

## Vanavil School Project – A Vision of a Better Future for Children



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## Vanavil Future Planning

Vanavil has successfully reduced begging, child labour, and child marriage in Nagapattinam district, and helped hundreds of underserved and marginalized children access education and attain qualifications. However, for the last several years Vanavil has mainly funded its programmes via small donors, limiting the scope of potential impact.

Vanavil hopes to strengthen its existing programmes and expand activities, in the following areas:

1. Get more children out of the streets from begging and other activities and into classrooms by strengthening and building capacity at the existing school campus.
2. Develop and document the pedagogical exercises that have helped Vanavil to succeed in getting nomadic communities and other marginalised children into the mainstream, in such a way that Vanavil's flexible child-centric pedagogy can be replicated and scaled up. This would also include evolving a teacher training module.
3. Conduct action research with local communities and government schools in the district on the impact and adoption of child centric teaching practices.





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## 1. More Children Out of the Streets, Through a Stronger School

Vanavil presently is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of running a residential educational centre for children. The School caters to 135 children, mainly from two nomadic communities (Boom Boom Mattukarars and Narikuravars). 92 children attend classes KG to 5 in the Vanavil Campus. 39 more children stay in the Vanavil Hostel but study standards 6 to 10 in nearby government schools. Older students are supervised by Vanavil but attend a hybrid of Vanavil and partner institutions: Our eldest student is in college second year and stays at the Vanavil hostel. Murugammal who completed class 12 this year will join the Government District Institute of Education and Training to pursue her goal to become a Teacher. Two other elder girls children are currently in standards 11 and 12 off-site.

Ten years of constant engagement and work with Boom Boom Mattukarars and Narikuravars have given Vanavil a rich experience in dealing with communities and children who strongly resist the schooling idea. We have tried to keep a balance of expanding the possibility of the school and also convincing the children that school can be fun. We have the facility and the expertise to run this operation of taking children out of the street - Begging, selling, performing, robbery - and give them a chance at childhood and education which stimulates and makes them grow. We have seen first hand how the current government system of school education has Gaps in being able to meet the needs of the unschooled, for example, placing an illiterate older child in their age-appropriate classroom yet without training the teacher on inclusive literacy instruction. While we had hoped to provide only a temporary bridge, our experience has shown an enduring need for Vanavil, as a flexible, child-centred institution that is able to bridge the gaps between the expectations of the communities we serve and the expectations of education officials.



#### Present Status:

1. We have greatly reduced the number of below 14 children who are not in School in the two communities we work with who constitute the bulk of dropout children in Nagapattinam district.
2. Brought down child marriages amongst the girls and continue to fight against the practice of child marriages.
3. We are helping the children who complete their schooling to secure college admission and counsel them on career choices.
4. Malnutrition is eradicated and the general health has improved thanks to the quality food and regular medical care.
5. We have established Vanavil as a safe space - the district Social welfare board brings children they rescue from the streets to Vanavil.

We propose that with additional financial support we stabilise the School and expand it to reach out other children who are working the streets in Nagapattinam, Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts. Since Vanavil's program has been a individual donor supported one, much of the energy of the board is spent on fund raising and an expansion was always thought about but never dared. Vanavil is an extremely lean operation (see budget section below) and have historically managed our cashflow by paying low salaries, postponing maintenance, and cutting back on research, training, and school functions during lean periods. We have been fortunate in being able to provide many

innovative training workshops through unpaid volunteers, however, this is not an effective long-term strategy.

With additional support we feel we can achieve, in addition to the present status:

- Sufficient financial stability to the existing school to enable us run all our training programme and events on time and without fail. (We haven't had our school annual day in the last three years due to lack of funds.)
- We can extend the opportunity of education and childhood to more students in the coming years.
- We can pay our teachers better and hence retain them.

This stabilisation and expansion can be split into three components:

1. Direct financial support for school operations and maintenance
2. Enhanced community outreach & enrollment
3. Underwriting of teacher training and school events



### **Support of School Operations:**

Our annual budget is approximately 31 lakhs, of which roughly 1/3 or 11 lakhs is direct school operations (8.6 lakhs for salary and 2.4 for maintenance).

