



KATCHIPEDU NOOK SET-UP REPORT

2022

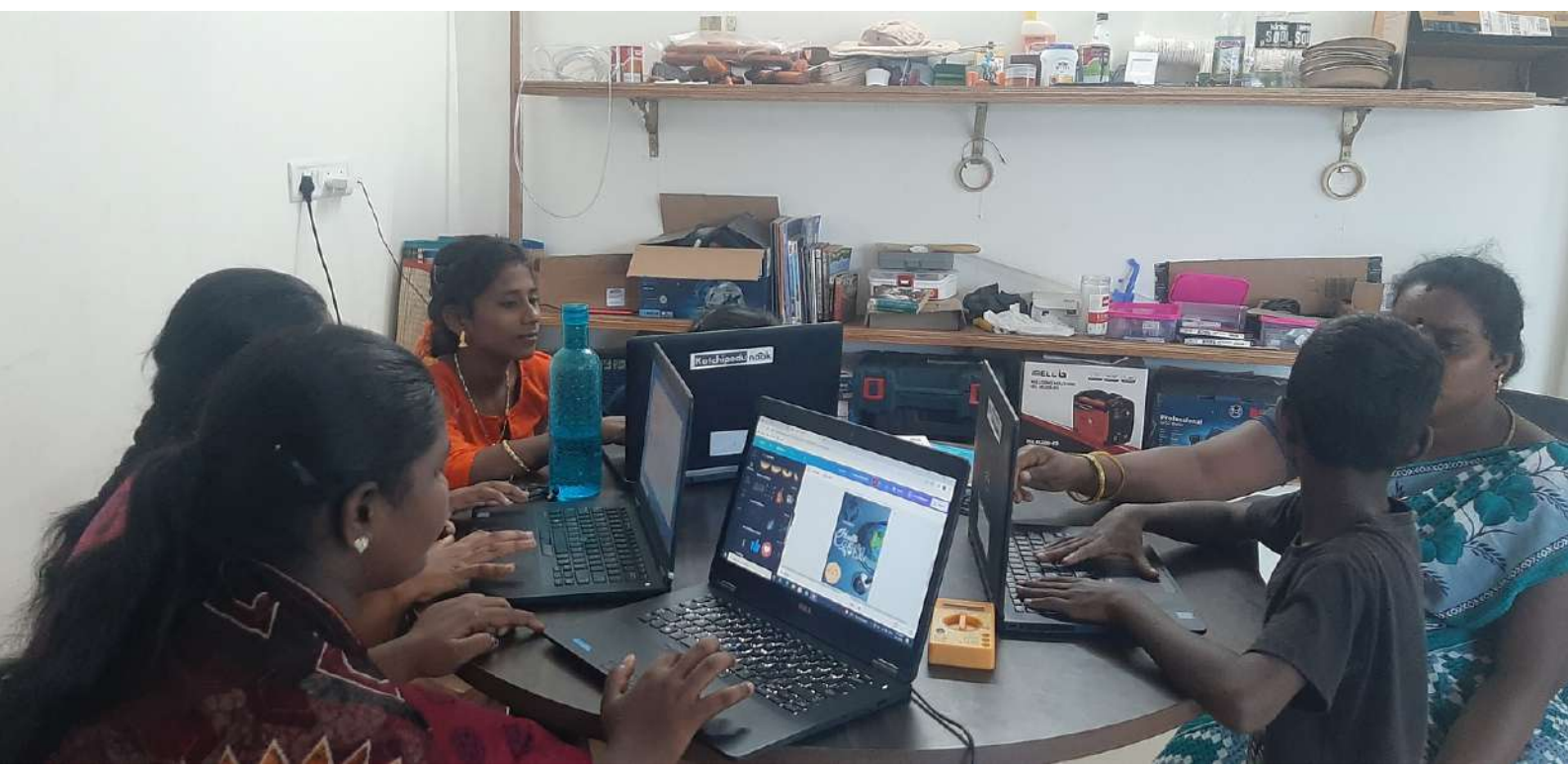
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PROJECT DEFY

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The Story So Far

The Katchipedu Nook is a fully operational self-learning space in the Katchipedu village of Sriperumbudur in Tamilnadu. The space began its operations in the Month of April 2022. The nooks are always a place for the learners to find themselves through the pathways of self-learning and community building. Since the beginning, we have completed the induction phase in the nook. The induction phase is like kickstarting the learning processes by starting the induction for the cycle.

At present, 17 learners in 6 teams are exploring different skills and learning areas in the Nook.

We particularly want to thank our partners IFNB and Hans Hermann Voss-Stiftung for their support and hope you will find this report informative and fruitful. We also thank our Partners for Change, IGCS (IIT Madras), and RGNIYD and look forward to some exciting collaborations in the future

This report is an attempt to elucidate the initial setup phase of the nook and how it came to get started. We have also attempted to cover the next steps.



Project Overview

The Katchipedu nook is the first nook started in the Tamilnadu state. It has been made possible through the collaboration of Project DEFY, IGCS at IIT Madras, RGNIYD Sriperumbudur, and community members of Katchipedu Village, Sriperumbudur with support from Hans Hermann Voss Stiftung and IFNB.

Project DEFY is the knowledge partner of the Project.

As an owner of the Nook Concept, Project DEFY provides all relevant know-how, training, and knowledge transfer to ensure successful and effective operations. Abhijit Sinha, Rupam Singh, and Nishant Kumar from Project DEFY have been leading in coordinating the set-up of the Nook and providing training, guidance, and continuous support to ensure the successful running of the operations.

