

Society for Education and Action Site Visit Report

Report Date: Monday, May 23, 2016

Visit Date: Monday, January 4, 2016

My name is Guru Mathur. I am the current chapter coordinator for the Dallas chapter of Asha for Education. My father, Mr. Sankaranarayanan, and I had the opportunity to do a site visit of SEA (Society for Education and Action) on Monday, January 4, 2016. SEA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) located in Mamallapuram in the state of Tamil Nadu. The organization's primarily focused on rights, protection, and education of children from the local fishing villages in the Mamallapuram area. Asha Dallas has been supporting 2 separate projects with SEA – (i) Motivation centers and supplemental teacher support for government schools and (ii) Anjalamal school for children with special needs.

On the day of my visit, Mr. Desingu, the project partner, along with another staff member of SEA escorted my father and I to visit Anjalamal school and one of the government schools supported by Asha Dallas. At Anjalamal school, we met with all of the students in attendance that day. The time of our visit coincided with end of school for the day. The children's parents and/or guardians were also present to take the children back home. During our visit, we distributed clothes, mats, & books to all the children. These were part of the items that were destroyed during the 2015 floods in Tamil Nadu. Asha Dallas had disbursed funds for flood relief and part of the funds was used to replace children's items that were destroyed.

Anjalamal school premises, at present, is a small 4-room structure including a kitchen. The 3 rooms are used for different purposes (physiotherapy, academic learning, etc.) during school days. Children are transported to and from the school in 2 dedicated vans that have been leased with support from a local company. I had the opportunity to meet and talk briefly to the drivers of the 2 vans. I also met the school's principal, who showed me detailed records for all the children that document their progress through the year. Both academic progress and physical ability progress are tracked. Mr. Desingu highlighted that 2 of the children's progress has resulted in them being enrolled in regular government schools in the area.

Following the visit of Anjalamal school, we went to one of the government schools that Asha Dallas supports through teacher's salary for a supplemental teacher appointed by the PTA. The school had been heavily impacted due to the 2015 floods. Most of the children's learning material had been destroyed. Asha Dallas's flood relief funds were used to replace the lost learning material, as well as new books and school bags for the children. The school is staffed with one principal and one teacher by the government and one supplemental teacher through the PTA, whose salary Asha Dallas supports. The school caters to children from grade 1 to 5.

Here are my observations and comments from the site visit. There are several positives as well as opportunities for improvement. I have also included several pictures from my visit following my observations & comments.

Positives:

- Anjalamal school
 1. The principal and teaching staffs in the school genuinely care for the children and are attentive to their needs.
 2. The children show significant progress in terms of their physical ability as well academic growth after attending the school for the past 2 years – 2 of the children are now able to attend the local government school.
 3. Van transportation appears to be working well and ensures attendance of children.
 4. SEA has done a phenomenal job of taking in children with special needs and nurturing and educating them.
 5. Flood relief funds sent were used exactly for the purposes they were requested for.
- Motivational centers / government school support
 1. Children and the 2 teachers I met were happy to be in school.
 2. Flood relief funds sent were used exactly for the purposes they were requested for.
- General
 1. With minimum number of paid staffs, SEA has been able to significantly intervene in the education and care of children from the local fishing villages.
 2. SEA workers are genuinely interested in the education of the children. They are from the local area and are emotionally invested in the betterment of the community.

Opportunities:

- Anjalamal school: There needs to be a larger place for this school than what is currently being used. The current space available is not ideal for the number of students enrolled. With plans to enroll more students in future, SEA needs to act fast on the construction of new building for the school in the recently acquired land. SEA is working towards this; Asha Dallas needs to follow up to ensure there is progress.
- Motivational centers / government schools: The schools are desperately understaffed. Asha Dallas and SEA need to engage in dialogue to determine best way to continue funding going forward. It is not clear if funding motivational centers is the most efficient use of funds. It may be of more benefit to supplement the schools with more, better qualified teachers.
- General: With a planned site visit lasting only a few hours, there was very little opportunity to discuss future plans with Mr. Desingu. It would be good to have the site visit last an entire day so that a few hours can be dedicated to discussing future plans.

Best Regards,

Guru Mathur.

Anjalamal school pictures



Government school pictures