*Note: our largest single expenditure is food, at 12 lakhs per annum. The 8.6 lakhs salary budget translates to an average salary of Rs 4,500 per month per*



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person, which is much lower than the minimum government teacher salary of approx. Rs. 12,000 per month.

### **Underwriting of Events:**

Each year we try to budget roughly 2 lakhs for training, workshops, and events such as our annual day. As these events are more optional than feeding and teaching classes, this section of the budget has historically been sacrificed.

## **2. Scale Up Vanavil's Expertise**

Vanavil has been an experimental schooling initiative from the beginning and it has grown informally with its students into the present school. The process has been by trial and error, trying different pedagogical methods and inventing some as needs arose. One of the key gaps in the Education for all and Right to Education act implementation has been the special groups where the general rate of literacy is acutely lower than the average and children going to school is also very low, for example, the Boom Boom Mattukarars and Narikuravars with whom Vanavil works. Tribals in the hilly regions and Plains like Irulas, Kattunayakkans, nomadic performing communities and other fringe criminalised communities still exist outside the formal enrollment drive and many of these children are targets of abuse and violence and initiation into criminal activities. A targeted attempt to get them into schools is extremely crucial for the slogan "Education for all" to ring real. However getting these children who have culturally been nomadic and have had no real relationship with village or urban societies is a challenge. It is a question of access and availability but also more crucially a pedagogic and teaching requirement that can understand the long standing differentness of these communities and accommodate these children without making them victims. Vanavil has worked on this particular problem a lot through many activities and teacher attitude creation. Vanavil's methodology is uniquely suited to accomodate nomadic communities and other marginalised communities who are still out of the "education to all" process, however, much of it is maintained only in the practices and spirit of the school. We would like to document this and also document other such initiatives that have succeeded in getting these kinds of children into schooling and develop a module that will both simplify training new teachers and can be used by others who seek to reach these types of kids.



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## **Develop and Document the Pedagogical Exercises that Helped Vanavil to Succeed in Getting Children into the Mainstream**

Process documentation has been hampered by the exigencies of the day to day. A one-off grant would allow Vanavil to develop a set of best practice documentation and an archive of the pedagogical exercises that have been incorporated into our current practices. Our approach would be to fund two staff (e.g. a board member and an educational consultant) for 1-2 months so that they could take sabbatical from their current jobs and prepare a standard operating principles (SOP) document, at an estimated cost of 1 lakh for printed manuals, or 3-5 lakhs for video documentation. We would welcome the contribution of volunteers as well, to assist in this process.

### **Share Best Practices**

In addition to documentation, we would like in the future to work with the government schools which have enrollment of tribal children and share our best practices and create an informal monitoring mechanism to track these children at least until standard twelve. This would mainly involve staffing to visit schools on rotation and to conduct knowledge sharing sessions at local schools.

## **3. Conduct Action Research on Impact of Child Centric Teaching**

A key component of Vanavil's long-term ability to attract funding is documented impact. Our academic results tend to be better than nearby government schools, despite working with groups of children that have typically been harder to reach. However, what baseline data we have is informal or incomplete. We would like to conduct research in two areas:

### **Impact Evaluation**

Impact evaluation of our students compared with regular school students and also completely unserved populations, comparing pre-school year and post-school year levels of literacy and mathematical ability

### **Demographic Survey**

We have wanted to conduct a demographic survey of the 7 hamlets in which the Boom Boom Mattukarars live in the Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur Districts. Many of the children from these hamlets are still involved in begging and it is actually a sad scene when we see children from these villages taking the place of Vanavillers in Velankanni as child beggars. The survey will create inroads for us into these hamlets and will help us work with the children there and stop them from begging and get them into the



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educational net. It will also help us in our work with the government to lobby for measures to curb child begging and child trafficking from these communities.

