

# **ANISHA MISTRY**

## **VOLUNTEER TEACHING PLACEMENT**



**KAMLA FOUNDATION**

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH**

**FORD TRUST**

**02.02.11-10-02.11**

## **PURPOSE OF MY VISIT**

I was introduced to the work of Kamla Foundation by my uncle Bhupendra Mistry. The various literature (such as Reports, Leaflets, Newsletters) produced by the Foundation made me question why people were in such desperate need of help. After reading the reports of Volunteers and in particular Maria's blog through the website, I found myself wanting to achieve what she had. The impact her work has had on the people of Tamil Nadu made me start thinking about how I could help, and what I could give. I decided I wanted to understand the situation of children and their education in India. Children are the future generation, and nurturing them into intelligent, resilient and interesting individuals is vital for them to lead the way. After my own experiences at school and the thorough enjoyment and satisfaction I received right through my schooling from nursery to secondary school to college and up to university had led me to pursue a career in teaching. I want to give students as enriched an experience as I had. I can think of nothing more satisfying than watching a child's knowledge expand.

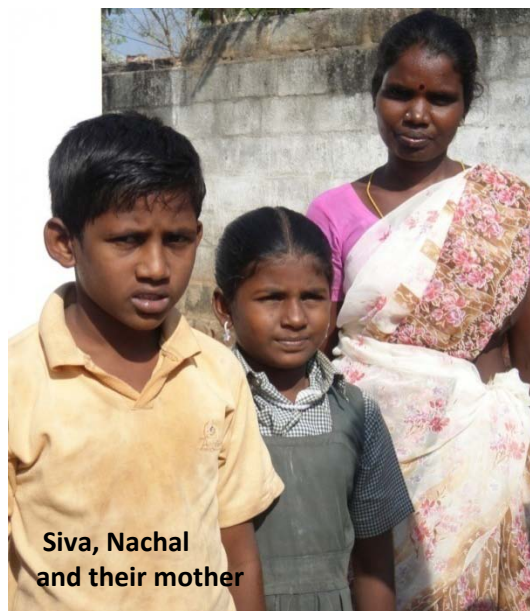
## **INTRODUCTION**

I arrived in Tamil Nadu with a clear, open mind. I had heard a great deal about the work Kamla Foundation does in partnership with FORD Trust, yet hearing about the work and seeing the work are two very separate matters. If I'm honest I wasn't sure what to expect. Hearing that they help the most disadvantaged people, in the most rural areas of Tamil Nadu, I think I was almost naïve. I didn't realise the extent of some people's situations and seeing it for myself has had such a profound effect on me. It has made me think about my life and my purpose in it, my goals and aspirations. Witnessing such hardship and suffering has made me value the opportunities I have been given in life. This experience has made me appreciate how much my parents have strived for the best in my education and life and how much they have sacrificed themselves to give me the best they possibly can. Even more so how for granted we take things in everyday life, water, food a stable home.

I was most interested in the child sponsorship program that Kamla Foundation has recently set up. I was intrigued as to how destitute these families were. Interested to find out their situations at first hand and understand why they were struggling to send their children to school, and when they did, what kind of education they were receiving. As education is compulsory here in the UK and funding is available for students from poor backgrounds it was disconcerting to see that these children have such huge aspirations but a lack of support, furthermore their parents, like mine, would sacrifice whatever they could to give them a decent education in order to prevent them from suffering the same hardship they face.



Nithish Kumar, his mother and Paul



Siva, Nachal and their mother

#### **WORK UNDERTAKEN BY FORD TRUST**

I spent my first week with Bhupendra Mistry of Kamla Foundation, Paul Rasan, Managing Director of FORD Trust and Miss. K.Karpagam a field worker for FORD Trust. This week allowed me to see personally the type of work the Foundation and FORD Trust do here in Tamil Nadu. I was there with the people we help, the people who desperately need our help. They work with the poorest of the poor. The neediest most desperate people and I've seen for myself that ALL the money raised by Kamla Foundation goes to these people. I've seen how much we have changed their lives, how much of a difference we have made so far and how much more there is still to do.

India is a country where divisions of wealth and caste are so evident everywhere you look. The people and what they wear, the houses they live in the jobs they do. The people that The FORD Trust and Kamla Foundation help are innocent beings, who under circumstances out of their control have led them into a life in extreme poverty and marginalisation. It was heart breaking to see the conditions of people houses and the lives they struggle to live, in particular the suffering of their children.

