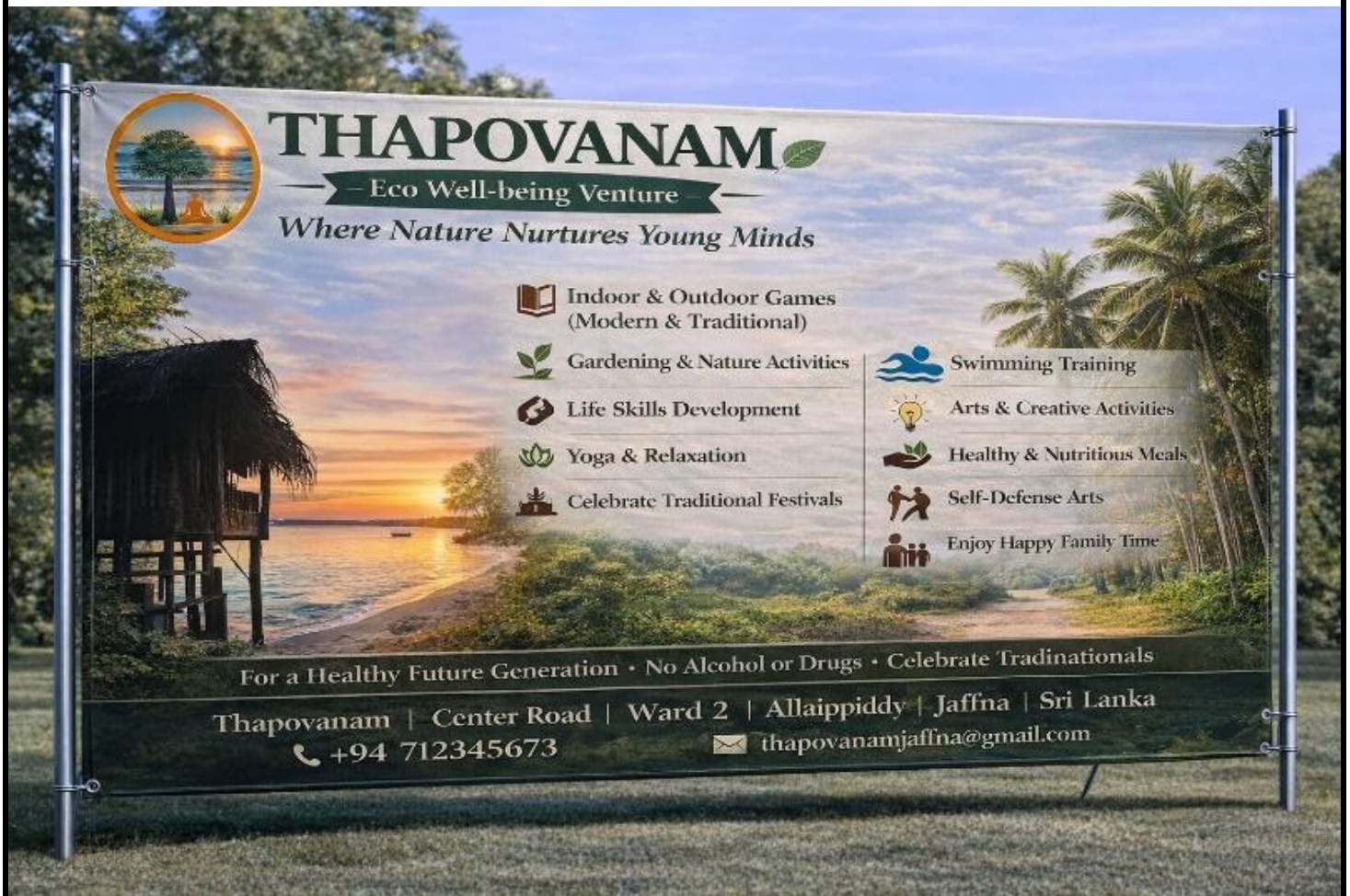




Child Enrichment Program

2025 Photo Narration Report

Thapovanam

Allaippiddy, Sri Lanka

Rationale

Individuals, families, and communities in Sri Lanka, particularly in the North and East, have undergone 30 years of war trauma including displacement, injury, detention, torture, and the loss of family, homes, employment, and livelihoods. In addition to the increase in individual mental health problems, the protracted conflict has had a significant impact on family dynamics and community structures.

