

Thamarai

Educational Projects



Annual Report 2023 - 2024

Thamarai is a registered unit AVAT (Trust) of
Auroville Foundation.

Thamarai
Educational Projects
Annual Report
2023-2024





"Essentially, the only thing you should do assiduously is to teach children to know themselves and choose their own destiny, the path they will follow; to teach them to look at themselves, understand themselves and to will what they want to be."

- Mirra Alfassa

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SUMMARY REPORT

Welcome to our annual reflection at Thamarai for 2023-2024. It has been a generative and joyful year on many levels including the completion of our learning centre and garden in the heart of Annai nagar village. The new building is now the solid homebase from which we work, grow and learn together. It has been designed with compressed earth bricks and has a light carbon footprint including solar power, rainwater management and doors made from recycled plastic materials.

There have also been challenges: we had been ordered to dismantle our Edayanchavadi after school buildings, to make way for a new road, at very short notice. So far, this has come with no financial support for dismantling or re-establishing the service. However, challenges are opportunities to redesign and we have been warmly welcomed by the local Government and Udavi school to use their facilities so we can continue service for the 30 children we had been engaged with. There is also an opportunity in this to increase our reach to other children in Edayanchavadi village. We look forward to seeing what emerges.

Thamarai's main areas of work fall in the categories of afterschool and weekend programs, leadership and wellbeing. Programs happen both at the learning centres and through our outreach network. Our learning centre in Annai nagar offers programs 7 days a week and is also a community meeting space for the youth and women's group. A key area of development for the coming year is in the area of adult education. For now though, here are some of our outcomes and outputs for 2023-2024.

Outcomes and visible changes this year include:

- Improved long-term stability with a permanent building as a homebase, additional full time team members to guide the projects and a strong sense of ownership by Thamarai children; their ideas have shaped our development choices for the new building.
- Stronger cross community integration, especially beyond caste divide, with increasing numbers of students also coming into Annai nagar from surrounding areas for programs at the centre and two big tournaments organised by the youth in football and volleyball that brought large numbers of players.
- A growing confidence, especially in female students, helped by their ongoing training and exposure in Ultimate Frisbee and access to multiple learning including Joyful English program, digital literacy, drama, talent shows and open mike sessions.
- Increased awareness of existing gender bias - girl students being given more freedom to attend programs with a more equitable distribution of household chores. This is especially visible in sports participation. Four years ago no girls played in the sports ground and now they play daily, thanks to the support of the coaching from the Auroville Frisbee team and the local volleyball team.
- Increased support to youth through partnerships for internships (locally and internationally), scholarships and ongoing learning and sporting opportunities.
- An increase in skill and competencies in English, digital literacy and STEM (Science, Technology, Electronics and Math's), in all students.

- Increasing number of young people, many alumni, are stepping forward to serve their community by offering to become youth facilitators in Thamarai. We have invested in their agency through the Radical Transformational Leadership (RTL) programs and have seen significant progress in their confidence and their ability to design and lead new projects.
- Establishment of strong community communications and support networks.
- Increased awareness in mental health and related issues, such as addiction and increase in Thamarai support through counselling, rehabilitation and the creation of alternatives through sports, leadership and learning opportunities.

Besides our regular after school activities, other output highlights this year include:

- Five new local team members joined this year and 3 new part-time international volunteers.
- The co-creation of a cross-cultural storybook and virtual art gallery in collaboration with Foroige youth, Ireland.
- Inclusion of drawings from three of our children in the recently USA published book 'You are amazing like a rocket' as part of Peptoc global children's project.
- Two large Sports tournaments in Annai nagar village organised by the youth club (volleyball and football) where over 25 teams competed each time and the participation of the girls in two regional sectional Frisbee tournaments.
- Organising four learning camps for 90 children and the enrollment of partners to support us with delivery while building core competencies for ongoing programs such as Maths, English, digital literacy, electronics, physical & mental health and the development of concentration.
- Numerous exposure visits have helped us to learn and be inspired by individuals who model life-enhancing practices such as water & forest conservation, mindful resource & waste management, permaculture, health, crafts and homemade natural household alternatives.
- Collaborating with international organisations and hosting volunteers from Kedge college in France, American university of Paris, the German government's Weltwaerts program and Foroige Ireland.
- Leadership - 1) we co-organised and delivered two RTL leadership programs to 120 participants from the bioregion, 2) twelve Thamarai team members attended RTL Stage One programs, 3) we had three days of RTL programs for children during camps and three of our staff are currently training to be practitioner coaches, one of whom is training in a global program.

We have sought to design our everyday activities to forward our values of equity and dignity for all. For example, we have invested in activities that model gender equity. We strategically target provision of resources in the marginalised section of the village whilst keeping the service open to everyone. We have team members from diverse communities and believe this creates a thriving intercultural learning environment where we learn from each other and can stretch to our full potential. This year we have also been consistently training and building our team of alumni and youth from the local villages. We have hired more team members to bring our fulltime team to six and part-time team to eight. In addition, we benefit from the variety of inputs from volunteer teachers who freely give their time to enrich our programs for the children. We acknowledge the many partnerships and supports that enable us to continue to evolve in our work. It has been an enriching year for all of us.

We hope you enjoy reading this report which is structured by sections on our vision, the people behind the project, the areas of the project - learning centre programs, health and wellbeing, leadership, our outreach work and finally a look at our finances. 2023-2024 we raised 29.6Rs lakh and spent 22.9 Rs lakh on services, see breakdown on donations & expenses in the financial section.

With gratitude to our partners, supporters, and dedicated team members, we look forward to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, knowing that we all care and are committed to work towards lasting change that forwards equity and dignity in the world.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.2 Our vision

Unity, dignity and equity are the values that we strive to design for. We provide education facilities and access to health care services that support people to unfold their full potential in the villages around Auroville. Our services, open to all, are situated in the most marginalised sections of the villages. We want to create an enabling environment so that each one has the opportunity to thrive; in particular for children and youth to feel encouraged to reach for their dreams and stretch to become the change-makers for well being their communities

1.2 What we do

Thamarai, Tamil for lotus flower, stands for full potential, equity and wellbeing for a thriving people and planet. We have been working with the villages, near the International township of Auroville, since 2006. We have done this through a series of formal and informal education projects including two learning centres with after-school program for 90 children, offering sports, STEM, and environmental education. We also run a natural health care education program and wellbeing service in the learning centres, local schools and at community level. Finally, we continue to invest in long term sustainability through providing a variety of training for youth including leadership and capacity development.

1.3 Our mission

Our mission is to co-create an enabling environment to develop agency and foster the full potential and wellbeing of all, particularly children.

Our objectives are:

- To nurture the full potential within and among all children, youth and communities especially those most marginalized.
- To address the gap in the mainstream education system by enabling a quality, holistic after-school learning environment that supports caste and gender equity.
- To support children to be active and responsible citizens and stewards/leaders.
- To co-create a community environment for the wellbeing of the people and the planet.

1.4 Where we make an impact

We work to create an enabling environment for education and community development in villages surrounding Auroville which is in Vanur block, Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. We offer regular services in 5 government schools and have daily after-school programs in Annai Nagar village with a direct population of 792 people, (with 4,000 people in the surrounding area), and in Edayanchavadi village with a population of 3,500. According to the last census, the average literacy of Villupuram district was 63.48% as compared to the national average of 77.70%. Our services are placed in, or next to, the sections of the villages that society has marginalized and we aspire to provide quality education including up to date technology to bridge the digital divide with an equipped technology room at our Annai nagar learning centre.

We also provide programs to women's groups in various locations and support other youth to lead similar projects. Poor health and high rates of anaemia are common in our area. We endeavour to provide health education to students in schools, to families in the community and to provide natural health care, and testing and at least quarterly health days with local hospitals, health facilities and therapists. We provide activities such as sports, counselling and mindfulness as a core part of our work as well as offering to work with families that are challenged by addiction.

HIGHLIGHTS

HAVE A LOOK BELOW AT IMAGES OF SOME KEY 2023-2024 ACTIVITIES

OCTOBER



JOY FUL ENGLISH

DECEMBER



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

FEBRUARY



INTERNATIONAL STORIES

OCTOBER



PUPPET MAKING

DECEMBER



FRISBEE CHAMPS

FEBRUARY



BRACELET MAKING

APRIL



MATHEGRAMMING

APRIL



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SESSION

APRIL



TALENT SHOW

APRIL



YOGA SESSIONS

APRIL



AWARENESS THROUGH THE BODY
(ATB)

MAY



ANNUAL TRIP



3. CHILDREN'S HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR



What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

I went to Mathegramming for the first time. I found my teammates when I got there who were all from different schools. Our given project topic to explore was “Congruence of A Triangle”.

My team was the 2nd to present, I was really afraid, everybody was sitting there looking at me. We went to the auditorium and our team number got called, then we presented our project. We were talking into a microphone. The Judges were asking questions.

I was a bit afraid but able to answer. My team won the 4th prize and we each got a pen drive. I felt happy and my parents felt happy, they said we would try to get the 1st prize next time. I also met two boys who are my friends now.

We went to the Craft Mela for two days. First day I did tailoring I made a bag and ate lunch and made a bamboo basket and a keychain. On the second day I made a candle, played and finished the craft mela and I also went to STEM land for electronics compilation and training and I learned a lot of stem things. And I feel very happy, joyful.

What made you most proud of yourself?

For the first time I went to Mathegramming to learn maths in an easy and fun way. Then, I started making a lot of Robots, not robotic electronics. In Arduino, I have made push button traffic lights, when you press the push button the light should glow.

Arduino board, bread board, jumping wires, Led lights, push buttons, and then resistors, I made it with all of this. I did all and modified it. My traffic light had a one minute wait, the red light starts at first, then yellow should glow, like that it should be in loop one after another. I am proud of all this.

- V.Sivaparasath(AGE:12)



What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

The 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th standard did a theatre performance for Diwali. The drama topic: Why do we celebrate Diwali? This was the first Time I got a chance to dance in a talent show..... I feel very happy in typing class.

I learned how to create an accountable-list using MS Word, which helps the team .I feel very happy to be a part of Thamarai. - K. Akshaya (AGE: 11)

What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

I LOVED going to the beach. All the children were happy because we went playing in the sea and swimming. I was happy to go and play frisbee, boys and girls together, playing was hard work but we got the energy to play.

We met many friends from Auroville and many from the villages. It was a happy time..... I LOVE Thamarai!

- S. Logith (AGE:11)



What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

Going to the Sound Garden was a magical moment because I felt my heart beat sound and I felt silent.

What made you most proud of yourself?

I am proud of is my eagerness to learn new things. Positive feedback really helps, and whenever I receive positive feedback from a facilitator, I feel motivated and build up my confidence to learn more and put in more effort. Reflecting on last year made me realise that what I lacked was interest and motivation towards studies. This year, I focused on being more disciplined in my studies and giving my best effort. I have improved. Now, in class written tests, I score 18 or 19 out of 20 overall. I feel more confident about myself and proud compared to last year. Making mistakes helps me learn and doesn't affect my motivation; in fact, it motivates me to make more effort.

-V. Sri Nithi (AGE:9)



What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

My magic moments were: Playing football in March 2023, the christmas gifts in Thamarai in 2023 and Maths class.

- M. Vignesh (AGE: 12)





What were your magic moments in Thamarai this year?

We did a performance for Diwali. The drama was about why we celebrate Diwali. I acted as Parvathi. I was happy and felt joy during the drama.

I have been part of many dramas before but acting as a god was different for me. There was a little fear inside when acting and there was also confidence in me that I will do it.

-G. Kaviya (AGE:12)



What am I proud of?

I am always brave everywhere, I won't feel shy when I am asked to speak in a group. I learn as much as I can to my capacity.

Whenever I am in a good mood to learn, I learn and when I am in a playing mood, I just play.

What was my magical moment?

We saw a lot of big snakes at Pitchandikulam. We saw a big yellow snake, and we learned about two headed snakes. We learned about many different animals. We learned about antique things and stones. We saw a whale spine bone, I have never seen that big bone before, I saw it for the first time. I have seen only a small whale in Chennai that was dead on shore. I realised that a whale bone is that big that day....

- R. Loshana (AGE: 13)



What are you most proud of?

I was so happy when I am acknowledged me for my help during the circle time.

What do you feel or think about when you think of Thamarai?

I feel disciplined coming to Thamarai. Yoga is happening, it is making me active and relaxed. We played a lot of new games. It is also so good to be at the computer , I learn how to type, how to keep our hands... all that I liked.

What did you enjoy most this year?

Going to the beach - before, when I used to go to the beach with my parents, I would only see the beach from the shore and come back home. But when going to the beach with the Thamarai, I was swimming in the water.

-M. Thasvanth (AGE: 11)

Learning and flourishing in Edayanchavadi in conversation with Carla and Savithri

Vinodhini has been described by Thamarai Team Leader, Bridget, as “flourishing and a future change-maker for her peer group and community”, and by Thamarai Facilitators as “a possible future facilitator with Thamarai”. When you meet Vinodhini, you understand why she is considered in such high esteem, and why she is greatly valued as a part of the student group of Thamarai Afterschool Edayanchavadi. For this brief case study, Thamarai Facilitator Savithri and I (Carla) interviewed Vinodhini one evening in mid-April on-site at Edayanchavadi Afterschool. Vinodhini was invited to share in Tamil and/ or English and Facilitator Savithri interpreted as needed. The interview was recorded, then transcribed, and now we hope you enjoy reading about Vinodhini and what she shared with us. Vinodhini has been attending Thamarai Afterschool Edayanchavadi for three years. (And according to Thamarai’s attendance data, she is one of the top five most regular attendees!).

When we asked for information about her and her family, Vinodhini informed us that she is currently in 7th Standard at Edayanchavadi Government School. She has two older brothers, Ratish and Rajesh, who are in 8th and 12th Standard, respectively. Her father’s name is Rajavel, he is a mason, and her mother’s name is Sudha, her work is housekeeping. There was a bit of laughter from us all when Vinodhini informed that no, she doesn’t like going to school. Her preferred pastime is playing and spending time with her friends. She also shared that her favourite part of attending Thamarai Afterschool is playing football! She also told us that she really likes STEM learning, in particular the maths component, and also English lessons.

Her response to our questions regarding any changes she’s observed in herself, and any impacts she’s noticed in her family and community, over these three years she’s been coming to Thamarai after-school, was thoughtful and mature; she told us she can reflect that she now has an understanding of the real meaning of respect. She explained that before she wouldn’t give respect to anyone, and now she’s able to give respect to others and she also shares and educates her peers on the value of respect. “So whenever, even in school, I see somebody speaking disrespectfully I suddenly remind them of the word, and I educate them how it’s very much important to respect each other”

(interpreted from Tamil by Savithri).

Vinodhini also discussed that coming to Thamarai these past years has changed her by giving her access to her favourite activities and studies - STEM technology, English, and football - which she didn’t have access to before joining Thamarai.

