Thamarai

Learning & Community Centre



Annual Report
2025-2026

“True knowledge is not attained by thinking.
It is what you are; it is what you become.”

Sri Aurobindo - The Life Divine



Thamarai is a unit under ‘Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research’ of Auroville Foundation

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A message from our hearts!

Dear Friends,

The Learning Centre continues to be a safe, active and caring space for children, youth and the wider community. We strengthened our commitment to human unity, equity and the full potential of all by expanding access, improving quality and introducing programs that support the whole child - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. This is at the heart of the work: children should not only pass exams, they should discover their own inner capacities, competencies and unique skills so their life can be directed by the inner compass of what they really care about.

From the ongoing presence of the Bytes and Bots innovation lab, to the newly established Story Labs that nurture storytelling and filmmaking, and Sound Bath research and Awareness Through the Body sessions, the year has had a focus on creativity and care. At the same time, daily homework support, small group literacy, Tamil and English learning, algebra, science, sports, nutrition and health support continued as the foundation of the centre.

We are especially grateful for the growing engagement of alumni, facilitators, parents, local schools and friends around the world. Former students are returning as assistant facilitators. Youth are receiving college support. Facilitators are learning new ways to support children with different needs. Together, we are nurturing the future.

Thank you for walking this journey with us. Your support makes it possible for Thamarai to stay open every day and to keep planting seeds of possibility.

The Thamarai Team



2025-26 team: L to R from the back - Boman, Siddharth, Manu, Don, Dhinesh, Carla, Raj, Prathap, Bridget, Sanjay, Ocean, Vishnu, Naifa, Savithri, Gothai, Muthulakshmi, Madhumita, Sathyavani, Abirami, Anandhi (Missing : Ananthi, Deanna, Jagrata, Mireille, Pablo)

Thamarai: The Lotus Blooms

In Tamil, 'Thamarai' means 'lotus.' Just as the lotus rises from the mud to bloom beautifully, our vision is for every child to rise from challenging circumstances and reach their full potential and follow paths in life that are meaningful for them.

Our journey began in 2006 with a simple goal: to practice the Auroville ideal of human unity by supporting children in the villages surrounding Auroville to thrive. In this area, many families face daily struggles. Literacy rates are often low, and unstable incomes make it hard for parents to fully support their children's education. Thamarai steps in to bridge these gaps, aspiring to offer the "missing elements" crucial for a child's complete development, extending beyond formal schooling.

The Annai Nagar Learning Centre is now our permanent home. It was built with the children's ideas and community feedback, incorporating sustainable practices like solar power, earth brick construction, rainwater harvesting, and water-conserving dry toilets. The centre is open every day and it is a vibrant space with after-school programs, STEM & integrated classes, weekend activities, body awareness, leadership training, and support for addiction recovery. It also hosts community meetings and adult classes. The adjacent sports ground is equally vital, a space for daily activities, tournaments and community gatherings.

Thamarai is more than a physical structure. It is a working model aspiring to be a blueprint for others to have the agency, capacity and skill to support their own communities to thrive through after-school and activity centres in regions with limited resources. It is a template we wish to share.





Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER)

Thamarai's work is connected to the wider vision of Auroville, which holds human unity as a central purpose. This is not only an idea for the report; it is practiced daily when children and adults from different backgrounds learn, play, cook, clean, create and lead together.

As part of the Auroville ecosystem and reported under SAIIER, Thamarai works in the spirit of Integral Education. This means looking at the full being: the body, emotions, mind, deeper inner growth and the ability to serve something larger than oneself. In Thamarai, this is seen through movement, arts, language, science, leadership, silence, community service, health awareness and practical life skills. We aspire to equip them for life.

Thamarai is located in Annai Nagar and serves children from local communities, daily wage families and neighbouring villages. The centre is open to all and works consciously on caste integration, gender equity and shared dignity. In 2025-2026, 30% of registered students came from neighbouring villages, showing that the centre has become a bridge across social boundaries.

During the year, the project also moved through administrative changes linked to the transition from AVAT trust to SAIIER trust. This brought learning, new systems and some uncertainty. The team responded by simplifying processes, strengthening internal roles and focusing on what matters most: the children, youth and families who rely on the centre.

