the video. Most children were shy and didn't

want to volunteer any answers but a couple of them were eager to participate. Karuna encouraged further participation by giving presents to the kids who were answering the questions. The gifts included pens, pencil boxes, and notebooks. It certainly got a few more kids interested.

The next part was an animated YouTube video with narration in Tamil about the private parts of the female anatomy and the importance of keeping it clean, letting others know if needed that they are private and cannot be touched. It talked a little about the health hazards of not keeping the private parts clean but didn't really touch on things like HIV or other sexual diseases.

At the end of the video, the boys (including Ajay, Karuna and me) were asked to leave the room and Paulin talked to the girls about being careful sexually. This lasted about 7 minutes or so.

We took our projector, speaker and screen and walked to the car where we found many of the fliers we had given the children turned into paper airplanes and littered all over the grounds.

We then went to the Pneuma home in Etchikulam that was housing the abandoned children which also had a wing for elderly people who seemed to be abandoned. I won't go into details about this as we do not provide funding for this project.

At this home, I saw a van that didn't seem to have been used for a while. The purchase of this van was apparently funded by Asha. It might be in disrepair and might need to be revived.

We left about 5:30 to visit two of the villages that were being funded for the After School Tuition Program. The first was at Kolinchipatti where Ms. Kannammai was employed by Pnuema to provide after school education for the children in the village. The village was extremely small and consisted of about 10 houses in a very small area. It seems, most of them are related. There were about 10 children who had prepared some artwork using waste products. One of them was a 3D crow that a child had created with chicken feathers. There was one that talked about capturing rainwater in a storage tank for future use.

We left Kolinchipatti and went to Valaikeni. This seemed like a larger village. There were about 25 children there and all of them had created some craft project. There was one girl in particular, who seemed very motivated and had created multiple projects. One of them was the depiction of the solar system and another was one of space exploration with pictures of the moon, the satellite and so on with pictures of some famous astronauts especially Indian origin astronauts Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams.

Karuna passed out gifts of pens, pencils and pencilboxes to all the children which was nice since it encouraged all kids instead of just the ones that performed well. The teacher they have employed is a retired teacher named Valarmathy. Her

grandson who is studying at American College was also there helping the kids. He apparently helps them with their homework. At both the locations, the Pneuma home had prepared a snack and sent it ahead of time with Ajay.

We then left the village and had dinner together before I was dropped off at the bus terminus.