Our studies¹ found dysfunctional families with a higher proportion of members with suicidal thoughts, mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse, poor income, lack of essential facilities and dissatisfaction with family life. Over the course of the war, social capital eroded; collective efficacy and institutional trust weakened. Other adverse consequences included increased suicide and attempted suicide rates; Gender Based Violence (GBV); child abuse; indebtedness; multiple partners, youth antisocial behavior, high use of illicit drugs (86%) and alcohol (84%), family problems (36%), unemployment (32%) and financial problems (26%); villages scored very low in structural social capital. The observed social capital changes, dysfunctional family units, negative changes in the functional dynamics of the community, and high prevalence of individual level effects was termed collective trauma. Subsequently, communities were impacted by the COVID epidemic and then, a national financial crisis. Many children grow up in dysfunctional families.

Often homes are shaped by alcohol and drug abuse—where fear, confusion, conflict, violence, abuse, poverty and hunger become part of everyday life. Majority of adult males in most rural areas (less in cities and towns) consume alcohol. Alcohol Rates are more in some strata (lower socioeconomic), religions and occupations (daily labour, fishing) than others. Some use alcohol as a form of self-medication to reduce the impact of past war trauma, daily stresses, family problems, pain, physical diseases, personal and social inhibitions and then become dependent. In those who consume alcohol many drink heavily on a daily basis, problem or harmful drinking to a level of dependence or addiction so much so that they cannot be without it, developing withdrawal symptoms like tremors, shakes, sweating and intense desire, craving if they don't take their daily quota on time. Younger males and youth use and abuse drugs. The economic, physical, mental, family and social consequences are dire.

Children grow up thinking and feeling this is normal life. They will inevitably repeat the cycle; in turn their children will repeat the cycle. In an effort at breaking this cycle, at Thapovanam, we are committed to nurturing young minds in an eco-friendly environment and practices through arts, music, drawing, drama, yoga, meditation, home gardening, swimming, traditional games, karate and martial arts, play and nutritious meals, supporting both their physical well-being, mental development, cultural, social and spiritual enrichment. Children find safe ways to express what they cannot say out loud. Through stories and characters, they release emotions, rebuild confidence, and begin to feel a sense of control over their lives. They are learning that their story does not have to end where it began. This is more than drama. This is healing, hope, enrichment, building character, inner strength, a capacity to take informed, healthy decisions, a new beginning.

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- ¹ Thamotharampillai U, Perera R, Wickremasinghe R, Williams S, Vijayasangar T, Sivatharsan B, Hilbert V, Somasundaram D. Collective Trauma- Psychosocial consequences of war in northern Sri Lanka 10 years on, a mixed methods study, SSM - Mental Health, Volume 8, 2025, 100457, ISSN 2666-5603, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2025.100457> (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666560325000696>)

Training for Child Facilitators

Facilitators were given training on various aspects of caring, supporting, encouraging and enriching the experiences, growth and development of children.

◆ Session with Father Damian and Savithiri: Facilitators personal history (12th November 2024) ◆



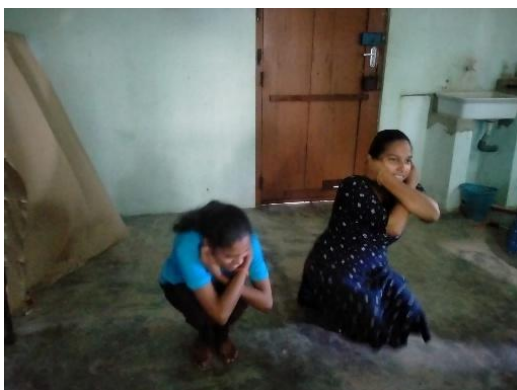
◆ Centre for Children's Happiness (CCH) Team Up program for Thapovanam facilitators ◆



◆ Kamalanathan from School of Education about Drama ◆



◆ Dr. Gowribalan delivered yoga training for facilitators via Zoom. (16th January 2025) ◆