Impact at a Glance

Behind every number is a daily story: a child overcoming fear and learning to read with confidence, a youth facilitator returning to guide younger students, a parent feeling supported, a child learning to focus and finding its voice, a team member gaining new skills, and a community using the centre as a shared space.
The numbers show growth, but the deeper impact is seen in confidence, belonging, health, skill development and the steady creation of a safe learning culture.

Our Year in Numbers

Impact at a glance

90 Children and youth in daily after-school programs	**7 days** Centre open every week	**174** Households connected in Annai Nagar
30% Students from neighbouring villages	**3** Ten-day holiday learning camps	**2** Community medical camps
6 Student films completed through Story Labs	**6** Youth supported in college education	**10** Upcycled laptops donated for learning
20 + Facilitator training sessions	**320 +** Participants in RTL leadership programs	**4** Evenings weekly of algebra learning with software and science


FRUIT



Afterschool: Learning Grows

The after-school program remains the heart of Thamarai. Children arrive for homework support, reading, writing, mathematics, play, movement, digital learning and quiet attention. For many children, this support fills a gap that families cannot always fill because of low literacy levels, long work hours or some with difficult home conditions

Learning at Thamarai is not limited to books. Children learn through songs, movement, games, computers, drawing, cooking, gardening, discussion, storytelling and peer support. This keeps learning joyful and helps children who struggle with conventional school methods.

Small group literacy classes were held daily. Tamil and English learning continued with the support of facilitators and visiting resource people. Joyful language sessions, reading practice, spelling, storytelling and writing activities gave children more confidence to speak and express themselves.

The centre continued to support children from 1st standard onwards, with children and youth between the ages of 5 and 18 forming the main group. The atmosphere is intentionally mixed in age, gender and background, so children learn care, responsibility and respect from one another.




Love You
always my
BESTIE
Forever



Students Learning

“This year, I learned to break down the big words to read. I am practising to develop my self-confidence level on making decisions and for my personal growth. My magic moment of the year is Jagratha’s embroidery class; it was very connected to my heart.”

“Before, I was the only one taking decisions, but now I have transformed into waiting a little and asking others in my team to make decisions.”

“I am able to handle my emotions, especially when I am angry. I would say the magic moment of this year is looking at the tap dance by the Korean travelling school.”

“This year I practised more to speak in English, and at the end I can see the changes in my pronunciation of the words, and I am nearly fluent in English. Now I feel more confident and bold. This year, I gained experience in different classes that are happening in Thamarai and it gave me wonderful and happy moments. My magic moment was during the Diwali celebration, lighting the candles with my friends.”

Small Group Learning and Individual Care

A major development this year was the stronger focus on individual learning needs with the support of Carla Schubert. Some children need one-to-one attention, smaller groups, movement breaks, quiet corners or different ways of learning. Thamarai began creating individualized support plans for children with developmental needs, with parent liaison and facilitator reflection.

The team received training in special needs, ADHD awareness, child development, classroom facilitation and joyful literacy. This helped facilitators observe children more carefully, understand behaviour with more patience and create practical supports inside the classroom.

Quiet corners were created in classrooms to support social-emotional learning. These spaces help children regulate themselves, calm down, re-enter learning and build self-awareness. Such small changes make the centre safer and more inclusive for children who struggle with focus, confidence or emotional expression



Bytes and Bots - Digital, AI learning and STEM (Science, Technology, Electronics, and Maths)

The Bytes and Bots innovation lab, created originally with Kumar Ram, continued this year as a space for young minds to explore technology, creative skills and practical problem solving. Weekly STEM classes were linked to the school curriculum so children could connect what they study in school with hands-on experiments and tools.

Amazon donated 10 upcycled laptops received through SAIIER. These laptops helped launch daily algebra classes using software, with algebra practice held four evenings per week. For many children, this was a new way to see math: interactive, repeated, visual and less frightening.

Digital literacy and AI classes were introduced for both facilitators and students. Children learned basic computer use, typing, coding, AI exposure, smart projects and creative technology. The program also included 3D printing workshops, Lego sessions, recycling and craft technology, and hands-on STEM activities.



