

Visit to Thulir

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1. Summary of Key activities

1.1 Construction activity at the Workshop Site:

Thulir and THI are currently involved in the construction of a Workshop in Sittlingi. The workshop is located about 700m from Thulir on the mud road. The workshop is designed to accommodate a mechanical workshop with lathe and foundry equipments. It has a provision to include an organic bakery. Some of the boys spent their morning sessions in the construction of the workshop. The foundation for the workshop has already been laid and the eco-friendly mud bricks have also been made ready. The students were involved in constructing the walls for the workshop. Their education onsite involved learning about mixing the cement mixture, placing the bricks and cementing them and checking the alignment of the bricks on the walls. The students worked on the site for about 2 weeks during the morning sessions. They seemed to enjoy the experience except for the heat. The learning is set to help them to construct a cycle-stand at Thulir which will be likely to be entirely done by them.



1.2 Classes on Drawing

While the on-site education involved learning the masonry work, the off-site class room education was about the engineering drawing of the workshop site. Krishna took classes for them on how to express the construction site in terms of a drawing on paper. His classes taught them how to take the measurement of the site and depict them as a picture. The students were later asked to measure the site and draw the site plan. The ultimate outcome seems to be equipping the students with the knowledge of designing and constructing a basic building site. The learning is likely to be tested when the students are handed over the task of getting a cycle site constructed at Thulir.

1.3 Key Chain Preparation

Team Asha has placed a huge order with Thulir to prepare 400 Key chains, which was likely to be distributed as goodies for their proposed 8K run on August 15, 2009 (Later cancelled due to Swine Flu scare). It involved getting the bamboo from forests, cutting and sizing the bamboo and polishing them, get some painting done on the key chain and finally giving them a coat of varnish to give the glossy look. Vinoo undertook the responsibility of getting them done in time. The other students were new to this task and need to be taught about it. Vinoo trained them and got the entire task done in a matter of few days well ahead of the event. The other students were quick to learn the nuances and provided a good support in completing the task in time.



1.4 Training for Kaveri Half-Marathon

Vinoo and Ezhumalai will be participating in the Kaveri Half-Marathon on September 13, 2009. Both of them are being trained based on the plan provided by Santhosh Padmanabhan. I joined them on few of their training sessions, one of them being a one-hour run. The boys ran very well and looked capable of doing the half-marathon. Ezhumalai lives about 2 Kms from Thulir and stays overnight to attend the training sessions. I hope to join them again for their long run practice during the August 23-24 weekend. Watching them train, Shakthivel and Jayabal are also interested in joining them. Shakthivel joined us for one practice session (in *lungi* and slippers)! and did quite well. He looked a natural runner and covered the distance despite the apparent discomforts. I

advised him not to run more than 30 minutes. More students are likely to be inspired by them and start running.

1.5 School going children

Rajamma and Devaki assist Anu in handling the school going children in the evenings. In one of the days, the children came forward to narrate stories and puzzles. Their rendition was recorded and replayed to them later (Video available on request). The children showed plenty of confidence and enthusiasm in their renditions.



1.6 Gardening Work

With majority of the student engaged in the construction activity in the mornings, Anu and Krishna decided to let them go easy in their gardening session in the evenings. The students still take care of their routine works in the garden but get limited time to do any new work. I was engaged with them in cleaning some weeds in the front area.

1.7 Bee Keeping

One of the Bee boxes did not have any hive in it as the queen bee has died. Perumal was assigned the task of going to the forest and getting a queen bee for the hive. Perumal along with few other boys started out to find a hive to capture them in the box. They located one close to Thulir and Perumal took the lead to get the hive. He was also explaining the process to the other boys and directing them for assistance. The process was meticulous and demanded enormous amount of patience. It was impressive to note how the students took care of the every minute detail. I observed Perumal waiting for sometime after capturing the queen bee. He waited to capture all the other bees associated with the hive. This, he says, ensures that the other bees don't die as they cannot be accommodated in other hives. Ideally, the queen bee must be sufficient to prepare a hive but Perumal showed concern for those tiny ones and saved the lives of many bees. Later the captured bees were transferred to a bee box. The activity was recorded in a video camera and on watching it, Perumal offered to do a better video shoot next time. (Video available on request).