#### **Empowerment**

The key area of work is within empowerment, namely women empowerment. The women in rural Tamil Nadu face such hardship, in some castes they are treated as such inferiors that they cannot work for a living, get beaten and abused. Some women have husbands who have simply just deserted them and in many cases they are widows. Furthermore, these circumstances are not in their control, yet they are still penalised for it. They cannot re-marry and are frowned upon by society. Many of these women now have to work to try to earn a living doing either the most menial jobs or jobs that

require such hard work and labour. I've seen such women working on road surfacing, pouring hot tar barefooted, carrying granite and stones from quarries to trucks. Most if not all of these women will have young children who have the ambitions of becoming successful in life. These children want an education, are willing to learn and put all their effort into creating a better life for themselves. But they simply can't. As they get older they are required to work to provide a living, as education is seen as too expensive, many children have to drop out to help earn a living. They are in a never ending cycle of poverty.



I was introduced to a few Self-Help Groups that The FORD Trust host; these groups encourage women to make a difference in their lives. They can apply for small loans with very little interest with an incentive to save money and gain good credit. They meet regularly to discuss domestic issues and how best to deal with them, furthermore they are informed of their rights as a woman. These Self-Help-Groups run up and down the country and they really do make a difference to the lives of these women.

#### **WORK SUPPORTED BY KAMLA FOUNDATION**

##### **Training Centres**

Kamla Foundation has been heavily involved in a number of areas creating sustainable opportunities for the rural poor. They have led on the installation of 4 bore wells in some of the most rural areas of Tamil Nadu. Supported three training centres in the Sivagangai district. We visited two of the training centres set up to help women in rural villages learn various sewing and embroidery skills to enable them to gain better job prospects. These centres have approximately 6 sewing machines and basic equipment like scissors and thread. They also act as a community centre of information and a place for women to gather and converse. Aside from training the users of the centres have asked for regular work to be sent to them in order to generate an income for the women that use them. I think this is a fantastic idea and gives the women the opportunity to be self sufficient; it also promotes group income and shared workload in a safe environment.



Training Centre



Micro Enterprise Fruit Vending Stall,  
Pillaiyarpatti

The Foundation have also helped fund Micro-Enterprise Projects for people to generate an income in a stable, safe and convenient way. As we passed through Pillaiyarpatti everyday to get to the bus stop, I would see the fruit vendor Rita. There have been numerous times in the baking heat we have stopped to eat fresh watermelon off her stall. Rita was struggling to make a living, she did not demand money but a chance to generate her own income. By selling fresh watermelon to the public she is able to sustain her house and provide food for her family. It has prevented her from undertaking construction work to make a living. With this fruit stall she can now earn up to 100 rupees a day giving her a comfortable living standard and enables her to send her children to school. Seeing how such a simple gesture can make such a difference to a woman and her whole family made me realise how lives can be changed for the better, forever with a little encouragement, supporting this project in person makes me feel so proud of the work the Foundation does.

### **Children & Education**

With regard to the children, Kamla Foundation set up an educational sponsorship program for 30 children. I visited most of these children, and I can guarantee there are not children who need this help more. They are the poorest of the poor, with such shocking background stories. I met some families who live in mud huts that have been battered by the rain and some families have no electricity. All these children come from single parent families and live in the most destitute of conditions. Without the help of the sponsors they would be working as child labourers. They are bright young children with a dream, with ambitions to become district officials, policemen, teachers and doctors. My love for children was what made me interested in this project. As a prospective teacher I wanted to understand the hardship these children face in getting an education. Seeing the children in their homes and the conditions they lived in made me realise how different life is in the UK. How we take for granted the help we have available to us, and how advanced our systems of education are.

Kamla Foundation also sponsored a children's resource centre in Maruthangudi at the FORD Trust office. It is a place where children from the neighboring villages can come to read, play games and just socialise.