◆ Session with Dr. Selvaratnam, Psychiatrist UK ◆



◆ Guidance by Assistant Director of Education Kirubaraj ◆



◆ CCH Robinson on paper models ◆



◆ Topic in health: Hygiene and communicable infection control by PHI Kishor ◆



Arts

◆ Music ◆

◆ Piano classes for Thapovanam children were initially taught by Ms. Nishalini from Allaipiddy ◆



◆ Piano Class- Conducted by Instructor Mr. Rajeevan for interested children ◆



◆ Scene of children singing a drama song on 2nd August 2025 ◆



◆ A child played a Thavil and entertained other children ◆



◆ Children enjoyed dancing along with songs and expressed their feelings ◆



◆ Selected via Ball Exchange | Showcasing Dance, Singing & Acting (6.10.25) ◆



◆ On 11.10.25 The children showcased their talents through dance and singing performances ◆



◆ Observe and perform body movements according to the sound of the drum (18.10.25) ◆



◆ Drawing ◆

◆ Drawing lessons by Mr. M. Ganeshanandan to enhance art skills ◆



◆ 13th August 2025 ◆



◆ 13th September 2025 ◆

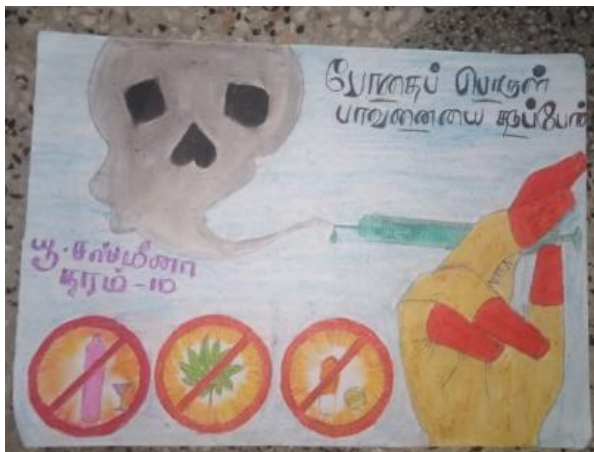


◆ Activities were conducted to enable children to express their creativity and inner thoughts ◆



◆ Alcohol and Drug Awareness drawing ◆

Pictures were drawn on the effects of drug and alcohol abuse by children (18.10.2025).



◆ Creative activities ◆

◆ Sand sculpting on the beach ◆



◆ Making things from materials found in the environment ◆



◆ Drama ◆

◆ Bringing out Children's skill through Drama by Jaffna University Drama Department (31.05.2025) ◆



◆ 19th of July 2025 ◆



◆ Drama Enrichment with Mrs. C. Yasodhara (12.08.2025) ◆



◆ Theatrical Activities with Ms. E. Vijayalakshi (14.08.2025) ◆

Sharing experiences of participants afterwards

"The mind is at ease, and the body and mind are cooled."

"I forgot about my personal problems and felt at peace."



◆ The teacher Mr. Sivakumar conducted drama composition activities (11.10,25) ◆



◆ Finding the color and coloring the circle ◆



Emotional expression

◆ Emotional Expression Training – Mr. Usanthan (Univ. of Jaffna) ◆



◆ Learning Emotions & Bullying Awareness ◆



Love, empathy



Disgust



Surprise, fear



Emotional bullying-Threat



Happiness



Ire

Yoga

◆ Yoga session for children on 6th September 2025 ◆



◆ Inner Peace Training ◆

◆ Children were taught calming techniques to control their senses and stabilize their minds ◆



◆ Mind and body relaxation training ◆

◆ Facilitators taught the Children techniques to calm the mind and control breathing ◆



◆ Peaceful Habits through Body & Emotion Training – Dr. Gowribalan ◆



◆ Positive Peaceful Thinking ◆

◆ Positive peaceful thinking was promoted through short stories ◆



“The one who tries harder than those who know everything wins in life”



◆ Positive & Non-Violent Thinking – Facilitators & Child (25.10.25) ◆



◆ Children were taught healthy lifestyle practices ◆



Learning about friends

◆ "Five Good Things, Three to Improve" – Peer Feedback Activity (18.10.25) ◆



Moral Education – Value-based Thinking

"Value-based thinking activities were conducted"



◆ Children were guided in ethical and value-based thinking ◆



◆ Children were taught life values through stories and discussions ◆

“One should treat others in the same way one expects to be treated”