For those interested to hear more from Thamarai, or who would like to participate whether supporting or wanting to attend the after-school, Vinodhini shared her view to do it; that if you come to Thamarai “you will get happy and you will get to enjoy - you will get support for doing homework but you will also learn new sports and other activities”.



Our closing discussion explored Vinodhini's vision and hopes for her future, and for her family and community.

For her community: everyone will be educated.

For her family: her two brothers will be in a good position in the workplace and taking care of her parents.

For herself: that she will complete her ambition and become a Doctor. Vinodhini's other hopes for her future - she would like to be with her friends always. Oh, and she wants to learn Chess at Thamarai!

4. THAMARAI TEAM

We are a cross-cultural, inter-generational team from Auroville and the surrounding villages who care about equity and full potential for all. It has always been important to us to co-create together and harvest from the richness of multi-cultural perspectives. Youth play a big role in Thamarai; graduates and undergraduates (many of whom are alumni) become big brothers and sisters to the younger children, mentoring and supporting with homework and exposing the children to a variety of activities and perspectives. Our team is enriched by local and visiting facilitators who share, learn and grow with us.

In 2023-2024 we expanded our part-time youth facilitation team and took on two new full-time members to support administration and planning work. All new team members go through an induction training to highlight Thamarai's values and criteria for engagement. We invest in capacity development through building skill and leadership (Radical Transformational Leadership Training ,<https://www.radicallytransform.org>) which develops agency, project design and organisational development. We are committed to nurturing a skilled and committed team who care deeply about our values and contribute to foster an environment for growth where each one is both a learner and a leader.

In Thamarai we have 14 facilitators (5 full-time, 9 part-time), and 5 long-term volunteers from Australia, Germany, India, Ireland and USA). The main role of our facilitators is to support the childrens' learning and development in subjects and activities such as STEM (Science, Tech, Engineering & Math), English and Tamil, school homework, typing, Virtual Reality (VR) and animation, arts, sports and health and wellbeing. Some are also assisting with the day-to-day office functions of the learning centres; administration, translation, snack preparation, activity coordination/ scheduling and account keeping.

More than half of our facilitators are alumni of Thamarai or attended a similar programme in their school years. When asked about their reasons for joining the Thamarai team, they cited the desire to acquire new experiences and personal growth and wanting to serve, teach and share their knowledge. Besides working in Thamarai nearly half of our facilitators are either studying or working

The People Beh



Bridget, Aswini, Abishek, Gothai, Ananthi, V
Madhumitha

ind the Vision



Vishnu, Savithiri, Carla, Abirami, Gunavathi,
and Jagrata.

4.1 Word cloud shows what changes facilitators noticed in their lives since facilitating at Thamarai



4.2 Some of the facilitators shared what they are proud of this year:

I'm proud of being a supportive daughter at home and a facilitator in Thamarai. Even though I have lots of family problems (financial problems , study difficulties and sometimes health issues), I pull myself to the positive side. I am respectful to parents and supporting them financially as much as I can. I felt proud whenever being with children, clearing their doubts and encouraging them -

Gunavathi

I feel proud about being a multi-tasking woman and to be a facilitator in Thamarai, especially being a part in educating most of the first generation children in my village this will lead to educated village and society -

Aswini

This year, I could recognize that my thought process has changed from a practical solution to a system shift. Whenever I make a decision I think about the long term sustainability and the system shift.

I'm also proud that this year we got 10 regular students from Annai Nagar for STEM class - I hope in the upcoming year we can increase the number of students and run the class more effectively -

Vishnukumar

I taught the children who are struggling with their learning and now they are improved by my new methods of teaching. Also, I'm friendly with the children - that's my accomplishment. In my village one child discontinued so I gave a motivational speech to her and now she's going to school. Also, I'm going to encourage to the all older people to gain education knowledge -

Ananthi

Before, I used to concentrate on the students' grades. Now I focus on supporting their learning with joy . Looking at my facilitation of the past year, I can see that I want children to learn by their own interest and not by competition -

Anandhi

What are the main things
you have learned or gained
from your facilitator role
with Thamarai?

Practical
Learning:

- English skills (3)
- Time-management/
organisation skills (3)
- Teaching techniques
- Leadership skills &
collaboration (2)

Values
Oriented
Learning:

- Responsibility (2)
- Working in alignment to personal values (3)
- Recognising the uniqueness of each child &
their individual capacities (2)
- supporting others (1)

Developing
Resilience:

- Avoiding angry
reactions (1)
- stage fear gone (1)

Goals of the year



for myself?

To complete the Shifu program and I want get a good job – Gunavathi

I would like to concentrate more on my studies and focus on getting placement and develop my skills on tailoring and Kolam – Aswini

I would like to develop my knowledge in the technical field - Vishnu

I want to learn English reading without making mistakes – Ananthi

I think I have to train myself in professional ways. Also planned to stop overthinking - Anandi

I want to improve my leadership quality through RTL and want to become financially independent – Abirami

for my family?

To reduce their stress Gunavathi

To bring lots of love and happiness and support them financially – Aswini

I want to change the thought process in my family to support each other instead of my mother doing all the work - Vishnu

I would like to be more friendly with my kids and take care of their health – Ananthi

I want my family to achieve a healthy lifestyle – Abirami

Already as a family we always discuss what is working and not working. Our family always believe in whatever happens it happens for a reason. I would like to follow it up - Anandi

for Society?

I want each and every women to be financially independent – Abirami

Be a responsible person because to achieve anything in the society the change should come from ourself – Aswini

For jobless people I want to help them to get job through women's group – Ananthi

I want change the thought about the children behaviour when the children study in government school – Ananthi

I am committed to work with the Incredible India team for pen pal project so I like to achieve that in this year – Aswini

I would like to support students to become aware that, 'each one is responsible for their own growth' - Vishnu

for Thamarai?

I want students to understand English. I want students to read and write without making mistakes and I want them to start self learning without facilitator help – Abirami

Some students are still with difficulties to read the sentence. I am going to improve their confidence and help them read the sentence in both English and Tamil . In math , I want improvement in addition and subtraction - Gunavathi

Connect with the youths to develop their technical knowledge for their growth - Vishnu

Some students are still with difficulties to read the sentence. I am going to improve their confidence and help them read the sentence in both English and Tamil – Gunavathi

I believe that only when one decides to change then change is possible in society - Anandi

4.3 Reflections from new team members

Ramanan “When I heard people criticizing the school curriculum, asking if it met their expectations, or why certain students excel in some subjects but fail in others, many questions arose in my mind. I realised these questions reflect a cynical side of us all. It's easy to find flaws without understanding the reasons behind them. Assuming something or someone without understanding the context can lead to incorrect interpretations.

The school curriculum may not be perfect, but it has produced great leaders and CEOs. Every child is different. When I grew up, I excelled in some areas and not in others. It is okay to not be perfect in everything. The real purpose of education systems and school curriculums is to help me discover what I am passionate about and follow my path to success. I went through various tests growing up, from learning to walk to cycling, and I learned from my failures. The fundamental education we receive is necessary, much like learning to cycle despite falling.

For example, I passed my high school exam on my tenth attempt, found my passion in cooking, and worked hard. Today, I am a Master Chef. Initially, society saw me as someone who struggled academically, but I worked hard and achieved my goal. Everyone is different, and every society/community has its positive and negative impacts. At first, society judged me for my academic struggles, but later, as a Master Chef, I received positive feedback and appreciation for my work.

In the end, my journey has taught me that success comes in many ways and often needs perseverance and self-discovery. Being part of Thamarai has not only let me help the community but also helped me grow as a person. I am dedicated to continuing this path of learning and support, making sure every child has the chance to reach their full potential. Together, we can build a society where equity and equality are real”.

“My name is Abirami. I deeply care about equality, respect and freedom for myself and others. I want to see equality and no difference in educational opportunities for both men and women. I feel proud to be a part of Thamarai supporting the next generation for a better life. E.g. the students are technically improving by using tabs and laptop computers for their homework in Thamarai. This support will improve their skill to know how to use technology, in a safe way, for education. I feel accomplished this year as I organized the International story book online launch with the team. I also see that the comprehension is improved in my students. I have started recognising my fears, after the Radical Transformational Leadership program (RTL), and I have learnt how to shift my fear to what I care about and that gives me power. For the future, I want to improve my family health and my leadership quality through RTL, and become financially independent. In society, I would like to see every woman financially independent, students understanding and speaking English reading and writing without mistakes and to develop an appetite for self learning”.



*“My name is **Gothainayagi**. I am a facilitator in the afterschool. I support homework, teach classical dance and have been coaching frisbee for 2 years. When I teach frisbee I feel that I can build confidence and my courage stands out. Also, by coaching and playing frisbee I have been able to adapt different skills. I can also see that the students are taking me as a role model and are following my footsteps. My dream is to support girls to be strong leaders through a frisbee community and Thamarai where then each individual is open to speak up for themselves. I care about equity, gender balance and courage. I feel it plays an important role in today's society too, for example: ‘there shouldn't be discrimination between boys and girls in playing sports or doing household chores ... or even comparing them with studies’ I would like to change the gender stereotypes to build a stable society where each gender is treated equally and has their own rights. Also, I want to build a society where girls have an equal say and they have their freedom to decide and do the things they care about. In sports, there is always fear of losing the girls because of the societal norms that stop girls from playing but humans need both physical and intellectual growth.*



My magic moment last year was when the girls stood up and took the initiative to teach the boys frisbee. I was really proud to see the switch in gender teaching. I was also able to spot that the girls can open themselves up and they have this huge amount of confidence which stood out. Also, when I interviewed the girls they told me ‘now we have built our confidence not just in frisbee but also in life’. I can see that the girls have become strong women who are empowered leaders now. I really feel glad that I had this opportunity to explore and see that they have grown strong and powerful”.

Deanna *“I’m a facilitator and volunteer with Thamarai since July 2023. I love the openness and compassion of the team where all strive to give their full potential. The children bring so much joy - full of enthusiasm to learn and create. For next year, I think Thamarai should continue self empowerment of the facilitators and community, more structured and integrated individual plans for each student and more integration with families .I will make more mindful observations and assessments to support the children's full potential. We measure progress and growth in different integral ways. I intend to hold a mindful space and provide an environment for children to thrive . I’ve worked with many teams in education and healthcare and the Thamarai team brings me the most joy and ease. There is always so much more we learn and receive than we give from the community and children”.*



*“I feel accomplished seeing the children overcome their fear,
I would like to change in our society that all must be educated’*

4.4 Thamarai mentors



Mitali Joshi from Mumbai, has volunteered in Thamarai since 2018, initially full time developing communication activities and conducting English classes. She has now moved on from Thamarai to work in journalism but continues to build connections in her circles to support Thamarai and to have interesting classes and resources.



Muthu Kumaran has worked across the globe in the domains of education, organisational development, disaster management, ecology, gender, disability and citizen science. He is passionate about fostering agency and full potential in young people and is committed to a world of equity and dignity for everyone. Muthu trained our team for 9 months in 2017, he has moved on to other fields but is still involved with Thamarai visiting for bi-annual training and as an ongoing mentor. See the youth section.



Raamkumar Loganathan Despite holding a PhD in engineering from IIT Madras, Raam's deeper yearning to understand himself led him to practise psychotherapy. Raam volunteers at Thamarai as a mentor, aspiring to support children, youth, and adults around Auroville in discovering their inner light and tapping into their own inner resources. He shared "I am inspired by the integrity and sweetness of the people at Thamarai, and I am excited by the curiosity and openness of the children and youth studying here. This makes me truly enjoy my work at Thamarai".



Raghu Prashanth Raja founded the Auro Language Education and Research Foundation in 2022 and serves as its Director. With nearly 20 years of experience as a Senior Assistant Professor, corporate trainer, chip designer, action researcher, and principal investigator, he focuses on joyful accelerated learning methodologies. His initiatives include developing a Language Acquisition Ecosystem and Foundational Literacy Kit to integrate innovative research into practical education solutions. Raghu and his wife Sirisha offer the Joyful English program at Thamarai and mentor our facilitators to deliver it.



Srilatha Juvva is a social work educator and professor with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. She is also a practitioner coach, trained in Dr. Monica Sharma's Radical Transformational Leadership and applies this to transform higher education and in-service delivery for mental health and disability. She uses these tools and templates also to transform disempowering narratives of mental health and disability through fostering dignity, full potential and ethical leadership in people. Srilatha is a constant support, building agency and full potential for our team. She visits us to deliver an annual RTL leadership community program in Tamil and is training our youth facilitators to be resource people so they will be able to take this work forward to children and to their communities.



Sanjay Tumati strongly believes that everyone should have the opportunity to access self development tools (Vipassana/ RTL) to be able to achieve highest potential and aspirations. He believes awareness, equanimity, self reflections and purposeful action, aligned with one's ideals and values, are the tools that one needs in order to achieve those ends. He has 17 years experience working in the industry with Silicon Laboratories and Analog Devices at locations in the USA, India, Singapore and Canada. Sanjay's work has found its way in chips being used in Cell Phones, Televisions, Automobiles and medical equipment. Since moving to Auroville, Sanjay has started working for Aura Semiconductors Bangalore (WFH), mentoring youth in the Shifu program at C3SLD. You will find Sanjay regularly in the STEM room in Thamarai in the evenings mentoring the children and facilitator team in Maths and electronics.

4.5 Thamarai visiting volunteers



'Incredible India' Kedge college students from Bordeaux, France: The Kedge students spend three weeks with us annually. This is always a great moment in our year when they integrate into all aspects of Thamarai life. They bring themselves plus their cultural and professional skills and they learn with, and from our children & young people. It provides for a very practical and rich cross-cultural exchange at the same time as supporting Thamarai financially (Kedge students fundraise for Thamarai, in France, packing shopping bags in check out queues and running Indian food evenings). We are inspired by their commitment and their care.

'Incredible India' Kedge students 2023



Ciaran Horkan, from Ireland shares one of his main takeaways after his year volunteering with Thamarai: *“I was blown away by the effectiveness of the programme and format. The practices used in the opening and closing circles, bring all the children and facilitators into a similar state of mind, focus and calm. These practices are so much more advanced than anything I experienced in Ireland. Also, during circle time the children and facilitators have space to acknowledge each other and to share something they are proud of or passionate about.*

There is a very conscious energy in Thamarai. This is a place where facilitators have agency to change the systems, adapting and championing Thamarai to be a tool which works for their own, and the children’s needs. Not solely focused on grades, it is radically different to traditional school methods”.



