

## **Irulars – a special kind of community with a lot of need for help!**

### *Who are Irular Communities?*

Irulas are the most primitive indigenous communities in India who inhabited in the forests before independence. After the Forest Protection Act, they moved to live in the peripheries of the villages with bare minimum facilities. They live in small huts and live with wages they receive for menial jobs available in the villages. Some of the irulas still engage in snake catching for venom collection with special license from Government.

Life of irula families are very simple and the boys and girls get married as soon as they attain puberty at the age of 13 – 15 years and give birth to children even before completing 18 years. They are also addicted to alcohol and substances at a very early age. Without health consciousness or proper medical care, they tend to die at a very early age. Deaths during pregnancy, child birth and childhood are very common among Irulas. Due to hard physical labour, men drink country liquor and die at a very young age.

Only this generation of children go to schools due to the constant motivation of government with special provisions and schemes. But still they find it very difficult to adjust to the formal education system as they were used to roaming and playing in the woods and forests.

### *How does Nandri help?*

Nandri realized that only through education we could protect this generation and we started our work in 2012 in Irula hamlets to improve the lives of the families especially children. Now we work in 6 hamlets. With our consistent hard work, we were able to ensure that all the children are enrolled in school and continue their education without getting dropped out in-between.

Our hard work yielded results only after 10 years. Almost all our children could complete their school education and some of them could pursue college education in the city of Chennai. The number of girls enrolled in college are increasing every year. We could not be successful with all of the boys as there is a huge demand for hard physical labor and boys go with other men in the village to work as casual laborers in the cities. Very few parents are aware of the importance of sending their children to school and support their children's education for a better future. Last year, one of our boys went to study Business Administration in a city college. His ambition is to get into Government administrative service.

Boys who are not interested in academic progress are motivated to learn vocational skills and we are making arrangements to send them to Vocational skill development institutions. Similarly, girls who are not interested in pursuing higher studies are helped to learn vocational and life skills to earn for their living.

We are happy and proud that the seeds we sowed are bringing positive results. But our journey in this developmental process was not easy. There were failures, setbacks and hurdles as the irula community as an ethnic group have a different perception about life. They think only about the present and they don't think about their or their children's future. While all the other communities in the world are only worried about their wellbeing, wealth and future chasing money, power and resources, Irulas are satisfied with their everyday meal and minimal clothing. We have to make them to think about the health and wellbeing of their children, the changing social and economic condition of the world and motivate them to care for their children's future.

When a few girls in their community become role models with their education and employment, this becomes a motivation for others. Now the parents are also showing interest in the progress of their children and involve very much in center activities.

We have a dedicated team of teachers, care takers and social workers to work with our community. They are provided trainings and workshops to improve their skills and knowledge in education, pedagogy and child centered teaching methodologies on a regular basis.

The credits to all our success goes to the Nandri board and sponsors for their generous support and periodic monitoring and mentoring.

*Our recent successful examples*

### Students testimonies

I am proud and happy that I can be a role model for other girls in my community – Sarala, first graduate from Irula community in Thondamanallur village. Working as quality controller in Intimate Fashions India Ltd.



I am happy that I could support my tuition center by teaching our students while doing my degree course. Surely I will become a Government officer and fulfill my parents dream – Palimuthu, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Business Administration



I belong to a community that was at the lowest social strata in our country and once upon a time we were considered as untouchables. Though Government provides reservations in higher education and employment, it is difficult for us to get those benefits. I could dream about studying medicine because of Nandri. I am waiting to get admission in medicine.



Going to school was a nightmare to me. I used to complain all kinds of illness and stay at home and dropped out from school before completing my school finals. Monika grandma come to know about it and wrote emails to me emphasizing the importance of education. I was touched by her emails and decided to write my school final exam. My tuition teachers helped me to learn the lessons and I wrote the exam. I passed four subjects and failed in one subject. Then I went to learn beautician course and tailoring. I teach tailoring to the girls in our village and run my own beauty clinic.





Thanks for providing transport for going to high school in nearby village. We will complete our studies successfully



Happy children and proud mothers after admitting the children in Government High School in Chengalpattu. Children moved from their village to nearby town. A healthy trend





We are not teaching; we are transforming lives – Thank you Nandri