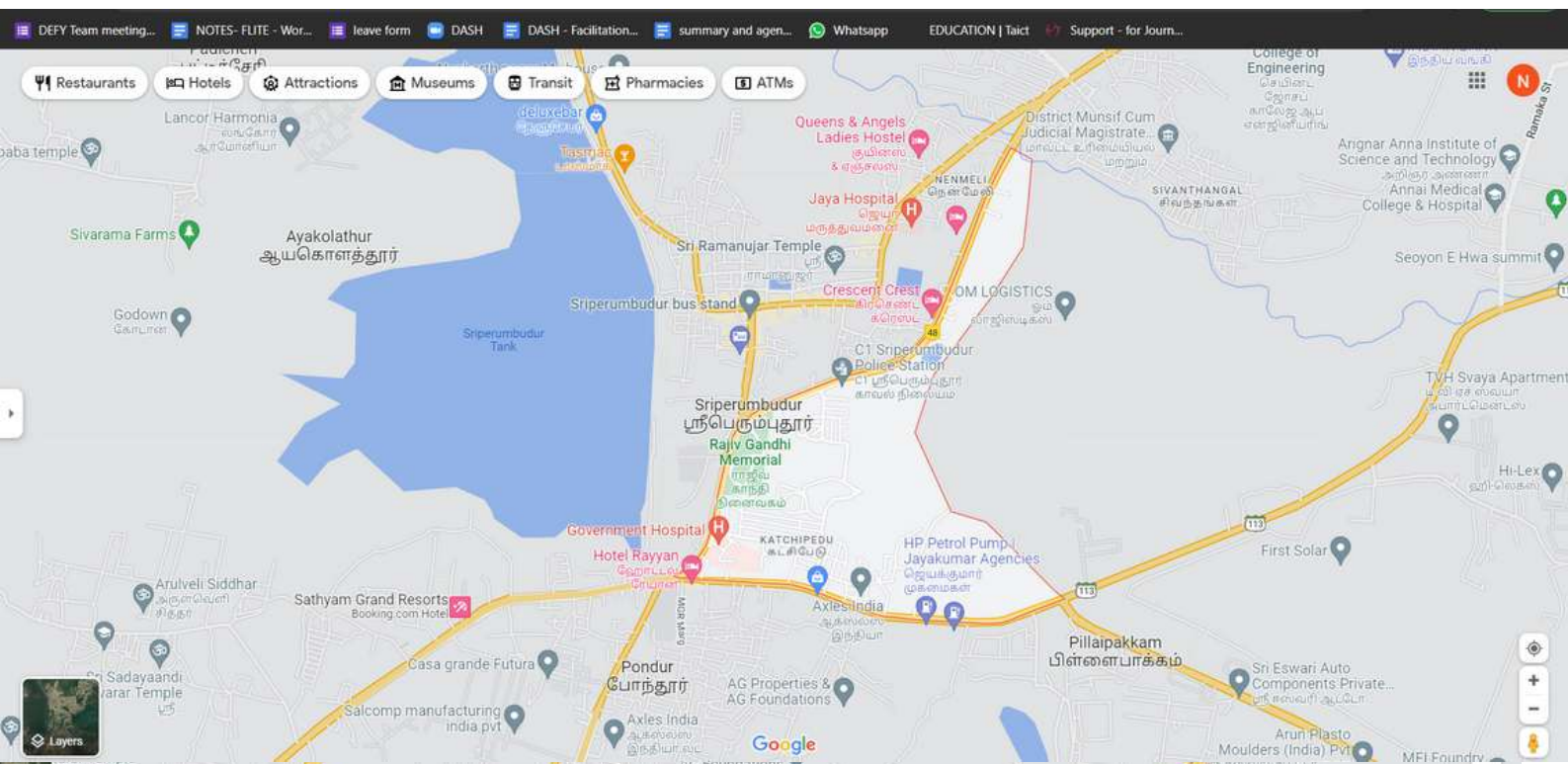
IGCS from IIT Chennai is the Project Holder and implementation organization. IGCS oversees the project management, obtaining required permission, liaising with government departments, and receiving funds from Hans Hermann Voss-Stiftung and IFNB. As an implementing organization that is running the project, IGCS procures all tools and materials and employs the Nook Fellows and volunteers working with the project. Uthra Radhakrishnan is the Program manager from IGCS along with Venkatesh S as Nook Fellow and Sona Selvam as Innovation lead.

We have Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) as our institutional partner. Dr. Lalitha S from the Social Works department has been instrumental in the Nook being able to create the initial connection with the Katchipedu community.



The Location

Katchipedu is a peri-urban village located in Sriperumbudur which comes under the town panchayat and lies in the Kancheepuram district. It is located about 45 km, southwest of Chennai, the state capital, on the Chennai-Bengaluru national highway. This village consists of 13 and 15th wards which the majority of the people belong to Adi Dravida or Dalit (so-called Untouchables) and it is situated nearly 5 kilometers from RGNID and 2 kilometers from Sriperumbudur. As per the census of India in 2011, 25 percent of the total population was involved in the primary sector category of occupation which is a cultivator and during that time the people's full-time job was farming, weaving, and animal husbandry. 10% of the population were doing secondary sector occupations which is manufacturing and construction employees and 65% of the population were involved in tertiary sector occupation which is service employees, (Source Town Panchayat Records) but The farming lands belonged to Reddy's, now they are all ended and due to the industrialization most of them doing works in industries. In terms of infrastructure the community had currently four ponds which are not maintained properly, public toilets one Aringar Anna government hospital which is located at the entrance of the community and one ration shop which is located on Kamarajar street, and one elementary school and separate community girls and boys hostel located in the village, The male population of the village is 2018 and female population is 1926. This Community is the smallest scale and is usually managed by village panchayats. However, villages like Katchipedu that sit at the crossroads of globalizing forces show that other actors and stakeholders in the region can have direct and indirect impacts on their lives and livelihoods.



The Community

The socio-economic background of this community is the majority of the people go to industries that are located in the surroundings and some of them engaged in daily wages, coolies, and so on. A number of people in the village started their own business-like water can supply, biriyani shop, tiffin center, and tailoring. The community people have natural and other resources however, it was identified that still they are facing different types of issues and challenges like poverty, and underemployment, although they have the resources of ponds which are not maintained properly and public toilets, still they face the problem of open defecation due to don't have pipeline connection and the problem of water crises and poor sanitation facility this are the major problems. Most of the youth are risk behaviors, school dropouts and unemployment combined with poverty and marginalization has led to a lot of social unrest amongst the youth and angst against the outsiders taking over our space, thus leading many to resort to illegal and crimes means to make quick money. Mainly the women in the community are really underprivileged and oppressed by many causes of gender inequality and social stigmas most of them are the breadwinner of their families. Due to peer influences, the children in the community are involved in risky behavior activities and they suffer from a lack of motivation and guidance. Kachipedu Nook is located is half km distance from the community, now we have very young learners also we try to bring some women and youth into the nook and while interacting with the community it was observed that most of the women in the village want to utilize nook space to learn something or making their livelihood by themselves and will open up from social stigmas.



Objectives of Katchipedu Nook

The foremost objective of Katchipedu Nook is to provide a safe and open environment to foster a community of self-designed learners, where they can discover their interests, curiosity, and needs. The community members can use the space and resources available to solve the challenges they face themselves. Thereby, giving back power into the hands of learners, leading to the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge that enrich the learners' lives in various ways, contribute to the creation of new livelihoods for the learners and others, or help to improve community life by addressing and solving local problems.