Viviana has been with Thamarai for one year as part of the German government Weltsweart program. *“Thamarai’s aim is that everyone should have the opportunity to unfold their full potential and blossom like a flower. I’m a bit involved in everything in my work. I help with homework, and sometimes I’ve given English classes, which was initially challenging as I had to get used to speaking in English again. I am involved in various tasks, sometimes cleaning , but mostly uploading pictures to the drive or writing reports about activities with Thamarai. I’m also responsible for Thamarai’s Instagram page. . I like this aspect as it allows me to immerse myself in village life. In my free time, alongside volunteering, my life revolves around Auroville which is different from India in many ways, but I can say it is a significant enrichment for my life. I am very grateful to be here, to have had the experiences I’ve had and will continue to have, and to have met all the wonderful people I’ve already met”.*



Sarah Pinto runs her own online teaching platform, School of Values, to help kids maintain their connection to nature and their inner wisdom, and equip them with skills to live a life full of magic and passion. *“It had been a long time since I taught kids in person, and I am so grateful to Thamarai and Bridget for sharing their space and letting me work with children here. It’s been a time filled with laughter, learning, and magic with children who absorb information like sponges.”*



Ashley o'Hara is a student from American University of Paris who spent 10 days with us in Jan 2024 and supported us with communications. *“My time at Thamarai was a very enriching experience. It is truly a very unique place. I am grateful that I got to see how much the students truly love and appreciate Thamarai. Throughout the day, students were regularly creating new designs to 3d print or practising their coding skills on Scratch. I love that Thamarai prioritises education, but has a comprehensive, multifaceted approach which also incorporates the development of real-world skills, e.g. the quality of education is increased as facilitators have opportunities to participate in leadership empowerment training. Overall, Thamarai has cultivated a sense of community in its local area and is a second home and family to everyone who has the privilege to be a part of it. It was such an incredible, inspiring experience working for Thamarai and I am thrilled to be able to continue engaging and I certainly hope to return to Thamarai in the future!”*



4.6 Partnerships

We were delighted to benefit from both local and international partnerships, which are an integral part of our programs. We partner for pragmatic reasons of program delivery while also checking for alignment to our values of equity and dignity of all. Our local partners include:

- Health professionals: Auroville Dental Clinic and PIMS hospital who enrich our health and wellbeing programs and support us to look at whole systems family health.
- Mental health: Matram counselling
- Alternative health and awareness: Eco femme (for menstrual health awareness) ATB (Awareness Through the Body), auroville therapists
- Environmental awareness: Auroville Botanical Gardens, Pitchandikulam & Sadhana Forests.
- Technology: Bits and Bots, Stemland, Yuvabe team
- General learning: Auroville Teachers Centre

Leadership and capacity development: Radical Transformational Leadership (RTL) programs support us to develop the agency of our team, students and the local community and to design and implement beautiful projects.

Our international partnerships include:

- Annual visiting volunteer students from: Kedge Management College - France, the American University of Paris and Weltsweart Youth Exchanges - Germany.
- Foroige, Ireland sponsored virtual reality headsets, Aoife, from their team, visited bringing Makey Makey kits and Ruairi helped with the virtual gallery of the stories, films and art.
- Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim Training Board (MSLTB) produced and circulated the International Story Book which contains stories co-created by our and Irish teenagers (see below).
- Peptoc USA- published our students posters



Bytes & Bots

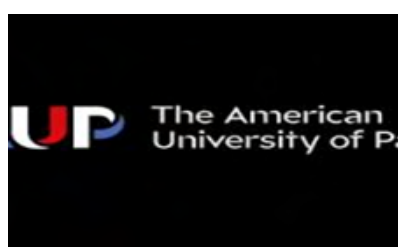


eco ♻️ femme



msletb

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna
Mhaigh Eo, Shligigh agus Liatroma
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim
Education and Training Board



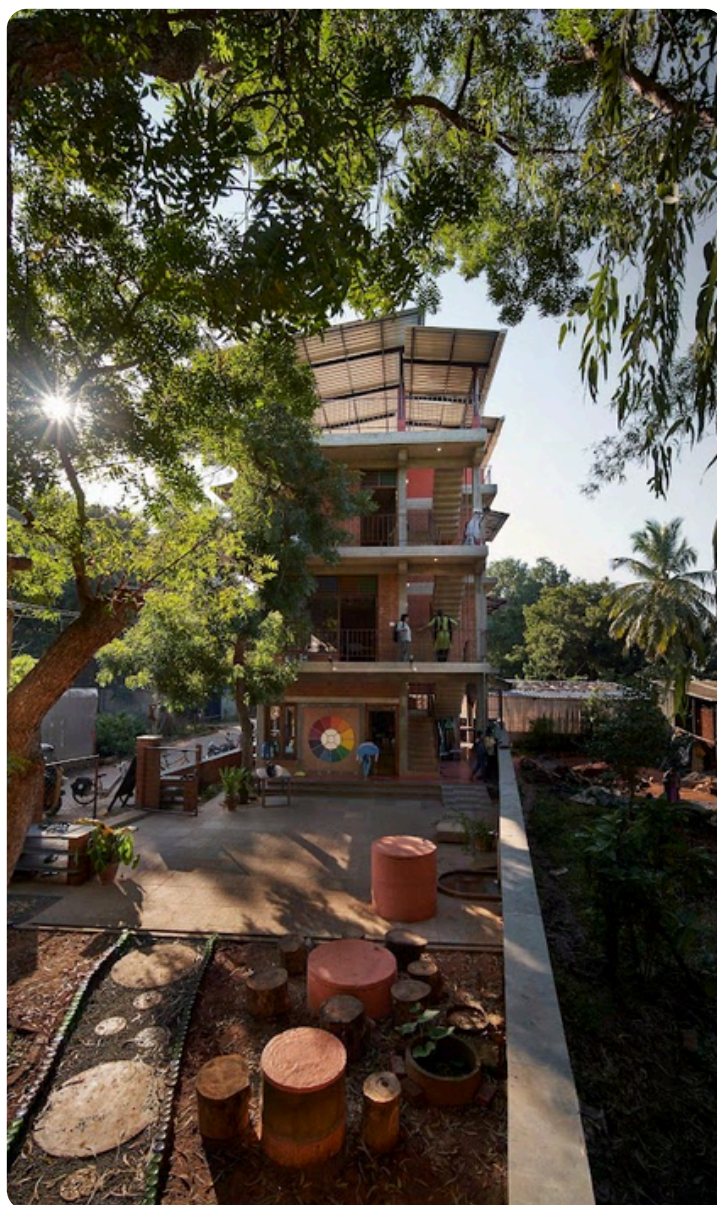
Der Freiwilligendienst des Bundesministeriums für
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung



5. THAMARAI LEARNING CENTRE

The Thamarai Learning Centre in Annai Nagar

The centre, fully completed this year, is now the home base that supports all our work. Located in the centre of Annai Nagar village, it hosts after-school programs for children and youth, adult literacy education and is a community meeting space. We consciously work towards gender and caste equity with daily practices such as each one, (beyond age or gender), caring for and cleaning Thamarai together. The centre and programs are designed to support the transformation of stigma and create an atmosphere of dignity for all. What has been an interesting development is the increased diversity of children and youth, from different castes, who are attending the service from surrounding areas and the number of families sending girls as a priority for the programs. Also, one of our most cherished accomplishments is that many of our Thamarai children, who had been part of our programs since 2006 (the founding year) have now graduated from college and are back working in the project mentoring the next generation of children. The centre has a fully equipped STEM room with ongoing electronics and technology programs and a sports ground for daily sports activities.



Thamarai hosts two daily after-school facilities: the Annai Nagar Centre and Edayanchavadi site, welcoming up to 60 and 30 regular children respectively. The children are supported by a team of 14 facilitators (primarily local and international youth and considered big brothers and sisters) as well as many regular visiting facilitators, providing homework support, themed subject classes, arts, sports and cultural activities.

Thamarai is open 7 days a week, evening sessions run 4.30pm - 8.30 pm, Monday to Friday and on the weekends its all day and evening programs. We have key practices that support our connection, growth and learning such as stillness, check ins, reflection and acknowledgement. Each day we end with a 20 minute closing circle to sit in community together before we finish with rhythm and silence. On the weekends we have a special activities program and self learning space .

5.1 The Joyful English program



Launched in October 2023, in collaboration with ALERF (Auro Language Education and Research Foundation), the Joyful English program aims to develop language skills in a unique, engaging and progressive approach. Students embark on a dynamic journey, where every word and sentence is not just heard but understood and integrated at a deeper level. In this way comprehension surpasses traditional rote memorisation as students immerse themselves in diverse, compelling contexts. This deeper connection to the language, combined with intrinsic motivation, becomes the driving force for continued learning and fosters a lasting love for the English language.

Insights from assessments inspire us to refine methods, tailor support, and provide students with the tools they need to excel. In recent assessments: one third of the students have comfortably crossed the initial reading hurdle; the second third, still navigating the reading barrier, will soon succeed; and the final third face unique challenges - and for this we are actively exploring innovative ways to support their learning journey.

In tandem, our facilitators follow a unique training model called the Natural Approach Model delivered by ALERF directors Sirisha and Raghu Prashanth. We have had regular training with Raghu since October 2023, providing new perspectives and teaching challenges in a progressive way (like building 'scaffolding'), allowing us to move beyond theory. Guided by micro models, the facilitators gradually acquire skills to ensure they create a dynamic and engaging learning environment for the students into the future.



5.2 In-house STEM activities by Vishnu



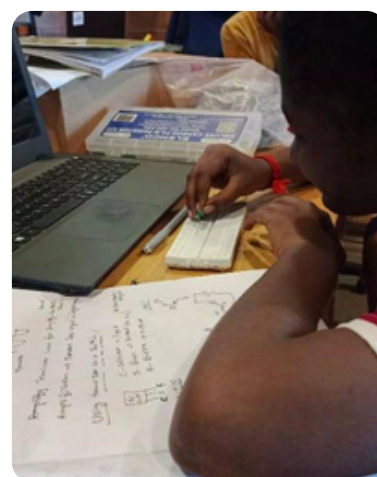
In this class, students explore a variety of technologies including Scratch, electronics, Robotics (NXT Mindstorm), and 3D printing. Some of the older students are enhancing their studies by practising Python programming tasks. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed to help students discover their potential and interests in these fields while also developing critical skills such as problem-solving, both independent and collaborative work, and self-directed learning. Students are encouraged to tackle tasks individually or in groups, fostering a learning environment that builds confidence and proficiency across different technological disciplines.



3D printing



Robotics



Arduino class



Scratch programming

Key components to our stem activities include:

Scratch Programming: offers an engaging and accessible introduction to coding for learners of all ages. With its colourful visual interface and block-based coding system, Scratch allows our students to create interactive stories, games, and animations without the need for prior coding knowledge.

Electronics (Arduino): a versatile microcontroller platform, provides the students with a user-friendly interface for creating interactive electronic devices to control sensors, motors, lights, and various other components with ease. Students can create simple LED blink projects like traffic light models to complex robotics and IoT applications.

3-D printing technology: a great hit with our students who have created many useful objects including pencil and stationery holders for the Thamarai desks. It harnesses cutting-edge technologies such as the Ender 3 printer, Tinkercad, and Ultimaker Cura to introduce students to the exciting world of additive manufacturing.

Robotics: The LEGO Mindstorms NXT robotics class offers students an exciting journey into the world of robotics, combining hands-on building with programming challenges. Students learn to design and construct their own robots equipped with sensors and motors, fostering creativity and problem solving skills.

5.3 STEM workshops by Vishnu

Mathogramming tournament: STEMLand invited us to participate in the Mathogramming tournament, which requires a specific standard from the participants. When we shared the news of the tournament with our students, their excitement was palpable and it motivated them to attend



the STEM classes more regularly. Consequently, about ten students from Thamarai participated in the tournament, and two of them won prizes!

Electronics Workshop: Building on this momentum, our students were invited to participate in an electronics workshop run by STEMLand. Two of our students attended this event, where they learned basic electronics concepts such as voltage, current, and power. The instructors used the analogy of water flow to explain electrical currents, making the concepts more accessible and understandable.

Throughout the day, the students engaged in hands-on projects that reinforced these concepts. Additionally, they learned how to calculate the power consumption of a device, enhancing their practical understanding of electronics.

5.4 Voice from Alumni students:

“My name is Dhinesh, and I reside in Annai Nagar. I’ve been acquainted with Thamarai Learning Centre since I was 13 years old and proudly count myself among its alumni. During my time, I engaged in numerous classes and extracurricular activities, including origami, dance, and classical stick dance. After completing 12th grade, I heard about the STEM program at Thamarai through friends in my village. Intrigued, I decided to revisit Thamarai and was impressed by the myriad activities catering to different grade levels. Witnessing students actively engaged in learning and pursuing diverse interests left a profound impact on me. I subsequently joined the STEM program, immersing myself in learning about 3D printing and robotics for two months. I also helped with the graphic design for the report and learned about Canva software”.

Through this experience, I acquired valuable skills in logical programming and more. The STEM classes played a pivotal role in guiding my career path, and providing invaluable direction for my future endeavours”.



“My name is Prithviraj. I am an alumni student of Thamarai. I live in Annai Nagar. I completed my schooling in 2024. I learned about Thamarai’s STEM activities from my friends, which sparked my interest. I started visiting Thamarai in the second week of March, and it has been 2 months since I began my journey of exploring STEM. Thamarai has provided me with the best learning experience, and I was even appointed as a mentor for beginners. In addition to this, I have learned about cura, 3D designing, and robotics, which has been a useful, great, and fun experience. I would like to continue my learning journey at Thamarai”.

5.5 Basic computer application and Artificial Intelligence (AI) sessions with Mitali & Anando



Long-time volunteer, Mitali and her friend Anando offered to support basic digital literacy skills and share AI technology with students during our summer mini-camp. They discussed AI; how it is used today and how it will impact our future. Anando highlighted that soon everyone will be accessing Artificial Intelligence like we are accessing the internet today. Students were introduced to AI-based chatbot and image generation tools (ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Midjourney) and were given practical challenges to try out AI functionality in the creation of presentations on a given topic in both English and Tamil.

To understand and illustrate how we can use AI, we started with a simple question that Sri Ram came up with; 'Why is the sky blue?'. ChatGPT responded with a three paragraph scientific explanation, but this was not easy for all the students to understand. So we requested a short and simple answer and we got a one-paragraph response but which lacked any scientific explanation. Our next prompt requested an explanation through the example of a cricket game. So we answered the question 'why the sky is blue' through the example of a cricket game that was easily understandable to the students! This began a series of classes that culminated in the students researching topics in pairs, making slide presentations and sharing their presentation and learnings in one Saturday evening open mike session to the whole village community.

