



In April 2017 we had a lot of enquiries from parents to host a children's camp at Puvudham. We decided to have a camp for "Zero Waste Lifestyle" in May. Baladhandapani from Aatral at Coimbatore stayed with the children for the entire 10 days and showed them how their everyday activities embrace all the science and math concepts that they learn till 6th class. 20 children attended the camp. We started the camp with a discussion on where the toilet effluent from every city dweller's house goes. We spoke to the children about how they must make it a point to know where the products they purchase come from and where the waste they generate goes to. The conscious consumer knows the source of the products and their destination after they have been used. The conscious consumer also makes sure that the product is used in creative ways and therefore is never a waste product. And at Puvudham we showed them ways of recycling paper into paper bags or handmade paper, cloth into cloth bags, wash and reusable sanitary pads and foot mats, coconut shells to phone stands and jewellery, egg shells to tortoise and penguin dolls and plastic bags into compressed blocks! The workshop was designed to help the children to become independent in all aspects. They learnt to cook, clean, care for the cows, sheep and chicken. They learnt how to use very little water and recycle even that to grow vegetables. They learnt to use the composting toilet and understood the advantages of the same in terms of creating healthy compost and prevent pollution of ground water by avoiding use of septic tanks and leach tanks. The children also trekked 8 kms to Piyush Manush's Coop Forest and met the activist to understand the importance of raising their voices when they see destruction of forests, rivers and lakes and violation of human rights.



We had a parent's workshop before the children's workshop for parents who wanted to know about Puvudham before they sent their kids for the workshop. Alongside the children's workshop, we had two construction workshops for whoever wanted to learn construction with mud. The idea of upgrading the school from 8th to 10th was a long time pending project. We have so many activities and not much dedicated space. So, our thatch roof was removed and we have put a mud and brick dome in its place. We also decided to construct another roof over it to make space for a science lab, a library and a room for origami, painting work and basket weaving.

The school reopened on 6th June and the children came with their energy and laughter. The first day we spoke to the children telling them that since there was construction happening we would be short of space and so we had to reorganize the craft spaces to continue our crafts work. The second day onwards we organized the spaces for uninterrupted craft work. This year a lot of educated parents have opted for Puvudham school. Most of these parents have attended our workshop "Return to the Soil". They feel that the environment of happiness, work with nature and scope for autonomy and creative learning at Puvudham is ideal for their children. More than 40 children including 20 of parents who have moved from faraway places to be close to the school and send their children to Puvudham needed to be transported to school every day. Our school Van was not sufficient to transport these children. Finally, in August we went ahead and bought a proper school bus (second hand) and got it registered without having to pay any bribes.



Mr Rajeshwar Rao Dadda, the art teacher from Shanthi Nikethan, got a better opportunity in Coimbatore and left Puvudham with the promise to come for workshops whenever needed.

Palaniyammal the hostel cook had left us in March. Since then Meenakshi and Geetha (a WIPRO software engineer, who resigned her job and has settled near Puvudham in a farm with her husband Mr Suresh Kumar) had been managing the cooking during the summer workshops. In June, Akila, a parent who attended the parents camp in March decided to join hands to help care for the children in the hostel. She is staying in the hostel with her two kids and she takes care of the LKG UKG section. Mrs Bhuvaneshwari, another parent, decided to help out with the little ones. She has also taken



charge of the herb collection and Health drink flour processing work. Mathiyalagan, who has been with us for 3 years now looks after the 1st and 2nd group. Gunavathi came back after maternity leave with her baby and is caring for the 3rd and 4th. Another parent who has relocated from the US to have their children learn at Puvudham, Mrs Swetha Sriram, joined to help with the 3rd and 4th. Rameshwari is there for 5th and 6th along with the new teacher who joined us in April Mr Perumal. Madhavaraj and Meenakshi are sharing the lessons of the 7th and 8th along with their administrative duties.

Sanjeevi, joined us in July and is under training to be able to take over from Gunavati the following year. Mr Jothi is taking care of the art and craft work since Rajesh left. He is also the driver for the school bus. We have 35 children in the hostel and 72-day scholars in Puvudham school this year.

Activities at Puvudham-Surabhi Nivas Hostel: All the children in the hostel are regularly engaged in the maintenance of the spaces, caring of the cattle, sheep, chicken, dogs and cats apart from weeding the vegetable beds and watering saplings. As we have a lot of new kids in the hostel, it was a bit difficult in the beginning to make them understand the routine and to convince them to do it properly. Starting from the cow shed, cleaning, bathing, washing clothes, cooking and hostel garden work for everything they needed training. So Meenakshi had to continuously be with them for more than a month. Now they are all in a sync and even if no one is there, they do their best. It is planned that one group will get up early for cooking and cleaning the kitchen, the other group will get up for milking the cows and cleaning the Cow shed while a third group goes for gardening. The other children who are younger will wake up a little later and sweep the rooms and verandas, clean the toilets and weed the garden.

The kanji made from 9 sprouted grains and a breakfast of millet upma will be ready by 7.30 am. After breakfast at 8.00 am, the kitchen and vessel cleaning will be shared by the adults and the children. They all then walk to school by 8.30 by which time the day scholars would have been arrived by the school bus and van.