Savithri's reflection

"As a student in my childhood I learned from Thamarai to speak English confidently and take part in extracurricular activities. Now, as a facilitator, I am learning to see each child's uniqueness."

Story Labs - Children as storytellers and filmmakers

Story Labs was created as a storytelling and filmmaking hub with the support of Siddharth Maskeri. In 2025-2026, two facilitators were trained and children produced six films. This work gave students the chance to observe their own lives, build characters, write stories, create storyboards, act, film, edit and reflect.

The process matters as much as the final film. Storytelling helped children practice language, imagination, collaboration and public expression. It also strengthened confidence, because students could see their ideas becoming visible on screen and being shared with others.

The program also connected with cross-continent animation and film learning. Youth from Thamarai and Foróige in Ireland joined in a cross-cultural story creation and filmmaking program. This produced a storybook and a film, and helped young people learn that their voice can travel beyond their own village.





Health & Wellbeing

Health remains central to Thamarai's work because healthy children learn better and healthy families are more stable. Many students face challenges such as undernourishment, low BMI, low haemoglobin levels, skin infections, dental disease, developmental delays, attention difficulties and learning challenges. These needs affect school performance, confidence and emotional balance.

Two community medical camps were conducted with Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences. Follow-up hospital visits were supported where needed. We have now signed an MOU that will establish a bi-monthly health camp at the centre. Auroville Dental Centre continued to support dental care, and the team maintained links with Mattram for Tamil-speaking counselling and mental health support.

Health work also included awareness evenings, child safety, body awareness, addiction recovery support for adults, menstrual awareness with EcoFemme, and mental health awareness through cultural events and drama. This work supports not only individual children but families and the wider community.

Nutrition, Kitchen and Community Garden

Daily nutrition continued through healthy snacks for children and youth. Children were also involved in preparation, which helped them learn hygiene, teamwork, responsibility and the value of healthy food. Nutrition training and community sharing supported families with practical knowledge about food and wellbeing.

The community garden became a living classroom. Children and community members learned about plants, cultivation, composting, food, nutrition and care for the environment. The garden-to-kitchen connection made learning practical: children could grow, harvest, cook and eat together.

Sunday morning programs combined gardening, crafts, art, typing and cooking. These programs were not only educational; they made the centre feel like a shared community home





Awareness Through the Body (ATB) and Sound Baths - Concentration, Relaxation and Inner Balance

Awareness Through the Body sessions were set up weekly for all students. Each school holiday camp also included a one-day workshop. These sessions helped children notice their body, breath, attention and feelings. Through movement and body awareness, children practiced emotional regulation, balance and concentration.

Facilitators also received training in Awareness Through the Body. This allowed the practice to be carried not only as a special class, but as a way of supporting children throughout the week and building long-term sustainability of the ATB program.

Weekly Sound Bath sessions were launched to develop concentration and relaxation in children. The team also began a research project on sound baths. Students and parents experienced a collective sound bath in Auroville and met Aurelio and the Svaram team, deepening the link between local learning and Auroville's rich cultural resources.




Happy
OD ENOUGH I AM GOOD



Leadership & Community: Building Futures Together

Leadership is central to Thamarai. The centre works not only to support children's study but to unfold what they deeply care about, find their inner values and act with agency. Radical Transformational Leadership (RTL), created by Dr. Monica Sharma, provides tools and practices for this growth. We are delighted to be partners with RTL and part of the Humanity Intelligence Movement that promotes capabilities for peace, prosperity and the planet.

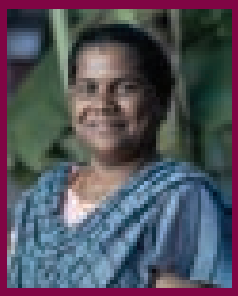
In 2025-2026, Thamarai team co-delivered three RTL leadership programs in 10-day and 4-day formats, reaching more than 320 youth and community participants. Facilitators and youth continued weekly practice and reflection. The leadership work supports participants to overcome obstacles, design projects and take responsibility for change in their own lives and community.

The community uses Thamarai as a shared space. Women's groups, youth groups, parents and local children use the centre and sports ground. Parent engagement and school communication have grown stronger, helping children receive more consistent support between home, school and Thamarai.