The specific objectives are:

- The learning space enables people from marginalized communities to acquire hands-on skills and relevant knowledge across diverse fields and areas.
- To find out learners' interests and Guide them to make projects to develop their skills
- To provide space to discuss the problems faced by learners in family, community, school, college, and working places and find out solutions.
- Introduce them to alternate education methods that improve their innovation, creativity, and livelihood
- To bring about an attitudinal change in the learners and help them to develop societal consciousness, sensibility, responsibility, and accountability
- To make Learners aware of their inner strength and help them to find new /out-of-box solutions to social problems.
- To develop a holistic life perspective among the Learners by making them study culture, traditions, habits, lifestyles, resource utilization, wastages, and its management, social problems, public administration system, and the roles and responsibilities of different persons across different social systems.
- To help Learners to initiate developmental activities in the community in coordination with public and government authorities.
- To develop entrepreneurial skills among the youths and women.



The Outreach

Below is the story of the outreach done initially by the NM Venkatesh S in his own words

"New place, new people. Excited to start the work. But it was not what I expected. More challenges. Most of the people I talked to them didn't have a good opinion about katchipedu. I was more curious about that place to know more about the community. During the training I got a basic idea about how to do outreach but implementing it in the field it's quite difficult. I found my room 3 km away from katchipedu. The first few days nook space was under construction work I had no place to go. I just started exploring the katchipedu. Every day I tried to cover a few streets to understand more about the community. The problem I faced was space it was so difficult in that temperature to walk around the villages. Sometimes I felt dehydrated and couldn't find a place to take a rest. So I started going to a juice shop and ordering some juice and taking a rest for some time and again going back to the community. Then I became friends with roadside sugarcane juice shop Sekar anna. He is my first friend in that area. so I started helping him to collect money and give juice to the customers. so finally I found a place to take rest and unlimited sugar juice. At that time I did 't know where and how to start. Then I decided to visit Anganwadi to get more details about the community, I visited a few Anganwadi but I couldn't get more details from them. The main problem I faced is as a male it is very difficult to speak to women in the community. Few women told me don't come alone if some people see talking to me they would create rumors about us. Sometimes some people stop me and enquire about me and I tried to explain about the nook. As I was roaming alone some people started suspecting me also. Then I decided it is not a good idea to meet people like this. I realized I need some support in the community to manage a difficult situation. Then I planned to visit the ward member and finally, I got the appointment and met him. Indhumathi (a ward member) and her husband Naveen Kumar, it was quite new to me to have a meeting with the political person, I explained about our projects, and they also explained about some community problems and promised me to do whatever help I needed."



Youth group and women's group

Through Dr.Lalitha and Uthra I got the contacts of Medhila and Dinesh. They helped me a lot. Through Medhila I visited other women's group members and through Dhinesh, I arranged meetings with youth group members. Ammu Akka women group member and his family Arun, Aravind (youth group member), and her daughter supported a lot for reaching more people in that area.

School

Somehow I convinced the headmistress and got permission to speak to the students. There are around 80 students and teachers, I explain about the nook and how students improve their skills and answered their questions. After that, I asked how many of them were interested almost everyone raised their hands, it was one of the most unforgettable days. After that, I can't remember many of them but everyone remembers me and whenever I go to the community they come and speak to me.



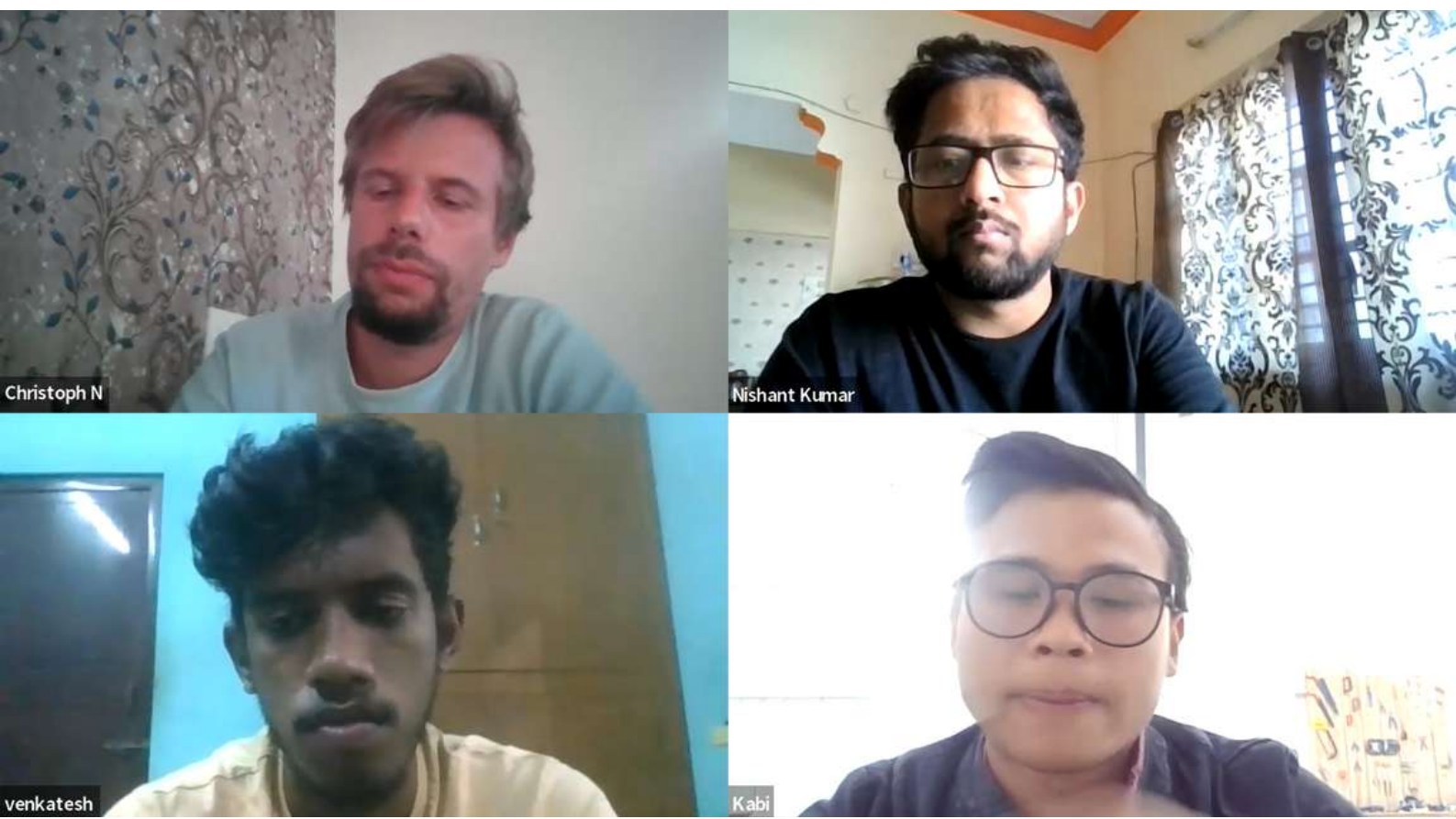
Eye camp

Ryniyd students arranged eyecamp in school. I helped them for arranging and inviting people to the camp. During that day I took my laptop and sit at the entrance of the venue. I distributed a nook poster and showed people videos about the nook and registered their names, on that day around 20 people registered for the nook and wants to know about the nook.

