From Destruction to Now:
A Community Back to Life
Nagapattinam Relief and Rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

Under the inspiration and guidance of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of the Art of Living and International Association for Human Values, the Nagapattinam Relief Rehabilitation Project was set up for the people who were affected by Tsunami in December 2004. With the ongoing long term projects, beneficiaries share with how they have experienced changes at the individual level as well as the community level.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Founder IAHV visited Nagapattinam to console Tsunami victims in December 2004 and to inaugurate free homes for Tsunami victims in August 2006 and visited the Schools in August 2009
December 26th was a shocking moment for people around the world when the Tsunami hit the shores of a number of countries. In India alone, the face of coastal districts such as Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari and parts of Chennai were altered in a matter of moments. Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu, was one of the worst-hit areas. Nearly 1.3 lakh families were displaced, 1,500 children lost one of their parents and 460 children were orphaned. The waves smashed fishing vessels and wiped out buildings, infrastructure and fishermen colonies in 73 villages and 21 villages were totally destroyed. The devastation rendered 39,000 people homeless. With time and the efforts of the government, non-government organizations and other agencies, the community of Nagapattinam has healed the wounds of the people and daily life has come to normalcy.

**IAHV-Art of Living Intervention**

Within 24 hours, IAHV and Art of Living volunteers reached the sites of the affected areas and started a major effort to provide immediate relief, and continued to support the community with short and long term relief and rehabilitation programs. After such a traumatic experience much support, physical and mental, was needed. Broken families, deaths of loved ones, psychological distress, unemployment, and fear are just a few of the emotions people had to deal with following the incident. The future seemed grim for the thousands of survivors.
Short Term Relief

Under the short term relief programs, IAHV and Art of Living started with immediate help through programs such as Medical Relief, Child Care Centre, Computer Centre, Tailoring Centre, Jute Bag Centre and Agarbathi (Incense sticks) Centre.

The project began with volunteers, mostly from India, coming together to distribute material items such as food, clothing, medicines and other household goods. Within the next month, medical camps were set into place.

The next step was the Trauma Relief Project, which included The Breath Water Sound and Trauma Incident Reduction (TIR) workshops meant to relieve the mental stress of such an emotional experience. All of these Trauma Relief Projects have reached out to more than 35,000 people in around 42 villages.

The Child Care Centre and the Computer Centre were established shortly after the destructive waves. These facilities enabled affected children and youth to become active in their lives again.

Lastly, two empowerment projects were started the community tailoring center and taught women the techniques and methods of jute bag making. The women also sold the goods that they made, providing them with an additional source of income.

Long Term Relief

Under the long term relief programs, houses were built for the people whose homes were destroyed in the Tsunami. Sri Sri Vidya Mandir Matriculation Schools, including Primary, Secondary and the Sri Sri Industrial Center, were also built to benefit all the people living in the area.
BENEFICIARIES SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCE

IMMEDIATE RELIEF - Highlights

IAHV-Art of Living has put together a compilation of testimonies from members of the Nagapattinam community that are involved in one or more of the project services provided. From the initial fear of the tsunami to the restoration of the community, experiences tell of an unsettling emotional state transformed by the workshops, programs and services provided by the IAHV-Art of Living community.

Let’s hear what they have to say!

The Lives of the Fishermen

To people around the world, the 2004 tsunami was a shocking experience. But to those who were there experiencing the tragic event firsthand, the incident is unforgettable. The brave survivors had to overcome much grief and pain and were able to do so with the help of the IAHV-Art of Living courses on trauma relief, transforming the lives of these fishermen who had lost close to everything. The accounts describe the sense of renewal or revival to their lives as they were able to decrease the pain and stress built up from the incident through the breathing exercises.

