

Project Summit SG â€” Reaching out to the underprivileged community worldwide

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Can you share with us on some of your previous projects?

My first trip as part of Project Summit SG was to Chennai in June 2017. Over there, I got the opportunity to work with Good Samaritan Charitable Trust, an organisation that was recommended to me by my very good friend Kumaravelu (Kumar). I was asking my friends for suggestions on places where I could collaborate and volunteer at. That is when Kumar recommended Good Samaritan, an organisation he well knew in Chennai. It was an orphanage that accommodates 15 children.

My team of volunteers and I went over to that place and did storytelling activities with the kids. It was not a whole day activity. We spent around 3 hours with them, teaching and reading the children storybooks. Apart from that, we even donated some books to the organisation. Before the Chennai trip, I put up a book donation drive in Singapore. Through my social media platforms, I asked those who were interested in giving away their books, especially children storybooks to come forward and donate them.

The drive was held in 2017 and until today, I still have books remaining with me. The support gained from people with regards to the cause was massive I should say. I was only able to bring some books with me in my baggage. Following my June trip, I did another voluntary work in December 2017 at Calcutta. I called out for volunteers once again to go and help the underprivileged children in India. However, in my second trip, I wanted to focus more on conducting extensive lessons with the kids. Thus, my team prepared a lesson plan that includes art and craft lessons as well.

The place that we volunteered at served as a home tutoring centre as well to children who lived around the village. They would usually come over to the home after their school ends and they will prepare for their exams or do their school homework. Recently, I found another movement called Rural Education and Action Development (Read) in Trichy, India. Read has 2 schools functioning under them.

Besides that, they also have a vocational institute under their responsibility. When I was keen on doing volunteer services at Read, I gained some feedbacks from my

friends saying that instead of only indulging in interactive activities that involves the children, I should also consider on doing some teacher training for the teachers present at the schools to sustain the content taught during our trip.

If the teachers are equipped with certain skills, they will be able to use them during their own lesson timings as well. During the trip, there were 3 MOE trained teachers including myself. The rest who were not trained teachers helped out in other aspects of the programme such as getting the children to engage in the Art and Craft activities that we have organised. For Project Summit SG, I would always prefer to have someone with teaching experience.

It is nice to share our ideas and content with trained teachers before presenting it to the children and teachers living in the rural areas. By sharing our ideas with one another, we all learn something new and personally, I feel that it is an enriching experience. We will derive on new strategies and activities to try out with the children. However, its not an absolutely necessary aspect Im looking for in a volunteer.



What is the purpose behind the trip to READ School in Andimadam, Trichy this December?

I wanted to continue the ties with this particular organisation. The teachers in Read School were very receptive of the information and tips we taught them during the trip. They even invited us to come back once again and teach them on another set of content that would be effective for them. This shows that the teachers at the school were very welcoming and wanted the type of resources we provided them.

The place we were at, Andimadam, was a rural area and even finding a photocopier machine at such a place was a challenge for us, let alone resources like books, stationeries and colour pencils. During one of our sessions with the teachers, we asked them on the kind of resources they would need for lesson purposes. The list that they gave me contained very basic needs such as post-its, flashcards, mathematical models and a few more. These items are easily accessible in Singapore, but not in India.

People have to travel for 3 hours to the main city if they have to get these items. The schools under Read are not well funded institutes. All these schools are functioning based on the donations and fees paid by the parents. However, the fees are not much as well. Its really heartwarming to know that they wanted us to come back. In our next trip, we are still planning on how we could support the children and teachers present at the schools.

The team that would be going to Trichy in December has scheduled to train the teachers under Read School on teaching strategies and bring in the resources that could be used during lesson timings. The process of learning is always going to be

an engaging element for the students and we want to make sure that they are not left out from what the rest of the world is experiencing.



What other activities do you plan other than helping underprivileged groups through education?

When I first started Project Summit SG back in 2017, I received immense support from my friends. They were undoubtedly contented with the new movement I've started to work on. They were even willing to extend their support to me in my new venture. For my every trip, they will help me out by providing donations in the form of money, storybooks or colour pencils for the children to use.

Kumar, my good friend and now a partner in Project Summit SG organisation, was also interested in the movement and wanted to do his part in helping out the underprivileged community. Together, we thought on how to make the organisation a sustainable one instead of always asking others for donations. Besides that, I wanted to make sure that I had a healthy flow of volunteers helping me out for the causes. I didn't want to deter them because of the expenses they have to manage such as paying for their own flight ticket and accommodation.

Some of my trips are during the holiday period and at those times, we can see that flight tickets are really pricey. I can't pay my volunteers a fixed salary because the service they do is considered to be a voluntary one. However, I thought of ways to reward my volunteers to a small extent. I was pondering on if there was any possibility to cover some of their costs. If there was a way, I was willing to explore on it. I just wanted them to feel proud of the work that they are doing.