Children at the Resource Centre

### **Rural Water Supply**

During her placement, Maria Sykes set up the water management programme. This project was something I didn't understand. I was naive in thinking that water was so readily available to everyone that it didn't occur to me some people here have to travel 2km up to 4 times a day to collect clean, safe drinking water. Some of the water conditions that they had been using were so dire, many of the villagers were suffering from water borne diseases and many suffered from back ache from carrying such massive volume of water. The three sites I visited couldn't have been chosen better. The people these hand pumps serve were in desperate need of a daily necessity. One hand pump in Sirugappatti served nearly 1000 people. Water on demand is something we take for granted in western society, it's definitely made me think twice about the amount of water we consume and waste each day.

I had the opportunity to visit the 3<sup>rd</sup> handpump site at Velayuthapattinam, which was very nearly complete, there was only the finishing cement left to place on the platform. It was just incredible to see the effect this pump is having on the villagers (it serves around 300 families), whose only local source of water was an open pond. In the dry

season they would have to travel up to 2km to get safe drinking water. The water management program and the difference it makes to these people really has touched my heart. Maria has done a fantastic job choosing the bore well sites and these peoples lives have been changed forever.



### **Additional Organisations**

We also visited several other organisations that the foundation could potentially be working with in the near future. One of which was DROPPS who do fantastic work with adolescent girls, encouraging them to understand issues connected with marriage, dowry, sexual health and support for girls in difficult situations. They also have an old woman's home whereby they house and care for destitute old women, who have been abandoned by their families or widowed. These women cannot work or fend for themselves and some were found nearly dying on the street. At current they receive very little funding and are struggling to keep the amazing work they are doing going. Visiting the care home was an extremely harrowing experience, the fragility of these women and the situations they had come from made me truly respect the people that work with them.

We also paid a visit to the RECO office, an organisation that covers issues such as trafficking and sexual offences to women. Their main specialism is the work they do in disability empowerment. We were scheduled a meeting at Bharathidasan University in Tiruchirappalli with the director of the Women Studies department. This visit was a very successful and encouraging visit, I felt that the issues covered by Kamla Foundation and FORD Trust are being looked at by the younger generation, who in turn will help sustain the work and increase awareness of gender equality, empowerment and such like. The university was keen to work with people in the field as were the foundation to work with professional academic staff. Collectively I think the two parties can debate and collate ideas and generate a really good understanding and awareness both professionally and within the field.

It was an eye-opening week, filled with very mixed emotions. At times it was very disturbing hearing of people's backgrounds and situations, and seeing people suffering. On the other hand it was fantastic to see how many lives have been changed for the better by the work that has been done.

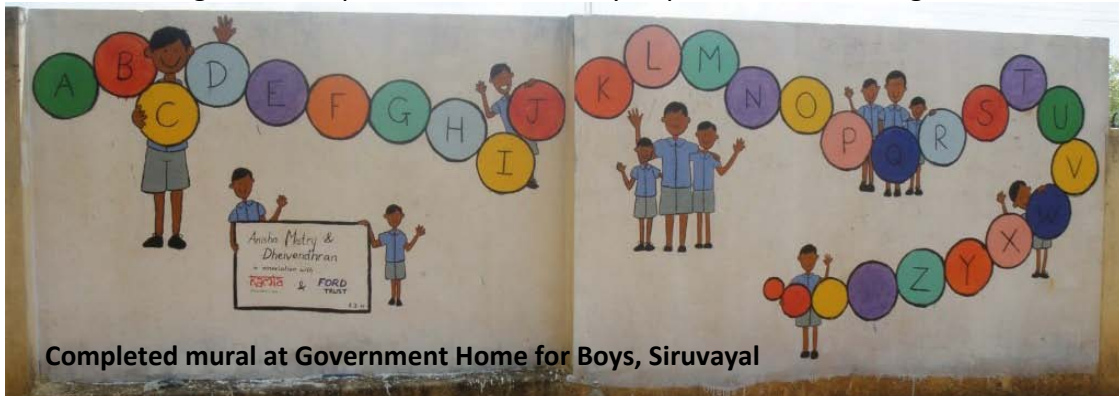
## **OVERVIEW OF MY PLACEMENT**

I started my placement with much trepidation. I felt after spending a week with such vulnerable people, I found myself questioning whether being here was the right choice, am I helping the right people? I saw the work that is being done, and is changing peoples' lives in so many ways, how did I fit into the equation and what would they gain from me?