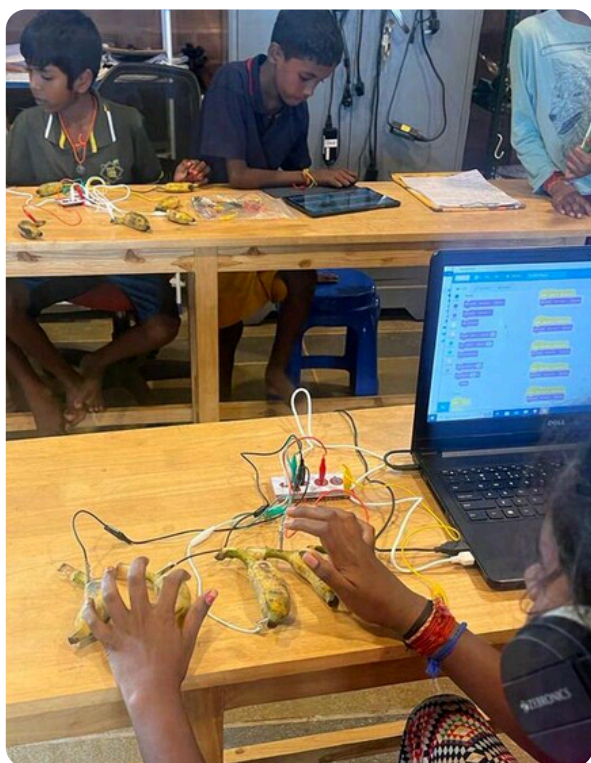
5.6 Digital Literacy

In spite of the state government policy which provided a free laptop to each 11th standard student (approx. 17 years old), there remains a conspicuous gap in basic computer literacy and exposure to technology. We found this to be particularly noticeable among the girls, who were not familiar with basic computer functionality. With today's technology being widely available it can potentially, significantly increase the opportunities for self-led student learning as well as enriching understanding of the school curriculum and other areas of interest. With that in mind we made a

concerted effort at the start of the 2023/24 school term to focus on upskilling students and youth in digital literacy. Our Irish volunteer, Ciaran, created a daily typing session and Aswini & Ramanan complemented this with the basics of digital literacy at our Sunday morning open house sessions. We further enriched these learning opportunities through the implementation of various digital initiatives, described above and below.

5.7 Makey Makey kits and micro bits with Aoife from Ireland!

Aoife, visiting from Foroige, Ireland generously donated 'Makey Makey' kits and micro bits. Makey Makey kits were invented by MIT researchers with the goal of making STEM education exciting. Aoife showed students how to use the kits to connect the computer to a variety of objects, for example, bananas! The students connected each cable to a separate banana and, using Scratch software, programmed each cord to a specific sound. As the bananas are conductive, the students could play the programmed sound on the computer by simply tapping the bananas! The students had great fun composing songs on their self-made banana pianos. Aoife also taught the students how to make podcasts and mix songs using Soundtrap, to make creative online videos using VlogNow Video Editor. We are so grateful for the generosity of Aoife, who has greatly enhanced our STEM program!



Banana Music with 'Makey Makey' Kits brought over from Ireland!

5.8 International Virtual Connect - Cross-cultural Virtual Gallery during inauguration of An Cosán



There was great excitement on opposite sides of the world as young people from Foróige, Ireland and Thamarai, India connected during a VR link-up for the inauguration, in June 2023, of An Cosán Erris, a new youth centre being built in Belmullet, Ireland. The young people displayed their creative talents of story writing, illustrating and creating video footage of their home cultures. This was showcased at the inauguration during a virtual exhibition, thought to be the first of its kind in Ireland, where youth shared presentations and exhibitions of their work online. Five VR headsets, kindly donated by Foróige Ireland, are currently used by the 13+ year old students to enhance their academics on Sunday mornings during open house sessions.



Using virtual reality to gain exposure to other cultures and landscapes, scan to see Thamarai gallery with Avatars.

5.9 An online, co-creations - Foroige, Ireland & Thamarai (Cross-cultural projects)

For the past two years, teenagers from Foroige Ireland and Thamarai India have been exploring shared learning platforms through digital education with the support of MSLETB. All organisations involved are passionate about inclusion, equity and full potential of everyone. This partnership has the potential to upskill young people on both sides of the world, enhancing enterprise, enriching curriculum and adding to a global movement of young people working for peace, prosperity and the wellbeing of our planet. Both Foroige and Thamarai work with rural youth and give priority to those from marginalised communities such as the traveller and immigrant communities in Ireland and the ‘dalit’ caste (so called lower caste) in India.

This project aims to transcend isolation and exclusion and work towards:

- Enhancing a global mindset of interdependence as young people connect across cultures and learn to understand cultures and norms, building respect, sensitivity to difference and celebrating the unity that exists in diversity.
- Creating a shared platform to explore universal values and how youth can inspire each other to use their creativity and voice on initiatives they care about to enhance a thriving world.
- Building creative and digital capacity in young people. Upskilling in technology that can build future access to further education, enterprise and valuable skills that will enrich life and give opportunities that might otherwise not be available to them.

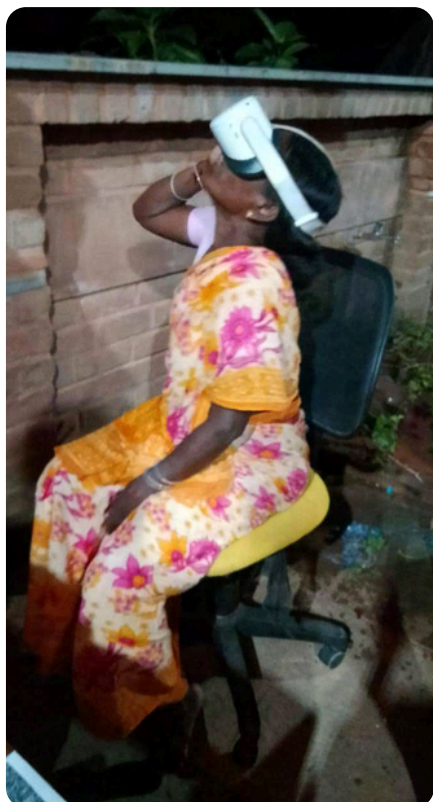


Indian Virtual Reality youth team with Ciaran

Between them the young people created:

- a cultural exchange through zoom space where they shared about their lives and cultures and found many similarities and learned interesting things about each other.
- an international story book project (see below)
- their own media (stories, art, film) for a virtual reality exhibition presented at the inauguration of the An Cosán youth centre in June 2023.
- Ongoing shared group programs that enhance friendships and help young people to learn skills in a joyful setting.

The Foroige and Thamarai teams have also learned new creative digital skills through Foroige’s ‘Level UP programme’ which uses the VR equipment donated to enhance school curriculum subjects for our students a making a primarily rote learning environment more visual and sensory. Thamarai will also be using the VR as part of their wellbeing health camps in local villages. We look forward to developing this cross-cultural, creative and digital project to enhance rural lives, to further education and to open opportunities in preparation for the emerging digital world where young people will be central to fostering peace, prosperity & wellbeing for people and the planet.



Adults have had the opportunity to experience places they otherwise have never travelled to, such as, in the picture, the grandmother was able to experience the Taj Mahal, being on the moon and under the sea, all while sitting on a chair in the middle of her village!



Thamarai community open day with VR

5.10 The International Story Book Project:

A beautiful example of youth global cooperation was the creation and launch of the International Story Book by the teenagers of Foroige, Ireland and Thamarai, India. The process was simple yet deeply impactful: students in India started the first half of their stories, bringing them to a critical point and then their counterparts in Ireland brought them to a conclusion. This required exchanges over zoom calls creating a space for each one to learn of the other's culture as their stories unfolded to reflect their lives, interests, joys, and challenges.

Twenty two young people from India and Ireland together created 9 illustrated stories, each from their own location with some online meetings. The book was launched in an online event in the presence of family and friends in Ireland and India as well. Jean Eisle, the founder of The International Story project was also online. She had been part of the project when it began at the height of the cold war when students in Russia and the USA were encouraged to write to each other. The book includes illustrations from the young people, their bios and pictures from their home village/town. A special added feature was the creation of a virtual library with the help of Ruairi Kelly, from Foroige Ireland.





Young people of the youth centre of Ballyhaunis, Ireland

“It was a great opportunity to be able to work with the young people in India to create these stories. They wrote the beginning of the stories and we wrote the endings so it was amazing to be able to add pieces of our own work to the project and be able to come up with ideas and see the ideas that the young people in India had. We have had so much fun writing these stories together. We all hope that we get to do more things like this in the future”. By Fionn and Emma on behalf of the Irish students



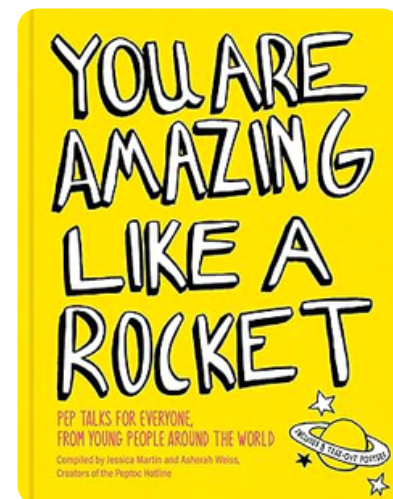
Story writing in Thamarai with Silky

"We are proud of ourselves and the international story book. We learned how to get inspiration and brainstorm our ideas, construct a story, write an outline and a draft. We also learned how to get feedback from our friends to create the final copy. Thank you for this opportunity. We would like to continue other things, we would like to write one more book, next time the Irish students can start and we will finish the stories ;) We came together to write the stories with friends and Silky. It was a jolly, fun experience. We celebrated with cake and it was a memorable day for us all. All of us who wrote the stories would love to meet the Irish young people again, we would like a photo together, maybe we can put 2 photos together digitally". By Dheebasri and Harini on behalf of the Indian students

5.11 Peptoc Global Drawing Project

Thamarai children had their drawings included in a global public art project, Peptoc. Young people in 25 countries around the world responded to an invitation to make a small poster with encouraging words or drawings, hang it in a public place, and then share photos of the poster with the Peptoc team.

Three posters from Thamarai students were accepted to be included in a recently published book "You are amazing like a rocket".



5.12 Sports programs

Sports are a key part of our everyday life in Thamarai. We recognize the importance of developing the physical body to build strength, agility and the overall well being sports brings to all aspects of a person. Sports is also a fantastic way to also build harmony, community integration and shift common norms of groupism, gender and caste inequities. It is also a great way to profile life enhancement and create a counterculture to addiction and negative peer pressure. For all of these reasons we developed a sports ground and now have a strong program thanks to many of the local Annai nagar youth, as well as partnerships in Auroville such as Gaia and Dehashakti grounds, the Auroville Frisbee teams, the local Alankuppam higher secondary school.

5.13 Frisbee by Gothainayagi

This report by our youth facilitator and frisbee coach Gothainayagi who has played on the Indian national Ultimate frisbee team:

“Frisbee is a mixed gender sport. Two years back when we started this project to teach frisbee in Annainagar, our main goal was to empower girls as strong leaders who in turn could teach the boys frisbee. In our area, usually only boys play sports, so we enrolled 25 girls to play Ultimate Frisbee which is a fast growing, gender equity, sport. It features non contact, mixed gender, self refereed and spirit rules. Players get to participate at the national as well as international level tournaments.

Ultimate Players Association of India (UPAI) is our official Frisbee body in India, which holds 3 to 4 tournaments yearly. These tournaments are based on qualifiers, which encourages teams from across India to qualify to nationals by getting through regional tournaments. Other than UPAI tournaments, players engage themselves with off-season tournaments. Yearly once, India sends 2 to 3 selected Indian teams to represent at International tournaments. Thamarai students practice daily and have two 1.5 hour coaching sessions per week. Our Thamarai girls participated in the regional women's 2-day tournament and won a spirit award. They were super excited to play an actual tournament and learn from each other.

Highlights of our frisbee year

- Witnessing new young talents and motivating them to stretch to their potential. The most inspiring part of the tournament was the encouragement of the crowd. By the end of the tournament, there was much appreciation of the girls' as upcoming talents from outside players. Through tournaments, we build lots of connections with new people. It's a growing community.

At the beginning of this programme we had 25 girls coming to play frisbee. We started teaching them how to throw a backhand. This type of throw involves using your wrists and your whole body. At the beginning, we faced a few difficulties, e.g. the girls felt insecure about wearing shorts or even coming and playing on the ground. They also faced issues like not having time because of their household chores but slowly when the girls started giving importance to this sport they started to gain their confidence. As well as the game skills, the girls' agency has grown, they take turns in leading the practice, have built compassion for each other and learn to work as a team.

They also build the never ending *will power* to persevere without giving up. Initially, the girls were more focused on individual growth and started blaming each other for the mistakes, through practice they have learned to encourage each other and build the team with equality as the base. Now, we hear constant voices supporting good plays and behavior.



Thamarai and Auroville girls play together against other teams in Frisbee tournaments

Our biggest achievement last year was taking the whole girls team to a frisbee tournament. These girls played 2 full days and played 3 matches per day. We had left it to them to take the captaincy to lead the team and to take care of warm-ups and calling lines in the game. During that time we were able to spot their emerging leadership, confidence and courage. It was so fascinating to see them train in this coordinated way because they were the youngest team. These girls were independent and powerful and that was when we saw many women and men taking our girls as an inspiration and supporting them. On their last day of their tournament during their last match, they fought hard and actually bet and won against an experienced Chennai team. We all felt so proud and we couldn't even explain the amount of joy and love we felt after the win. It was their first ever match that they won. The joy we were able to identify in each individual's eyes was so precious. It showed and proved the love and care they gave for the team. At that moment we just felt really proud of ourselves.

Quotes during tournament from some players:

“ Akka (Sister) at the beginning I was scared to come and play on the ground but now I feel confident and I am not scared of anything.”

“ Akka now after playing frisbee I am able to speak up. I am not scared and I don't fear anything.”

“I felt nervous. I learnt how to do throws. Now I'm not scared and I feel strong.”

“I felt Scared and judged myself. Now I am able to face my fears after playing frisbee”.

“At the beginning I was scared to speak to people. Now I have gained the courage to talk to people without fear.”



Frisbee Team

What I have learned:

I learnt that teaching can be interesting and that if I want the students to be strong and powerful, I will need to be a role model for them. E.g. coaching the boys requires a certain way to teach them. I need to be conscious in the way I speak to them. I need to be aware that sometimes they can physically overpower and this can demotivate us. Also, I have coached the men's team in Auroville, it wasn't that easy because first thing they were all boys, second they were all older than me, So keeping this criteria in mind I was able to approach and teach them in a fun and learning way. So that's the same thing I did here in Annai Nagar. I worked at being the role model and showing how to keep the equality in gender so we have balance and no one thinks they are higher than anyone else.

Regular commitment is the key for the growth of this initiative. At the moment, progress is a bit stagnant due to less commitment. So I need to inspire and I am adding one more weekly session as a small step towards the goal. Our future plan is to focus on empowerment, building leadership skills for girls and also to expand to other sports. We are organising a Thamarai sports committee of mixed coaches and sports to build a strong foundation and we plan to add an early morning sports session each day before school.

- I see growth in the Children evident in their compassion for each other, their growing leadership skill and understanding of each others' perspectives, their commitment to the sessions, responsibility to take care of each other and their body carrying water and making sure to do regular stretches.



