

JRM VISIT to RSTC POONGAVANAM KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT

JRM team visited the Residential special training centre which is run in poongavanam kanchipuram block, especially for the destitute and dropped out children of socially disadvantaged groups like 'Irulas' on 19.4.2017. All kinds of amenities provided in the RSTC were checked by the team. The team expressed their pleasure visiting the centre and appreciating the dedicated staff for their care towards the kids. Besides, the story of Sakthi and the way he mobilized the other 19 kids impressed the JRM team members. They offered a note of appreciation and encouragement for the good work and functioning of RSTC Poongavanam.



It was really rewarding as well as motivating for SSA, kanchipuram, Tamilnadu to receive such a note of appreciation from JRM team. It gives us confidence to work with more energy for the betterment of children in future too.

19.04.2017 - JRC
It was a pleasure visiting Poongavanam RSTC. It was impressive to see such a dedicated staff caring for these destitute drop out kids. The story of Sakthi and the way he mobilized other 19 kids is a story in itself. Well done friends keep up the good work.
Shreeavan

Meritorious Meera – Prathiba Award

Meera Soundarajan is a successful and proud alumna of Sarva Sikhsha Abiyan's and Hand in Hand India (NGO) Dhamaneri Residential Special Training Centre (RSTC), Thiruvallur District. Tamil Nadu. Hard work, determination and grit has



paved the way for her to receive the '**Pratibha Award**'. It is given by the education department of Andhra Pradesh based on the Government database of the list of students who cleared 10th standard examination with highest marks and are finalised (categorised based on caste) by them. This award comprises a **cash amount of Rs. 20,000, a tablet worth Rs. 10, 000, medal and certificate.**

Meera hails from Chinnakadambathur, Thiruthani Block, Thiruvallur District and her family belongs to the secluded marginalised 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) Irula community (Snake charmers). This seclusion often led them to take up odd jobs in different places, leading them to adopt a migrant lifestyle. Meera and her three siblings, dropped out of school at the age of 10. She studied up to 5th standard in Chinnakadambur Panchayat Union Primary School and used to spend their childhood assisting their parents in brick kilns, cattle fields and forests for earning a living.

Whilst grazing cattle, Meera was identified by SSA and Hand in Hand (NGO) field staff at the age of 11 during the year 2012. They approached her family and motivated them to send all their children to Residential school where boarding facilities available. Multiple visits later, the parents obliged and there was no looking back for Meera and

her siblings. All four of them were enrolled at the RSTC, Dhamaneri. Whilst at the RSTC, she was an ardent student, pursuing the 6th and 7th grade between 2013-15. In 2015, she was initially mainstreamed to the 8th grade at Manampathy Higher Secondary School in Kancheepuram District and was accommodated at Bharathiyar RSTC Hostel (because her family was migrating from place to place).

Meera found it difficult to adjust to the new school environment and discontinued her education. The SSA and NGO Staff motivated her and her parents and got her enrolled at Kidayarpalayam Government Middle School in Vellore district (UDISE code of the school 33040300502) which was near to her home. Meera again did not like the school as she expected RSTC style of education and was irregular to classes which was identified by Block Resource Teacher Educators during their visit to that school. They motivated her to complete 8th standard and NGO staff promised her to find a school for her with hostel facilities similar to that of the RSTC. Finally, she completed 8th Standard successfully.

And then, she was shifted to another school named **Dheenabandhu Aided TM High School** (located in the border of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh State and belongs to Andhra State) which has hostel facilities within the school campus. It is run free of cost by the **Dheenabandhapuram Association**. She completed her 9th and 10th grades there. SSA and NGO staff constantly monitored her studies and ensured there was no interruption in her learning. In 2018, Meera has tasted sweet success by securing 78% in the 10th grade examinations, coming first in the **Scheduled Tribe** category in Chittor Mandal, Andhra Pradesh. These grades, something unimaginable for her community, has earned her the 'Pratibha Award' from the Government of Andhra

Pradesh! The benefits of this award includes scholarship to continue her higher education in Andhra Pradesh.

Meera is currently studying 11th grade at Pothaturpettai Government Girls Higher Secondary School. The other younger siblings, Muthu, Sathish, and Saraswathi are currently pursuing 9th, 7th and 6th standard respectively.

Meera aims to pursue her higher education in **nursing** and is determined to serve the poor people especially in ST communities in remote villages. Even though her parents are happy that Meera has secured high marks and has been awarded, they have the fear that if she studies till college, she would not get a prospective bride groom in her community. But with Meera's determination and motivation from field staff, her parents are convinced to support her education.

Stories like Meera reinforce the confidence in our work and make us work harder to provide education to all children!