Vishnu on RTL

"Through the RTL journey, I was given the opportunity to facilitate and present a leadership tool to an audience of over 100 participants in the Amma Appa leadership program. While I discovered that speaking before experienced senior leaders brought unexpected fear, I also experienced the confidence that comes from preparation, support, and practice. It reminded me that growth happens when we step beyond our comfort zone. When I pause, reflect, and respond with clarity instead of emotion, every challenge becomes an opportunity for growth."



Savithri on RTL

"Through RTL tools, I found my inner values. I deeply care about equality for myself and others. When society said civil engineering was only for boys, I chose it for my higher studies, as I believe that girls should have the same opportunities as boys. I practice equality in my day to day interactions with students, encouraging them to stretch for their full potential.

Alumni, Facilitators and Team Care Growing leaders from within

A strong sign of Thamarai's long-term impact is that former students are returning as assistant facilitators. These alumni understand the children, the village, the language and the challenges. Their return creates a powerful circle: children become youth, youth become facilitators, and facilitators become leaders for the next generation. Six youth received college support. Alumni in their first year of college were engaged as assistant facilitators and given training opportunities. This creates a bridge between higher education and community service.

Team care was also important this year. The project follows Auroville increment guidelines, maintains gratuity planning, and supports team wellbeing through yoga, health awareness, daily snacks, training, language classes, digital literacy, programming, permaculture and nutrition learning. Maternity leave, childcare support through children's participation in Thamarai activities, and counselling access help make the work more sustainable for the team.



Anandhi - Community Impact

After school facilitator and RTL practitioner coach, Ananthi, has used her courage and leadership to help stop three child marriages in her native village and convince families to support girls' higher education instead.



Sports, Culture and Learning Journeys

The sports ground remained a vital part of Thamarai. This year it was upgraded, thanks to the Men's Shed, with new fencing, nets, lights and gates, making play accessible later into the evening. The ground supports daily play, and regularly Ultimate Frisbee, football, tournaments, community gathering and a healthy alternative to life-depleting habits such as alcohol and substance abuse.

Sports at Thamarai also supports gender equity. Boys and girls play, learn teamwork and build confidence together. Facilitators and youth mentors encourage children to take responsibility for the ground and for one another.

Cultural life also grew. Pongal celebration, Christmas celebration, Margazhi Bhajanam at Savitri Bhavan, monthly talent shows, craft mela, open-mic and movie evenings, drama, flute, drumming, music sessions, puppet theatre and art activities helped students express themselves with joy and courage.

Learning journeys extended beyond the centre. Students visited Matrimandir, Mother's Garden, Sadhana Forest, Pichandikulam, the Earth Institute, Kinisi, Chidambaram and mangrove forests. These visits helped children experience Auroville and the wider world through nature, culture, ecology, architecture, movement and reflection.

Thamarai
Educational Projects



Partnerships & Global Reach

Partnerships continued to strengthen Thamarai's work. Local collaborations helped bring health, technology, ecology, arts, sports and wellbeing into the centre. International partnerships helped children see themselves as part of a wider world.

Local partners and resource people included Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences, Auroville Dental Centre, Mattram, EcoFemme, Svaram, STEMland, AIAT, Auroville services, Dehashakti, Pichandikulam, Earth Institute, Kinisi, Botanic Gardens, and many individual mentors and facilitators.

The cross-cultural partnership with Foróige in Ireland was an important part of the year. Staff and youth from Thamarai and Foróige engaged in joint learning that produced a storybook and film. This created a rich platform for shared learning, interdependence and a global mindset.

The team also engaged with AVI Italy through a webinar on developing leadership, equity and unity through community learning, and with visiting groups from France and a visit to the Irish Embassy. These exchanges helped build confidence, connection and wider visibility for the Thamarai model. The Auroville International Network continues to be a major moral support and a safe channel for donations allowing donors, in specific countries, to avail of tax exemptions for their contribution.