6. LEARNING CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

6.1 Highlights of the Edayanchavadi after-school from Savithri

The completion of a colourful bamboo structure for our activities creates a peaceful atmosphere and was one of my highlights this year. Children loved how French puppeteer's Mireille transformed their English text book stories into magical puppet shows. They learned to make puppets and create their own stories. Carla's yoga classes were a great addition to improve our health and well being. We experienced many camp activities this year and one favourite was the nearby Nataraja Pyramid Temple where children sat inside in silence and reported how peaceful they felt afterwards. They learnt about how Nataraja is the initiation of dance which they love to do. The children's magic moment was an invitation to take part in a co-creative musical play Every Soul Is Unique at Cripa with others from Auroville and surrounding. The children co-created two dramas on the themes of transforming shame and gender bias, using girls playing football and boys doing house work as context . This event had a great impact on the children's confidence and self-esteem, they experienced that they can achieve great things if they really want to. Just after the performance, student Sandhiya said "I am very happy and I will never forget this day, because everyone is equal in performing."



Children performing on stage in Cripa performing arts centre





The bamboo structure in Edayanchavdi after-school



Yoga with Carla



Puppet performance with Mireille



Puppet making with Mireille



Nataraja Pyramid Temple visit

6.2 Highlights of Annai nagar after-school from Abirami

Earlier in the year we identified concentration, comprehension and joy as factors we wanted to develop through the after-school activities. Programs such as the 3 month kolam yoga course, craft sessions, mediation, yoga and Awareness Through the Body have all helped. We also have offered 'Joyful English' sessions and honed our technical design skills and 3D imaging using Gravity Sketch through virtual reality. Key changes I have seen in the children this year include:

- A shift from memorising to comprehension and increase in ability to recognise phonetics and break down words for self-directed reading.
- From initial hesitation and restlessness during yoga and meditation to ability to sit in stillness and value the experience in body and mind.
- Girls coming on time to class and other family members taking up house chores.
- Children readily offering to take up responsibilities eg. typing up the schedules in digital literacy class, setting up class, managing the garden and preparing snacks in the kitchen
- From shyness and hesitation to increased confidence and self-esteem in sharing their reflections, speaking with the microphone and performing in talent shows etc.
- Older students, especially girls, deciding on 3rd level study beyond their nearby locality, seeking broader subject ranges rather than following social norms of what girls have done in the past.
- Girls playing every day in the sports ground in shorts. This has been a huge change from no representation 3 years ago prior to initiating the Frisbee programs.
- Parents giving students more freedom to go to activities without them such as other sports grounds and training camps in Auroville.
- Children have become more mindful of their language and use of swear words
- Children notice inequities and speak up in open mike sessions and give feedback to the team in Thamarai. For example, when a student was getting resistance from her grandmother about coming to Annai nagar village because it is considered to be so called lower caste, her friend spoke up to support her and grandmother changed her mind.

6.3 Addressing Behavioural Challenges and Enhancing Concentration

We have observed growing numbers of children challenged with some learning and attention challenges. This can be due in some part to poor nutrition and sleep patterns as observed in the results of a recent survey by Carla in the after-school nutrition report. We are working on targeted strategies to support children including training for our team, working closely with parents, partnership with PIMS hospital for testing and treatment and fostering an environment that is conducive to focused learning within the scope of our facility. Our commitment to inclusivity drives us to ensure that every child receives the attention and support they need to thrive academically and personally.

6.4 Developing concentration through Awareness Through the Body - by Jagrata

Awareness Through the Body (ATB), started in July 1992 in Auroville as a program to improve the posture of school children, but quickly evolved into a practice to help children develop their capacity for attention, concentration, and relaxation while enhancing their ability for self-awareness and self-regulation. Thanks to the Aurovilian ATB facilitators, we are lucky to be able to offer this practice to Thamarai children and facilitators. Once a week, Aurovilian, Pablo, comes to work with the children and facilitators and during the last summer camp he came everyday. We also had a 3 evening introduction for the facilitation team with Honor and Vega.

6.5 Jewellery making with Gunavathi



One of our youth facilitators Gunavathi offers Jewellery making sessions at weekends. She researches ideas on the internet and shares that it is wonderful to create beauty and that children are curious and interested in making jewels on their own. *“ I am grateful to teach them. It's an opportunity for them to learn and for me to teach them and make beautiful things”!*

6.6 Puppet making with Mireille:

Weekly, the students enjoy both puppet making and their English curriculum stories as puppet drama to enhance their learning. A highlight for this year was working Gulliver's travels into many stories and giants! Mireille skillfully guides the children to express themselves and their imagination. Often times they speak about themselves and their own lives through the puppets. Mireille shares how she sees their tenderness emerge with the paper puppets and how children often forget themselves as they become one with the puppet. Children learn voice projection and body expression, Mireille's skillful drama techniques and exercises help them overcome shyness and builds confidence. The children perform their stories during our Saturday night open mike sessions and talent show nights. Mireille has also performed her earth worm puppet show at Allankuppam higher secondary school to an audience of 300.

6.7 Women's Elementary English Class with Tom

As well as regular English classes with the children, Tom offers bi-weekly Women's Elementary English Class. The focus is on building confidence in speaking and on improving fluency. Many young adults in the villages have some ability to read and write, but have difficulty in speaking. This appears to be the result of lack of exposure to speaking practice (a lot of emphasis is placed on reading and writing in schools), lack of confidence and fear of mistakes which leads to self-censoring and becoming tongue-tied when speaking. To address this Tom challenges his students with as much speaking and interaction as possible, throwing in humour to create a light, fun atmosphere. While attendance varies as many women are taken up by work at home, a core group of four women attend regularly and have become noticeably more confident and motivated. Tom says *‘I feel I am learning at least as much as the women from these classes. It is a continuous learning process!’* Tom is about to jump into his next adventure offering English to the village youth he occasionally plays football with. This will support them with work and if they travel for out of Tamil Nādu state Sports competitions.



6.8 Weekend program highlights

After a week of school and homework, the weekend is a time that we can engage in lots of fun learning activities where the students can choose from a range of activities on offer and co-create learning experiences themselves with the help of our youth facilitators. It starts with Friday evening being a lighter evening, students can choose to play frisbee, concentrate on clay work with the local potter or join the awareness through the body class. Most students choose an activity and also get their homework finished off so the weekend is free to enjoy. Thamarai is open 7 days a week and the weekend activities are cherished.

Saturday program is coordinated by Savithri and hosts Mirelle's puppet making and storytelling, where concentration and joy meet in a unique learning experience, Savithri works on children's strength, coordination and love of dance in her Bharatnatyam dance class and Carla's yoga class brings flexibility and relaxation. In the afternoon Jagrata offers embroidery class in a concentrated setting that's eagerly attended by both boys and girls. This is followed by a snack and sports before the evening open mike session that usually starts with songs and jokes and then a focal point such as a movie or leadership sessions are explored. Afterwards, all are welcomed to the mike to share their reflections. It is an empowering space and we are continually nourished by the insights and wisdom that is shared.

Sunday mornings is an open-house to learn from a platter of activities. Aswini and Ramanan lead a digital literacy class. Some students use the time to speed up their typing with Typing.com, others play chess, garden, bake, finish school homework or use the centre's material to finish school projects and later join Gunavathy for crafts and jewellery making upstairs. The younger ones tend to congregate around Mirelle for puppet making class on the ground floor or play with lego or other learning materials. Stories and jokes are shared during snack time that is prepared by the children, often with offerings from the garden. It's a fun filled learning experience and sets us up for the week to come.

6.9 Camps

Camps are a special time at Thamarai as there is no homework and the students are free and come to Thamarai day and evening time. Prior to each camp we take time to plan taking the learnings from last camp, ideas from the children on how they would like to use the time and have a planning meeting centred around the RTL - Conscious Full Spectrum planning tool where we ask what values do we want to bring to this camp, what are the current challenges for the students and what outcomes do we want to achieve. After this planning session we design the camp in a conscious full spectrum way so that it is not just output orientated in a scatter of activities but more designing for strategic learning outcomes that are joyful and build agency and the full potential of the students and the team. Highlights for this year were our partnerships with the STEMLand mathegramming team and the Auroville Awareness through the body teams but this year's favourite was the Craft Mela.

6.10 Craft Mela: Cultivating Creativity, Preserving Tradition



Craft Mela isn't just one event, it's a whole week dedicated to learning and fun. It's all about showing how important traditional crafts are and helping kids in Auroville keep these skills alive. During the week, students learn to use their hands in special ways that keep old crafts going, even in a world full of new technology. This special week, happening every February, teaches to love these old crafts and pass them on to the next generation. Craft Mela is like a bright light, making sure creativity and tradition stay strong for years to come.

6.11 Site Development

The Thamarai learning centre is finally finished! The solar powered centre has been built with a sensitivity to our carbon footprint. Further, during a Radical Transformational Leadership workshop, we were able to harvest ideas and suggestions from the children regarding the design and running of the centre. They came up with important inputs such as water saving, use of natural resources and waste reduction.

Raman, Divij and Hendrik helped with technical design. Notably, we have incorporated Ecosan compost toilets, recycled plastic doors and compressed earth brick to reduce concrete use. Krishnaraj and Guna helped us with construction. Silky designed our rainwater harvesting system which collects the rainwater from the metal roof and surface paving. This water is then channelled into a series of interconnected percolation pits that allows groundwater recharge and prevents excess surface runoff. The percolation pit covers act as stepping stones meandering along the garden walkway, connecting the main building to the toilet block.

The walkway integrates discarded glass bottles as part of the design. Throughout the garden, flowers like hibiscus, Jasmine, Champa and more are planted. Banana, papaya, and spinach are also part of the garden. A compound wall has been erected, with future plans for an exhibition sharing the values of Thamarai and the activities that happen here.



7. HEALTH & WELLBEING

We aspire to have health and wellbeing as an integrated part of all we do at the learning centre and on our outreach programs with an integral focus on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. We work through a diversity of initiatives, such as yoga and contemporary and traditional Indian healing, nutrition, sports, awareness/mindfulness, food, gardening and general health awareness programmes. We support children and adults in our communities to recognise the benefits of being renewed with a strong immune system and a resilient inner capacity.

Drama, street theatre and puppetry productions help to raise awareness on prevalent topics like suicide and addiction and we have services in place that people can access such as counseling with trained professionals. We strive to create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to seek support when needed. We also have a sponsorship program that supports people through rehabilitation programs.

The health and wellbeing program is coordinated by Carla and Muthukumari and offers:

1. Yoga and body, mind, spirit awareness development
2. Physical and mental health programmes (at our centre, in schools, villages and Auroville units): dental camps, medical check-ups, natural health remedies, counselling
3. Alcohol de-addiction and wellness programmes.

7.1 Outreach health and well being



Much of the well being work is outreach to government schools, education centres and women's groups to enhance health and well being. The service stands for the full potential and integral wellbeing for all with the aim to:

- Develop consciousness of the body, mind, and spirit, based on integral yoga and healing practices.
- Empower towards holistic wellness by building leadership, knowledge and confidence.
- Promote awareness of common health risks and support healthy lifestyle choices and practices that enhance wellness to prevent health causes.

The program is a counter to busy life pressures where unhealthy lifestyles and food habits take root compounded by lack of exercise and substance abuse leading to high levels of poor nutrition, blood pressure, diabetes, joint pains, cardiology complaints, obesity, stress and domestic violence. Muthukumari uses yoga and natural health care techniques such as tapping meridians, dhyanam meditation, sound healing and nutrition to enhance the classes.

7.2 Government school programs by Muthukumari

Carla and I are offering these program, to all ages, currently in three Government schools and next term to be expanded to five. The program aims to develop consciousness of body, mind and inner reality and integrates aspects of primary health care, concentration and yoga techniques with an emphasis on healthy everyday practices that can be integrated into life and home.

Our commitment extends to measuring health indicators in children especially iron and providing access to healthcare advice and services through local partnership for natural and allopathic health. For this we collaborate with local health care facilities including PIMS hospital, local health centre and Anganwadi centre for facilitating mother/baby group and in promoting family health in the community.

Feedback from teachers in the local government schools has been good, they reported student's enthusiasm for the yoga health class despite lacking this for other subjects. Also they have noticed an increase in student concentration levels and willingness of children to finish lunch and eat more vegetables because of the classes.

Isaiambalam school feedback “This yoga program helps our children’s concentration, energy and enthusiasm. They are able to do the 10 minutes of Anapana meditation every day without fail. They get discipline by attending the yoga session and we are able to see the good relationship with their colleagues”.

Bommayapalayam school “Thank you for the yoga class, it is very useful. The health information on menstrual cycle, nutrition, and mobile addiction are very useful to us all. The haemoglobin check up motivated the girls to eat healthy vegetables, fruits and they learned more about taking care of their body’.



7.3 Countering substance abuse and screen addiction by Muthukumari

We have used promotion of sports and wellbeing to counter addiction in the community. We have invested in developing a local sports ground and have supported sports programs in two villages this year for 45 girls/boys in Annai nagar and 26 boys in Morattandi village. They have ongoing practice & coaching primarily in frisbee, football and volleyball. We aspire to create life enhancement through these programs and counter the life depletion and peer pressure associated with addiction.

Substance abuse, primarily alcohol, is a major issue. Alcohol addiction is compounded by domestic violence and debt. We see the results of this on many of the children and mothers who attend our programs. Addiction and related issues have a great impact on children and their ability to self regulate emotionally and to concentrate. It also drains families resources that could otherwise be available for education and health.

This year we hosted drama productions to raise awareness on alcohol addiction and mental health issues, such as suicide. We have partnered with the local youth, women's groups and Rashmi drama team from Matram Mental Health services. Also, we offer 30 day rehab sponsorship programs through partners Mother care and TTK hospital. Dr. Palani and Raam have been a great support for counselling and we also disburse homoeopathic remedies, supplied by the Auroville Integral Health team, to support those with addiction.

Additionally, excessive screen time is a growing challenge, even with infants, as parents manage busy lives and rely on the phone or TV to keep children distracted, especially while eating. We have held a session with parents and young people on the effects on the mind and general well being of excessive screen time and the added worry of access to material that can be harmful to young people such as pornography. I have used energy rods to show the effects of negative thoughts or stimuli on the energy field and how electromagnetic waves with radiation can affect us. This experimental class has a very positive outcome as all can visually see, with the measurement from the rods, how our energy field depletes with negative thoughts or electromagnetic fields emanated by mobile phones. The Thamarai team also bring programs to the children on how to be safe on line and responsible using technology. This year we have had one successful case of rehabilitation when we partnered with TTK hospital in Chennai. The person concerned has been without alcohol for 9 months, is back at work and attending weekly AA meetings.



7.4 Women's health by Muthukumari

We can impact a whole family when a woman is empowered to take care of herself and others. I run a daily women's class at Arulvazhi centre and other weekly programs at various locations around Auroville for 67 women. These classes have their foundation in yoga but also emphasise primary health care and building strength and energy for the management of overall well being. We use simple practices of nature walking, healthy pranic foods, yoga asana, meditation and pranayama. Women freely bring their issues, both physical and emotional and I tailor practices to support them overcome these issues and maintain wellbeing. The practices have helped women get diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure under control and many can live now without medicine and cope with menstruation in a natural way.