Suresh

At 27 years of age, I had settled firmly into the daily rhythms of a fisherman's aid. But the tsunami turned everything in my life on its head. I finally found respite from the suffocating fear after the IAHV-Art of Living Breath-Water-Sound workshop for trauma relief. The Sudarshan Kriya helped me overcome my tendency to fall into depression and the yogic exercises relieved me of my physical tribulation of continuous headache and severe body pain enabling me to go back to work again. My friends and others around me have also noticed the positive transformation in my demeanor and have been amazed at my returning to the sea and continuing fishing. I feel confident and happy and re-born after the workshop and am able to support my family and livelihood with strength.

Arul

“Whoever comes on this planet should come for this course...”

Physically, I felt exhausted all the time and experienced heaviness in my limbs. The severe mental stress that I was under led to disorders in my digestive system as well as acute pain in my back and shoulders. After the meditation, I experienced a tangible reversal of my mental attitude from fatalistic negativity to hope and responsibility. In fact, after the Sudarshan Kriya, I felt so free from fear and skepticism that I felt unafraid even of the threat of another Tsunami, confident that I would not only survive but handle whatever happened.
SHORT TERM REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Survivors of the tragic incidence were facing a very difficult time in their lives as they suffered from the loss of loved ones, destroyed homes and livelihoods. With the help of the IAHV-Art of Living short term programs, residents of the area were able to obtain emotional support, educational options, empowerment opportunities as well as a general sense of well-being. With the opening of various activity centers, as well as the stress-relieving workshops, members of the community were able to keep their mind clear and lives busy. The computer center, child care center and the skill training centers allowed all ages to participate in group activities, relieving them of their terrible memories.

M. ELANGO VAN

Being able to finally let go of the awful images of blood and gore of the past, was literally the gift of life as it brought me out of the fatalist, suicidal depression that I had fallen into. I felt transformed and healed and ready, for the first time in my life to help others.

Art of Living had started a tuition centre for the students in Nagapattinam. Every day we finished the classes at 6pm and had satsang. The children became very energetic and enthusiastic after satsang. In the early morning Rajendran, another IAHV-Art of Living volunteer, taught students yoga in the tuition centre. The students showed a lot of improvement in their studies after joining the tuition centre. IAHV-Art of Living volunteers encouraged me to continue my education. Now my main aim is to become a good teacher. Whatever I earn after I become a teacher will be for my younger brother.

TAIYAL NAYAKI:

For Taiyal the terror and revolution she felt as she saw mangled corpses of small children floating in the wreckage left a deep gorge of traumatic fear in her that eventually led to insomnia, mental confusion and doubts. Eventually, Taiyal went to the IAHV-Art of Living Breath-Water-Sound workshop for Trauma Relief where she spent a dynamic 5 days

Following the course, her body experienced rest and healing for the first time in months, her mind felt absolutely peaceful and relaxed. All the fears, confusions and horrific thoughts subsided and she began to feel free. Today in fond memory of her teacher Rukmini, Taiyal is able to retell her story with a smile... indicating a miraculous recovery.

Taiyal has trained in jute bag tailoring under the regular workshop conducted by the IAHV-Art of Living Vocational Training center for Women
PRIYADARSHINI:

Priyadarshini, is one of the children who attended the IAHV-Art of Living Child Care Centre in Nambiar Nagar village. She lost her younger sister in Tsunami. The memory of the incident still terrifies this sensitive and impressionable young child.

For a long time Pradarshini's dreams of dancing and becoming a doctor were clouded by the trauma of Tsunami; she was terrified and claims that she would have discontinued her education had it not been for the teachings of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. She recalls this, and simply smiles planting a big kiss on her teacher and on the photograph of Guruji.
LONG TERM PROJECTS

SRI SRI VIDYA MANDIR MATRICULATION SCHOOL

With the establishment of the Sri Sri Vidya Mandir Matriculation Schools, many lives have been positively affected. Students from many different villages have been able to put their time and energy back into their education and future. Even parents have experienced a change with the opening of the schools. Teachers and other members of the community have been able to participate in the school project as well.

The progress and success of the schools can be seen clearly with each testimony. IAHV-Art of Living believes strongly in the building of a human value focused education sector to ensure a healthy and prosperous future of students. The SSVM School is being run in association with Vykti Vikas Kendra, India, one of the sister organizations of Art of Living-IAHV.

