

Meet the people: Shanthakumari

Slide 1

My name is Shanthakumari and I am from Chembakolli. I live with my father, Sivarajan, my mother, Sumathi, and my younger brother Manimaran.

Slide 2

My father works as an animator for the Adivasi Munnetra Sangham (AMS) in the Devarshola area. My father and mother both work on the land. We grow coffee, ginger and pepper.

Slide 3

I like living in Chembakolli because it is beautiful. It is a bit hard when it rains. We have to watch out for wild animals like elephants!

Slide 4

I wake up at six in the morning. After washing and changing, I get my hair tied by my mother and then I sweep the house. I eat breakfast and leave home at half past seven. I get back home at five. In the holidays I help with bringing water and washing pots and clothes.

Slide 5

In my free time I read books. I also like to play with my friends Banumathi, Nithya and Nivya. We play runner and catcher. Sometimes we play house and pretend to cook and take care of the children. I also play with my little brother, he is only three years old.

Meet the people: Indira

Slide 1

My name is Indira. This is me in the middle with my daughter, Maya, and my mother. I am from the Mullakurumba tribe. I grew up in Onimoola village with my parents and four sisters. Now I live in Gudalur, with my family, and work at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital, ASHWINI.

Slide 2

I trained as a nurse at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital in 1993 and I did nursing for 12 years. When the hospital needed a pharmacist, they paid for my studies so that I could qualify to work in the pharmacy. I did a two year course, which I completed in 2007. Since then I have been working in the hospital pharmacy.

Slide 3

ASHWINI was founded in 1990 to provide health care to the Adivasi people of the Gudalur Valley. There are five different tribes in this valley: Paniyas, Bettakurumbas, Mullakurumbas, Kattunaickens and Irulas. We prioritise access for tribal patients but on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays we also see non-tribals. We have 50 beds in the hospital and we also see out-patients. On our busier days we usually see around 120 people.

Slide 4

I am responsible for ordering and managing our drug stocks. I order medicines for the hospital wards and the hospital pharmacy, where patients get their prescriptions. I also make sure that our 8 Area Centres and our Mobile van are stocked with the medicines they need. The Mobile van goes out to see Adivasi patients in the Gudalur, Devala, Devarshola and Srimadurai areas.

Slide 5

Our hospital has tribal and non-tribal nurses and doctors. Most of the doctors practice using modern medicine but we also have one Ayurvedic doctor, Mahesh, who practices traditional Ayurvedic medicines. He prescribes remedies made from medicinal herbs.

Slide 6

The government gives us Rs50,000 worth of free medicines every three months or so, for our tribal patients. To keep the cost of hospitalisation and treatment down, most Adivasis also pay into our Health Insurance Scheme. They pay a small premium each month and only pay Rs10 for their prescriptions.

Slide 7

This is my family. My husband, Surendiran, works at Vidyodaya – the Adivasi school. We have two children: Maya is 14 years old and Magesh is 11 years old.

Slide 8

This is me with Surendiran's family.

Meet the people: Balakrishnan

Slide 1

My name is Balakrishnan. I work as an Education Co-ordinator in Devala. My wife is Srija and she works in the office at Vidyodaya School. I have two daughters. The older one is called Nithya and she is 4 years old. Our younger daughter was born just a few weeks ago!

Slide 2

I have worked here for the AMS since 1993. The AMS (Adivasi Munnetra Sangam) is an organisation that was set up by the Adivasi people. It supports local tribal people in areas such as land rights, health, education and savings. In this picture I am leading an activity at a camp for Adivasi young people in Devala.

Slide 3

I am in charge of running all the educational programmes in Devala. I help to organise and lead camps for children, support our village librarians and run after school activities. Here I am performing a drama about how to help someone with tuberculosis.

Slide 4

This is a view from the education centre in Devala. We are surrounded by beautiful forest and tea plantations. The Adivasi people own the tea estate here. All the profits are used to help people in the community through health, education and housing programmes.

Slide 5

Many Adivasi people have tea gardens growing outside their houses. Most of the tea picking is done by women. It takes a lot of practice to pick the tender buds with both hands. In the rainy season it is particularly hard work as it is cold and wet and there are lots of leeches.

Slide 6

This is my wife, Srija. She is an office administrator at Vidyodaya School. One job she does is to look after all the savings accounts of the children in the school. All pupils have a saving account managed by the school. The children bring in spare coins and notes when they can to deposit into their account. They can withdraw money if it's needed to pay for school equipment and exam entrance fees.

Slide 7

Here I am standing outside my new house.

Slide 8

Here's the newest addition to our family.

Photograph credit: ACCORD

Meet the people - Bindu

Slide 1

My name is Bindu. I am from the Mullakurumba tribe and I live in the village of Nedungodi which is in Erumad district. I am training to be a teacher at Vidyodaya School.