Adhi. Age 38 yrs

"I have been continuing this wellbeing session for almost 2 years with Muthukumari at Arul Vazhi, Morattandi village. I am a household member, and after marriage, I only cooked and stayed at home! This lifestyle increased my obesity and bored me leading to a stressful life. When I heard about the yoga program I joined and today my health and family health had completely changed, we have a more healthy and happy life.

I have gained more knowledge of yoga and healing techniques and I have visited places like the mother and Sri Aurobindo's ashram, Auroville Matrimandir, Savitri Bhavan. I have uncovered wisdom and have practice now in my daily life. This knowledge touches and inspires me to learn more and do something for the society. We performed yoga at the Auroville Village Action Women's Day program for the last two years. I had never participated in any programs because of my obesity, and also my fear but today I performed on a stage in front of 5000 people in a program of yoga and dance. I am so happy to see a lot of life changes within me. Because I have changed, it helps family members".



7.5 Thamarai women's group wellbeing trip in Auroville by Muthukumari



A highlight for me this year was a Sunday wellbeing trip to Auroville with the 35 women associated with Thamarai, many mothers of the children who come to the afterschool. They immersed themselves in nature, visited the Matrimandir, and engaged in exercises to source their inner capacity through Radical Transformational Leadership led by Savithri. A talk on healthy lifestyle management, self-healing techniques, and relaxation was also conducted by Mila. This was followed by a specially prepared healthy conscious meal at the Visitors Centre where the nutritional value of wholefoods was emphasised to prevent health issues such as anaemia, diabetes, and obesity, aligning with our commitment to promoting holistic health. The women reported feelings of peace and relaxation, emphasising the beauty, order, and silence of the Matrimandir. Physical and emotional benefits were noted, with some participants experiencing a sense of relief and lightness, both mentally and physically. Despite the physical exertion of walking through the forest to reach Auroville, even older participants expressed enjoyment and felt their bodies rejuvenated after the experience.

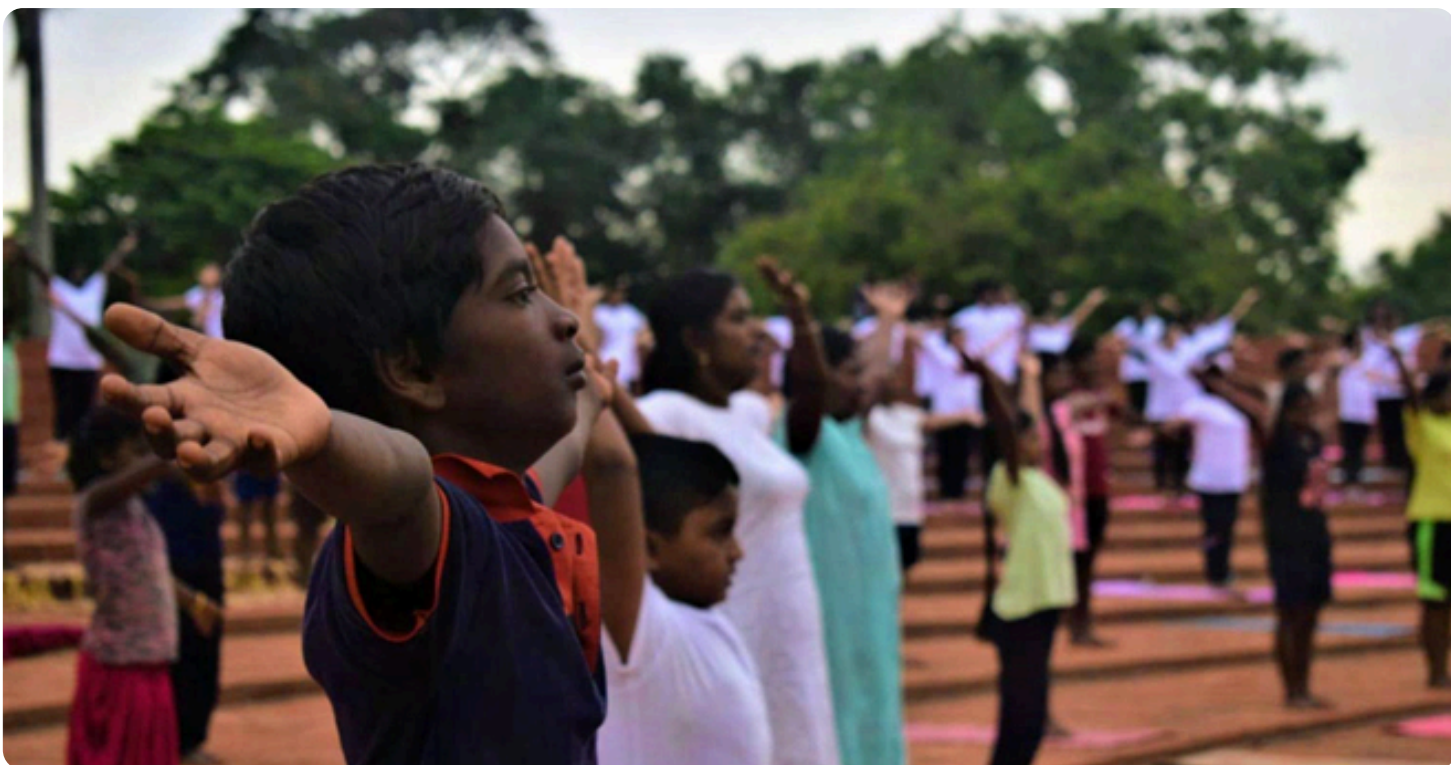


7.6 Yoga at Amphitheatre by Muthukumari



We had a beautiful experience this year with a month-long program of early morning yoga at the amphitheatre at Matrimandir. Thamarai Children met others as they participated in yoga class at sunrise. This supported the children to wake early and practise collective yoga in a beautiful atmosphere with the rising sun. The children were inspired by the renewed energy and wakefulness in their bodies and calmness of mind that they felt after the sessions. Each day they commented on the beauty of the gardens as they passed by and the yummy fruit and bread that they got before they piled on the bus to return home ready for a school day.

Early morning asana practice at Matrimandir



Yoga at sunrise at the Matrimandir

7.7 Yoga & Health Sessions by Carla

I hold weekly yoga and health sessions with the students in the two after-school centres (from 1st to 8th standard) with wonderful support and translation by Abirami (Annai Nagar) and Savithri (Edayanchavadi and weekend program) and also during school holiday camps. My focus is to prioritise joyful, creative and participatory learning with the main intention being to enable the space and opportunity for each student to experience and build awareness of their outer and inner worlds.

Sessions utilise techniques of hatha yoga including asana, pranayama, mudra and mantra, as well as a range of other movement and mobility methods, small and gross motor and other neurodevelopmental challenges, strength building exercises, partner and group cooperation activities, and a range of concentration and relaxation practices. Through games activities and discussions, I incorporate various educational elements on understanding the physical and bioenergy bodies and on behaviours and habits that support general health and wellbeing; including learning about parts of the physical body (joints, limbs, organs) and the nervous system and five physical senses, the nadi/ energy system and role of prana, the five elements of nature, the importance of good nutrition and drinking enough water, and of balancing plenty of physical activity with sufficient rest and relaxation.

I've noticed many changes over these regular sessions, and many of the students also spontaneously share some aspect of their learning with me. This process of encouraging the children to look inward, to bring into their awareness their thoughts/ feelings/ reactions, and then (at whatever their age-appropriate level) to express them and make connections with others in the group, can help them further absorb and integrate their learning.

I've observed many changes over the year as our Thamarai students are growing and developing; I've especially noted changes with some students who earlier could not control certain movements or complex gestures and now have greatly improved, some who found hand-eye coordination activities or gross body coordination very difficult, others who were unable to stand up without using their hands, others who were challenged to sit still and listen for even a short time - I've been able to observe definite improvement in so many of these. I've also really valued heartwarming moments such as when the children spontaneously started practising the mantra we'd been learning " Lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu". There is so much more potential growth we can share together, and these efforts are connected to their growth in all other areas - nutrition, self-efficacy and confidence, lifestyle behaviours and routines, language and comprehension, relationships and community, school exams etc. This journey with the students is ongoing, and I consider that continuing consistently with the holistic, integrated approach that we aim for at Thamarai is key to supporting further flourishing.

Some of Carla's students shared 'something I've noticed about myself':

- "I learned if I focus on the ball, I won't miss the ball, so I learned that when I focus on something I can achieve it better"
- "That I can do poses that are hard, I learned that I also have talent within to do these things"
- "We learned to listen"
- "In standing balances such as vrksasana, we learned to focus on one point, to keep a steady gaze, and then we don't shake and lose our balance, we remain steady"
- "Yoga practice has helped me maintain my body healthier and fit - fit in the sense not only of outside physical fitness, but also inner fitness".



7.8 After-school Nutrition Program by Carla

As part of our integrated approach to children's learning we recognise the key role of nutrition in enabling children to grow and thrive. Since school age is a very important time for good nutrition to influence development positively, and the associated health consequences in later life, we see that adequate nutrition is an essential consideration for every child, every day.

We have some evidence that a considerable proportion of students attending our after-schools are currently undernourished or malnourished; most are significantly underweight for their age and height and many have anaemia (of 15 female students tested (aged between 11 and 16), during one of our health camps, 100% showed levels below normal range). It is therefore likely that there are other key nutrient deficiencies. This was recently confirmed by the assessment of a number of the children by visiting doctors from Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS). Along with strategies such as ongoing assessment, visits from medical professionals and family education, we have recognized the special potential for our daily snack program to offer a modest but regular contribution toward improving nutritional adequacy for our students. We decided, therefore, to review the daily snacks we offer to the students and how this could be optimised. Ananthi, Abirami, Bridget and I reviewed ways to improve the snack menu focusing on locally nutritious options that are accessible and affordable, beneficial food combining covering requirements of macro and micro nutrients, and food that is tasty and satisfying for students. Some of these improvements are already being incorporated into the daily snack menu and feedback from the students has been positive.

Progress is tracked using a 'snacks diary' which is reviewed quarterly. Abirami and Carla also created a questionnaire to find out more about students' food habits and eating-related behaviors and gain understanding about specific gaps and particular needs. The survey is still in its early stage though some patterns are already emerging:

- Almost all reported they are eating dinner late (between 8-10pm) and the majority reported going to bed late (between 10pm and midnight).
- A couple of the children said they do not usually take breakfast, The majority are eating rice as the basis of most main meals, with little range of protein intake. Similarly intake of fruit/veg and calcium sources was reported low.
- For snacks, many mentioned eating cakes, biscuits, and other sweet processed foods interestingly, students gave their favorite foods to be the home prepared meals such as sambar, noodles, biriyani and variations of rice (curd rice, turmeric rice), rather than highly processed foods,
- Five out of the 10 reported regularly eating 'high fat foods such as fried chicken, fries, crisps' and one 'high sugar foods such as cookies, soda, sweets, cakes' with their family.
- All 10 students said they regularly play team sports such as frisbee, football, etc. and or play games in the schoolyard and/or also cycling.

We intend to survey more of the students in the coming weeks and then to drill down further into some specific topics to better identify specific needs that could be further supported through the programs at Thamarai.

7.9 Collaboration on health & wellbeing with Auroville Therapists by Carla

As part of our ongoing health and wellbeing focus, we are grateful for the input and support from a variety of Auroville therapists: Muthukumari (Arulvazhi school) offering various activities around health and wellbeing awareness, Palani (Maatram) - counselling in Tamil, Mila - craniosacral therapy, Malar (Integral Health) - homoeopathy and me (Carla) - yoga therapy.

We have continued with our monthly 'Wellbeing Walk-ins' on Thursday mornings, for over a year. This allowed us to observe that it was mostly the elderly attending because those who are working or studying are not available on a weekday morning. Additionally, those who did attend came mostly for blood sugar and blood pressure checks rather than to access the various natural therapies on offer.

Thus, we sought to open the service up to more people in the village - which meant shifting the timings. Our first attempt was to offer it on a Sunday morning, the first Sunday of October, but attendance was low, with most of those who did come being the usual attendees of the Thursday mornings. We explored likely reasons for this with our local facilitators and some residents and found that for most of the villagers engaged in full weekdays (here in Tamil Nadu most weekly wage jobs are Monday to Saturday), Sunday was the one morning of the week they took for domestic, social, and personal/ rest time and so this timing also did not suit them.

So for our next attempt, in early December, we tried offering a wellbeing camp on a weekend evening - on Saturday from 5:30 - 7:30pm. Beyond making the event accessible to more people, the program aspired to share awareness on the foundations of holistic wellbeing including: nutrition and other healthy behaviours and strategies for health; the concept of the Pancha Kosha model; and the layers of the being (mental, emotional, energetic and soul) in relation to the physical body. The benefits of natural therapies, to support and complement allopathic medical treatment, and the range of techniques and practices for self-care, relaxation and pain reduction were also highlighted to enhance autonomy and resilience.



Poster for the weekend wellbeing camp (designed by Viviana and translated by Savithri)

Unfortunately, attendance for the weekend camp was low and we noticed that nobody engaged in counselling or homoeopathy. However, a wonderful surprise was that many of the older Thamarai after-school students came; helping set up and pack up, participating in learning the relaxation technique and then practicing with each other. It was a joyful, caring, and fluid atmosphere, and we look forward to seeing how it evolves in the next session - we are very much hoping to expand on the strategy of offering experiential, education-oriented group sessions and holistic self-management approaches in the wellbeing space after the summer break, particularly in collaboration with the Village Action Women's groups, and also offering to youth and men if there is interest.



8. LEADERSHIP & CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Another pillar of Thamarai's work is leadership and capacity development, notably through our ongoing commitment to the Radical Transformation Leadership (RTL) Program. RTL is a dynamic values-based approach to leadership that goes beyond conventional practices to support significant and lasting change, (Conscious Full Spectrum Response change) fostering everyday leadership within organisations and societies. This leadership style, created by Dr. Monica Sharma, from her life's work of leading global projects for the United Nations, emphasises the necessity of addressing the root causes of systemic issues, fostering personal growth, and pursuing a purpose-driven mission to achieve profound societal impact. It recognises that we are all leaders no matter where we are from and what we are working on. And creates values based solutions based on dignity and equity for all.

Our whole team (children, youth and adults) are supported to discover their leadership skills based on values, competencies and ability to be agents of change at home, in their workplace and in their communities. We conduct regular training sessions at Thamarai and online and we are part of a growing wider network of practitioner coaches who support the program being delivered in English and Tamil.

"RTL is a results-oriented program designed to produce sustainable outcomes by challenging existing systems and disrupting cultural norms." Monica Sharma

The program currently has two stages of training. The Stage-1 Workshop introduces participants to the foundational concepts and practices of RTL with the primary goal being to equip attendees with the tools, self-inquiry and insights necessary to initiate transformative changes within their lives, organisations and communities. Of notable value is the implementation of weekly triad meetings where participants engage in structured calls, facilitated by 'practitioner coaches' providing ongoing support and guidance as they apply the workshop materials in their daily lives.