Developing a set of evaluation instruments, performing a survey / evaluation, and collating the results is expected to require roughly 8-12 weeks of effort, e.g. 1-2 weeks for planning, a week to pilot, a week to tune, 1-2 weeks for the baseline, 1-2 weeks for the endline, and 2-3 weeks to document the results, for an estimated cost of approx. 1 lakh, including travel.

### Government Relations

Proper documentation, especially an evaluation and research facility, will give us a strong and compelling case with which to lobby with the government to create special educational facilities for the nomadic tribal communities. We hope outside groups also lend their voice in this matter, as they see fit.

### Financial Overview

Vanavil has roughly Rs. 4 lakhs in net assets, with approx. Rs. 5 lakhs in fixed assets (TVS, furniture & fittings, cycles, and improvements to agricultural land), and the 5 lakh Beins Scholarship Fund, which is kept as a fixed deposit whose interest is used to pay the school fees and living expenses of older Vanavil students studying outside, e.g. Murugammal, against non-interest bearing loans issued by supporters and trustees of approx. Rs. 6 lakhs.

The below table summarizes expenditures for the last two years along with the current FY14-15 budget:

Category	Actual 12-13	Actual 13-14	Projected 14-15
Administration <i>(incl. phone &amp; electricity)</i>	224398	153263	180000
Education <i>(incl. school fees &amp; materials)</i>	68866	82486	180000
Food	820746	993555	1200000
Loan Repayment	100000	0	0
Maintenance	59006	240483	170000
Medical	17912	48154	54000
Other <i>(incl. annual day)</i>	87753	24668	60000
Salary	553925	707767	800000
Transport	177021	377445	380000

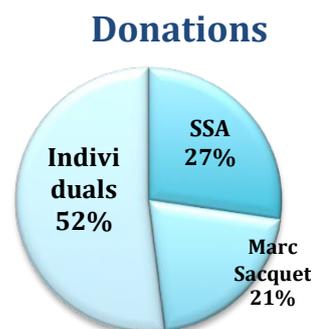
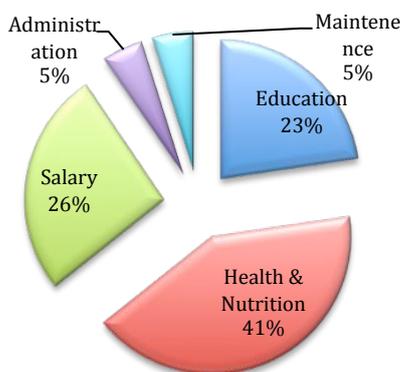
Workshops / Celebrations	73347	95060	80000
<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>2182974</b>	<b>2722881</b>	<b>3104000</b>
Govt Funding (SSA)	1153554	521826	500000
Grants & Foundations	179755	690696	1000000
Private Donations	1188444	1349873	2000000
<b>Income Total</b>	<b>2521753</b>	<b>2562395</b>	<b>3500000</b>
<b>Net</b>	<b>338779</b>	<b>-160485</b>	<b>396000</b>

Cashflow is highly variable, especially since the government funding (through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or SSA) has been both delayed and declining over the last several years. SSA has indicated that this year's funding may be cut again, to approx. 2.5 lakhs. Our largest source of funding is private donations from individuals, typically in amounts of Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 10,000.

For the last five years, we have received an annual grant from the Marc Sauquet Foundation, a philanthropic organization based in Spain. This grant varies from year to year, from 2.5 lakhs to 5.2 lakhs, depending on the Sauquet Foundation's budget preferences and the exchange rate. For 2014-15 the Sauquets are not giving us a grant. We have approached Aram Sei and Asha Foundations for 5 lakhs in total, but we are still waiting for their approval. We had hoped for a total of 10 lakhs in grant support, but at this point may receive much less.

At this juncture foundation support can really help sustain Vanavil and develop it into a model school aiding most marginalized children to transition from a life on the streets to education.

