Puduvayal School Library Project

(Umayal Natesan, a 17-year-old high school freshman from Pittsburgh, PA, focused on school and village libraries as part of her TNF internship during Summer'2018 and developed this project. Umayal can be reached at umayalnatesan@gmail.com)

Puduvayal is a small town about 13 kilometers outside of Karaikudi in the Sivagangai District. The town its neighboring villages are home to small farmers and daily laborers who lead difficult lives.

In the 1930s, a school was founded in the village and christened "Sri Saraswati Vidyalaya". In 1982, it became an all-girls school to promote women's education, which was severely lacking in the area. It served underprivileged girls in Puduvayal and the surrounding villages. The school gained a reputation for its impeccable quality of education and good results (for the past few years, the school achieved a 100% pass rate in the 12th grade government board exams).

Today, the school is a government aided non-profit organization. Unfortunately, it still requires funding from private donors to provide basic services to students and a living wage to some teachers and staff. Until recently, the school was only able to serve girls until they finished 10th grade because it did not have the facilities to offer a full education. As a result, many girls did not continue schooling beyond this point.

Several donors in the community joined hands with TNF to solve this problem. They aided the school by building a new suite of classrooms to sustain its growth and allowed it to offer a full education until the 12th grade. Because of TNFs involvement, many of the girls can attend college and get white-collar jobs to help their families. With these new classrooms, the school received a library to house books and other learning materials for the students. However, due to a lack of funding, the library remains empty and only contains a few books.

This is a sad reality, since a library should empower students and encourage reading. Thankfully, you can change this by making a small contribution to the Puduvayal School Library Project. Every dollar you donate to this project will be used to buy books and foster literacy, creativity, and joy among the girls at Sri Saraswati Vidyalaya.

Your donation will make a difference in the lives of generations of underprivileged rural girls. You can donate online at http://tnfusa.org/donate/ by choosing 'Libraries are Temples" under projects and mention in the comment section that your donation is for 'Puduvayal School Library Project".

Following are a few pictures of the empty library and a summary of Umayal's internship report.

<u>Library Development Report</u>

Challenges in rural libraries:
1. Librarians cannot order books they feel are relevant, and often times donations are not relevant to the students.
2. Students aren't encouraged to visit the library unless there is a competition or period without a teacher. There is no incentive to visit the library.
3. Some communities would benefit from a strengthened community library, while others would benefit from a strengthened school library.

Library Visit Highlights
Nerkuppai Public Library
- Best example of a rural library
- Incentivized use of the library with prizes and awards each month
- Attracted students to the library and books using computer and Wi-Fi facilities
- Received books from several government associated programs, like the Raja Ramamohan Library Fund (RRLF)
- Had many magazines, periodicals, and newspapers that attract people of all ages to the library
- Librarians do not have a great degree of freedom in choosing books

Kalapur Girls School Library
- Had 2 bureaus of books
- Received books from the Rhastya Madyani Shiksha Byan (RMSA) government scheme annually
- School awards ceremony presents books as prizes to students, but presented no prizes for reading
- Has 500 books total
- Students usually use the library to study for oratory competitions, and during their weekly 45-minute reading period
- There is a specific teacher who takes care of the library
- The intent of the library is to inculcate the habit of reading in students, and to encourage them to use the public library, because the school library facilities can only take a student so far
- Librarian cannot choose books for the libraries to any degree

Puduvayal School Library
- Has two bureaus of books, and more bureaus of engineering reference books (donated by alumni) which were unfortunately irrelevant to both students and teachers
- Library is used when a teacher is not present and the students must fill their time, or during government mandated moral instruction periods
- Students are encouraged to donate a book to the library on their birthdays instead of bringing sweets for their peers
- Library does not receive any usable books on a large scale

Puduvayal Public Library
- Has about 30,000 books

- Receives books from government associated programs like the Raja Ramamohan Library Fund (RRLF) for public libraries
- Has a full-time librarian who splits her time between this library and one in Kottaiyur, a neighboring village
- Students only use the library to prepare for oratory competitions on National Book Day (April 24th) and Independence Day
- Has a selection of periodicals, but not an extensive one
- Librarian thinks that students would be encouraged to use the library if it held more events, had a more relevant selection of books, and teachers from the neighboring school brought the students to the library occasionally

Kanadukathan School Library
- One of the most sophisticated school libraries we witnessed
- Has a check in/check out system that allows students to take books home
- Since the school is English medium, it receives many donations of English books that it is able to use
- The school has a teacher who works as a librarian
- The librarian suggests a 1:2 ratio of students to books, at a minimum

Best ways to implement libraries in rural areas:
1. Relevance of books
   a. Instead of asking librarians for the total number of books in the library, one should ask about the number of relevant books in the library. This will give an accurate picture of how many new books are actually necessary.
   b. One cannot depend on government programs or schemes completely when furnishing a library. The books are often irrelevant.
   c. In the long run, a check-in check-out log book or list of books that have been checked out would be extremely helpful in determining relevant books or types of books to buy in the future.
   d. Librarians should tell TNF about the nature of their irrelevant books, in case they can be relevant elsewhere and TNF can help in relocating them.
   e. All libraries that receive funding from TNF should take librarian and student input seriously in determining what books to buy. Field coordinators like Vinod will be extremely helpful in this process.
   f. Magazines and periodicals seem to be more popular among students than anything else. Funds should be allocated as such.
2. Incentivizing library usage (in and out of school)
   a. Small changes to school activities that reinforce the importance of reading can be implemented.
      i. Giving a book to the school library instead of sweets on a birthday.
      ii. Books as prizes on school awards days instead of sweets or trinkets.
   b. Since library usage increases during competitions, a TNF-affiliated competition that requires library usage would be effective in increasing library traffic.
   c. Librarians maintain that any sort of special event will draw library traffic.
   d. Offering a monetary reward to the best young user of a library each month.
   e. In the long term, providing computers/Wi-Fi services to students would encourage them to come to the library.

3. Community library vs. school library
    a. In some cases, strengthening a school library is better for a community, while in others, strengthening a community library is better.
        i. This is dependent on the resources that libraries currently have and the traffic at each library.
        ii. TNF will have to make decisions on a case by case basis for each area so that the money spent on the library can have the most effective outcome for the community.
    b. In the case of a community library, some school affiliation is necessary to make sure the library is successful and young people use it.
        i. Teachers must bring students to the library regularly and encourage its use.
        ii. The library should offer some incentivized membership rate to students.