



Newsletter 2019-2020

**The Tiny
Seed**

*Help change the lives of children by making
their schools better places of learning.*

To our Donors, Sponsors, Family and Friends,

This has been an unusual year, to say the least. We are reminded that Change is the only Constant.

2020 & the arrival of Covid19 follows 2 consecutive years of unsettling monsoon floods in Kerala, particularly in our hometown of Kottayam. Our schools, students and their families were put through the ringer in more ways than one. The outpouring of love and care that we received from you all back then, in the form of funds and decisive action, continues to inspire.

In the face of tragedy, heroes emerge, and this time has been no different. Over the past month, a bunch of enterprising & kind hearted 16 year olds from a local private school championed a project to raise money for families of our students; these are families that have been struggling with little to no prospects of work and income on the horizon, and for whom the lockdown has been especially cruel. 1260 Essentials Kits (containing grocery items, masks and such) were distributed to these families. We are also proud of the work of our Kerala Government, for leading the way in its proactive care & handling of these hard times.

Kerala has since then largely opened up, and this week, classes began through the State Operated Victors TV channel. These classes have not been without hiccups, largely related to logistics & access for this particular demographic. But it's a good start, and time will tell how practically this pans out.

The school year of 2019-20 ended early & rather abruptly, with Primary Schools having closed on



the 6th of March, and High School & Higher Secondary Schools closing soon after. State Board examinations had to be put on hold, and were recently rescheduled & completed this past week.

Typically, we would have used this past summer to conduct our yearly reviews with the teachers and parents of our schools, analyzing our programmes and activities, setting us up with plans for the year ahead. The lockdown played party pooper to many of our plans.



From the ashes of old plans, however, new ones rise, and with a renewed hope & vigour. We remain committed to our goal – to elevate the lives of our students. How best can we alter our intervention to cater to new needs? What can we do to promote self-reliance and self-sustenance? What can we do to be ‘enablers of change’ there, while still using the framework of working with & through schools?

In this Newsletter, we will discuss some of our evolving ideas with you.

Over 2019-20, we were able to carry out **Rs. 53.5 lakh worth of projects across 6 schools & 1,631 students**. Of this, Rs.17.5 lakhs was raised via a fundraising event & the generous contributions of other donors. Rs. 36 lakhs worth of Flood Relief & Repair work was also carried out at our schools over the past year, as part of a tie up with local charitable organisations.

Our **core areas of intervention** this year were – **Infrastructure, Nutrition, Student & Teacher Development, and Scholarships**.

Our Feed Our Minds (FOM - Nutrition) programme reigned popular last year. Last week, a video surfaced online about a child trying to awaken his mother who had died of hunger. This tragic incident struck such a deep chord in us, and emphasized the need for sustained nutrition programmes at schools, including looking at providing breakfasts for children for whom lunch is often the first meal of the day.

As we recount our decision & activities of this past year, and explore options for our next, we ask that you join us on our journey – we need your support. Schools in 2020 will not look like ever before, but thanks to your continued generosity & help, we can strive to make things better.

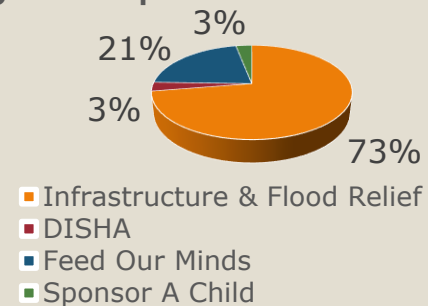
Best Wishes to you all,

Malini Mathew Varughese

Mariam Mammen Mathew

Ashika Anna Mathew

Project Spends



i. Infrastructure :

The schools that we support are rural, Govt and Aided schools that face neglect and severe financial constraints which limit their functioning and capabilities. To find a govt. school with service minded staff, dedicated to the concept of whole school transformation is rare. We spend a lot of time and care vetting schools & projects before funding them. Infrastructural support is often our first step when in the door of a school.



FLOOD RELIEF : We continued with the rehabilitation of schools after 2 years of Monsoon related floods that ravaged Kerala in Aug-Sept of 2018 & 2019. For this, last year, we tied up with Kottayam Round Table no. 79 and Kottayam Ladies Circle no.48 to implement Rs. 36 lakhs worth of sponsored flood relief projects at 6 schools.