VASANTHY RAVICHANDRAN

I have been the principal of this school since 2007. Sri Sri Vidya Mandir (SSVM) was started on 26th July 2007. When the school started with 177 students, but then increased to 198 students within the first year. At the beginning the classes were up to 6th standard only but now it’s till 8th standard. In 2007 there were only 11 teachers then the next year there were 13 and now there are 17 teachers. The parents of the students studying here are illiterate and financially they are poor. For students this year we have given books and uniforms for free. We also provide them with free noon meals.

We are giving more importance to discipline than studies; we teach them how to keep their environment clean. We tell them that we must throw all the garbage in the dust-bin. We are also conducting yoga and meditation classes twice every week and weekly once we conduct satsang, pranayams and bhashrika for students. I want to develop the school in such a way that it will be able to give a life equivalent to the life of students in cities.

This year there were many students who came for admission in this school, but we denied admission for some students since we have made many things free of cost and we need some more development in infrastructure to handle more students. We expect that in the next two years the number of students will reach one thousand. So in all we are training our students such that they develop not only in the academic side but also in other extracurricular activities.
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

PRIYA

I have been teaching here for past one and a half years. I take mathematics class from 5th to 8th standard. When the students came here to study, they didn’t even have basic knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. They were also not well disciplined or well mannered before. But now we have made lot of changes in them. We have taught them some good habits like wearing clean and ironed clothes, good manners, etc. Before the students were not sincere but now after joining this school I can say they are more than better. You can see a lot difference between the old students and the new comers. We have also taught them many good habits like keeping their shoes in an order outside their classrooms, forming a line before going anywhere, wishing their elders and teachers, asking for excuse before going to drink water or before going to the toilet and also obey to whatever the teacher is telling them to do I think this is the difference between our school and the other schools in this locality.

AMUDHA

When the school was started less than 200 students were there, then the next year number increased to 300 and this year it’s 500. Thus the school is growing and improving at a tremendous pace. Many students are coming from Poombuhar and they are coming from such a far distance because of good education and good atmosphere created here for the students to study. We all teachers live together as a family.

ELAKYA

It has been just four days since I joined this school I never knew about SSVM before but I used to see school buses going. I thought that if education is free then the parents who can relatively afford paid schools won’t send their kids here, but still they prefer sending their children to SSVM. When I asked people they said that it is because the education is very good here. When I came to this school I liked it immediately I see a lot of difference between students from this school and from other schools. Our school students are disciplined and well mannered compared to other school students. The teachers here are also very cooperative, they don’t ignore saying that I am a new staff.
STUDENTS

MANIMAGAN:
I am studying in 6th standard. My father’s name is Rajothri and my mother’s name is Chitra. My father is a farmer and my mother is a house wife. I have a brother who is studying in 7th in this school. I love this school very much and my favorite subject is mathematics. I want to be in the Indian Army.

INDUJA
I am studying in 4th standard. My father’s name is Muthukumar and mother’s name is Manimeghalai. Father has a tea stall and my mother is a house wife. My favorite subject is mathematics. I am the class first rank holder. I like this school very much and teachers are also teaching well. In future I want to become a computer engineer.

NON TEACHING STAFF:
SELVARAJ
I joined Art of Living in 2005. It was an amazing experience.

There are lot of changes in the area after the school was built like buses started to come to this area since there was a school and this is the only English medium higher secondary school in the area. Here students from both rich and poor background are studying together. Parents who are poor and can’t pay the fees tell that they have joined their children here just because it’s Guruji’s school, so madam also helps them saying that you can pay how much ever money you have and remaining you can pay in the next month. All the staffs and management are doing a very good job in developing the school and making it the best school among all the areas.
SRI SRI INDUSTRIAL CENTER:

SENTHILNATHAN, Principal

This center was established in July 2007 and since then I have been the principal of the industrial center. 2008-2009 is the first batch of students in ITI. 50 students were admitted this year. There is a lot of difference between other polytechnics and our school. We have trained the welding students such that they can earn a minimum of Rs.50 per day. In future we are planning to improve our facilities such that other than practical exams we can even conduct theory exams also here itself.