◆ Identifying ourselves (25.10.25) ◆

The ‘*knowing themselves*’ exercise was conducted by facilitators for children over the age of 10. The questions asked were: *Who am I?; What is my name? What is my preferred name? What do I like? What do I want to become? What are my strengths and weaknesses?*

◆ Explanations, and discussions took place based on the children's answers to these questions ◆



Nutrition

◆ Regular education program on health and nutrition by Dr. Sutharman ◆



◆ Home Gardening ◆

◆ Home Gardening for Physical Health, Mental Well-being & Savings ◆



◆ Nutritious Meals ◆

◆ Nutritional food ◆

Thapovanam Provided Children with Samaposa, Sathuma, Laddus, Cakes, Uzhundu Vada & Fruit Juice/Milk Tea



◆ Nutritious lunch ◆



◆ Parents Bought Supplies & Cooked Together (11.10.25) ◆



◆ Cooking Skills ◆



◆ Special Lunch 25.10.25 ◆



Physical Activities

◆ Swimming ◆

◆ Facilitators & Children at Swimming Training with My Christurajah - Ocean University ◆



On 21st June 2025



On 5th July 2025



On 12th July 2025



On 19th July 2025



◆ Waste Management ◆



◆ Traditional Games ◆

◆ (*kulai eduthal*) were conducted for younger children ◆



◆ Children playing the traditional game of Kilithattu ◆



◆ Karate and Martial Arts ◆

◆ Karate training by Master Vijayaraj for Thapovanam children ◆



◆ Play ◆

◆ Children played happily in the Thapovanam environment ◆



◆ Children played joyfully at the seashore ◆



◆ Children under the age of 10 were provided with healthy behaviour training through games ◆



Group Activities

◆ Play, Games, Leadership, Art & Meditation – CCH & TSA (23.03.2025) ◆

Play activities, Group games. Leadership training, Art work, Meditation by Centre for Children's Happiness (CCH), The Social Architects (TSA) (23.03.2025)



◆ Initial Children program by CCH Facilitators ◆



◆ Singing, dancing and rhythm exercises for joy and teamwork ◆



[illegible]

◆ **Child and Women Protection by Jaffna Police (24.05.2025)** ◆



◆ Discussion with Children & Parents – Allaipiddy RC Tamil Kalavan School (07.08.2025) ◆

During a discussion with the children and parents of the Jaffna/Allaipiddy Roman Catholic Tamil Kalavan School regarding Child Enrichment program activities on 7th August 2025



◆ Discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of modern children's phone use ◆



◆ Child Enrichment Program Feedback – Mr. Dushi Selvarathnam (28.06.2025) ◆

Children's opinions about the Child Enrichment Program with Mr. Dushi Selvarathnam, Manitha Neyam Trust (UK), 28.06.2025



◆ Board Secretary on Child Enrichment Program – Pros & Cons Discussion ◆



◆ Secretary Discusses Children's Home Behavior & Parent Interaction ◆



◆ Discussion with Allaipiddy School and Govt. authorities and officers ◆



◆ Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention – Discussion on Child Impact (02.08.2025) ◆



Home Visits

◆ Parental Consent Meeting – Event & Swimming Lessons ◆



Discussions and Visits

◆ Jaffna University Medical Faculty & Students Visit Thapovanam ◆

26.07.2025



The Tamil song “farewell, our country, the house that spreads the sea the door of the sea.....” was sung by a medical student, Sri Ramanan

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZSmOS2DhwexkTioPZG487yKInGKmETXj/view?usp=sharing>

Dec., 2025



Drs. Sivathas, Sajath and Father Damian (May, 2025)



Past medical Jaffna medical faculty students of 10th batch, now doctors in all parts of world visited Thapovanam during their reunion



Dr. P. Ahilan, Jaffna University; Someetharan, film director
June, 2025



Dr. Cynthia with Jaffna University psychology interns, May 2025



Dr. Sivathas & Dr. Umaharan, Aug., 2025



Group of Bhikkhus visited Aug., 2025

◆ **One-day event for Ilanthalir Children (11th October 2025)** ◆

Participants were children, caregivers and their family members.