Slide 2

There are 17 trainee teachers on our course. We are eight boys and nine girls aged from 16 to 24. We study lots of subjects here like maths, Tamil, English, social studies, science, arts and crafts. We also learn about Adivasi History and Culture.

Slide 3

Vidyodaya School is very different to the school that I went to. At my school when some children didn't understand the lessons the teachers didn't have time to help them. Here the teachers try to make sure that all the children do.

Slide 4

I have four brothers and one sister. My younger sister is studying in class 10 and my younger brother is studying in college in Gudalur. All the others are older than me. We all live together.

Slide 5

We have some land where we grow paddy (rice). We also have coffee and tea and have planted bananas and vegetables. This is my father.

Slide 6

My dream is to learn everything that I can during my training so that I can go back to my village to teach there. I want to make sure that no Adivasi child drops out of school.

Meet the people: Ishwaran

Slide 1

My name is Ishwaran. I have worked for ASHWINI since 1996. First I was a health animator in Sri Madurai, about 10 km from Gudalur. For the last two years I have worked as a health co-ordinator at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital.

Slide 2

ASHWINI (Association for Health Welfare in the Nilgiris) is a charity that was set up to provide health care for Adivasi people in Gudalur valley. I did my training at the hospital. My job is a busy one. I make the schedules for the doctors' and nurses' visits to the field (villages) and meetings. I help to look after the patients when they come here. I make sure that they are comfortable and talk to the health animator from their village about the patients. I'm in charge of the tuberculosis (T.B.) programme and I also go to the villages to do sickle cell screening. Sickle cell anaemia and tuberculosis are two common illnesses here.

Slide 3

I live with my family in the village of Kanjikoili which is about a 20 minute drive from Gudalur. My wife is called Lata and we have two girls, Ashwini and Ashwathi. Lata works as an accountant in the ACCORD office. Ashwini and Ashwathi go to Vidyodaya School in Gudalur.

Slide 4

In my free time I like spending time with my children and watching cricket and football matches. I also help my wife at home.

Meet the people: Jayanthi

Slide 1

My name is Jayanthi and I live in the village of Veramanga, in Ayyankolli. I am fifteen years old and I am studying in the tenth standard at a government school near my village.

Slide 2

Nandini and I are the librarians in our village. There are 34 libraries running in different Adivasi villages in the Gudalur valley. The libraries are looked after by village librarians aged between 11 and 15 years old.

Slide 3

We have books and reading cards in Tamil. We also have puzzles to play and we are hoping to get some English books and paper and crayons for drawing.

Slide 4

Our village library has only been going for a few months. We store our books and puzzles in a metal trunk and get them out when we need them. Other village libraries are much bigger and have cupboards.

Slide 5

We mostly run it on Sundays and in the school holidays. We help the children to read and study and keep records of the books that each child is reading.

Slide 6

Twenty-nine children in the village use our library. They are aged between 5 and 12 years old. Before the library started the children just wanted to play and weren't interested in reading. Now they want to read and come to ask us to open up the library!

Meet the people: Nibuna

Slide 1

My name is Nibuna. I am sitting second from left with my friends. Our names are (from left to right) Sruthilaya, Nibuna, M Badichi and CK Badichi. We are Village Librarians in Chembakolli. We go to Vidyodaya school, in Gudalur, and are in Standard 8 and 10.

Slide 2

Village librarians are children who volunteer to run small libraries from their homes. Most villages have one village library but in Chembakolli there are two because the houses are spread apart over a large area. We have one in M Badichi's house for the Bettakurumba tribe and one at the balwadi (creche) for the Kattunayakan tribe. There are two librarians for each of the libraries. This is a picture of the Kattunayakan library blackboard.

Slide 3

All four village librarians in Chembakolli go to Vidyodaya school. Some of the other children from Chembakolli also go to Vidyodaya but the others go to the government school and the GTR school (Government Tribal Residential school). Some don't go to school at all. That is why we have village libraries.

Slide 4

Here are CK and M Badichi. They trained for 6 months to be village librarians. They learnt to teach games and songs and how to make storytelling and reading fun. They also learnt to keep records of which children come to the library and which books they read.

Slide 5

This is the Bettakurumba library. We run the library on Saturdays and Sundays. Children come to the library and we give them books and puzzles. We play games, we sing and we dance. We read to the little ones and we teach them using jigsaws, pictures and maps. Most of the children who come are aged between 7 and 10.

Slide 6

At the Bettakurumba library we keep the books and puzzles in a trunk. We have reading materials in English and in Tamil. Every few months we bring our reading cards and books to the library at Vidyodaya and we swap them for different books.

Slide 7

Here I am with Sruthilaya at the Kattunayakan library. I am on the right, wearing purple.

Slide 8

We like being village librarians because we can help children to read and it improves our reading too. It is also fun – especially when we sing and dance. Many children have only ever read from school textbooks, so we try to make reading at the libraries as fun and interesting as possible.