TEACHERS

RADHAKRISHNAN

I have been working here for the past one year. The name of the course is Welding technician. After finishing this course they can be called as ITI entrepreneurs. It is also possible that the students might work in companies in foreign countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Gulf countries, Arab countries and also western countries. Civil constructions group from L & T and Sharp industries from Coimbatore had come to see our facility and talk to our students.

The vehicle parking shed near the school gate was built by our students in 3 days. In this course there were 23 boys studying now. We plan to bring in more facilities for the students as we feel committed to give them the best.

VIMALA:

I have been working here for the past one year. I like teaching here and I have had a good experience so far. Students are also cooperating well with me and they also study well. I have them taught all the aspects of tailoring in both theory and practical. There are 6 students this year. After this course they can join any clothes designing company or they can work for household purposes. This is the only ITI School here in Anaikovil which gives education to even girls. There are other institutes at Theni, Madurai and Chennai. This place is calm with fresh air blowing all the time and is perfect atmosphere for the students to study.
INDUSTRIAL CENTER STUDENTS

JAGAN
I am coming from Seergadu. I am doing my computer hardware and software in this school. I like studying in this school. I come daily by bus from my home to Ananthamangalam and from there I come to the school by a minibus. School facilities are also good. They have provided us with good classrooms, we also have a ground to play and only thing is if we can have some extra computers in lab it will be useful. I have prepared well for my exams and I am aiming at coming first in state level. After this course I am planning to do diploma in mechanical engineering. As far as job is concerned if I get a job in computer field itself is good and if not I will go for mechanical side.

KRITHIKA
I am coming from Yerkatanjali. I am studying tailoring here. I also come by cycle to school. This is the only ITI here where there are provisions for even girls to study, so it’s something great for us. The teaching here is very good compared to other schools. The surroundings and the environment are also very calm and peaceful. We need some more tailoring machines since we have only four which are working. The other machines are not working and they can only be used to stitch bags and not cloth materials.
PARENTS

PRAKASH

PANNER SELVAM

SSVM was an eye opener for me. First year, there were only four students from Poombukar. After sending them to that school I found a profound change in the behavior of my children. Even I learnt discipline from them and I am very happy to see that. Disciplines like brushing and taking bath everyday were insisted in the school by the teachers. Seeing all these changes in my children, others also started to send their children to SSVM now there are 120 students studying from Poombukar this year. My children were given scholarship of Rs.2000 the previous year. It is very helpful to us. I did the basic course in Poombukar and I also did the advance course in Thanjavur.

B.RAMAMURTHY:

I am an autodriver. I am married and my wife’s name is Amutha. I have two children. I have joined 25 students in Guruji’s school by my own will. I wanted my child to study in English medium school, so I admitted him in SSVM. In other schools the fee is Rs.5000 and even more. I can’t afford to pay such high fee. But in SSVM it is only Rs.500 and this school is like a gift to us. Van facility is very useful. It would be better if there are schemes for handicap children.
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS:

SHRI ANNADARU (District Revenue Officer, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu):

I always wanted to visit this school. By God’s grace, I was invited to this inaugural function at this building (high school). I saw children of poor families having such a good education. I have seen the students of seventh standard giving a nice speech in English. I feel very happy that children of this village are getting such a quality education.

I wish all the best for this school. I hope this school will become famous not only in Tamil Nadu and India but also the world over.

TENKASI S. JAWAHAR (Ex-District Collector, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu):

At the time of tsunami many NGOs provided food and material needs but only a few like the IAHV-Art of Living took care of the mental trauma. So far over 35,000 people have benefitted from trauma relief programs of the Art of Living.