We are part of the organisation team that hosts the stage 1, nine day program every September in hybrid sessions of online and in person in Auroville and a shorter 4 day in person session fully in Tamil for the local community. Between these two sessions, the whole team in Thamarai get the opportunity to renew this training each year and to take the tools and templates into our lives and work as everyday practices.

The Stage-2 Workshop aims at deepening the participants' understanding of RTL principles and enhancing their skills in implementing transformative strategies within their organisations and communities. Savithri, Vishnu and Bridget have participated in this online workshop over 4 weekends and are using the new tools to look at how we can enhance Thamarai as a learning environment and develop as an organisation.

Beyond the stage 1 and 2 programs, participants can choose to become 'practitioner coaches' to deepen their practice and help support leadership capacity building in others, be it in their own organisations or beyond. This is a twelve-day international, online training program. Savithri and Vishnu, two of our long term Thamarai facilitators, are both training as RTL practitioner coaches delivering in English and Anandhi has just begun this adventure to be a practitioner coach in Tamil.

Apart from this, we hold sessions in the community with parents, youth and children. These sessions are a rich source of space for each one to share about what they care about, identify the issues present in the community, hear each other's reflections and design solutions that work for everyone.

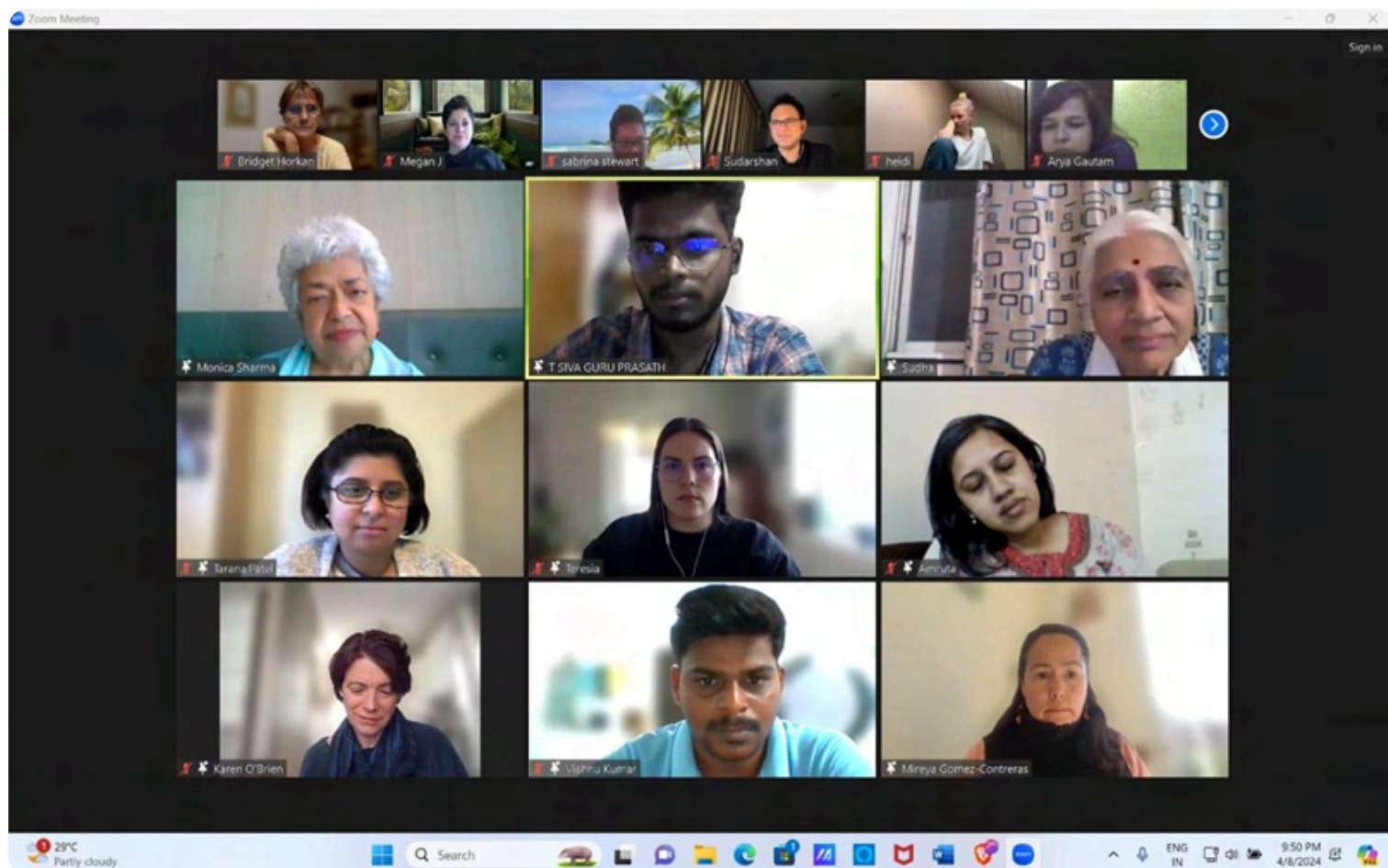
Our team joined a weekly book club and practice session to deepen our understanding and ability to apply the principles and practices.

We are grateful for the support of this work and especially for the presence of Srilatha Juvva and Muthukumaran who hosted sessions at Thamarai for the community, delivered the Amma Appa program in Auroville in Tamil and trained Anandhi, Savithri and Vishnu as practitioner coaches this year.

Vishnu taking part in a global RTL resource person training programme

‘When I applied for practitioner coach training, I was delighted and looking forward to it. In the first session, I got international people in my breakout group and I was a little nervous looking at their deep understanding of RTL and their way of presenting the tools. At that moment, I judged myself and thought I was not good enough After the session, I was thinking of not continuing the training program..... I noticed that I was being driven by my fear. So, I decided to change my thoughts to be more positive. I thought I was just out of my comfort zone. This zone helps me learn many things from others and I can also learn more about myself....

I was sharing my learning and insights with good company including Karen O'Brien who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her climate change work. I felt proud at that moment because I prepared her example from the RTL book and I was very happy to see I was pinned next to her on the Zoom screen’ - Vishnu.



Vishnu online with Monica Sharma, Karen O'Brien and others

Savithri on providing RTL training to a group of students in Ariyalur

'I have been learning and practising RTL for myself for 10 years and for the past 5 years I have been a practitioner coach. I recently got an opportunity to go one step further. I was asked to be a resource person on a 4 day program, over 2 months, RTL leadership training, with colleagues from Stemland and Tata Institute for Social Science, to a group of students from RAMCO at the Apex training centre in Ariyalur. In between session 1 and 2 we had weekly practice Zoom calls.

At first I felt nervous - my 'background conversations' ran asking me: was it possible for me to be away for 2 days leaving my 2 year old son... and could I support the others to learn with what I knew and practised.

In the end all went well. The logistics and care we received was delightful and having all the care arrangements made at home, made me feel happy. I learned how much organising is needed to do all of this. One big transformation I gained was that my family looked at me with pride and respected me after this exposure. The students' learnings in the session were great and the professional closing with acknowledgement by the Ariyalur team was a learning form me'



Savithri presenting RTL tools to construction students at the Apex Training Centre in Ariyalur



RTL in Tamil - Amma Appa Program

We had an opportunity to conduct an RTL Tamil program for the teams from Auroville units and projects that started with a request from Matilde in Marc's cafe. This time Thamarai led the organisation of this program with the support of the STEM Land team. It was great team work and an opportunity to learn a lot about logistics. The program aimed to build confidence, capacity and a shared language at the workspace. It was designed at three levels 1) enhances self-awareness and personal potential 2) enhances ability to see underlying patterns in self, work and society that result in recurring problems and 3) enhances ability to design and implement solutions.

Srilatha came from Tata Institute of Social Science, using her leave to be with us. Savithri supported Srilatha as a resource person. *"I learned how to notice and overcome my fear and transcend that by acting from my stand which is equality for myself and others. I could see this was a unique opportunity for me to change my perspective and work from my inner power".*



RTL in Tamil for youth at the SAIIR conference hall in Auroville

8.1 Youth capacity development

Since the inception of Thamarai, youth has been an integral part of what we do. In 2006 when we opened our first afterschool program, it was the youth of Edayanchavadi village who stepped forward to get involved as they were the first batch of 3rd level graduates in their village and they knew, first hand, how education opens doors in life. Since then we have followed an organisational model where youth in the local communities are trained to be facilitators in Thamarai and join a cross generational and cultural team to co-create educational activities at the centre for the community. It creates a big sister, big brother atmosphere where children feel supported by people close to them who are role models stretching for their dreams and being change-agents in their community. We have a clear criteria for engagement for all team members despite age and nationality, that has its foundation in care for everyone and we choose facilitators who are prepared to work towards equity and dignity for all. We each learn, grow and facilitate learning together, continuous learning is an important part of life in Thamarai. We have weekly opportunities for both skills development in language and digital literacy and opportunities to grow in our inner capacities through the RTL practice sessions and book clubs. As well as our general facilitator training and the Radical Transformational Leadership programs there are numerous ways we support and engage with youth including the following highlights of 2023-2024:

Career guidance and counselling

We have held numerous career guidance and counselling sessions this year for +9std students. Sessions with Raam have emphasized the importance of getting in touch with what one cares about and stretching for a career path in that direction rather than social norms. He also raised issues such as comparing oneself with others rather than seeing the greatness in oneself and in everyone else. In Muthukumaran sessions, he stretched the young people to think beyond their locality for further education and emphasized the importance of developing various faculties and life experience that add to having plus 1's that enhance career opportunities. He also gave examples of study opportunities and scholarship programs and we have been exploring partnership and opportunities.



Young people's challenges and opportunities session, 12th August, 2023



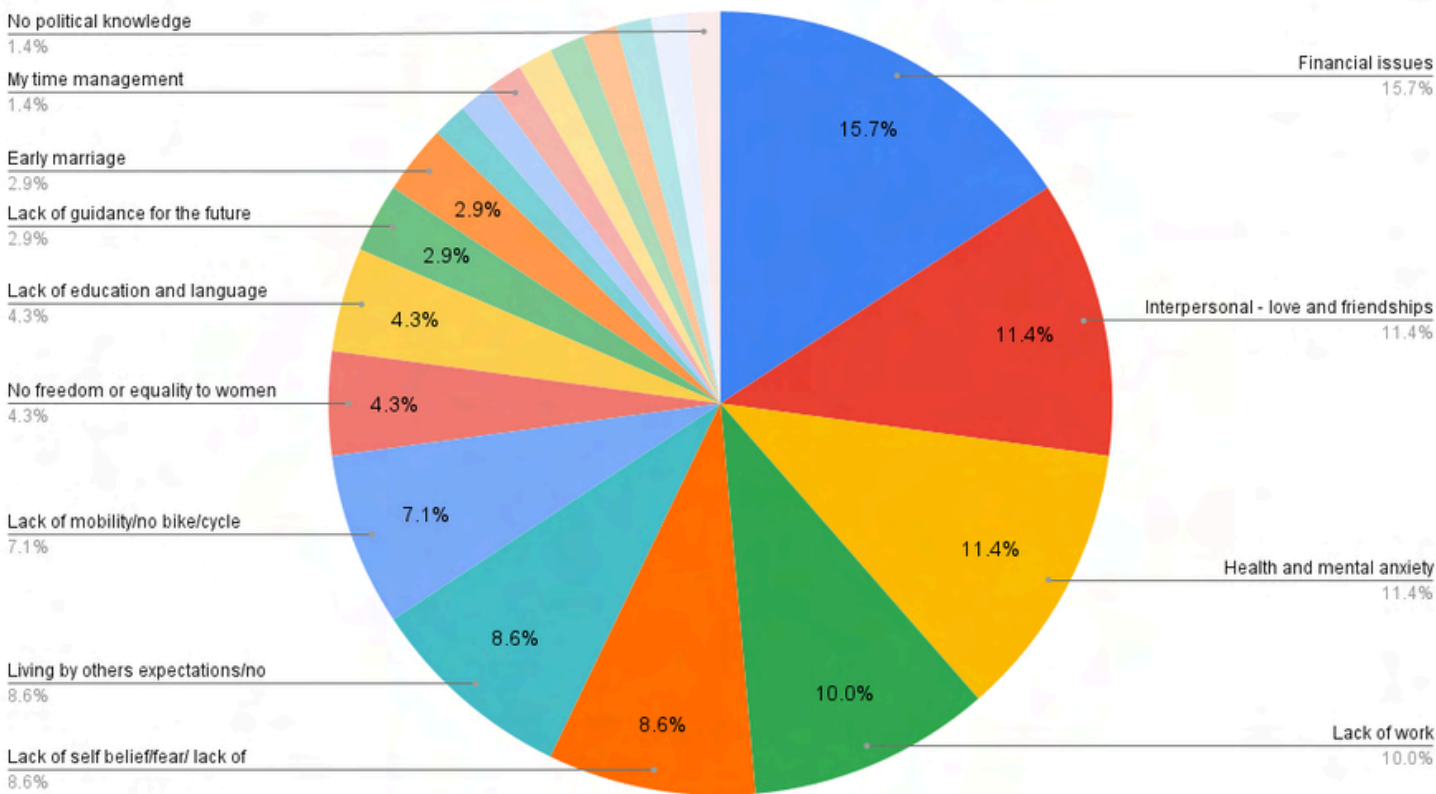
RTL Youth leadership and career guidance with Muthukumaran

A four hour session in Tamil based on the challenges and opportunities for youth was held in Saiier conference hall on the morning of 12.8.23 with Muthukumaran,(see bio below), based on the tools of Radical Transformational Leadership. Twenty five people attended the program from local villages including Mooratandi, Annai nagar, Edayanchavadi, Kottakari and also from Auroville and Isaiambalam school.

Muthukumaran lead the participants through a session that included learning to:

- Source my inner capacity and transcend my fears.
- Identify my profiles and learn how important it is to operate from my wisdom profile rather than exclusion and separation.
- Identify my background conversations and understand how they hold me back in life and how I can have these same background conversations about others.
- Identify the current challenges in my life and place this within the WHO parameters for well being (emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual).
- How to design projects that overcome these challenges and bring life enhancement.