### **Government Home for Boys, Siruvayal**

I started my work with the government run children's home, which is based in Siruvayal. It is a home just for boys aged 4 to 16, they are housed and fed there, and attend a local government school daily, with the weekends reserved for private study. Nearly all of these boys do have parents, or have single parents but their families have abandoned them because they simply cannot care for them. These boys are bright and energetic individuals, and it is evident that they treat each other like brothers. There are constant arguments, and fights, but they equally help each other out. I had the pleasure of spending 2 hours every weekend for 4 weekends, playing alphabet games and encouraging them to learn via creativity. I've learnt so much about children's upbringings and the way they envisage life for themselves too.

The home is very basic, there is no play ground or grass, just a dirty rubble floor and the building is painted a very dull yellow. I had decided before coming to Tamil Nadu that I wanted to create an educational mural for the boys at the home, to brighten up the grounds. I'm so pleased with the result and the bright colours most definitely make a massive difference. Thankfully with the help of a young man called Dheivendhran I managed to complete it in good time to a high standard. Dheivendhran was an interesting young man to speak to, he is very talented and very creative. His dream is to use his drawing skills as a profession, and I truly hope he achieves his goals.



## State Schools

With regard to the school system in India, education is free and compulsory for students up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard. However, in nearly all rural areas I visited, most students had only completed up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. The reason being, that they had to leave to work to generate an income for their family. Although education is free, the cost of uniforms, materials and books results in many poor and disadvantaged families to remove their children from education. As many families in rural parts of Tamil Nadu have to work extremely long hours for very little pay just to feed themselves. The necessity of sending their child to school falls behind being able to eat. There is currently no financial help available to cover school costs for children in school.

The child sponsorship program is an incredible set up by the Foundation and really does help young people make a difference in their lives. Some of the students chosen for the sponsorship program attend the Somasundaram Middle School, Saravayal which is a brilliantly managed school, the staff have the right balance of teachers and spend their time and budget accordingly. They provide a very good education with the assistance they receive and assured me that students are encouraged to continue their education up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard at a nearby high school.



Somasundaram Middle School, Saravayal



The law currently states that within a radius of 1 km there should be an elementary school, within 3km a middle school and within 5 km a high school. It is for this reason that there are so many schools in neighboring villages. It is to allow easy access for rural communities. The disadvantage is the lack of funding available to sustain the schools, especially the staff. The government will only provide 2 teaching staff for 100 students at elementary level. It is for this reason Sri Karpagavinaygar Elementary School, Pillaiyarpatti was struggling with the workload and was having difficulties managing their time accordingly with their students. Not being able to teach each standard separately causes a great deal of strain on the teachers as they feel they cannot provide the best level of education for their students.



I was introduced to a new creative, interactive learning system the government has provided. It is new for the academic year 2010-11 so all the state schools and the government-aided school now go by this system. I found both schools implementing this system in different ways and each one finding it quite difficult. As lessons are split into Tamil, Maths, Science, social Science and English, there is a different set of charts (ladders) and cards all with different picture codes corresponding to each standard. The charts are colour coded for each standard. The aim is to work through each activity and progress up the ladder towards the end of the year. The activities themselves range from group led rhymes and songs, sentence structures, flashcards and word association.

In both government-aided schools I worked in, the teachers were finding it difficult to execute the activities as they didn't understand them themselves. I found that in both schools the classes were split, and groups of children worked through the cards. It seems as though the system is being used to allow the students to work at their own ability and gives time for the teachers to assess from a distance. I'm guessing it may be a ploy to ease the workload of the teacher and enable them to teach collective students at the same time. It was interesting looking through the cards that creative learning was being promoted now. Some activities which have been employed in English schools for generations are just being introduced now.

### **Private Schools**

Private schools like the Indira Gandhi Elementary School, Thiruppathur can choose their syllabus accordingly from private suppliers. The education at this school is second to none. They have excellent text books which encourage all aspects of learning, and the fundamentals of the English language. This schools success and its reputation has soared in the past few years and they are currently expanding to matriculation up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. The government needs to oversee middle school level of education therefore the syllabus will be provided but privately taught.



Indira Gandhi Elementary School,  
Thirupputhur



### Reflection on my classes

My classes were very well received. The staff found them innovative and original, however to me they were simple tasks used in everyday classes in the UK. The students increased their vocabulary knowledge and understood that visual and expressive learning can help them remember. I was told by all the schools that my classes have given the staff confidence to try new activities and encourage more creative and interactive learning.