The enclosed diagrams from our Annual Report show the breakdown of expenditure and funding for 2013-14:





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This financial year we have set ourselves an aggressive goal of 35 lakhs, based mainly on expanding our network of private donors, but have limited our expenditure and are prepared to once again eliminate workshops if fund raising is not robust.

## Cost Analysis

Vanavil serves 135 kids, providing education, 3 meals a day, and housing as needed, at our budget of 31 lakhs, or about Rs. 23,000 per child per annum, or Rs. 63 (US\$1.1) per child per day. This is comparable or below expenditures of similar NGOs; among NGOs active in our region, we serve more children at less cost per child. All of our expenditures are on child services – fundraising is done on an unpaid basis by board members and well-wishers. Roughly 40% of our per child cost is spent directly on health and nutrition, or approximately Rs 10,000 per child per year. This means that as enrollment rises within the existing class batches and physical capacity of the school, operational spending will increase by Rs. 10,000 per new child but the average cost per child per year will go down (see table below) as salaries and fixed costs remain constant.

Enrollment	Total Expenditure	Notes	Cost per child per year
135	3104000	FY14-15 Budget	22,992
140	3154000	+ 5 kids x Rs. 10,000	22,528
160	3354000	+ 25 kids	20,962
180	3554000	+ 45 kids	19,744
200	3754000	+ 65 kids	18,770
220	3954000	+ 85 kids	17,972



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The table below shows projected expenditure for FY 14-15, and the projected budget for continuing operations without any changes for FY 15-16, assuming 10% cost increase in food, materials, and other expenses and factoring for a 15% salary increment:

Category	Projected Actuals 14-15	Continuing "as-is" 15-16
Administration <i>(incl. phone &amp; electricity)</i>	180000	198000
Education <i>(incl. school fees &amp; materials)</i>	180000	198000
Food	1200000	1320000
Maintenance	170000	187000
Medical	54000	59400
Other <i>(no annual day)</i>	60000	66000
Salary	800000	920000
Transport	380000	418000
Workshops / Celebrations	80000	88000
<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>3104000</b>	<b>3454400</b>

### Budget Projections for Proposed Initiatives

The table below summarises the expected operational implications of each element of this proposal, including social "return-on-investment":

Proposal Element	Estimated Budget (Rs.)	Type	Expected Impact / Social ROI	Est. Future Expense per annum	Notes on Future Expenses
Support Of School Operations: Food Salaries Maintenance	Up to 21,70,000	On going	Stabilise the School, Reduce teacher turnover by 50%, increase learning quality	Would depend on number of students.	With the fencing of the farm the food expenses can be brought down by 50 percent in 3 years time.
Develop And Document Best Practices: Vanavil SOP	1,00,000	One-off Initiative	Document "best practices", provide a tool for training teachers and sharing knowledge, scale up approach to other sites		



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Proposal Element	Estimated Budget (Rs.)	Type	Expected Impact / Social ROI	Est. Future Expense per annum	Notes on Future Expenses
Develop And Document Best Practices: Video SOP	5,00,000	One-off Initiative	As per written SOP, but with lower transfer costs as video medium is more accessible and can be broadcast over the Net		
Share Best Practices: Workshops & Monitoring at Local Schools	1,40,000	Ongoing	Retain "at risk" children within govt schools, improve teacher quality, and provide mentoring to tribals	1,40,000	Based on part-salary for a full-time staffer plus local travel costs
Action Research: Impact Evaluation / Demographic Survey	1,00,000	One-off Initiative	Compile baseline data, provide data and new avenues for working with government & other NGOs to further reduce child begging, improve monitoring of actual conditions		
Government Relations	Incl.	Ongoing	Increase govt. attention and funding for at-risk children, reduce dropouts		

Vanavil appreciates that most foundations support a variety of projects; this proposal is presented in the spirit of allowing insight into projects we would like to pursue if able, such that donors may choose to fund appropriate aspects of Vanavil's vision in keeping with their mission. We request you to help our school so that the benefits of this labour of love and solidarity can further develop into a strong public institution to reach education to the most marginalized and often neglected children and save them from the clutches of child begging.