Projects ranged from small to big, including white boards, blackboards, water purifiers, new computer labs & UPS systems, new tiles for classrooms, new classroom separators, rain water harvesting units, new roofing, and the repair & repainting of building structures.



INFRASTRUCTURE, FLOOD REPAIR & REHABILITATION



ii. DISHA :

DISHA means '**Vision**' in Malayalam, with the goal to '**Develop Students as Agents of Change**'.

Our approach is two-fold : (1) to aid and assist teachers with the necessary skills, vision and means to carry out their jobs effectively (2) to provide students with holistic and enhanced learning experiences. Teachers, Students (and parents) are sensitized, encouraged and enabled to take charge of their school, their families, their society, and the important roles they each play.



Training & Personality Development workshops form the core of DISHA. Our year starts and ends with Vision Exercises with Teachers across all our schools to set & align their individual & common growth goals.

DISHA was rolled out in 2017-18 in our pilot school Govt. UP School, Kumarakom, and it has since been a big draw for parents, with a -

- 21% increase in 2019 Grade 5 admissions from the previous year
- 75% increase in total enrollment since our intervention in 2014
- Average Attendance above 90% annually



*In June-Aug of 2019, we conducted a demographic study of the target student group of DISHA, surveying 20 percent of students' homes and families. The data gathered helps us plan our workshops, including adding a focus on 'Substance Abuse' and the setting up of a Gender Club, to cater to needs of girls. We also recognised the need for a second bread winner – and now, plans for setting up a **Stitching Unit for Women** at a school are in the works.*

Highlights of DISHA 2019-20

Reading Right (Malayalam basics)

Math Matters (Abacus lessons)

Gender Club – Safe Space for Growth for Girls (NEW)

Karate classes (NEW)

Field Trips to CUSAT (Science Park)

Art & Craft classes added to curriculum (NEW)

Grow Your Own Garden (Veg garden for Mid-Day Meals)



Highlights of DISHA 2019-20
(contd.)

Personality Development Workshops for Students

Vision Exercises & Reviews with Teachers

Meets with Parents

Workshops, Street Plays & Inter-school competitions on Substance & Alcohol Abuse (NEW)

Psychotherapy sessions for Special Needs students, in Association with Jewel Autism Centre (NEW)





'Gender Club' was initiated at Govt. UPS, Kumarakom, with the goal of providing a Safe Space for Young Girls to share their stories. Social Workers, and Guest Speakers (including Interns & Volunteers from Australia & USA) came in to discuss key issues related to Girls' health, hygiene, equality, empowerment & personal development.

Content building of this Gender Club has been in-house, and this programme will be extended to other schools in 2020-21, as well as setting up an equivalent club for Boys too.



iii. Feed Our Minds : *To flourish, we must nourish.*

Our FOM scheme to provide a nutritious supplement such as an Egg or Banana a day at 6 schools has been hugely popular, amongst teachers & parents of students. In one school Breakfast is provided too, which will be extended to another school in 2020-21, if new rules & logistics permit.

FOM results in improved -

- Concentration,
- Attentiveness
- Energy levels, and
- Student-teacher engagement.

***He who has Health has Hope,
and he who has Hope,
has Everything.***



iv. Sponsor A Child (SAC):

In 2019-20, we provided a total of 59 scholarships across 5 schools worth over Rs. 2,00,000. Students in our schools are largely from poor, broken, single parent and sometimes abusive households. Our scholarships are meted out to deserving students on a Financial and Merit basis.

Projects you can support in 2020-21 :



Sponsor A Child : Rs. 2,500 per scholarship



Feed Our Minds : Rs. 30,000 per month per school



Kitchen Renovation : Rs. 1.5 lakhs

Projects you can support in 2020-21 :



New Windows & Doors : Rs. 1 Lakh



New White boards : Rs. 30,000



New Teachers Tables: Rs. 18,000



Grow Your Own Vegetables : Rs. 25,000

Projects you can support in 2020-21 :



Swimming Coaching / Lessons : Rs. 21,000

Setting up a Stitching Unit
(for mothers) – Phase 1 : Rs. 35,000



Setting up a Science Lab : Rs. 3 lakhs

As an add-on to our Scholarship Programme, we are rolling out 'Bhaavi' this year, which means 'Future' in Malayalam. This focuses on the academic development of 3 student toppers from Grades 5,6 & 7 each of a school. The goal is to sustain & improve their performance until higher education, and thereafter on to gainful employment.



Bhaavi : Rs. 5,000 per year per child

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