

Ayikudi Youth Conference

05 - 07 January, 2023

Amar Seva Sangam, Ayikudi



The group picture at the Let's Make A Difference-ASSA conference in January, 2023

History

In the last 29 years, Let's Make A Difference has done over 100 conferences in various parts of the country and yet, in January 2023, it was the first time that a Let's Make A Difference conference was conducted in the southern part of India. Mr Shankara Raman, the secretary of Amar Seva Sangam, Ayikudy [ASSA] in 2018 was invited as a guest speaker in the Let's Make A Difference National Youth Conference. He has kept in touch with Let's Make A Difference since then.

Two of the Let's Make A Difference volunteers had visited Mr Shankara Raman and Mrs Pushpa in Amar Seva Sangam in Ayikudi which is envisioned as the "Valley for the differently abled" in October of 2022 to gauge the campus and see if a conference was possible. The warm-hearted people at Amar Seva Sangam were more than excited about the idea of conducting a Let's Make A Difference conference at their center. Keeping the exams in mind, the dates were finally decided - 5,6,7 January, 2023!

This conference was unique in one other way - the participants predominantly understood and spoke their local language - Tamil. The course convener and the visiting Let's Make A Difference

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team took the support of the local volunteering team to translate English to Tamil so the essence of every session was conveyed.

The Conference

The Let's Make A Difference Amar Seva Sangam conference was inaugurated in the evening on 5 January with 170 students attending from classes 9, 10 and 11. The participants were introduced to IOFC, Let's Make A Difference and Asia Plateau. The volunteers sang the song "Chaliye Na", inviting the participants to join hands to bring about a change! A group discussion followed where the participants introduced themselves.

The participants listened with rapt attention as the course convener spoke about Quiet Time and how it helped bring a change in his life. Many participants came forward to share with the gathering about their Quiet Time thoughts.

"I want to have a loving attitude towards everyone around me. I realized that I get angry often. I am jealous of the attention that my parents give to my brother. I sometimes get this selfish feeling that my parents should only give attention to me. I also lie a lot and have never thought of the consequences. I want to change." - Participant during the morning sharing.



Students are seen writing in their Quiet Time diaries

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During the planning meetings, the principal of the Siva Saraswathi Vidyalaya Higher Secondary School mentioned that the students did not study to learn. The only reason they studied and came to school was to get marks. This was partly because this is all their parents expected them to do. To address this, during the session of *Pyramid of Life*, the course convener and the volunteers spoke about what is required to have a well-rounded career - Habits, short- and long-term goals, and good utilization of one's time. This was complemented by the session on concentration.

The participants wrote in their exercise sheets about how they would achieve their goals and shared it in their groups. This forced them to not only think about what they want to do in life but also how they would achieve it.



Three group discussions were held at the conference

Parents and teachers play a crucial role in reiterating the topics spoken about during the conference. The coordinating team felt that it was important to bring the parents on the same page. They were invited on the last day. The course convener briefed them about the conference, Quiet Time and encouraged them to listen to their children - not for the sake of responding but in the spirit of honest conversation. A few parents came forward and shared how their children had apologized to them the previous evening after attending the first day of the conference.

Visits

Field visit to the homes of children with physical disability - Amar Seva Sangam runs an early intervention program. The program's goal is to help society, families, and parents identify children with disabilities at a young age (0–6 years) and rehabilitate them for better development using modern techniques. The Let's Make A Difference volunteering team visited the homes of children with various types of disabilities with a lead physiotherapist. They saw how young physiotherapists work hard on the field to identify children with disabilities, and how they help them with treatment, have regular home visits, and save them from a higher risk of illness due to the effects of sedentary life by providing therapy to them.

Tour of the Amar Seva Sangam - Mrs Pushpa showed the Let's Make A Difference team around the Amar Seva Sangam campus, a home for physically challenged poor children that provides medical care, appliances, and education.

- Day care center for 82 children with special needs.
- Workshop for making calipers.
- Medical testing facilities with physiotherapy and care giving services.
- Post acute care center for spinal injuries.
- IGNOU classroom.
- Advanced Information Technology Lab.
- Notebook making and bookbinding unit.
- Tailoring and garment production.
- Typewriting section.
- Soft skills training section.
- Goshala and Vermiculture Unit.

A visit to Shri Kashi Vishwanath Swami temple - In the evening of January 6, Mr. Shanmugam, the CEO of ASSA, arranged a trip to Shri Kashi Vishwanath Swami temple in Tenkasi which houses the murtis of Lord Viswanatha and Goddess Ulagamman. Mr Shanmugam led us to the temple, which was built in the 15th century and spans 4 acres of land. The temple was built by King Jatilavarman - Arikesari Pandia. The temple is famous for the Rajagopura, a 178-foot-tall tower; 9 floors of aesthetic beauty. It also has numerous mini-temples on the premises.

The rehabilitation orchard - The Let's Make A Difference team visited the rehabilitation orchard - a facility for the development of flora and fauna, yoga, and relaxation. 15 acres of fertile land with an open well and drip irrigation generates a good yield of fruits like amla. The idea for an orchard was inspired by the former president of India - late Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, who introduced the concept of social forestry to Mr Shankara Raman in 2013 when they met.



Let's Make A Difference Volunteer team with members of Amar Seva Sangam

Annexure 1 - Feedback

The following is some of the feedback given by the students -

- From this training I learn by myself. I must reach my long term goal.
- I will not cheat my parents from now on. I will be honest with my parents.
- I won't neglect my grandmother's love and affection.
- I won't tear my notebooks and I will keep them clean.
- The pyramid of life was my favorite session.
- I will follow my Quiet Time thoughts every day.
- I will be honest with my parents and teachers.
- The concentration exercise is very helpful for me.
- I like the Quiet time and I will follow it every day.
- I will correct my mistakes. I will love everyone.
- I will destroy bad habits. I will learn good habits.
- I will respect my mother and father.
- I will use my time to improve my career.
- I liked Quiet Time because it showed me who I am.
- From now on, I will be very kind to all.

- I will learn english and speak english. I want to change my bad habits.
- I learnt to be honest. I will be very sincere in my studies.
- I will follow quiet time, I ask my friends to follow quiet time.
- I will use my time to improve my career.
- I slowly came out of my Ego.
- I will respect my relatives and friends.
- I understood that I should not have Ego through this conference.
- I will avoid using my cellphone while studying.
- I like to practice concentration exercises.
- I broke my ego like the coconut that was shown in the morning session
- My parents showed me love and affection after my change in behavior.
- Let's Make A Difference makes me think differently and has changed my behavior.

Annexure 2 - Sharing after Quiet Time sessions

Note - The following were shared in Tamil and have been translated to English.

- I love my grandfather. I get angry when he corrects me though. I thought about Honesty and how I lied all the time about studying. I get angry that my parents support my sister and show affection towards her, I feel that I have an ego.
- I want to love everyone. I get angry a lot and realize later. I'm jealous of my brother. I feel that my parents should only give me attention and I now realize that it is selfish. I want to change
- I realized that I lie a lot. I love my dad a lot and I do not want to be the reason that my parents fight.
- I am jealous of my brother and get angry with him a lot. I will be nicer to my family.
- I feel like I speak to my friends only when I have a need. I want to spend more time with my parents.
- My grandmother passed away. I used to avoid her and now realize that she loved and cared for me a lot. I regret this.