◆ **Gifts were given to all the children, their caregivers and the Thapovanam facilitators** ◆



◆ **Book Bag Distribution to Children – Donated by North America Vembadi Old Girls (05.07.2025)** ◆



◆ **One-Day Psychosocial Program for Children's Home Wardens and Children** ◆

Initiated by: Department of Probation and Child Care Services, Northern Province, Sri Lanka
6 September 2025



◆ GAMA Foundation Clothes Donation – Children's Day (28.09.2025) ◆



◆ St. Philips Preschool Children's Day ◆

On Children's Day on the 1.10.25, Thapovanam facilitators visited the St. Philip's Preschool, Allaipiddy at the invitation of their teacher. The facilitators involved the children in activities such as dancing, singing, and balloon popping. The children were then given writing instruments on behalf of Thapovanam.



◆ Mental Health Day (10.10.2025) ◆

Jaffna Education Zone with Zonal Director of Education (ZDE) observed Mental Health Day at Thirukkudumbal School at which Thapovanam was invited to introduce and inform about their activities



◆ Cultural Activities ◆

◆ Thaipongal Festival Celebration (14.01.2025) ◆



◆ Aadiparappu Festival Celebration ◆

Aadiparappu is a traditional festival marking the first day of the Tamil month of Aadi. This festival was celebrated by cooking Aadikkoozh on 19.07.2025



◆ Saraswati pooja rituals (28.09.2025) ◆



◆ Christmas Festival Celebration ◆



A puppet dance was performed by the children



A drama was performed on the rule of Satan among the children



A Christmas English song was sung



Children danced with Santa Claus



Challenges

◆ Food Rations for Children Affected by Ditwa Cyclone – Fr. Damian (Dec., 2025) ◆

Daily wage earner families were affected due to the Ditwa cyclone. Due to this, small packages containing food rations were provided to the children under the patronage of Father Damian



Assessment

The Children Development Programme, which began in 2024, aims to nurture children holistically—physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Regular Child enrichment programmes were carried out through 2025, usually on Saturdays, sometimes on Sundays, public and school holidays. 95 children registered for the programme with an average attendance around 30-50 for a day of activities. Thapovanam arranged subject specialists, resources and instructors for the programmes with the support of Thapovanam facilitators. Facilitators were selected from local youth, mostly those who had recently finished their A levels and high school. Financial support for the programme has been provided by Manitha Neyam Trust, UK; Vembadi School Old Girls in North America, other donors and well-wishers.

The following table shows some of the activities:

Activity	Number of Activities in 2025	Average Child Attendance per Activity
Swimming	13	10
Meditation	14	30
Piano	14	9
Lunch	8	42
Drama	5	35
Drawing	4	32
Yoga	1	30
Karate	5	40
Dance	1	20
Nutritional food	52	30
Creative Activities	2	20

The Child Enrichment Programme continued to provide a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment for children affected by adversity, family dysfunction, poverty, and the long-term consequences of conflict, COVID and economic crisis.

Through an integrated programme of creative arts, music, drama, emotional learning, yoga, meditation, physical activities, play, home gardening, nutrition, life-skills education, and cultural observations, the programme promoted children's psychosocial well-being, self-confidence, resilience, healthy lifestyles, waste management, eco-friendly practices and positive values. The active involvement of parents, schools, local professionals, volunteers, and community organizations were encouraged to create community ownership and enhance the programme's reach and sustainability.

Despite ongoing socioeconomic challenges affecting many families, including the impact of the Ditwa cyclone, chronic alcoholism in adult males and increasing drug use in youths, the programme adapted effectively to local needs and continued to provide consistent support to participating children.

Positive Changes Observed in Children After Joining Thapovanam

Positive Child Development – Thapovanam Program:

- Better understanding of Thapovanam's mission: When children first joined the programme, most of them had little understanding of what Thapovanam was, its purpose, or how participation could benefit them. Within approximately three months, they developed a clear understanding of the organization's vision, objectives, and the value of their participation.
- Improved social inclusion and acceptance: Initially, some children and parents from one section of Allaippiddy were reluctant to accept children from other sections (wards) and adjoining villages attending Thapovanam. There was considerable in-group vs. out-group attitudes, opposition, rejection and conflict. There was considerable in-group vs. out-group attitudes, opposition, rejection and conflict. On closer observation, it was apparent children were reflecting adult (family and social) prejudices, often using the same language and body language without quite understanding what they were doing. Over time, despite a few minor disagreements, children from different backgrounds gradually accepted one another and now participate together in programme activities with greater cooperation and mutual respect.
- Reduction in aggressive behaviour: At the beginning of the programme, many children frequently displayed aggressive behaviour and used inappropriate, violent, abusive, swearing, obscene or offensive language when interacting with peers. Again on closer inquiry these language usage appeared arise from what the child had heard in the family or society without understanding the meaning of the words, often they repeated the tone of voice and body language they had seen or heard. Thapovanam facilitators some of whom had initially responded with similar language and tone of voice were encouraged to respond with non-violent language, tone and body language, explaining and persuading in kind words what was being said and done, and creating an atmosphere of love and respect. Thapovanam adopted a policy of reinforcing, encouraging and rewarding appropriate use of language and behaviour. Overtime, a noticeable reduction in both physical aggression and the use of abusive language has been observed, with children demonstrating more respectful communication and self-control.
- Development of new skills and interests: Many children had little or no exposure to modern educational games, such as chess, before joining the programme. They have since developed a strong interest in these activities, improving their concentration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- Participation in mindfulness and structured play: Most children were unfamiliar with mindfulness practices and structured play activities when they enrolled. They now participate enthusiastically in these sessions, showing increased focus, emotional regulation, teamwork, and enjoyment.
- A safe and happy environment for vulnerable children: Many participating children come from families affected by alcohol abuse and frequent domestic conflicts, which have deprived them of a joyful childhood. Thapovanam has become a safe and caring environment where they can temporarily forget their worries, experience happiness, build positive friendships, and enjoy being children again. This is considered one of the programme's most meaningful achievements.
- Promotion of home gardening: Through the programme's home gardening activities, children have become motivated to establish and maintain small home gardens with their families. This has encouraged responsibility, environmental awareness, and healthy living practices beyond the programme.
- One 8 year old child reported that earlier he had no friends, hardly talked with anyone, felt isolated and alone but now after coming to Thapovanam he has formed friends of his age, is able to relate and converse.
- Many children started learning basic swimming skills, losing their fear of water and the sea. It's noteworthy that schools in Sri Lanka do teach swimming skills as part of the curriculum and many previous lives have been lost due to frequent drowning incident
- The children and their families had by long habit become dependent on unhealthy fast food. It took some effort to bring about a change in tastes and attitudes among the staff, children and eventually in their families.

Case Study: Transforming a Facilitator Through Psychosocial Support and Mentoring

Background:

When one of the facilitators first joined Thapovanam, he displayed signs of emotional distress and anxiety. These challenges affected his work performance and relationships within the team. He often struggled to complete assigned tasks, showed limited cooperation with colleagues, and found it difficult to accept guidance and instructions from supervisors. As a result, his confidence and overall contribution to the programme were limited. We found he had a difficult childhood and unsupportive parenting. His father was alcoholic with frequent domestic violence, family disruption, separations, poverty, hunger, strained relationships.

Intervention:

Rather than focusing only on his weaknesses, the Thapovanam team sought to understand the underlying reasons for his behaviour. Through regular mentoring, emotional support, encouragement, and patient supervision, a supportive working environment was created. He was gradually given opportunities to participate in programme activities, develop his skills, and take on responsibilities according to his strengths. Continuous positive feedback and recognition helped rebuild his confidence and motivation.

Outcome:

Over time, a remarkable transformation was observed. His anxiety reduced significantly, and he became more confident, responsible, and cooperative. He developed positive relationships with other staff members and became more receptive to guidance and teamwork.

Today, he independently plans and leads many children's activities at Thapovanam. He actively contributes ideas, takes initiative, and demonstrates strong leadership qualities during programme implementation. His journey illustrates how appropriate psychosocial support, mentoring, and a nurturing work environment can unlock an individual's potential and enable meaningful personal and professional growth.

Key Learning:

This case demonstrates that individuals experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties can make significant positive changes when they are understood, supported, encouraged, and provided with opportunities to grow. Investing in staff well-being not only benefits the individual but also strengthens the quality and sustainability of programmes delivered to children.