For the inauguration we made posters and with Rgnyid students, we distributed posters door by door in the community, many people turned up for the inauguration event and registered their names."

NM Training Program

The nook, in order to fulfill its objectives, needs some trained personnel on the ground who can facilitate the learnings of the learners in the nook and keep the space operational. We have a requirement for two persons which are the Nook Manager (NM) and Innovation Lead (IL). We have a very extensive recruitment process for the two posts. The major common requirement for both posts is the person should have an open mind to learning and developing themselves and should be open to connecting and engaging with the community. Other than that the nook manager role is more towards community engagement and managing the space. NM has to take care of the space operations. The innovation lead is more of a maker role where the person has to have the technical knowledge and the attitude of learning anything with the learners. This role is more about helping the learners technically in their learning process. Initially, we had been able to recruit a person for the nook manager role. Venkatesh was recruited way before we actually started on the ground. For all the NMs and ILs we have a training program to help them get started with the learning processes in the nook and its philosophies. The training went on for around two months covering the philosophies of the self-learning ideology, alternative education, problems of the current education system, and how the nook works as a solution to them. The training also involved them being trained in the methods of outreach, daily operations, finances, and know-how of facilitation of a session.



Setup of Nook space

The nook in order to facilitate the self-learning of the learners has the basic tools and materials in a space not limited to but consisting of computers, internet, basic power tools, hand tools, art supplies, and so on along with the Nook manager and innovation lead. The physical learning space in the case of katchipedu nook is a rented 400 sq feet space in a building on the pattanul Chathram state highway near the Katchipedu village. The space is on the first floor. We also have access to the roof above which also has the washrooms. The roof above is also used for gardening purposes.

Furniture

The nook has 20 stools for sitting and 5 tables out of which one is a big 6x4x4 ft table acting as a workbench for woodworking and metalworking needs. Rest four tables are circular tables for general working purposes. We have a small storage cupboard which is used to keep the materials. We are planning to build some upcycled chairs using discarded tires. We have also built shelves and tools to board ourselves.

Toilet

The nook has a single toilet on the second floor provided by the building owner. We also have an old-styled sink there. The water tank is just above the toilet.



Beautification of the space

One of the first projects that were taken up in the nook was the beautification of the space. We have set up a garden on the 2nd floor which contains most of the vegetable and general plants like tulsi, rose, aloe vera and so on. Another one was painting the pillars in the nook room. The pillar was painted with a chessboard design. Now the learners are making some more designs on top of that.

Tools

The required materials for the nook were purchased mostly from amazon which involved most of the tools. Some of them were purchased from local markets in Chennai and Sriperumbudur. We have some basic and advanced tools for carpentry and metal working along with basic hand tools. Other than that we have materials for aari works, arts and crafts supplies, and stationery supplies.

Electricity

Currently, the nook is being run by the electricity from the supply given to the building. We have four fans and four tube lights. The power tools and laptops are used as per requirements. In the future, we will try to make nook self-sufficient in power and take it off the grid.

First aid kit and safety

The nook has a standard first aid kit box with essential medication and required materials. The Nook fellows have a basic knowledge of first aid. Better training has to be imparted to the nook in coming times.

A fire extinguisher of 4 kg is put on an accessible spot in the nook and the fellow knows how to use the extinguisher. The learners have to be trained.



Internet

The nook has a 300mbps broadband connection for all its internet needs. The connection is an e-pon from a fiber network. It has been sufficient until now considering 9 laptops and 3-4 mobiles being simultaneously in the nook hours.

Laptops:

Computers/laptops are an essential part of the nook which acts as the portal to the world of self-learning for most of the learners in the nook. The challenge in the nook was to get a decent machine within the budget. We wanted to keep laptops instead of PCs for obvious reasons. After much research and fanfare, we finally locked down to refurbished laptops from a dealer nearby. We got 9 pieces of the selected laptop along with the charger. The specs of the machine are:

DELL LATITUDE E7470

INTEL CORE - i5 6th generation

RAM - 8 GB

SSD - 256 GB

Backlight Keyboard

DISPLAY - 14' inch HD LED screen

WEBCAM - Yes

WI-FI - Yes

After receiving the laptops we sat with the learners and installed the required software in it like google chrome, da Vinci resolve, sketch up, and so on.

Garden

The garden which was set up on the second floor is called the GAIA garden. We initially planted some vegetables like ridge gourd, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, cucumber, watermelon, and other plants like tulsi, mint, aloe vera, and so on. Once the cycle begins we will be erecting a shade on the roof and planting even more plants in pots which will be DIYed.



Enrollment and Beginning

Initially, we had only Venkatesh S as the nook fellow. He had already attended the nook manager training program. After the partners had found the place for the nook, Venkatesh went to the location and started the outreach. He tried to understand the community and its needs and talk about the nook in that way. The outreach was a success. Lots of people were interested in joining the nook to fulfill their learning needs. Every time outreach was done we took down the names and numbers of the people who showed interest and then we called them all on the 25th of April 2022 for the opening day. We hadn't launched but we started the operations of the nook on the day. The first day was quite motivating for us seeing the number of people who turned up.



First Day

"We had already done the outreach and we had around 50 people interested in coming but we needed only 20 people to come for the early projects initially. So to be on the safe side we invited around 30 people for the day and planned an orientation session for them. The batch was from 6-8. In the evening people started coming in and we were taken aback a little since lots of people were coming in. By the time of starting we had 40 people in the small room of the nook. It was super noisy.

Initially, we tried controlling the crowd and making ourselves heard but we couldn't. We tried running the nameless introduction activity but no one was ready to hear. Then we had help from Abhijit in managing the crowd. We stood silent for 5 minutes, Then when everybody else stood silent then we began. We again did the nameless introduction where people have to introduce themselves for three minutes without telling their name, age, family details, education details, etc. After that, we had to do the paper tower challenge today. For this, we tried putting people into heterogeneous gender groups but they refused to do so.