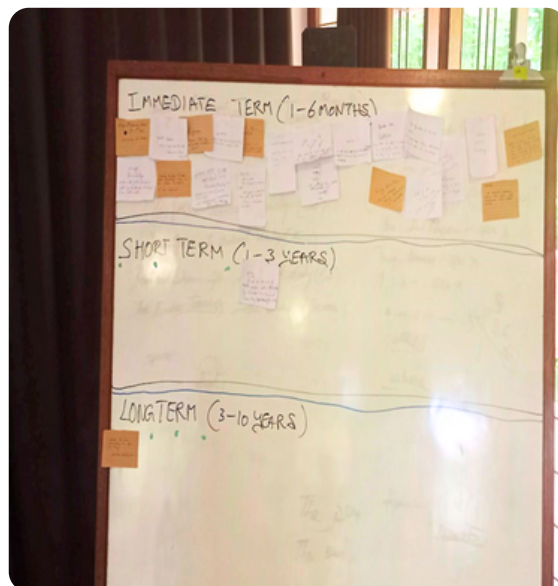
Life challenges: Each young person was invited to identify up to 5 challenges they have in life and place these on the floor into groups based on WHO parameters for well being (emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual). It was telling to see visually where the main stress points in life were. The lack of resources/adequate education, interpersonal difficulties, health/anxiety and lack of self confidence were the top issues identified. Here is the complete list:



Key challenges identified by the young people



Project design: The participants were then introduced to systems thinking and project design and were invited to design an implementable project that would help them overcome these challenges and bring life enhancement in the immediate term, short term and long term. This process helped participants to identify the shifts they wanted to make in their lives and to identify clear actionable next steps to take that would create this change. It was interesting to see on the board how much was placed in the immediate term and how participants got clarity on who to seek support from within their extended circle of friends as well as elsewhere.



Participants designing solutions on the Conscious Full Spectrum Model Worksheet from Dr. Monica Sharma

Session follow up:

Many young people requested support to learn more of these tools, improve their job readiness, emotional well being and literacy skills. They were also interested in creating more life enhancing activities in their neighbourhoods such as sports and skill development activities.

The youth will be invited to the upcoming RTL Here and Now session in September to deepen this work. We will reach out to participants and hope to have services in place such as English, digital literacy and wellbeing classes and to link the participants with other services in Auroville that might be interested in providing support to this group.



Scholarship programs

This year supported by partnerships such as Reach for the Stars and others, we have been able to get full scholarship grants for two 3rd level students and 2 children. Thamarai also gives a partial study grant to all our facilitators who are full-time in college and volunteering the after school in the evenings.

Classes for youth

English and digital literacy form the core of the classes accessed by youth although youth can drop into the centre at any time and self direct their learning using the facilities and the online programs such as the 70 Udemy software learning packages we have, plus Headway and the British council English software packages.

Reflections English Class by Keerthana

“In the English class we learn how to speak and to have conversations with others in English. I enjoy playing games in class like Scategories, spaceman and storytelling chain. My favourite activities are playing games and learning grammar. We have learned about conjunctions and clauses.

Sometimes when the teacher speaks I don't understand clearly. I ask and then the teacher explains it deeply again. I feel good and better after class ends and I miss it when it's not there. I am very proud to speak in English”.

STEAM Class by Prithviraj

The classes were in different themed rooms and my favourite was the day we learned about ‘force’. In that class, we played the pulling game and did gravity experiments. We also learned about the centripetal and centrifugal force as well as the centre of mass and the Robert Hook force. In another class, we learned about the leaf names, organisms, tissues, and nucleus and we made a stick next with a 'stone' egg. Here we also learned about the structure of a cell like the Mitochondria and Vacuole. I really loved this class.

I enjoyed the STEM class. We learned new things on the Makey Makey online software like making music, alarms and security codes. Using crafts we made origami. In another online software, Scratch, I learned to create games and a way to speak with cats. We learned a lot about technology in the first class.



Some other things I learned- I learned how to be a captain. In the program hall, we made a 7 segment display. I learned how to connect a battery to a light using my hand and body to connect a gap. I now also know how to read a potentiometer and an Ammeter.

My favourite activity in the whole workshop was Scratch and Make Make. I made new friendships, made conversation with other people and played games like 'honey bee'. I especially loved the group discussions. On the last day, they arranged ice cream for the team and their captains.

International internship programs

Weltswaert is a youth volunteer program, sponsored by the German government, that offers annual German youth volunteers to Thamarai. Our partnership with Weltswaert had a welcome addition last year when it became an exchange program where youth from villages could go to Germany to intern for a year plus. So as well as having the opportunity to host German students at our project like Viviana who you met earlier in this report, some of our youth got to intern in Germany. Here is their experience:

Abishek

I worked as an international volunteer in Germany for a year and a half, staying with a German host family in Oberriexingen, near Stuttgart. I would like to thank Thamarai for giving me the wonderful opportunity of this internship program because I lived near Pondicherry and have never ventured beyond my small village. Now I was in a different country learning a new language, culture, tradition, and meeting a lot of new people. This helped me personally to explore more about myself.

My biggest achievement has been coming out of my comfort zone and standing on my two feet. I worked in two different places: Tafel (food bank) and Kindergarten. My favourite place was Kindergarten because I love to work with kids. My work was to spend time with kids playing, drawing, having picnic lunches, and completing some office-related work. Whenever I felt lonely or tired, the kids made me happy. It also helped me to learn about the German education system.

For me, this has been the best part of my life so far. This one-and-a-half-year journey helped me to learn who I am and how I can do things all alone. I even went solo travelling from Germany and met a lot of new friends. For me, travelling is not about the destination, it's all about creating memories. Travelling taught me a lot and as a social worker, it's really important for me because I like to interact with new people and try to learn new things. My life in Germany was amazing.





I'm **Swathi** and I turned 21 a few months ago. I always loved to say that I stood for gender equality in my past, but recently I have realised that I also stand for courage, love, and self-compassion. It has been nearly one and a half years since I left my home, my parents, my friends, and my country to volunteer in Germany as a kindergarten teacher. "YOU CAN'T MAKE IT" (stop trying, get married to someone, and have a baby). To the people who told me that I'm telling you this to you proudly, "I MADE IT". I was a young girl from a rural background in a small village in Puducherry who was never allowed to go anywhere. I faced so many challenges. My experience in Germany was like a rollercoaster. New people, country, culture, language. I supervised Indian evenings, presented and spoke about topics like climate change in India, attended seminars about culture, health care, clean energy, climate refugees, and so on. Thamarai has been my stepping stone in life. Five years ago I went to Thamarai as a student to learn about computers. Slowly, I moved from a student to a volunteer, then I started working as a facilitator. My relatives weren't very comfortable with me going to Thamarai at first since the village it is in has a different caste and temple god than my family. I'm proud of myself that I have never been influenced by those things. Also, I changed my parents' beliefs towards the caste system. I'm looking forward to the future and feeling grateful for the past.



8.2 Future plans & actions

Now that the learning centre building and compound garden has been completed, it provides a solid base to serve and flourish from. We will continue to 'listening in' to needs and to co-create, with the local community, values based programs that develop skills, competencies and inner capacities. After almost 20 years of delivering after school programs, a key area of concentration for the future will be to codify our procedures and practices so it can support youth from other areas to develop similar services in their communities.

We have invested in training our team as practitioner coaches and resource people to deliver the Radical Transformational Leadership programs. We will now begin to deliver these programs with more frequency in the community supporting people to unfold their inner capacity and design and deliver projects that provide long-term, values-based solutions to problems they face.

We look forward to building on the cross-cultural initiatives that have begun; in particular a pen pal project with school children in France and the creative, digital project with Foroige Ireland. Both of these support us to learn more about the world, further education and to open opportunities in preparation for the emerging digital world where young people will be central to fostering peace, prosperity & wellbeing for people and the planet.

Another area of concentration will be the continued development of team building skills especially in the area of noticing learning challenges in children and building capacity to respond effectively to support children's needs. As well as expanding life and career opportunities for youth, we are working on key intersection points such as education and family wellbeing. We will also hone our skills on assessment and will work closer with families monitoring health and well being while building awareness.

Our Saturday night open mike sessions have become a valuable interactive space for learning, sharing and growing together. Another emerging area is the current struggle of local businesses so we are exploring how Thamarai could support the local community as a skills development and incubation space.

We will also start a new after school facility in the Government school in Edayanchavadi to respond to the schools needs and to the children that have been displaced due to the closing of our other facility because of the new road construction.

We look forward to 2024-2025 being a year of joyful service with growth and learning for ourselves and everyone. with love and gratitude, The Thamarai team



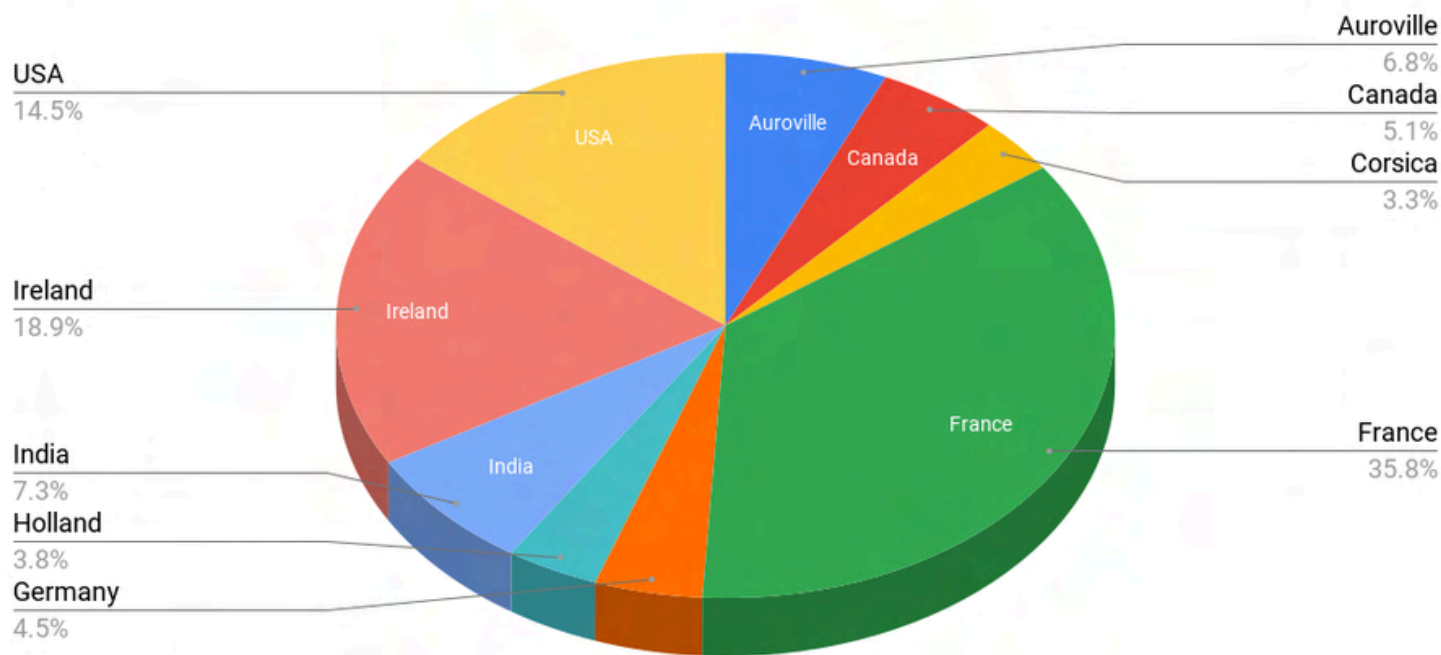
8.3 Financial report

In the financial year 2023-24, we had income and expenditure for the operations of:

Contributions to Thamarai 2023-2024	Rupees	Euros	Dollars
Total contributions received	2965201	33096	35537
Total expenses disbursed	2395946	26741	28714
Conversation rates 24.06.24 1 INR = 0.011 EUR & 1 INR = 0.012 USD			

Where contributions come from

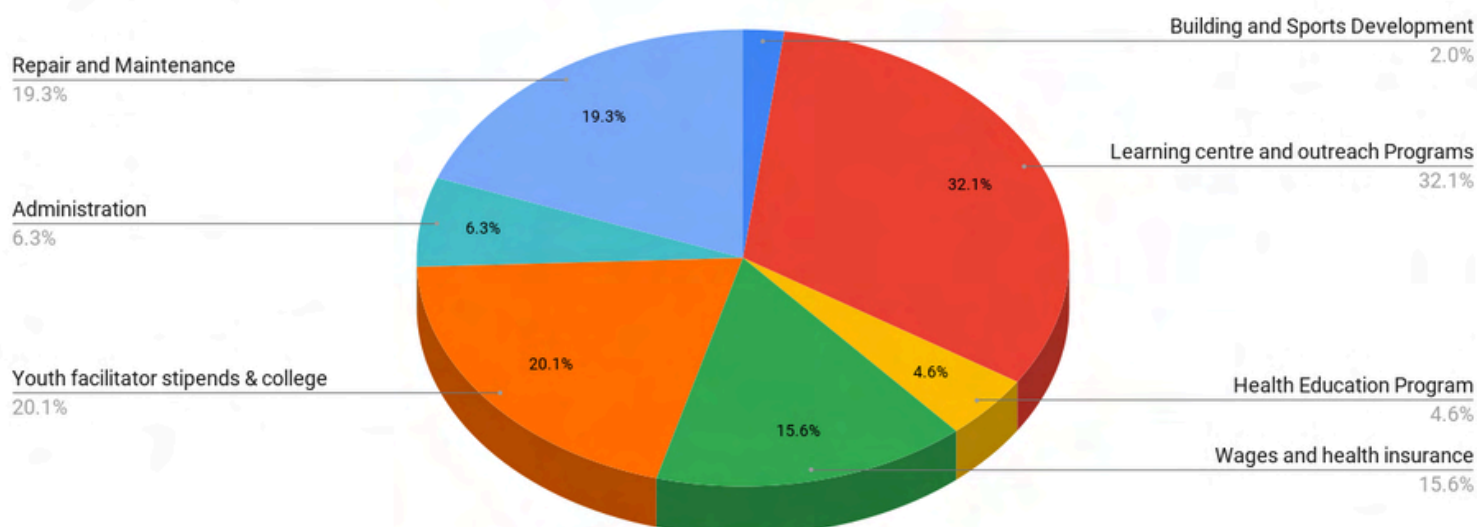
Where Donations come from



How we spend contributions

1st April 2023 - March 31st 2024 Categories of expenditure	INR	Euro	Dollar
Building and Sports Development	48,601	542	582
Learning centre and outreach Programs	768,984	8588	9219
Health Education Program	109,022	1217	1307
Wages and health insurance	373,714	4174	4480
Youth facilitator stipends & college supports	481,650	5379	5774
Administration	151,551	1692	1817
Repair and Maintenance	462,423	5164	5544

Income and Expenditure



9. Acknowledgements

Our work is enabled by the supportive structure that is behind us.

We are grateful to our mentors, volunteers and patrons.

In particular, the people of the local communities - Panchayat, self-help groups and families.

Our network in Auroville, India and internationally who have helped us refine and enrich our service.

Special thanks for the financial support of Ramco, Electric Aid Ireland, Stichting de Zaaier, Foundation for World Education, Kedge Business School and fundraising drives in Ireland, France, Auroville, Australia, USA and Canada as well as the Auroville international channels around the world.

We were also extremely grateful for those who worked on designing and building our new learning centre and sports area, in particular, Raman architects and Guna and Kishore construction teams, our partners & local youth groups.

Thank you also to each one reading this. Together we create an enabling environment of possibility and for growth and learning to emerge. Those of us on the ground are bolstered and renewed by this wide network of support.

We thank you for journeying with us.

With love the Thamarai team

Thank You



with gratitude from all of





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