DR. J. RADHAKRISHNANAM (Ex-District Collector, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu):

They [IAHV-Art of Living] actually have been working with us especially focusing on trauma care. They have full time presence in the area. What I am happy about them is that right through; their volunteers have been working with us in a selfless manner trying to involve the communities, so that they can be mainstreamed now. Art of Living services will definitely be remembered in Nagapattinam. I am sure their value based services will help in improving quality of life of its affected citizens especially the unfortunate victims of Tsunami.
**PANCHAYAT MEMBERS**

The second part of the long term IAHV-Art of Living projects included the building of homes for families who had lost their houses in the Tsunami. Members of the community worked together with IAHV-Art of Living volunteers in the construction of the homes, which allowed the survivors to become involved and empowered in transforming their own lives. They, themselves, were initiating change. The accounts describe the rehabilitation process overall.

**MANIMARAN**

I am the village counselor for past three years. I had been the village committee chairman for five years. Guruji came here and found us helpless. Construction started immediately. 94 houses were built in this village. You can see Guruji’s photo in the pooja room of many homes. Guruji’s school gives education as a service. The fee here is very low so that even very poor people can afford. Guruji’s school is the only school that provides English education at such a low cost. I have a great belief that this school will grow more and more. In the future it might even become a university. Guruji was the only person who thought to build an educational institution and uplift the people by giving them proper education.

**RAMADASS**

I am residing in Manickkapangu and I am a fisherman. IAHV-Art of living changed our village and built the first English medium school here for all our children. After the school was built the panchayat members took initiative and built a roadway for this school. IAHV-Art of Living ‘adopted a village’ and without seeing any discrimination they built the houses for them. After Tsunami, many organizations came with the intention to help people but the only organization which built a school for the children and gave yoga courses to free from all the shock, was Art of Living. In Guruji’s school, students are given free books, notebooks and uniforms. In this school majority of the children who are poor and whose families were affected by Tsunami are studying. We never even dreamed that Guruji’s school will come up to this level. People are admitting their students in Guruji’s school because of the change in mannerisms of the students after joining this school.
PERIAMANICKAPANGU HOUSING BENEFICIARIES

As a part the long term relief project, IAHV-Art of Living cooperated with local families in order to help them rebuild their homes and lives that were severely destroyed by the tsunami. Much of the housing was completely obliterated. But partnership of dedicated members of society, construction for the new community began. The following accounts describe the sense of revival that Guruji brought with the opening of new homes.

KUMARAIYAN

I am a farmer. Guruji built houses only for those who lost their houses and were unable to build another house. Their trauma relief programs they conducted gave additional relief to us. They conducted yoga courses every day. Today I am living happily in the house because of Guruji. Even if I had built a house for myself I wouldn't have spent this much. The cement, sand and the construction materials they used were of good quality. In addition to all of these the school that has been built here is the greatest and unique service that they have done. Many of the children of our area are getting high quality education in this school.

BABY

Our houses got damaged due to tsunami. We stayed in the temple only. Guruji built this house for us within 6 months itself. We were one of the first to be built a house. When Guruji came here our houses were completely built. The photo came in newspaper. I became very happy.
PROJECT FUTURE:
The sustainability of these projects and programs rests in the participation of the community members as well as the supporters and funders. From the previous stories and accounts, one can surely see the importance of such programs for the lives of the Nagapattinam community. The physical and mental wreckage has subsided and surely the projects and activities have made a difference. We want to continue to provide these quality services to the community. In order to do so, we seek the support of global citizens, corporations and organizations who share the same human values.

How you can get involved

You have the power to make a difference in the lives of the people of Nagapattinam by a number of ways.

Your contributions can help sustain and expand existing projects as well as create new schools, bringing education to more people. The future of these schools, children and their families rests in your hands.

*Help us make this world a better, more educated place.*

For Further Details Contact:

Sangita Gujrati

_The International Association for Human Values (IAHV)_

21st Km, Kanakapura Road, Udaipur, Bangalore South

*Karnataka 560 082*

Email: iahv.blr@gmail.com

Phone: 080-28432103, 09342540105