Meet the people: Nisha

Slide 1

My name is Nisha. I am from the Bettakurumba tribe. I am a Trainee Teacher. I live with my parents, my grandmother, my 2 brothers and 2 sisters, in the village of Muthirakolli. While I do my teacher training course I am staying at the Centre on the Vidyodaya School campus in Gudalur.

Slide 2

Here I am with the other trainee teachers. The AMS, an organisation of adivasi people, initially set up Study Centres in our villages, to educate tribal children who had dropped out of school. The Study Centres were difficult to run because they didn't have enough good teachers, so they had the idea of running a teacher training course. Once we complete our training course we will go back to our villages and we will run the Study Centres.

Slide 3

This is Rama. She teaches the trainee teachers. There are 15 trainees: 8 girls and 7 boys. We study Maths, English, Tamil, Psychology, Philosophy, Science, Social Studies, Planning, Adivasi Culture, Challenges in Education, and Health.

Slide 4

This is me during a lesson with some of the other trainees. I left school in 2006, after completing Standard 7 (this would be Year 8 in the UK). Most of the trainees either studied to Standard 8 or 10. We left for various reasons like illness, the school being too far away or to earn money.

Slide 5

I'm doing this course so that I can help the children in my village to get a better education. I am enjoying the teacher training a lot.

Slide 6

I am not nervous about teaching. We have practiced teaching in the classroom at Vidyodaya and it was a good experience. I will be friends with the children and teach them what I know.

Meet the people: Ramesh

Slide 1

My name is Ramesh. I live in Gudalur with my family. I am from the Bettakurumba tribe. I studied at Vidyodaya School and graduated in 2005. I am now volunteering for the Shola Trust for one year.

Slide 2

The Shola Trust is a charity involved in nature conservation. We educate people about the importance of protecting local forests.

Slide 3

This is an Indian Rock Python. I am learning how to rescue snakes as part of my job. Snakes sometimes accidentally go into people's houses and are killed because people are afraid of them. I catch them and take them to the forest where they will not disturb anyone and will be safe.

Slide 4

A famous snake handler, Madhu Anna, is training me. He has taught me about the different types of snakes and the risks. He has also taught me how to handle snakes using a tong and hook. So far I've only tried with non-venomous snakes but I go with him to rescue all types of snake, and I hold the bag for them to go inside.

Slide 5

When we get a call to rescue a snake, we go to the place where the snake is and we put it into a bag. We don't touch the snake's head and we don't hurt it. We use a tong and hook to guide the snake into a bag. Then we make sure the bag is securely fastened. We take the bag to the forest, away from any houses, and we release the snake into the wild again. We have to take photos when we release the snakes, as evidence for the Forest Department, to prove that we haven't killed or sold the snakes.

Slide 6

These are spectacled cobras. There are many different types of snake living here, including various species of cobra, vipers, the rat snake and the rock python. Some are big and some are small.

Slide 7

This is a King Cobra. Some snakes are venomous, some are semi-venomous and some are non-venomous. Part of the problem is that people don't usually know the difference so they are afraid of them all.

Slide 8

My parents are not happy about me learning to handle snakes. They are worried in case I get bitten by a venomous snake. I can learn the safest way of handling snakes, but it will always be risky. Animals are unpredictable and snakes are very fast, but I am becoming more confident as I gain experience and we always take precautions.

Meet the people: Subramani

Slide 1

My name is Subramani. I am from the Paniya tribe. I live in Kothervayal village, just outside Gudalur town, with my family.

Slide 2

I studied at Vidyodaya School. For the last six years I have been working for Just Change making soap at the Soap Unit. I also teach Adivasi communities how to make soap in their villages.

Slide 3

Just Change India is a company that was set up in 2006 because local Adivasi farmers and craftsmen didn't want to sell their products to big multi-national companies. We realised that if we link up directly with communities that want to buy our products, we all get a better deal. We keep ownership of our products so we can make sure that we get a fair price and the people who buy our products aren't over-charged.

Slide 4

Just Change now have a range of products. As well as soap we make and sell umbrellas and bags. We also have tea and pepper that come from the Adivasi estate in Devala. We have honey, from Chembakolli, and coconut oil that we get from Calicut. We have many artefacts made by Adivasi people in local villages: flutes, fans, dustpans, spoons and glasses – all made of bamboo! Each village specialises in making something different. We also sell steel pots and glasses, coffee powder, ragi and shampoo powder, that we get locally.

Slide 5

I work with three other people at the Soap Unit. We make soap, umbrellas and bags made of recycled newspaper and string. We also package all of the other Just Change products and send them to the UK, Germany and several places in India.

Slide 6

Here are some soaps. To make soap, we use coconut oil, lentil powder and lemongrass oil. We mix everything up in a big tub and then we pour it into small rings. We leave it to set and then we remove the soap from the rings. The soap is ready to use after 21 days.

Slide 7

Here I am with the soap we've made.