Still, there was lots of drama, people hitting each other and so on which made it quite difficult to continue. But we tried setting up the culture like asking people not to hit someone else there will be consequences, asking them to greet each other by high fiving, and so on. So we ended the day with everybody breathing in and breathing out in a fun way collectively."



Second Day

"This was again a very noisy day where we got some 35 people in the nook and 15 more were interested in coming. We weren't able to have a starting and ending circle owing to the pandemonium. We just began with the paper tower challenge where people have to build a tower out of paper and tape which should be upright on its own. The one team with the highest upright tower wins.

Today we began with making heterogeneous gender groups and they all agreed to be in their groups which were pretty nice. We gave 20 minutes to the teams to build their tower. The participation was a mix of people aged 9-15 years. It was quite satisfying to see them all use their brains, thinking and discussing ideas and then implementing them there. Finally, it was time for some end discussion on how and what they thought could have been done better. But there was again pandemonium. So today we decided to take only people above 13 years of age."

"Day 3 of the nook was a day oscillating between chaos and order with more order than chaos. In any new nook, it is very important to set the culture of the nook to make the learning experience awesome for everybody involved. From this day on we had only called in people aged 13 and above. This demarcation was done so that we could begin with people who had relatively better language skills and we could communicate with them with much more ease than others and set up the culture of the nook. We had 25 people that day.



We had a super day with good discussion with learners doing the nameless introduction and then talking about their community. To promote a culture of listening and speaking we have begun storytelling where each day one of the learners tells a story. We have also divided the people into two groups where one group will paint a pillar strip in the nook and another one will do gardening in the nook and on the terrace. After three days of getting used to the space, we finally started out with a little bit of work on this day. The teams for gardening and painting were already divided so we began with the work. So the first step in doing either of the work is designing. We had three people on the gardening team and 13 on the painting team. So we split into teams and started the initial design phase. The gardening team started planning on what plants will be planted and where plants will be planted with proper design. In the same way, the painting team decided what theme will be for the painting and in that theme what all elements will be drawn and painted along with their position on the wall. We ended the day by finalizing the design. The Painting team decided to have a space-themed painting on the wall.”

And thus we started the operation in the nook. At this time the material procurement and physical setup of the space were also going on simultaneously. Finally, we finished the garden and painting in the nook and everybody was more or less accustomed to the nook. After this, we moved on to the first stage of the nook induction process, the early projects.

This all culminated in an official launch day on 17th May 2021.



Launch Day

Launch day was an outreach event for the nook. The day was designed to give the experience of the nook to the people who come for the event. A nook is a place where people can come to learn, earn and have fun. Initially, the people who came to the nook were given a tour of the place by the learners themselves, letting them know of the various things the learners learned and the guests could learn. The guest also had the option of trying out the various projects done in the nook. Then they were taken to the next level on the roof where we had made some different mocktails consisting of mango, nannari juice, ice apples, and various other ingredients. It was super fun seeing all making their own version of mocktails.

We had already distributed the poster and invitation for the launch day to the community and other people in and around Chennai. We had lots of guests from other alternative learning spaces.



Induction Program

Designed by Project DEFY, the main aim of the Induction Program is to introduce the idea of self-designed learning to the learners. Every new learner will go through the Induction Program when they enroll in the Nook. Apart from project making, the induction program tries to encourage learners to try out new areas of skills, gather confidence and make the choice of what they wish to learn. With facilitated learning sessions, we introduce new avenues of learning and skills areas to the learners that they have never explored before. With discussion and deliberation sessions, the program is intended to break the mental barriers of the learners to decide on their own learning journey instead of making choices based on family pressure and societal influence. We tried to invoke curiosity, encourage them to keep an open mind to do things outside their comfort and have fun with them.



From this phase, we followed a semi-structured routine in the Nook where the team hosted discussion sessions and various activities like team-building activities, watching movies, playing games, etc. We also conducted opening and closing circle discussions where learners shared their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and questions. In these circles, we also do a daily check-in on the progress of their projects with the larger groups. We did topic discussions, and various ice-breaking sessions and talked about challenges faced in the community. It cultivates the culture of questioning, sharing ideas, teamwork, bonding, and helping each other in the Nook. Some of the learners started leading and facilitating the discussion session even. The discussion and activities cover many topics which are beyond Nook and education. So, we encouraged learners to ask about anything and everything concerning their life, curiosity, and various societal problems.

There are Four Phases in the Induction Program with specific purposes; Early Projects, Exploration, Goal Setting, and Design Week.

Early Projects

The idea behind the Early Project is to invoke interest and create a buzz about the Nook in the community. Before we enrolled the learners and started working with them, the Nook is just an empty physical space with tools and laptops. Even if we talked about the problems of education and explained the concept of the Nook to the community, they will not remember it. So, we invited a few people to work on projects based on the criteria set out by Project DEFY where one would make people say “wow” when they see the outcome of the project, second “it should be a new or innovative project for the local community”, or “the project should be useful for the Nook”.

Based on these parameters and the challenges faced during the pandemic, we decided to work on the following projects:

Heat beating hat:

The time during the early project was the hottest time in and around Chennai. It was really hard to be outside those days in that heat. That is why at that time the team came up with the idea of a hat that could be used to beat the heat. The hat was supposed to have a fan attached along with some cold juice with a sipping pipe attached. Then we added the idea of putting a mystifier in that so that the water could be turned into a cold mist. All of that was put on the hat. It was fun to wear that in the community.



Foldable backpacking chair:

The current nook space is very small. A bigger space was needed but it could not be arranged. So naturally, we had to use creativity to manage the space and place materials in it properly. So we made a foldable backpacking chair that could also be carried like a backpack and help us during the outreach, and of course, solve the problem of space in the nook.



Explorations

The explorations are a method to introduce new learning and skill areas to the learners. In the katchipedu community, the people are still living with the conventional thought of learning i.e. what a boy should and can learn and what a girl should and can learn. Even that list is very limited in their minds. The explorations help them broaden their horizons, try new things and boost their confidence that yeah they can do new things and learn it actually. It is kind of the stepping stone through which people move to find what they really like to do. The explorations have fast-paced facilitated sessions which are designed to invoke curiosity and enable the learners to pursue a broad range of new and exciting hands-on activities and projects every two to three days. This helps learners to make better choices about what they want to do in the next stage which is goal setting.

Based on the inputs from the learners about their interests and the intent of creating exposure to new fields the team decided to facilitate the following sessions :

Basics of Computers and email:

Most of the learners were new to computers and were using them for the first time. It was a good call to take them through the basics of using the computer and setting up their email accounts. Now all of them have emails and can register for other services too using those mail IDs. So this was a good beginning.