The Social Architects (TSA) Observations

(During a workshop at Thapovanam)

Children and young people participated enthusiastically throughout the workshop. In particular, the children actively engaged in the activities and discussions that were facilitated. Most participants responded confidently to questions and contributed actively during discussions. Although a few children appeared hesitant at the beginning, they gradually became more comfortable and participated fully in the activities. The group demonstrated a wide range of talents and abilities. Among the participants were children and young people with strong acting skills, artistic ability, creative writing talent, and proficiency in the English language. Several participants also expressed a genuine interest in contributing to positive social change and demonstrated a strong desire to make meaningful improvements within their own community. The children creatively expressed their thoughts and emotions through drawings and subsequently shared their reflections with confidence and enthusiasm. They reported that the participatory learning activities were highly beneficial and expressed a strong desire for similar workshops to be conducted on a regular basis in the future. The children in the intermediate age group demonstrated ambitious aspirations and a strong commitment to contributing to the development of their village. Establishing focused youth groups around these participants could further strengthen engagement among intermediate-level children and promote the development of an active and socially responsible community. These participants also showed considerable enthusiasm for producing artistic work and participating in creative activities.

Recommendations:

Considering the differences in participants' ages, learning abilities, and levels of understanding, future training programmes should be conducted in two groups: an **early childhood/primary group** and an **intermediate group**. This approach would enable facilitators to adopt age-appropriate learning methods and maximise the effectiveness of programme delivery. A group-based approach would also allow activities to be tailored to the developmental needs of each age group, thereby further enhancing participants' engagement, self-confidence, leadership skills, and teamwork. During group activities, it was observed that two participants from the intermediate group occasionally disrupted the learning environment and affected the participation of other group members. It is therefore recommended that these participants receive individual guidance, appropriate responsibilities, and positive behavioural support to encourage constructive engagement.

To ensure that all participants can participate actively and equitably in future workshops, clear group norms should be established at the outset of each session, supported by consistent guidance from group leaders and facilitators throughout the programme.

IBC Interview with Dr T. Srikanan

(MBBS, MD (GenMed), MRCP (UK), FRACGP (AUS), Family Physician, Sydney, Australia; and was a physician at Chavakacheri BH and Senior lecturer, Dept of Medicine, University of Jaffna)

Discussed the possible beneficial impact of the Thapovanam Child enrichment programme on early child development, particularly neurodevelopment, on neural pathways and circuits that would determine later adolescent, youth and adult behaviour, attitudes, values and decisions

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zNOvhJjJ6e3lE-6VzssV7oPn3ZoE3ZMG/view?usp=drivesdk>)

Interview of Child participant with International Child Rights Organization

Sir, when we first came here, I was very afraid. In fact, all of us were. We kept wondering what would happen here and what we would have to face. But now I feel very confident and enthusiastic. I am here today because of this centre. At first, we questioned whether it was a genuine organisation. We wondered whether children would really benefit or change. All our parents had these doubts. We were pleasantly surprised that such an organisation had been established in our area. From the very first day we came, we felt happy, and we continue to feel the same way today. I felt that this would become an important place where our children's talents and abilities could be discovered and nurtured. It is difficult to put into words how much happiness we have experienced here. The centre offers many activities, including karate, piano, swimming, drama, and various other training programmes. Through the karate programme, many children have participated in competitions and returned with medals and certificates.

The main reason for these achievements is this centre. Whenever I feel happy or worried, I come here. It has become a place that I naturally turn to because I know I will be warmly welcomed. People greet me with a smile and ask, 'Are you happy? Are you keeping well? Is everything going well at home?' That is why I wanted to grow up in this environment, and that is why I come here."

(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c5i68MSyXWua_pqQ4NG1VVG-5kA-R6a/view?usp=sharing)

For the future, Thapovanam plans to systematically document outcomes and changes in the children through case histories, home visits and quantitative measures at different periods.

Conclusion:

Overall, the programme demonstrates the value of a holistic, community-based approach to child enrichment and mental health promotion. By integrating physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual development within a caring environment, it contributes not only to the healthy development of individual children but also to strengthening families and building more resilient communities. Continued monitoring and evaluation, together with sustained community partnerships, will further enhance programme quality, document outcomes, and support future expansion.