Working with The Elements in School: As a part of our curriculum we don't have any maintenance staff in Puvudham. The children are divided into groups to clean the campus and water the plants and provide for drinking water with the help of the adults (teachers)



in the team. Instead of prayer we have gardening class for 5th to 8th standard from 9 am to 10 am. Thereafter

they go for a walk, have discussions, sing songs, listen to stories, enact plays, work with numbers, draw and paint. Each month we focus on one of the Five Elements and all the stories, songs and experiments are designed accordingly. In the middle we have a 20-minute break for biscuit at 11.00 am and a 45 minutes lunch break at 12.45. After

one class from 1.30 to 2.15, the art and craft classes start and go on up to 3.30 pm. The children are divided into vertical groups with each group having children from 6 to 12 years of age. The older children help the younger children to learn the various skills while making different products in the craft classes like soap, herb teas etc. Every month the groups are changed and at the end of the month each group gives an account of the products they made and the cost for each product is worked out! The products made during the craft class are kept in our shop at Puvudham and most of them are already sold out!



After this the children and teachers play Traditional games like khokho, kabaddi, kallaatam or cricket, football or volleyball on the school ground. The day ends at 5 pm with a small snack of sprouts and greens prepared by the kitchen group in the school.

Official Business: The school approval was renewed for the 4th time. We had applied for approval in August 2016. And that finally after changing our roof, putting a fence around the campus and many declaration letters we got the approval to run the school till August 2019. We are thankful to all the officials for finally granting us this permission.

The hostel approval had been pending for the last 2 years and finally that also came through for the next 5 years. We can have 50 students in the hostel and run the hostel till 2022.

This year from June onwards we have offered an 11-month course for Sustainable living and Entrepreneurship. We had some enquiries but since we are not able to offer a structured program and the Course is a Self-designed learning program no taker so far!



We have also started soil conservation, water harvesting and tree planting work on lands of local farmers who are willing. Geetha and Meenakshi are coordinating the work with the help of NSS students from local colleges. Geetha is very energetic and keen to make a change in the water situation in our village. She stayed in Mr Gopal's farm almost a week in May and with the help of Paramveer college NSS students and has done wonderful work. They could make pits to store the rain water all around the farm land. Later we planted trees all along the bund where the water stores in the pits will support the plant later.

The Drought : Year 2016-17 was very dry. The total rainfall was less than our average of 340mm per annum and that too in sprinkles so that there was no chance of the ground water being recharged. So, in May 2017 we were down to the last litres in our wells. The new well in the new hostel land that is closer to Puvudham school was completely dry. The summer was a harsh one and we had to transport water from our old hostel well. Almost every third day 6000 litres were transported by our tractor and trailer. In June when the school started and the hostel had to be run, we rationed water for washing and bathing and recycled every drop to grow some gourds with the used water. It was during this time that we decided to try our luck with a deep bore well at least for drinking water. We drilled up to 600 feet and got only wet granite dust. But after it rained in September the bore has filled with water and we have set up a hand pump to supply clean drinking water.

Gardening: So, when it came to gardening we decided to make the vegetable beds in our old hostel. Classes starting from 5th to 8th divided their plots and very nicely have dug up their plot and made nice beds to plant with the help of Rameshawari, Perumal and Madhavaraj. There is a hand pump available. Using this to water their garden manually, they have grown a vegetables, herbs and greens. They learnt the process of digging, making raised beds, manuring, planting, watering, weeding and harvesting. By recording the above activities every day in a diary they learn to calculate the input in terms of labour and seeds, keep track of the output in the vegetables or herbs they harvest and work out for themselves the economics of the farm.



As usual after the first month, in July we had the elections for our children's parliament. This time Balamurali, who is a design graduate from NID Ahmedabad, came to document the whole process. He is making a documentary film about Puvudham school. He has put down his feelings about his visit to Puvudham in his blog <http://eyam.co.in/puvudham-school-a-children-paradise/>

Tours: The educational tour for 3rd and 4th class students was organised in end of September to AMIRTHY forest near PADAVEDU, in Vellore District. One of our friend Mrs Rekha and her whole family arranged for the whole trip. All the children were enjoying the tour. We could visit the Amirthy zoo where they saw a lot of wild animals like fox, dear, snakes, a python and different types of birds. From Amirthy forest the 1 km forest walk took us in to a big water falls which was running with red water. Though we could not have bath there we enjoyed the scenery. We stayed in



Rekha's father's ashram which he designed on his own. The children climbed on the hill near by the ashram and he showed them the very rare endangered medicinal plants. We were missing the water and the swim in the whole trip. Finally, we found a water body in a deserted quarry.

This year during the rains we have planted a thousand Palmyra seeds all along the fence and water collection ponds. All the children worked for two days to get the planting done. We also planted banyan and peepal cuttings and all of them have sprouted! We hope they survive the next summer.