Story Writing

In a marginalized community being self-expressive or even expressive at all is a big plus for the people so that they can understand how they and others around them are feeling and be able to convey it to themselves and others. This helps a lot in fostering communication. Of course development of language is also an important part of this. So we did a session on story writing where learners wrote a story in a team of two in the language of their choice and then they had to read the story to everyone else.



Toy making

Nook is all about fun, learning, and earning. So we wanted to combine the fun and learning part in a session together in beginning. What is better than making your own toy all by yourself and then playing with it? So the learner learned about various kinds of toys and then proceeded to design their own kind of toy. Finally, they built their version using various materials like cardboard, wood, waste materials, and electronics. It was fun.

Oyil atam and parai

The katchipedu community is a music-driven community. So it was only natural to have some dance and music in the exploration phase. Oyil atam is a traditional folk dance of Tamilnadu and Parai is a traditional drumming art form mostly used for protest and street plays. So for 5 days learners learned the oyilattam and parai and then performed in the nook itself.

Jewellery making

The art of making beautiful things from things around us is always a happy endeavour which leads us to new discoveries about our surroundings and makes us more aware. So we facilitated a session on jewellery making using items around us which are not being used at all. The happiness on the face of the learners was priceless.



Introduction to electronics and Arduino

Exposure to new tech which people are generally not able to see around is also important. Thus we added an introduction to electronics and Arduino session in the explorations where the learners learned about the basics of electronics and Arduino programming and understood the possibilities that they could explore with these new learnings.



Carpentry

This was another hands-on session that was much required in the nook. One the most active sessions where everyone got to use machines. The session was done in a client-designer sort of way where one person becomes a client and another becomes a furniture designer. The designers then go on to build a small prototype of the furniture the client wished to have. This session was an action-packed 3 days session for the learners.



Goal Setting

The learners were exposed to various learning areas in the exploration phase and now the next phase was goal setting. Goal setting phase is the time when the learners have to start thinking about their self-designed learning journey and make choices about what they want to learn based on their needs, aspirations, and curiosity.

The learners have to decide on their learning goals which are mostly projects for the next three months. The phase took 10 days to complete. The learners had to think about what they wanted to learn in the nook based on the concept of the ikigai. We asked them to list down areas they want to work in and then we proceeded to make teams of 3 people having similar areas.

Once the teams were formed, we moved on to setting the SMAART goals (Specific, Measurable, Aspirational, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) for the teams.

This was followed by intense discussion and brainstorming with the teams and the facilitators to make sure that the projects are indeed SMAART and something which the teams and the individuals really want to do. All this questioning, research, and deliberations made learners think a lot, and get better clarity on their projects and their way ahead.



Finally 13 learners in 5 teams set the following Smaart goals for the first goal cycle of the katchipedu nook.

Name of the learners	SMAART Goal
Sugitha, Kanishka, Harish	IN three months we are going to make one automatic dressing table 5ftx2ftx2ft with rotating storage racks and switches.
Sanjai Lalu, Gunalakshmi	In three months we will create 7 chains, 6 rings, 7 earrings using epoxy raisins, wood, cloths etc and we will add electronics in it like LED lights.
Sanjana, Tamil, Vaishnavi	In three months we will all learn piano, violin and drum separately and create cover songs for 3 songs each and then create a cover in a band together for a song.
R Rohin, Sabari	In three months we will create a 5 minutes youtube video of a day in the nook by shooting and editing the video.
Keerthi, kaviya, Nithisha	In three months we will create a two cloth with attached umbrella and raincoat which will be controlled electronically.

We started the countdown of 90 days to achieve the goals set after setting the goals. The counter is maintained by writing the number of days left on the whiteboard in the nook. It shows the learner how much time is left and motivates them to keep marching towards their goals.



Design Week

Design Week was the phase to help learners understand their projects from the lens of the community. Earlier this the learners already worked on finding what they like to do and made it into the SMAART Goal. Now the task at hand was to understand the communities' take on it. How people in the community saw this and did it solve any issues or would they take the project if completed? This is also a phase when learners try to get feedback from the community before starting the project.



Step 1: Empathise

It went on for two days when we discuss empathy and sympathy and the difference between them. Then the learners found out and wrote about the target audience for their projects. This was followed by a role play on how to go talk to the target audience taking care of empathizing. All this prepared the learners for the next thing to do which was going to the community and talking to the people about their projects and getting feedback and insights.

The act of going and talking in the community was a real deal breaker in terms of learners taking lead and ownership over their projects. After the first couple of people, we didn't even have to prompt them to speak, they just went themselves to people and spoke about their projects. They answered all the questions that were thrown at them. We were so happy to see that change in them. Venkat and Sona realized the impact of the nook to a great extent that day.



Step 2: Prototyping and user feedback

Ideally, the next step would be to sit down ideate, find the problem associated with the project and consecutively find the various different ways other than the project to solve the problem. But since we have been dealing with kids in the age range 10-14 who are also impatient, we had to skip that part.

The community people during the last visit had expressed their desire to see the samples or prototypes of the projects, so we spent the next 4 days making the prototypes, and then we went back again to the community, showed them the prototypes, and got more feedback from them. The learners were happy with the encouragement and suggestions received from the community.



Add ons

Regular community visits and trust building

One of the most important activities we have been doing in the nook is continuous community engagement through various different means mostly involving dialogues and hanging out with the community members. The key to doing this is consistency. We go to the community every Tuesday and Thursday and hang out with various community members. This activity can be broken down into :

- => Interaction with new community members who do not know about the nook
- => Interaction with parents and family members of learners who come to the nook
- => Interaction with community members who know about nook but are not able to come.

This is making the nook totally a part of the community and the trust of the community members is being built up.