One of the elementary teachers at Somasundaram Middle School has been visiting me regularly and insists that they are becoming more interactive with their students. The staff at each school could not have been nicer; they have been extremely professional and very welcoming. I was presented with a hand-made soft toy dog by this teacher as a gesture of gratitude for my work at Somasundaram Middle School. The staff at Indra Gandhi School were equally as welcoming and appreciative. I was stunned by their gift of a silk shawl, I've never been treated in a professional establishment with such grace as I have in the schools here.

I have learnt so much about myself and my abilities as a teacher. My patience levels and found out how difficult it actually is to teach English as a Second language. It has definitely secured my thoughts on being a teacher and has made me extremely eager to start practicing. It is so gratifying knowing that my ideas have touched so many children and shaped their education for the future. I hope to keep in contact with the schools to aid them further on new ideas and innovative learning. I plan to formulate ideas to help them sustain a healthy level of creative learning and engage their students in intellectual, interactive education

The students themselves are very energetic and always happy, regardless of their situations. It's been such a joy just being around them. Seeing their faces light up by simply singing 'Hokey Kokey' or 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses' made my day. I saw how much their education means to them. They really do aspire to be the best they possibly can to dig themselves out of the poverty hole they are living in.

## Child Resource Centre

I was also able to spend a fair amount of time with the local children who come to the resource centre. We played skipping, carem board, chess, snakes and ladders (with very strange rules) and many rounds of Hokey Kokey. On my last Sunday I hosted an Arts and Crafts day which went down a storm. 34 children all creating fantastic chenille animals and painted butterflies, there was collage and colouring and my favourite game 'Pin the nose on the clown'. The children loved this; it was a whole new concept. The whole morning was a huge success.

I just really enjoyed being with the children, making them feel alive. Seeing their faces shine with the simple act of butterfly painting, or playing a game. Just spending time with them enriches their creativity and thinking and hopefully gives them a chance to differ from the hard lives they are currently living, and just be children. Using the left over paint I bought for the Government Home mural, Paul asked me to paint a similar one outside the Child Resource Centre. It certainly brightens up the area around the office and I really enjoyed painting it, even in the baking heat.



Mural outside Child Resource Centre



## Reflection

I'm so pleased with my visit here, and I most definitely was working with the right people. I've seen children develop their English speaking skills in one week, and

encouraged students who dare not speak a word, sing a song to a full class. The impact my time here has had on the schools I've worked in is fundamental. I've made fantastic professional acquaintances who I wish to keep in touch with in the future. I've seen how helpless some schools are with the system they are handed by the government, yet the love of children and learning is what makes the management shine through. I honestly believe that if schools didn't have such decent structures and realistic, level headed members of staff, the students wouldn't have the professional level of education they receive today.

None of the work I have done would have been possible without the help of Paul, and especially Karpagam, who attended all my classes as a translator and a friend. She escorted me via the moped, the bus and even taxi to get to school on time. Every day I spent with her I realized what a credit she is to the FORD Trust and how much of a dedicated field worker she is. She truly is a remarkable woman and well worthy of the 1<sup>st</sup> Kamla Foundation Award. My stay here was made so comfortable by Paul and his whole family, the fantastic cooking of his wife Mary Laila who is just so motherly, from the way she pronounced my name, to teaching me how to wash my clothes. I was welcomed with open arms from day one and have been so well looked after that I am extremely grateful.

I have learnt so much about myself and my patience with Indian life. There have been times where the culture and way of life can increase your frustrations at getting things done. But on reflection you realise that this is just the way the country runs, things will be completed, maybe not in the allotted time, but they still get completed. I've learnt to deal with frogs and lizards and sit with no power in the baking heat, and all these factors have contributed to my experience and made it incredibly enriching. Spending time in solitude has made me realise how much I adore and miss my family.



The work that is done here in India by Kamla Foundation and the FORD Trust has sincerely opened my heart and eyes to the hardship people face in developing countries. Corruption, pride, tradition and culture have all had an impact on everyone's lives but I've never witnessed it with my own eyes. I feel content with my work here and what it has made me as a person. I sincerely thank Kamla Foundation for supporting my visit and the FORD Trust for making everything I did possible.