

## Tamil Nadu



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Tamil Nadu - [Chennai](#)

### Where support is more than just money

Meera Srinivasan

*Vazhai offers time, attention and guidance to first generation learners*

— PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**HELPING HAND: Vazhai's members with the children they work with, at a field activity.**

CHENNAI: "I want to become a police officer when I grow up," R. Arjunan says with conviction. The Class X student going to the government school at Chinnavathalapuram, Dharmapuri, is eager to give his best this year and score high in the public examination.

Arjunan is one of the students whom Vazhai, a city-based non-governmental organisation, has identified to offer support. And according to them, support means much more than monetary assistance or support in kind. D. Bharathirajan, secretary of the NGO says: "There are many generous people who donate large sums regularly. But we think giving time and attention to students is equally important."

As many as 15 youngsters from various fields came together three years ago and formed Vazhai. All of them are first generation learners now holding noted positions in different organisations. They felt the need to do their bit for first generation learners, particularly in rural areas. And thus began Vazhai's journey.

The NGO, now with 60 members and 50 student beneficiaries, decided to work with educationally backward districts and started work at Dharmapuri. Members identified first generation learners, visited their homes and chose children who needed attention very badly.

"Our mentors start working with a child in Class VIII and continue giving support till they are in Class X," Mr. Bharathirajan says. And this support essentially means time, attention and guidance.

Mentors set aside 10 days in a year for these children. They organise four two-day workshops covering a range of academic and non-academic exercises. The mentors continue following up through letters and over the telephone.

#### Being cared for

All the children come from very modest backgrounds. Arjunan's parents, for instance, are daily wage labourers. Thanigaivel, Arjunan's mentor, means a lot to him. "I tell Thanigai *anna* everything from my homework to what I play ... everything," Arjunan says.

And it is this feeling of being cared for that seems to have worked. The first batch of students that Vazhai started working with emerged

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successful in their S.S.L.C. examinations, with a majority securing first class and a few scoring over 400.

With experienced educationists, activists and psychologists on its panel, the NGO trains mentors before they start interacting with children. Knowledge of Tamil and willingness to dedicate some time is all that a mentor requires, members say.

For further details, visit [www.vazhai.org](http://www.vazhai.org) or call 98847 07546.

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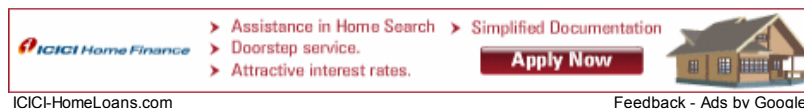


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