

*1) Detailed budget. This time in the budget you had send broad stroke items like lumped salaries, etc. What was required is a clearer idea of the number of employees and what they are being paid.*

*Could you also put down their responsibilities (e.g. Devaki, Rajamma - training pre-school teachers in the morning and engaging with evening kids from 4:30 - 6:00.) and if they are part time (e.g. cooks) or full time.*

**Staff and responsibilities:**

Senthil- More than full time-Teaching the older students practical work, accounts, general administration, looking after guests pickup, dropping, building maintenance, teaching computers etc.

Rajammal- Full time- Teaching the evening children, preparing and planning for the classes, taking charge of Arts and Crafts activities and accounts, Teaching the balwadi teachers, taking stock of the kitchen once a month, allotting the cleaning duties , Taking charge of the staff saving and loan scheme, conducting meetings for it etc.

Deavaki- Full time- Teaching the evening children, preparing and planning for the classes, taking charge of the kitchen purchases, Teaching the balwadi teachers, taking stock of the kitchen once a month, doing the kitchen accounts every month, keeping the handwritten attendance records, activities records etc.

Sakthivel- Full time-Teaching the evening children, preparing for classes, helping Senthil with teaching practical skills , working on electrical , plumbing,wood and electronics work for the Thulir buildings, etc.

Lakshmi and Sasikala- full time- Preschool teachers. We pay half their salary and the parents pay the other half.

Rajkumari and Saroja- Part time- cooks in the kitchen

Kannagi- part time- Guest house maintenance.

<b><i>Thulir Expenses and Budget 2012-13</i></b>				
		<b><i>Actual Expenses April 12 to Dec 12</i></b>	<b><i>Proposed budget for Jan 13 to Mar 13</i></b>	
1	Salaries			
a	Senthil @ 3500		10,500	
b	Rajammal @ 3500		10,500	
c	Devagi @ 3500		10,500	
d	Sakhthivel @ 2500		7,500	
	Total		1,11,500	39,000
2	Lunch for Students and Staff and Evening Snack for students		1,03,438	35,000
3	2 wheeler fuel and maintenance		8,547	3,000
4	Travel expenses		9,612	3,000
5	Exposure Tour		16,675	6,000
6	Library		3,041	2,000
7	Arts and Crafts materials		150	2,000
8	Course materials		12,831	3,000
9	Farming expenses		1,140	1,000
10	Computers/ equipment maint			2,500
11	Bank charges		112	500
12	phone/ postage/ internet		12,837	4,500
13	Resource persons Expenses		22,113	7,000
14	Teaching materials		6,015	2,000
15	Rent		22,500	7,500
16	Campus Maint		7,155	2,000
17	Stationery and Printing		3,046	1,000
	<b>Total</b>		<b>3,40,712</b>	<b>1,21,000</b>

*2) Agri Enterprise: You had mentioned during your visit that the children's enterprise is profitable. The group wanted details of the expenses. Also how do you train the children to account for investment (e.g. buying cows) and running expenses (e.g. salaries) of the people involved with the enterprise.*

We are in the process of collating the details of the expenses. After my reporting at the meeting, there has been some developments. The rains failed this year so there wasn't much fodder and so we have ended up spending money on fodder. It has also been difficult to graze the cows, especially as the numbers have increased and simultaneously, Jaibal, Jaga, and later Raman who replaced Jaibal all dropped out of the agri project, due to family compulsions to go for cooly work outside to earn some money quickly. We are still maintaining the cows with the involvement of Senthil and Dhanabal's family.

The issue of how to account for investments is a new one even for us. One option is to treat it as a loan for the cows purchase, and so this amount with the interest to be either paid off in installments [depending upon income and cash flow] or to be paid off by sale of cows/ calves at a suitable date in future. The income from Milk and other produce sale has been periodically split to pay as salaries, to keep the enthusiasm going. Right now the energy levels are a bit low after loss of a calf and the failed rains and crops. So we need to have a meeting of everyone in Thulir and decide jointly how to go forward with it. We would be happy to get any suggestions from you all.

*3) Evening Sessions: There is a bit of confusion regarding how many children attend the evening sessions and with what regularity. You had mentioned 190 kids attend Thulir and around 30 on an average and more recently 60. The group had asked for the attendance (Senthil was working on this for some time). Is this available?*

The issue is that if you do the math a child only comes in once a week on an average. This doesn't seem to be reflective of the reality, it seems more likely that a child does not come in more frequently for a few months and not come in for some time. But, this would be clarified by data on the attendance.

There was a request for more information regarding engaging with the evening kids and if any curriculum is being constructed to see how knowledge of what they have done before can be built upon.

Also do you maintain records for each child to track their activities and progress? I don't remember seeing something like this, but I was not as involved with the evening sessions.

The attendance data we have is names entered in Tamil in a note book each day. That is available for all the years from the beginning. Various volunteers have at different times made computer programmes for us to enter this data. Manoharan had made an online programme to enter it. This programme too had inherent various small problems from the beginning. So we would give the feedback to Manoharan and wait for him to fix it. After manoharan, we have no one to do this. Senthil still has some problems in this. That this is an online programme makes this that much more difficult for everyone to access it in a place like Thulir. Also we are very short of hands and have not been able to enter the data. So if any volunteer wants to take it up, fix this or do a new programme and do the analysis they are most welcome. We are not able to do it.

