

## **Background**

Thulir is an Education Resource Center for children and young adults at Sittilingi, a tribal village in Dharmapuri District, Tamil Nadu. The Bangalore chapter of Asha has been supporting Thulir since 2008-09. More about Thulir in their website [www.thulir.org](http://www.thulir.org) and details of Asha funding in the website <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=967> . You can also read their newsletters in their blog <http://www.thulir.org/wp/blog/>

## **Current Activities**

The focus for the present year will be on the evening program for the school going children. Many children from Sittilingi and neighbouring village attend the after-school program in Thulir. The program will be handled by Anu, Senthil, Rajamma and Devagi. In addition, other part-time staff, guests and others, will handle some classes for these children. The children visit Thulir every evening from Tuesday to Friday and also on Saturday morning. Some of these children participating in the training program for running events visit thulir during early morning and sometimes attend classes after their morning runs. The attendance for the evening program varies depending on various factors. A more detailed report on the evening program is available in Annex 1 of this report.

The basic technology course is not being pursued for this year. This is largely due to the reduced number of dropouts and preference for mainstream school and college education. The connectivity between Sittilingi and other places have improved due to additional bus services enabling students to attend schools elsewhere. However, there are seekers for tuition classes for year-end examinations.

Currently, three girls are trained in teaching preschool and primary school children and three boys trained in building maintenance, electrical, plumbing and solar work.

The training program for the teachers for the evening program as well as the pre-school will be undertaken during the day time.

## **Staff**

Krishna has decided to take a break from the regular activities. He will continue to guide others in various administrative activities though. He is also involved with Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in construction of new operation theatre, wards, quarters in the tribal hospital at Sittiling, which will involve working with some of the Thulir alumni. Senthil, Rajamma and Devagi are geared up for more responsibilities and are likely to contribute their efforts towards the evening program. Shaktivel had to leave Thulir due to family circumstances and

is likely to return only after three to four months. Other past students like Dhanapal, Jayabal and Paramesh are also likely to leave in the short-term due to family commitments. Being a resource centre, Thulir is very much open to additional people joining them at any point of time and tailoring programs accordingly.

### **Pre-School**

Last year Thulir started a small preschool section for the children of the staff of the hospital. Two girls were selected and trained as teachers for that program. It was started with just three children aged 3 to 5. The program was started on an experimental basis and is likely to be strengthened this year. Thulir offers help in expertise, part-time staff support and funding partially.

### **Initiative to start a School**

There has been more emphatic demand from the parents and staff of the hospital as well as in the village for Thulir to start a regular school. Thulir believes that such a school should be a group initiative with complete parent and village participation in management and administration. Thulir would assist in education aspects and in training of teachers and in fund raising. The administrative issues are currently being studied. Any development in this regard would only involve time and efforts of Anu and Krishna.

### **Youth Organisation**

Some of the youth in Sittlingi village have come together to form a youth organisation aimed at serving their village. Their first initiative was to conduct a cricket tournament this summer and invited teams from the neighbouring villages. Their second initiative was launching a 'clean the village campaign' to eliminate the plastic waste from the village. They look up to Thulir for support in various aspects. Anu is currently involved in guiding their efforts along with Dr. Ravi and Manjunathan from the hospital. They have rented house and started a library and it also acts as a meeting place for them. It is envisaged to make it a community learning centre.

### **Agro-enterprise Development**

The initiative to develop an agro-based enterprise has failed due to lack of rains. Most of the team members has since left Thulir for other options. A consolidated report on the initiative is being worked on and the lessons learnt are likely to help in the future. Should they get good rains, some more initiatives on those lines are likely to be restarted.

