Adapting, redesigning and going forward - Thamarai Learning Center

The past few months have been an intense time needing adaptation, creativity and constant redesign. We have become very aware of the challenges that both the lockdown and the virus has thrown up and the profound questions arising about equity and well being. Many people in the villages we work in are concerned about their families future, mothers in our women’s group meetings report increasing levels of tension and alcoholism affecting the whole family. A recent survey by the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective in 62 villages in our state indicated that at least 81% of rural families reported some form of domestic violence.

It's a time for care and small acts of human unity. Since the beginning of lock-down many projects have been responding. At Thamarai Educational Projects, our youth facilitators have been reaching out to the children regularly distributing books/worksheets/snacks, exhibiting colourful children’s newspapers on the village fence, having small group project work and daily learning calls by phone each evening that are designed to connect children, check-in on how they are doing, and to have an interesting learning experience each day.

*Children collecting worksheets, books and a little snack!*

*Reading on the fence*
Youth facilitator Vignesh on his daily evening learning call with three children safely in their homes and Sowmya delivers immunity boosting spices, from an Auroville well wisher, to all of our children's houses in Annai Nagar and Edayanchavadi.

Now as restrictions are slowly lifting, we are cleaning outdoor areas and covering spaces with shade netting to start small group classes for older children on open ground in Annai Nagar and Edayanchavadi villages. We have designed 1 hour socially distanced classes that rotate with different children throughout the day and they will also carry on their evening calls as usual.

Preparing outdoor spaces where learning can happen safely

It's been a time of stop/start/reflection/redesign constantly adapting to what is emerging and is possible. It has also been an exciting time for us all at Thamarai as we are building education facilities for/with local children and youth. A learning centre, sports ground and a small children’s play area. We have been steadily working with the community to build a shared vision for the future. We have been told many times that this development is bringing hope in Annai Nagar village at this time of immense challenge.
New learning centre emerging

It has always been important to us not just to identify needs and respond with services but to constantly ask, both ourselves and the communities we serve, how we can work together towards realising full potential and thriving interconnected communities. This learning centre and sports/play area has emerged for envisioning sessions in Tamil with the local communities over the past 2 years with the support of RTL practitioner coaches Srilatha Juvva and Suriya Prakash. They have helped us hold a series of explorative sessions, bringing together various sectors of Annai Nagar community and using a design tool - Conscious Full Spectrum Response model. These sessions supported the children, youth, and adults we work with, and our Thamarai team to get in touch with what we each care about and supported us to collectively look towards possibility at this challenging time. It is wonderful to see in these sessions how the children, youth and adults come together in a non-hierarchical atmosphere of equality where the child’s voice can be as powerful as the village elder and with both designing equally meaningful projects that transforms resignation into possibility as each one realises their potential to be an agent of change. Last year a young boy spoke of disharmony in his village and his dream about bringing peace through sports, his project was to develop a sports ground and he is now doing it with others in Annai Nagar village.

A village committee of youth, adults and Thamarai team has been established and we are working on projects for the improvement of education, sports, clean water, and health in a mixed gender, intergenerational setting where each one’s voice matters. In this time of COVID 19, the main immunity is Community. At Thamarai, we are committed to working towards thriving, interconnected, local communities where each one has the learning opportunities and resources to grow toward their full potential. We serve this, day by day, as our practice in action for unity and well being for all.