Kumar and I wanted to start our own social enterprise. We named the company as KriyaiD and registered it. The whole idea behind coming up with KriyaiD was to ensure that there was some kind of sustainability that I could reward my volunteers with. KriyaiD works towards selling educational tools and products. The products sold under KriyaiD are eco-friendly and are made by the students from communities that we support.

In my last trip to Trichy, I had a donor who donated a certain amount of money and asked my team to cover for their accommodation expenses. This was a relief for my team as they had one less expenditure to worry about.

However, we wanted to sustain the funds that we were getting. That's when the social enterprise steps in. Through Kriyaid, we did our first saree sales event. We imported sarees from India and wanted to sell them at a profitable price in Singapore. We thought of using the profits earned from the sales in our next project.

Our very first event turned out to be a really successful one. I earned some profits from the venture and decided to use the money to cover some of my team members' expenses who are all set to leave to Trichy in December this year. This would be a simple thank you gesture from my side to the team who is going out to aid in the learning process of children and teachers from rural areas.



What do volunteers in this programme get to do?

So far, I've only been concentrating on teaching as that's my primary focus. As a teacher myself, I could only coach children on the aspects I'm familiar with. During my last trip to Trichy, I had a nurse on board my team. I thought that she could teach us on something that we are not very sure of. Thus, we decided on carrying out hygiene and first aid lessons in the schools. That was a very interesting element as we carried out a first aid training among the teachers in Trichy Read School.

They might not be certified medical aiders, but the session thought them on how to treat a child when he/she requires basic medical needs. The teachers in Trichy are dealing with young children who are mainly in Kindergarten. The kids are always very hyper and running around which makes them prone to injuries. Thus, a little knowledge on basic first aid can help the teachers to tend to the children more

quickly. Therefore, it also depends on the type of teammates that we have. We organise our schedule based on the teams strength.

The team that's going out in December is planning to embark on a new journey called Karka Kasadhara. It has not been officially launched yet. I am only planning to do so in the month of December. The initiative behind Karka Kasadhara is to actually build libraries in the less accessible areas, so that children will always be exposed to books.

We wanted to refurbish the existing library by painting up the place and equipping with new books. This is the plan that the team is currently working on. We are already in talks with the schools in Trichy with regards to our initiative. We just want to make it a conducive environment for the children.



What are your thoughts about volunteering for such noble causes?

It is definitely a good feeling when you see the smiles on the children's faces. They are truly grateful for the simple things that we provide them with. For example, a colouring activity which many children in Singapore take for granted. The kids in Trichy will sit still for 30 minutes and colour the same picture without getting bored as it is an activity that they don't get to do on a daily basis.

It is a gratifying feeling to be with the kids and spend time with them. Every individual should come forward to at least volunteer for such causes once in their lifetime. They can learn on many valuable insights. Even for myself, I always learn something new when I go on such voluntary trips. I might be a professional teacher, but as I embark on this journey, I'm always learning on various aspects such as making beautiful Art and Crafts, tips on making lessons more engaging and even first aid.

Many people have this mindset that voluntary work is all about donating to an organisation in terms of monetary wise. However, I feel that it's a 2 way process. At the end of the day, the trip will teach you on an important skill as well.



What other future plans does the movement hold?

I am extremely happy that a project coordinator had come forward to take on the project of visiting Trichy Read School in December. For the past three projects, I helmed the teams and went for the trips. Currently, I've moved out of Singapore and am working in Jakarta. I understand the fact that I'm no more in Singapore and the decision taken is with regards to my career shift.

However, I still want to continue with my passion for Project Summit SG. I approached one of my volunteers from the last trip and she is taking up the project that is happening in December. She is the project lead of the initiative and thus, she is planning and liaising with the management in Trichy now. I am contented that I've moved on to the next stage and have inspired the upcoming batch to take on projects.

I will constantly find for new homes and organisations to work with. As of now, I'm looking for an opportunity within Indonesia, so that it would be convenient for me in terms of travelling. I'm definitely looking for a new place where I could connect and extend my ties with.



Right now, I am looking for volunteers who can help out with our initiatives and causes. I'll be more than happy if they could contribute their part by volunteering for the programmes. They can email us their CVs so that we can have a pull of volunteers to work with. People should come forward for such noble deeds I feel.

It would be great if they could experience it once in their lives. Besides that, the public can also show their support by taking part in our fundraiser sales. The money earned from the sales are not going into my pocket. Instead, the profits are used to reward the volunteers who are part of Project Summit SGs initiatives. I truly hope that the public will consider being part of the movement.