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## **FUTURE PLANS**

### **Enhanced Outreach and Enrollment:**

Based on 25-30 student sections, Vanavil's current campus has the capacity to educate approx. 220 students, for example, 170 KG to 5<sup>th</sup> standard taught on-site plus 50 older students, with approx. 70 students living in hostel. Vanavil's enrollment is lower because of the practical difficulties in interfacing with both the government infrastructure and the communities from which underserved students come, including logistics.

If we do the Action Research - Impact Evaluation / Demographic Survey this year 14-15 we will make inroads into the other hamlets and will be in a position to motivate parents and children from those hamlets to join Vanavil. Gradually we can bring down child begging and increase schooling rates in the seven hamlets of Boom Boom mattukarars and can also look at other Narikuravar settlements in the three districts. Bringing down the begging and getting these children into school will be achieving two important milestones

1. In three districts we will reduce number of child beggars who go to cities and work in hazardous conditions on the streets.
2. We will strengthen the school as a model non-formal school to work with historically marginalized and out of school communities.

Within a roughly 15km radius, there are Porakudi, Neelappadi, and four other areas with population similar to the communities we are currently serving plus Velankanni (a large Catholic shrine) and Karaikal Market, Nagore darga, Mayiladuthurai Bus Stand, Chennai, Kerala, etc., epicenters of child begging that would yield large numbers of students through regular visits by Vanavil staff. (We currently visit Velankanni via our TVS to fetch children who are trying to bunk school, but this is not practical for large groups.)

Typically we could expect to encounter 30-50 school-aged but non-attending children in a locality, out of which roughly half would likely come to Vanavil within the first year of outreach, e.g. approx. 80 students per annum. Vanavil would expect to see its student population steadily increase in stages, e.g. 140, 160, 180, 200, 220 as we reached out to each area. This would also be contingent on our ability to regularly visit and service these communities; we would need at least two proper school vehicles to work with children in



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other hamlets and to monitor places like Velankanni, Karaikal market etc., to curb child begging. Beyond 220 students, we would likely require hostel renovations and more classrooms, for example, construction of an additional building. A school bus can be purchased for roughly 12 lakhs, plus fuel and other running costs of about 2 lakhs per annum.

Historically, Vanavil's teachers have done a good job supervising school classes, but have struggled in dealing with the community and with education officials. This role requires a measure of education, credibility, diplomacy, and creativity that is hard to find at Rs 4,500 per month. Also, Vanavil's transport consists of one TVS scooter and a single aging school bus, making regular school pickups beyond our current radius impractical. Community outreach has therefore mainly centred on the voluntary efforts of our trustees and what limited resources we can bring to bear. Almost the entire energy of our management is consumed in supervision of the current programme and fund-raising. If this pressure were reduced, or, if Vanavil could afford to hire a full-time project manager at a salary of Rs 15-20,000 per month, we would be able to spend more and concentrated time with additional communities in the surrounding districts. An additional full-time project manager would be an annual expenditure of 2.4 lakhs per annum. In other words, a one-off purchase of 12 lakhs plus 4.4 lakhs per annum is likely to almost double the utilization of the current campus. These estimates are rough and after the completion of the Action research we can come up with a proper plan and submit a proposal to execute the same.

## **Vanavil Trust – A Brief History**

Vanavil was born in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami in Nagapattinam - the ground zero in India with more than 8000 deaths. A group of volunteers from different professions came together to work in clearing dead bodies, doing therapeutic art and music workshops with children and enlisting hamlets left out in the relief and rehabilitation process. We stumbled on the Boom Boom Mattukarar community, traditional performers and soothsayers who were reduced to beggars in the present. We wanted those children to get education and a chance at childhood. Cutting a long story short we decided to run a bridge school for these kids so that they can get to go as equal children to the mainstream school. The bridge school opened up the other issues of nomadic tribal communities that somehow make it almost impossible for the kids to join, to attend and to continue in a regular school. We decided to run a full



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time residential school for the children from this community and other such nomadic communities like the Narikuravars.