Coming to average figures and total nos, conventional computing and math do not work for figuring out our unusual evening sessions. 190 children have used Thulir last year. One can't divide that and arrive at figures of the number of children coming in. The children coming in the evening are of various groups. There is a faithful group which comes most working days and which wants to learn subjects with some continuity. They would have at least 75 percent attendance. There is another group which comes on holidays and random days to use the books, Art materials, puzzles etc. There are some who come in for specific needs- to prepare for an exam or competition or to get something explained. We sometimes call in groups for fixed camps. For instance we had adolescent girls coming in for weekends over Feb/ March this year. Some just come in to participate in events. We have not included kids who have come in for just 2,3 days in the 190. So in short, there are some children who come more regularly and so will have 75 percent or more attendance while others might have very low figures. But the fact we want to emphasise is that we are an open space so there are new children coming and dropping out all the time.

This kind of nebulosity is sometimes frustrating. Especially when people ask us for statistics or ask us to define things. We have discussed many, many times whether to structure this more. But we feel very strongly that since this is the only place in this valley where children can access these things we should not bar our doors to anyone!! We feel that a learning centre should be open for all kinds of learning. We also are not compulsory about attendance. Children should help out at home and in their farms when required. Any new child might develop interest and come more regularly. Also sometimes it is possible for occasional visits to become meaningful for the child as they might get inspired or touched by even a one off interaction with an interesting teacher/ guest/ volunteer. Nowadays we have older students who have grown up and gone away for higher studies or work who when meeting us tell us what they have learnt here or what helped them and it gives us the confidence that our effort is not wasted and this kind of open space is needed.

This is also frustrating when the teacher has taken trouble preparing something to teach a particular group and many of the group does not turn up or are preoccupied with something at school and demand to be taught that. Or sometimes kids are absent for sometime and the continuity of the lesson is lost. And one will have to start all over again for the absentees. But for the last year we have realised one has to look at teaching in this situation also very differently. The sessions here have to be student driven and not teacher driven. Though we still keep reading up and are prepared with things that we feel the students ought to know, we don't force it down their throats nor do we get frustrated if we don't get to teach it that day. Nowadays we have Rajammal, Devaki, Ambika, Anu, Sakthivel, Chidambaram and sometimes Senthil and Krishna teaching the children. We have normally a group of 8 to 10 students each. They mostly tell us what they want to learn. Sometimes they want to do what they are already good at or like doing. But since we keep making sure that they feel comfortable to ask what they don't know at Thulir, most kids would ask what they don't know and say 'please teach me this'. And mostly every child in the group is learning what they want to learn at their own pace. This is more work for the teacher. You have to be prepared for teaching something you are not prepared for at all. Sometimes you have to tell them you would prepare and teach them the next day. There are very few sessions where we are teaching the whole group the same thing. Of course there are some who are playing most of the time, but we find that when there is freedom, even they learn when they have to. The kids who are learning or doing some work continue to work even if there is a group playing.

We have to teach from selected topics from the stateboard samacheer kalvi syllabus as all our students go to the government school. We don't do all the lessons in that order from the book though. We have to teach most of the topics in a more practical way or do some other activities so that the kids understand them better. Due to our limited time we definitely cannot cover the whole portion. In addition to this we do Art, Craft, Music, theatre, hikes etc. which are not done in the Govt. school at all.

Again conventional evaluation does not work for such a diverse group. This has always been a source of questioning and exploring for us. We are not a formal school and the government school children are not with us full time. But we would like to get a feedback on how effective we are and also gauge the progress of each child. We do have tests and worksheets from time to time when the child asks for it and is eager to participate in the evaluation. But our time with them is so limited, we have so much to share and they have come to us after 8 hours of school and tests there already that we are not able to have them at Thulir too. We have tried various ways over the years! We now have files for each kid (for about 60 kids who come more regularly) where they keep all their work, so that they and we know what they have been doing. We also have an Evaluation of Thulir and the teachers and the teaching by the kids once a year. We also have a self evaluation by each student once a year. But we don't think any of these conventional evaluations give us the entire picture or indicate to us the actual learning which happens. How do we evaluate what kids pick up when they come now and then? When there is a visitor from Switzerland and she shows pictures and photos and talks about her life and land, how does one evaluate if the kids have learnt anything at all or not? This is not filed in their files. When we catch a rat snake and we are examining it and doing some experiments how do we evaluate what happens in the students' minds? When we do dance and songs for a whole week, or sports for a whole week, or go on a long trek in the forest, what learning takes place and how can that be evaluated? These are some questions we have. We are still searching for meaningful ways of teaching, learning and evaluating. Your suggestions are most welcome.

Every day the activity we do with the groups is recorded in Tamil. Anu keeps a diary in English and records happenings but usually does not get time to write when we are most busy, doing the most exciting things or are the busiest with camps etc. So this diary has gaps but is still an indicator. Most worksheets, ideas for activities, puzzles etc. are filed and kept. Interested people are most welcome to browse through.

#### *4) Fellowship: What is your fellowship amount and when does it expire?*

We really appreciate Asha Bangalore's concern for our [Anu and Krishna's] Fellowships. A friend of Thulir who visited us, is raising the money for our fellowship for 2013-14. We are hopeful of his raising the required amount. We will keep you informed about developments on this front and request your help, if and when needed! Thank you!

Warm Regards,

Anu and Krishna