Play
Timing
for
Play
While playing
ARY SCHOOL
ALINUPPAM



Challenges and Lessons Learned

The year also carried challenges. The restructuring of all trusts in Auroville meant a transition from AVAT to SAIIER trust which brought administrative changes, new systems and some uncertainty. There was also pressure from limited financial and human resources. Rising costs, restrictions in spending, and unexpected repairs such as a new water pump added pressure. These challenges showed the need to diversify funding sources and simplify where possible.

Children's needs remain complex. Many children live with inadequate infrastructure, health gaps, financial stress, undernutrition, dental problems, skin infections, learning delays, attention challenges or emotional difficulty. This confirms that the work of Thamarai must stay holistic, combining education, health, family support and emotional care.

The key lessons were simple but strong: cultivate stillness, understand what is happening, simplify complexity, use technology wisely, strengthen roles, focus on non-FCRA funding sources where needed, and look for possibilities and strategic partners with shared values and vision.

A practical learning from the year
The team saw that whatever receives attention grows. By putting attention on children's needs, facilitator training, health links and community trust, Thamarai continued to grow even in a difficult year.


Apple
PUMPkin
Brinjal


WHO AM I?

Looking Ahead: The Path Forward

Thamarai's long-term vision is to develop a curriculum on after-school management based on 20 years of experience. This would include values, operational principles, tools, routines, child-support practices, leadership methods and community processes. The aim is to train local community volunteers to run similar projects while building their own agency and leadership.

In the coming year, the focus will be on deepening what is already working and simplifying what needs to become more sustainable. The centre will continue strengthening daily learning, digital education, health support, body awareness, mental wellbeing, facilitator capacity, sports and community leadership. Key areas of focus include:

- Strengthen integrated and inclusive learning for children with different needs.
- Expand digital, AI, STEM and algebra learning.
- Deepen health, nutrition, body awareness and mental wellbeing programs.
- Continue Story Labs, films and cross-cultural story creation.
- Develop facilitator training and local youth leadership.
- Improve sports ground use as a life-enhancing space for youth.
- Build daytime adult and digital literacy programs when resources allow.
- Codify the Thamarai model so it can support other rural after-school centres.

Financial Overview: Our Stewardship

Thamarai remains committed to using every contribution responsibly. The centre depends on donations and grants to keep daily programs open, support staff and facilitators, maintain the building and sports ground, provide learning materials, offer nutritious snacks, support health and wellbeing, and help youth continue college education. We are constantly aspiring to keep our administration costs to a minimum so that we can deliver maximum value to our community. Accounts are audited by the controller and auditor general of the Indian goverment every year and are available on request.

Financial Summary 2025-2026:

Category	Amount
Total Contributions Received	INR 29,06,721/- (equivalent of Euros 27,949 or US $ 31,255)
Total Expenses	INR 24,84,824/- (equivalent of Euros € 23,893 / Dollars $26,719)
Surplus	INR 4,21,897/- (equivalent of Euros € 4057 / Dollars $4537)
Note: Exchange rates used for conversion: 1 Euro = 104 Rupees, 1 US Dollar = 93 Rupees (approximate average for 2025-26) The figures do not include depreciation of buildings	

How we spent contributions	
Administration	INR 1,28,644/- (5.18%)
Maintenance - Building, Garden, Sports	INR 2,39,339/- (9.63%)
Program expenses	INR 8,35,717/- (33.63%)
Staff, Teachers and Resource People	INR 1,267,247/- (51 %)
Asset Write off	INR 13,877/- (.56 %)
Total spent in INR /-	INR 24,84,824/- (100%)
Total in (Euro € 23,893 / Dollars $26,719)	



Join Our Journey:

Thank you for your belief and trust in Thamarai. Supporters are not outside the story; they are part of every child's journey. Your support helps keep the centre open, safe, joyful and responsive to the real needs of the children and community.

Continue Your Support:

Your ongoing donations are vital and new donations are warmly welcomed.

They provide the stability and resources we need to continue our daily operations and to overcome challenges.

Your consistent support ensures our programs remain strong and accessible.

Spread the Word:

Share the story of Thamarai. Tell your friends, family, and networks about our work. Help us reach more people who care about empowering communities in regions with limited resources.



Contribute:

https://thamarai.org/donations/

Tax exemptions are currently available on donations from India, the USA, the UK, and Germany. Please email us for details.



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