## Budget for the Year 2013-2014

S. No.	Major Head	Note	2013-14 Budget	2012-13 Budget*	2012-13 Actual
1	Salaries	1	2,22,000	1,54,000	1,56,000
2	Nutrition Program	2	2,00,000	1,29,696	1,36,448
3	Resource persons Expenses	3	40,000	27,084	24,493
4	Rent		30,000		30,000
5	Exposure Tour		25,000	44,675	16,675
6	Travel expenses		25,000	9,992	16,797
7	Telephone and communications		20,000	25,723	17,097
8	Vehicle maintenance		15,000	12,567	12,157
9	Campus Maintenance		10,000	11,210	16,000
10	Printing & Stationery		9,000	5,909	7,580
11	Teaching Materials		13,000	21,546	10,286
12	Computer Maintenance		6,000		4,550
<b>Total</b>			<b>6,15,000</b>	<b>4,42,402</b>	<b>4,48,083</b>

\*The budget for 2012-13 was presented in September 2012. It contains the actuals for the first 5 months and estimates for the next 7 months

### Notes to Budget

#### 1. Salary

There has been significant revision in the staff salaries this year. The break-up of the same is as follows:

S. No	Name	2013-14 Budget	2012-13 Actual
1	Senthil	78,000	42,000
2	Rajamma	72,000	42,000
3	Devagi	72,000	42,000
4	Others		30,000
Total		2,22,000	1,56,000

I had discussions with Senthil, Rajamma and Devagi about the increase in their salaries. Their roles and responsibilities are increasing every year and they are more committed than before. They see a future in Thulir in terms of managing the centre in future. Senthil and Rajamma are now married to each other and likely to move into the campus soon. They were explained the differences in salary and stipend and the expectations from them. The wages for skilled as well as semi-skilled labour has significantly gone up and it has increased the risk of losing these staff towards those activities. These three staff have a long association with Thulir and their presence in Thulir is extremely beneficial for the development of Thulir. The salaries were arrived at after discussions with them about their expectations and lifestyles. The salary for others includes those of staff like Shaktivel, Perumal and others who worked for few months in the previous year. Funding for salaries of such staff and stipend for the 6 students mentioned earlier are to be sourced elsewhere.

## **2. Nutrition Program**

The evening snacks offered in Thulir is aimed at promoting healthy millets and snacks. They also provide lunch for the staff working in Thulir. Visitors, guests and resource persons visiting Thulir are also provided with food in the kitchen. The increase in budgeted is largely due to the increase in the prices of basic provisions for the past 1 year. There is some potential to grow some of the ingredients within Thulir Campus and it is constantly being explored. The rains have failed in the past one year.

## **3. Resource persons Expenses**

Various kinds of resource people visit Thulir from time to time to teach students in general or teach particular skills, conduct workshops etc. They are not paid for their time and effort. However, Thulir takes care of their travel and food. Some resource persons have been paid an honorarium for their efforts. It is difficult to predict accurately as to who will visit Thulir. Being a resource centre, they are always open to people from different backgrounds.

## **Annexure 1 - Report from Thulir on Evening After-school Program**

Our evening sessions are a little unusual. 167 children have used Thulir last year. 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 167. 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. We want to emphasise that we are an open space so there are new children coming and dropping out all the time. Also, we want to have this as an open space because this is the only space in the village where kids can access materials, books and sympathetic adults. So ours is a library, tuition centre and a resource centre combined for the children attending the evening after-school program.

We have discussed 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 do not want to be 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. 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 when we occasionally meet older students who have grown up and gone away for higher studies or work they tell us what all 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.

It 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. One will have to start all over again for the absentees. During 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, Devagi, Ambika, Anu, Nikhil and sometimes Senthil 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. 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 ask us to teach them. This gives every child in the group, a chance to learn what they want to learn and at their own pace. This increases the 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 State Board *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. But we are still not able to record all what they do. I also feel that this takes away time from learning and teaching- our important interaction with the children. 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 was 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. We keep a diary in English and records happenings but usually do 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.

We do prepare for our evening sessions. Many mornings in a week are spent in this. We don't have a standard format. If we did we would be like the government school. We would not be effective! We are here because we would like to cater to what is needed for each group of children. So each teacher tells what she or he has done the previous week and what her students need to learn and we prepare materials and methods accordingly. We have many files and notes and cards. Someone has to spend days looking at all the materials we have, to understand this! Most worksheets, ideas for activities, puzzles etc. are filed and kept. Interested people are most welcome to browse through.