Saturdays Potluck

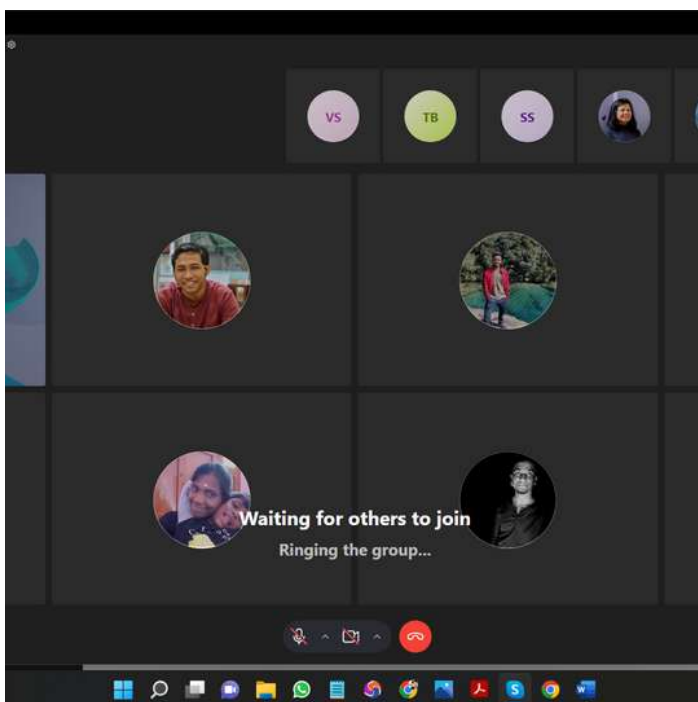
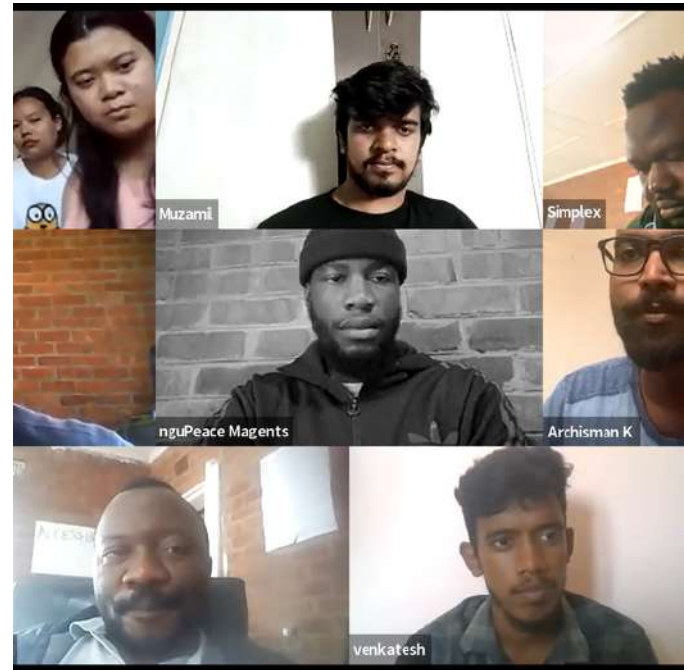
The learners have a maximum of two hours on weekdays to come to the nook. So to compensate for that we opened the nook for a full day on Saturdays from morning to evening. This gives the learners enough time to catch up with their weekly milestones. We also introduced Saturday's potluck where we all bring our food from home and we all eat together in the nook. This has been a ritual that has brought everyone really together and fostered a sense of community.



Learning and training support for the NMs

Nook Forum Call

The Nook Forum Call is a platform designed by Project DEFY where all the Nook Managers/Fellows gather and share their learnings, exchange ideas, discuss the challenges, brainstorm solutions and learn skills together. It is also a platform to minimize the distances among the Nooks and build a community of educators. Every Wednesday, we organize the forum calls, and sessions are facilitated by NFs and DEFY Office Team members. NMs can bring up any topic or issue for discussion. There is no restriction in selecting the topic for the discussion or sessions. Skilling sessions on various software and topics are very regular in this call. Venkat and Sona have been attending the forum call regularly and are going to conduct sessions soon.



Nook Update Calls

The nook update call is a weekly call organized by the Project DEFY operations team to keep themselves updated with the latest happenings in the nook. In the call, the Nm and IL tell about the proceeding of the nook for the week and give updates, and share stories. This keeps the operations team up to date with the challenges and problems also happening in the nook. This is another way of providing support to the nook manager and innovation lead in the nook.

Nook Health Monitoring Call

This is another reflective call that has been happening monthly with the nook fellows and the Project DEFY operational team. Through this call, we try to gauge the health of the nook in terms of the number of people in the nook, quality of projects, the social media presence, events in the community, and so on to help the fellows know the areas of nook is struggling and help them to get back to speed.

CORE Conference

Consortium Of Regenerative Educators(CORE) is an annual conference organized by DEFY Team members where we invite all the team members and partners working on the Nook Project to discuss the way ahead and collectively design the future of learning and education through a grassroots movement, putting the needs of local communities first. The first edition of CORE was held from 6th June to 12th June in Dharamsala, India. Venkatesh from Katchipedu nook participated in the CORE. Being a new nook he got exposure to the work being done in various other nooks. He also understood the challenges being faced by those nooks and the steps being taken to overcome them. It was overall a learning experience for him.



Future Plans and Challenges

Completion of the 1st Goal Cycle and Exhibition week

We are looking forward to completing the first cycle in 2nd week of October by achieving all the goals set by the learners. We are closely following up with all the teams with regular check-ins and problem-solving. The nook fellows are closely working with the teams providing them their full support.

The completion of the cycle will give way to exhibition week where we will invite the community members and local people. Parents of learners, government officials, and friends of the nook a grand showcase of the projects made by the learners. This will provide a platform for learners to get feedback and improve their public speaking skills and of course, get a confidence boost.

Creation of the GAIA Garden

We Plan to use the terrace on the first floor to develop our GAIA garden. We have already set up some plants which are growing. We plan to put even more vegetable and ornamental plants by making our own pots using materials thrown around the land from the garbage. Slowly we are planning to integrate sustainable concepts both in the nook and the community at large.



Aari workshop

Currently, we have only young learners in the nook, The notion in the community a lot is that the nook is for the children only. So to break that barrier we are working on facilitating some aari workshops in the nook through the help of a professional and then taking those old learners in the nook. This is also going to help create some direct earning opportunities for the learners.



Challenges

Nook is a different approach to learning and as expected it has a lot of challenges. Some of the major challenges we have faced here in Katchipedu nook are:

1. The disinterest of older learners in the nook process. To date, we have been having learners of the maximum age of 15 years in the nook.
2. Lack of trust initially among community members for the nook. This was resolved later.
3. The distance of the nook from the village is about half a kilometer and the way goes through a state highway with high traffic.
4. The learners have only a 2-hour window in the whole day when they can come to the nook. The rest of the time is blocked by the school and mandatory tuition.



