

With a very joyful Deepavali time behind us, it was time to gear up to bid adieu to another fantastic year at Vanavil. November and December not only saw the kids learning and thriving, there were also significant improvements to our infrastructure.



Highlights:

- A brand new fuel-efficient steam kitchen with LPG cylinders was inaugurated on November 22nd.
- Our biggest supporters Usha and Subbu made a site visit in December, pledged their continued support and challenged us to do more.
- More of our kids now have a community certificate which entitles them to available government schemes.
- As part of our ongoing efforts to find novel teaching aids, our teachers attended a storytelling workshop.
- The kids, what can we say about them... They continue to have a blast learning, dancing, singing, playing, growing up... Words cannot express the range of things they do... but, we do have pictures...

Kitchen:

Cook Nagarathinamma and assistant cook Leelavathi have been churning out nutritious and tasty food for the last seven years hunched over a wood burning stove. Despite the increased workload due to our growth over the years, they have gone about the herculean task without a complaint. But, relief came when Usha and Subbu visited Vanavil in December 2016 and decided to ease the burden by fully supporting a fuel-efficient steam kitchen with LPG cylinders. The brand-new facility was unveiled on November 22nd at a small function. SSA official Mr. Sundararajan, village heads from nearby Sellur, our engineer and support Ramesh graced the occasion along with all our children and staff. Though it is hard to gauge the effect of the new kitchen on Nagarathinamma and Leelavathi, we can almost hear their backs and knees quietly thanking the people who made this happen.

Doing more?:

Usha, Subbu and their daughter Riya visited us. They came bearing gifts for the children (under garments for all kids and school boxes for the after-school children). They were delighted to see the new kitchen fully operational.

As always, discussions ran along the lines of

- stabilizing and improving Vanavil.
- expanding our horizons to help more children in and around Nagapattinam area.

They have pledged their continued support for Vanavil and we are very thankful for that.

A visit to Vanavil after school centers in Neelapadi and Porakudi and to the Puducherry Government School where 64 kids from Vanavil study (in classes 6 through 10) opened the door to opportunities where we can do more. One of the ideas floated was "collaboration with government schools" by plugging the gaps in their operations/infrastructure and enabling them to do the best they can for the children. There is mutual interest from the HM for this idea as well. We will share more details as and when this concept takes shape.

Can I get what is rightfully mine?:

A significant percentage of children at Vanavil belong to the nomadic tribe Boom Boom Maatukarar who have not been part of the government system. In fact, that very issue was a driving force behind the genesis of Vanavil when these people could not get Tsunami relief from the government as they were outside the system. Over the years, we went up against what seemed like a never-ending obstacle course, but were successful in securing the Community Certificate for some of our children.

But, a recent development is encouraging. The community has organized itself and lobbied the local authorities to provide the missing paperwork. Their efforts have borne some fruit. Mr. Bharathi, RDO came out on November 29th and issued Community Certificates to a group of people in the community which included some of our children.

While that is a significant step in the right direction for those kids, we still have a long way to go before all our kids have the necessary paperwork to be considered part of the system and be eligible to get what is rightfully theirs. We have more work to do...

More possibilities, more opportunities:

At Vanavil, one of our core tenets is to enrich the minds of the children in various ways, the limited resources of a tiny hamlet notwithstanding. To that end, we encourage all our teachers to constantly hone their skills and find better ways to teach the children. As part of that initiative, two of our teachers, Farzana and Gayathri attended a workshop on use of storytelling in effective pedagogy. The workshop focused on how to inculcate creativity, imagination, self-belief and perseverance in kids. We look forward to the teachers incorporating their learnings into our curriculum.

SSA organized a camp to talk to the children about opportunities in vocational training and higher education through District Employment Office.

Support in kind:

Thanks to Ms. Radhika, we now have a new heavy duty washing machine.

Wipro Cares Chennai had conducted a food grains and clothing drive for Deepavali. They went the extra mile by organizing a van to deliver supplies from Chennai all the way to Nagapattinam. 22 boxes arrived on 21st November. We greatly appreciate your efforts!

The health:

Come November, come monsoons and heavy rains. That meant holidays during the first week of November. While the children rejoice not having to go to school, protecting them from the ravages of the elements and the contagious diseases that are always a threat is an unenviable task the wardens are entrusted with. Thanks to their diligence and meticulous care, all our children remained hale and healthy through the rainy season. The local Primary Health Center (PHC) held a medical screening camp at Vanavil campus on November 6th.

The special occasion:

Children's day falls on November 14th and children are celebrated throughout the month. We had a gala celebration to commemorate the day. This year's theme - "Improve social skills and communications". Oration and poetry writing competitions



were held to emphasize that. Our children love to sing, dance and put on a show. So they went ahead and did that as well after the competitions.

Is it learning? Is it fun? It is both:



Did somebody say field trip? Try keeping them in a single file. One teacher ain't enough...

We don't need water to faux swim, our classroom is plenty good



Give them some paint and paper and the results are beautiful



Learning arithmetic the old school way



Learning to pronounce English alphabets through listening



What time is it? I don't know, I am just a hand in this human clock



An activity that brought a hospital into a classroom. Kids recreated a hospital scenario to learn a social science lesson. The staff and even patients in the hospital took to their new roles very seriously and it functioned exactly like a PHC.

Higher education scholarships:

Five of our kids pursuing higher studies and vocational training got scholarships from Tamil Nadu Foundation (TNF). Thank you to TNF for enabling children to pursue better opportunities for their future.

Farmer's market:

Organized by the children and staff. There were handicrafts made by children for sale. There was a lot of real life learning. Buying, selling, negotiating, weighing, measuring, handling money and the list goes on...



Christmas at Vanavil:

Winter holidays, no more school, no more exams. Time to unwind and celebrate Christmas!



Palm craft:

Rukmini from the Yusuf Mehrauli center in PR Puram came and taught the teachers and children about palm crafts. Brilliantly hued baskets, elegant garlands, bouquets, hats were made by the children and teachers.

