

Visit to Thulir - September 2012

I visited Thulir on September 16 for two days and had informative conversations with Anu, Krishna and some of the students. Krishna had met the Asha volunteers on August 19, 2012 and the excerpts from that meeting are given below.

KRISHNA'S REPORT ON THULIR PROGRAMMING

Educational Enrichment Centre: The area around this school is historically tribal, self-sustaining and physically difficult to access. The agricultural market and government services were only available at considerable distance. When Krishna and his family moved to the area in 2003 they did an assessment of educational status and were surprised to learn that parents highly valued educational attainment, despite the fact that existing schools were poor. While there were not enough resources (staff – and otherwise) to start a school, the family built and operated a centre for educational enrichment on their property. The primary goals of the centre were to increase functional literacy and exposure to the outside world in a non-coercive environment – children were free to attend as it suited them.

Multi-Skills Program: After some time, the family recognized the need for additional programming for teenaged boys who had dropped out of school and were at the centre during the day. Ultimately, they identified a model that they felt had merit, which was vocational training in a range of skills. The objectives were to broaden possibilities for the young men, as opposed to having them train extensively in an area they may or may not select as a lifetime career path. Also, while one village area might not be able to support its own electrician or plumber, it could potentially generate sufficient income for a jack-of-all-trades. Boys were given a stipend, as their peers were generally off earning money in the garment industry and it was important for this program not to create financial burdens for families. The unexpected results of this program were that many graduates returned to school, more confident in their abilities, and passed their grade 10 or even their grade 12 exams.

Pre-school Program: Since 2003, the area has become more connected both physically (a new road has been built) and through technology (cell phones and televisions). The economy is increasingly cash-based– with attending problems of unscrupulous money-lending. Government services are more readily available and the quality of government schools has improved somewhat. Along with these changes come significantly increased

educational aspirations. Manual labour is looked down on, and while some parents are sending their children to a private school, even those recognize the need for supplementary programming. After discussions with the parents, it appeared preschool programming would meet some of these needs while continuing to steer clear of RTE requirements.

The Multi-Skills program (already becoming less relevant, due to the changing aspirations of villagers) was put on hold to develop a new preschool education training program. Four Thulir “alumnae” girls and two boys are studying in the program, and four preschool aged children are enrolled to help provide appropriate context.

Other Projects and Programming: Thulir has collaborated with local government schools to support science education. They have also created and delivered trainings for local health workers, and are encouraging cooperative organic farming for youth who want a sustainable livelihood in agriculture.

As the number of children using the facilities continues to rise, it's clear the programs need space outside the family's personal property. The Foundation has purchased two acres. Parents want a school, and the Foundation is dialoguing around possibilities (maybe a parent-owned and administered school, with Thulir running the program?) While RTE is not friendly to alternative education, some younger educators feel alternatives can still be run if the school is registered and the government is satisfied around the school's infrastructure (toilets, playground, etc.) Another possibility is to set up additional educational enrichment centres and to staff them with the new surplus of young 10-12 standard graduates.

Asha's Role: Asha Bangalore has been involved since 2008, providing funding for food, materials, and staff salaries. Asha Princeton has provided a fellowship for the couple since '03.

There was no specific proposal presented at this meeting, but Krishna reported he will have one ready in the next couple of weeks and he expects to request about the same amount for program costs as last year (with the costs of the preschool training program substituting for the multi-skills program).

Other fund raising priorities are

- Personal income: next year the Princeton chapter is closing and so the couple will need another source of funding to meet their own needs.

- Capital to build the new structures, and assured stream of operating support for any new programming

Change in Program

The change in the educational program has been explained by Krishna during his meeting with ASHA volunteers. Given the small size of the population in Sittlingi village, it is important that the programs are flexible with the changing aspirations of the students in the region. The evening program for school going children attracts many students and offers them an opportunity to enrich their skills. The Government school at Sittlingi is currently undergoing shortage of teachers and this affects the development of children adversely. The evening program at Thulir offers them some chance to keep pace with their learning. The program is handled by Thulir staff who have been trained by Anu and Krishna for more than 4 years. The staff continues to be trained by them during the day.

Team

All the staff of Thulir are alumni of Thulir and are committed towards the centre. It was suggested to have their profiles updated on the Thulir web site and will be posted on the Asha page of Thulir.

Enterprise Development

In November 2011, Four of the Thulir alumni came together to start a Agro-based enterprise. More details about it can be found in my earlier site visit - http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/967/sitevisit_Nov11.pdf The students are continuing with their adventure. One of them have since left the group and another person had to go out for a short time. The rains have failed in the months of June and July affecting their crop for this year. Despite these hiccups, they seem to be determined in continuing with the development of the dairy activities.

Budget for 2012-13

Asha has not yet released the funds for the year 2012-13. Thulir has submitted their actual expenses for the 5 months in the year 2012-13 and has estimated the expenses for 2012-13 based on those expenses. It needs to be discussed at the earliest.