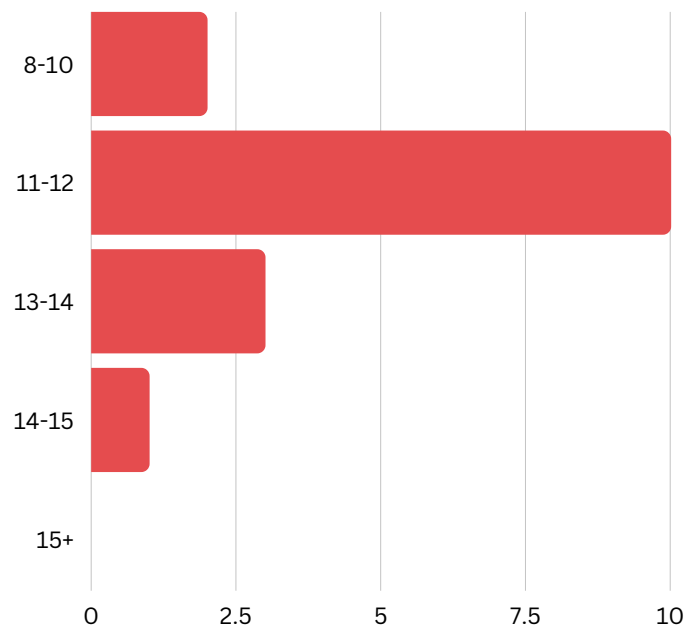
Meet the learners

Charted Representation

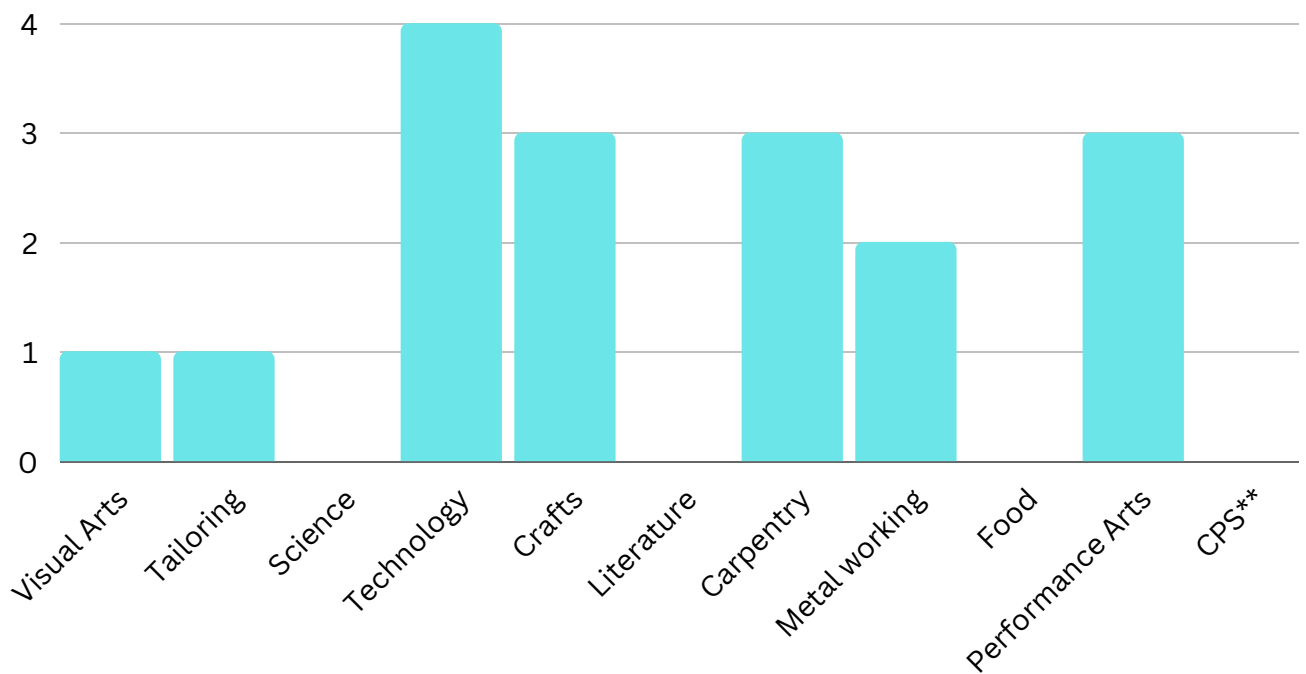
Gender Distribution



Age Distribution



Areas of Learning vs No. of Learners



Learner Stories

Sanjana situates her identity within communities. Coming from a family of eight individuals, her draw toward the community-centred space of the Nook was only natural. "I met Venkat Anna and Nishant Anna at the eye screening camp conducted in my locality. They informed me about the Nook and how I could learn anything there", he said.

Her interests in coming to space were drawing and dancing, exploration phase in the Nook opened up a new facet of interest- that of playing the Violin. She prefers spending her time at the Nook practicing being a maestro over her sixth-grade classroom and also she is liking Sona akka and Venkat anna so much.



Her family supports each other- her mother is a worker in the food service sector, her dad and uncle work as taxi and water lorry drivers respectively, and her aunt performs the role of a housewife. She finds similar themes of support and community in the Nook, which is why she loves spending time in it. A rampant problem she finds in her community is violence- connecting it with substance abuse (primarily alcohol). Fights break out continually in her neighbourhood. She adds that her parents were scared to send her to the Nook because of this.

Nook provided Sanjana an avenue to learn and also (she says) laptops to listen music in!



Learner Stories

Sanjai Lalu found himself in the Katchipedu Nook before he could wrap his head around the reasons for enjoying chicken with rice and his fascination for space exploration. His brother told him of an "experimental class" in their neighbourhood with laptops for them to listen to music and play games. His fourteen-year-old self naturally gravitated to the Nook and found himself exploring and discovering new avenues of interest and hobbies. He enthusiastically proclaimed, "I am going to make a chain that glows," as he showed us reference pictures and mockups he found on the internet. To the question of "Why Jewellery Making and not Oyil Attam (which he also enjoyed)?" he would smirk and say, "I had fun making it and even made a quick buck selling it in my neighbourhood."



When we questioned him about his neighbourhood and the issues he thinks it faces, he responded quickly and said, "It has to be the walk to the temple Kozhai Thaneer. Not everyone has access to water in our community. Even I had to go to the temple to collect water before I could even come to the Nook." When we asked him why he thought this was an issue, he awkwardly smiled and looked at us as if we asked a foolish question. "I don't think it is alright for us to frequent trips to the temple to get access to water," he said solemnly.

Currently, in 8th grade, he says he prefers the Nook to the school he attends on the weekdays. The Nook from April 25th (when he joined) became a place where he dabbles with his interests and (more importantly) a place to play games on the laptop.



Meet the team

Venkatesh S
Nook Manager



Sona Selvam
Innovation Lead



Nishant Kumar
Hopper, Project DEFY



Rupam Singh
Program Manager, Project DEFY



Meet the team

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