1.8 Trekking Expedition

Mondays are holidays at Thulir. I was offered a chance to undertake a trekking expedition in one of the hills nearby. I eagerly agreed and the trip was finalised. Senthil took the lead

and guided us from the front. We started from Thulir at about 3:00 in the afternoon and headed to the rocks. Few more boys, whose home was on the way, joined us in the trip. We walked through MoolaSittlingi and reached the foothills. From there, it was an arduous climb up the hill. The boys accomplished the task with ease. The trip gave me an opportunity for plenty of informal interaction with the students and a chance to understand them better. Some of them shared their concerns about the depleting forests in the hills and showed me some evidence. On the way back, Rajamma offered us a cup of tea at her house, which was on the way. She greeted us on the way up the hill and extended the hospitality to serve us a delicious cup of tea on the way back.



1.9 Students meeting

On Sunday morning, the students meet with Anu and Krishna to discuss the learning the previous week and also planning the activities for the following week. The meeting also provides them with a chance to raise their issues and find solutions by discussing them. Issues like wastage of food, displacement of stationery, feedback from the construction site, feedback from those making key chains were discussed.

1.10 My Sessions with Students

Anu and Krishna were gracious to offer me a chance to interact with the students in the class room. I attempted to initiate some ideas on improving their communication skills. The theory classes were conducted in the afternoon sessions. The Students were less interactive as they looked a bit tired after the morning work at the site. Also, the topic wasn't very interesting as I did not prepare myself with sufficient aids to involve them in detail. On a later date, I tried to have a Group Discussion with the students. They came forward with few topics and eventually we chose discuss on *Deforestation*. This session

was well received as I realised that its a topic that is relevant to them. Also, Krishna and Anu have provided them plenty of knowledge in this area. Their suggestions to minimise deforestation was quite interesting. Some of them are quoted below:

- Speak to Villagers in various forums and try to bring discipline in cutting trees
- Join Government departments like Police, Forestry etc, and work for the public
- Form an association with all youngsters and lobby for their cause
- Work on tree plantations
- Try to educate children in schools
- Other activities to minimise erosion like digging pits near the trees.

1.11 Football Sessions

The children are encouraged to play games in the evening and they have taken up to football. Vinoo has put in a mandatory 30-minute practice sessions ahead of the game to ensure that every boy has a chance to play the ball. The big boys and small boys play their games separately.

2. Impression about Students

2.1 Old Students

It was really nice experience to interact with Rajamma, Devaki, Perumal and Vinoo. It is very easy for anyone to be overwhelmed by their humility. They seems to command a good respect from the new students and it was demonstrated often when they take classes for the boys. Rajamma and Devaki take classes for the school going children and have started shouldering the kitchen responsibilities with Anu.

2.2 New Students

It is too early to comment on the new batch of the students as they have completed just 2 months. The boys from Gudalur have settled well and they have even rejected an offer to go home for Onam festival. There seems to be a good amount of cohesiveness amongst the batch which is likely to encourage better learning this year.

3. Diary of Events

Date	Events
Wednesday 5 August 2009	Morning - Visit to the Workshop site, Observing the Key Chain preparations Afternoon - Conducted my first session on Communication Evening - Playing football
Thursday 6 August 2009	Morning - More detailed work on Key Chains Afternoon - Second session on Communication Evening - Playing football

Date	Events
Friday 7 August 2009	Morning - Running with Vinoo and Ezhumalai Morning - Visit to Workshop site and Key chain preparation Afternoon - Attended Krishna's session on Engineering drawing Evening - Attended Anu's session involving school going children Night - Watched the movie 'Home' with students
Saturday 8 August 2009	Morning - Running session with Vinoo and Ezhulmalai Morning - Visit to Workshop Site Evening - Gardening work with Students
Sunday 9 August 2009	Morning - Running with Vinoo and Ezhumlai Morning - Krishna's session on Engineering drawing Morning - Meeting of all students Afternoon - Rest
Monday 10 August 2009	Holiday Evening - Trekking expedition with students
Tuesday 11 August 2009	Morning - Packing Key Chains Evening - Video show for School going students Evening - Watched live demonstration of bee keeping by students