Many parents who have chosen to come to Puvudham because they do not want to stress out their children with exams and rote learning have requested us to upgrade the school till the 10th. The first thing that is needed is space. So, we decided to remove the thatched roof of the Craft room and make a dome with bricks and mud. On top of that we are building another floor. We have started the work with the help of Sabarmani one of our oldest students. He has completed his B.Sc in Physics and done MSW through correspondence. When he was a student in Puvudham in 2004 he had helped Meenakshi with the masonry work of the arches and dome. Since then he has been



interested in construction. He has been helping Meenakshi with some of the projects of mud construction that she did in Conoor. He came to help with the construction of the domes. Mr.Venkateshwaran, a civil engineer, who attended the parents camp and whose children are now studying at Puvudham, worked with him through out to learn the techniques. We are proud to say that Sabarimani is a highly skilled mason and he is a product of Puvudham. He also has had the conviction to build his own house with

rammed earth, against the advice of all the neighbours. He is now constructing a retreat with rammed earth and brick and mud domes in Erode.

Now the work is close to finish and we are looking forward to having more organized space for all the young entrepreneurs! We have decided not to go ahead with the upgradation for 10th level. We feel that it is better to write the 10th state board exam as private students or enrol with the NIOS for the 10th and write the exam at the student's convenience. This would be better than going through the motions of another approval. Besides the infrastructural requirement for the 10th is very intense and we cannot provide it because of paucity of funds.

Financial Support: As always, our staunch supporter Mr. Manikkam from Dharmapuri through his group called Udhavum Ullangal supports our need for groceries. Mr. Suresh Kumar, who is a Manager in South Indian Bank – In Kovai (Coimbatore) has found good support there and we have a continuous supply of groceries from his friends. He also runs an NGO in Salem called NIZHAL, through that he organizes feast for the hostel children. Whenever someone celebrates Birthdays, Wedding days and any other functions. He and his wife Geetha both helps in the trust activities in many ways.



The parents workshop “Return to The Soil” that we hold once every month also brings us an average of Rs10,000/- per month. We are also grateful to Ganesan and Swamy to have supported the construction of the buildings, and purchase of the School bus through their circle of friends. Another group called Team India is also supporting the construction activities and we are thankful to Mr. Waran for sourcing funds for the same through his contacts. Our major funds still come from ASHA for Education. They support the running expenses of the school and maintenance of the campus.

Dr. Rajasekhar who is a bird enthusiast sighted some uncommon birds at Puvudham and has sponsored a bird bath at Puvudham. Once the birds become comfortable with the presence of the bird bath and the structure nearby we shall be able to photograph the birds in all their splendour.

Visitors, Trainees and Conferences: A lot of nearby BEd colleges brought their students for field visits to learn about the alternative and innovative practices in education. Around 12 students of MA education and MSW came to observe and learn the practices at Puvudham. Meenakshi travelled to Bihar to a village near Gaya where Anil and Rekha have decided to start their school called Sahodaya. She helped them with the construction of their school and house with mud while training local masons in building arches and a dome. This will become another place for our children to travel to! She attended a National discussion meet on “Gandhian Ideas In Education Policy Perspectives” organised by NEUPA at New Delhi from the 3rd to the 5th of October. She presented a paper under the theme “Curricular reforms based on Gandhian Educational Ideals” and her presentation was called “Education and Sustainability”. It was about bringing in sustainable practices as a part of learning and living as we do in Puvudham. Meenakshi also attended the **Indian Multiversity Alliance Gathering** at Udaipur in Swaraj University. Many different initiatives from all over India had gathered to share their experiences with self-directed and self-motivated learning where the certificates became unimportant and life became the examination to prove one’s worth in the field.



Every year we have our plastic collection and segregation drive. This year the children went to Hogenekkal to clean up along with teachers and some parents. Meenakshi went to some of the colleges that visited Puvudham to ask the management to support segregation and collection of plastic waste through an awareness talk with the students imploring them to segregate the plastics in their homes and bring the plastic waste to the colleges from where we shall pick it up. The major incentive for the segregation is lost when people see that the segregated garbage is put in the same pile as the unsegregated one. But if people knew that their efforts in segregation were appreciated and the plastic was being recycled they would do it with consciousness. She told them about the plastic block making machine and told them that after we had enough blocks we would be making a small house with it – using waste plastic bags as a resource could be a way of recycling them.

As a part of our localization and anti- plastic ideal we have completely stopped purchasing any snacks from big shops. We have found groups which are working with organic farmers and processing millets into murku and laddoos. We purchase these from them and provide these snacks to the children over and above the sprouts and greens. An activist called Nakkeeran went around giving mustard seeds to protest against the GM Mustard. We joined him in the protest and have planted mustard in our gardens.

We thank all our donors and friends for their continued support! Do look us up at www.puvudham.in or just come over! **If you would like to foster one or more children or contribute to any of the activities, contact puvidham@gmail.com**

| | |
|--|---|
| PUVIDHAM RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST | Phone: 09600491176 / 09500964830 / 09585759184 |
| FCRA number: 075870079 | 80G no: c.No:9755(23) / SLM / 2003-2004 |
| Postal address: Puvudham, Nagarkoodal village and post (via) Indur, Dharmapuri , Pin no: 636803. Tamilnadu. India. | |