

Preface

Before we begin talking about the TQI-Ullas project we need to ask the question, why is there a need for such an initiative? If we peel down the layers of any initiative, at the most fundamental level there are only 2 entities present, namely: -

- The giver
- The receiver

Both feel the need to be satisfied. The giver finds fulfillment in the feeling that he/she is being useful to someone, while the receiver finds fulfillment in the knowledge that they are not alone and there is someone looking out for them. Initiatives like the TQI-Ullas program aims to bridge the gap between the 2 entities and support the journey towards fulfillment for both the parties.

In the following stories of perseverance, passion, personal courage, team effort, overcoming challenges and finding fulfillment you will come across some very ordinary people taking up voluntary responsibility and blossoming into leaders in their very own right.

Now, you might ask what does voluntary responsibility mean and why should one take up responsibility voluntarily?

There's no particular reason as to why one should take up voluntary responsibility. But, upon retrospection I found the following arguments compelling: -

- You take up responsibility for what you feel is right.
- You find a harmony with the cause you've taken up.
- There's a greater sense of freedom in voluntary actions over a forced responsibility.
- In some way or the other we are affected by both our actions and inactions. For example, if I were to work in a team and I don't feel and inclusivity with the team it is as much my responsibility as it the team's. Hence, we are affected both by our actions as well as inactions.
- Also, you sense a need for something among the people you interact with. When you perceive the need, you automatically volunteer to fulfill their needs in your own capacity.

During my journey with TQI as a volunteer, I have always observed that everyone of us have involuntarily taken voluntary responsibility for someone or something in our own lives. It is time we became aware of it.

Acknowledgement

I would first begin by thanking the Ullas team right from Mr. Arun Jain, Manju ma'am, Sukanya ma'am, Poornima akka and the rest of the team for trusting in a bunch of kids who dream of changing the way the society thinks. A big shout out to the volunteers who have come together with no expectations whatsoever to help us in our mission to create a socially responsible society. I would like to go a step further and pay my gratitude to families of the volunteers who have allowed them to spread their wings and take the message of TQI far and wide. To all those college staff who supported us by sharing in our vision, no amount of gratitude can ever be enough. To all those who chose not to support an even bigger thanks to you all, because you helped us gain invaluable insights by allowing us to make mistakes so that we could learn and equip ourselves better. I would also like to mention my Alma mater SRM University, Chennai for providing us with the freedom to explore and learn. Also you taught us that one needn't be academically superior to make a difference, the very thought that I want to make a difference is powerful enough to push me to contribute positively.

To all my friends who were there in the beginning like Ashish, Sorabh, Hari Krishnan and the others, you were there when the idea was still a dorm room phenomenon. To the core team consisting of Harish, Viswa, Kamal, Aravinth, Venky, Vel, Vikram, Nandhini, Karl Markz, Shahil, Ashok and Saadique, you guys teach me important lessons on friendship, love and brotherhood every single time. I would never trade any of you guys for anything in this world.

To my 2 brothers Ram and Mohan anna, both of you sustain this movement through your indefatigable energy and patience. You guys have helped shape many a lives through your love and it has been an honour to have been able to travel with the both of you on this journey.

To Sam and Manasa- I love you guys. I'm sorry if I might have driven you hard, but this book wouldn't have seen the light of day if it were not for the both of you. Thank you for putting in all those sleepless nights.

To my team at Mysore, thank you for believing in me and making the whole process of social transformation a fun one. Also, special thanks to Karishma, Nikhilesh and my grandparents for helping me initiate the TQI Hyderabad chapter, it would be awesome to have you guys return one day and start it all over again. ☺

Kumar anna thanks for providing me with a laptop for getting the manuscript ready.

Dear Sriram you have always been a benchmark for me to excel in whatever I pursue in life. Amma and Appa thank you very much for all the silent support you guys have shown.

I will like to thank Yoshua Shaji George for designing the Book cover.

I also owe special thanks to Facebook, WhatsApp and Google Playstore. If it were not for them, the process of compiling this would have been Herculean. Thanks for making life easy.

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This book is dedicated to you- The Volunteer ☺



Talent Quest for India – An Introduction

As Mark Cuban of Shark Tank fame would put it, “Do not follow the passion, follow the effort”. The following chapters will reveal all the effort put in by the team at each stage to overcome challenges and come as close as possible towards our collective passion.

Adolescence breeds creativity and energy but it needs to be channelized effectively. An adolescent mind is also a fertile breeding ground for ideas. Ideas need to be backed up with relentless execution to bring fruition. The idea of Talent Quest for India (TQI) was also conceived by an adolescent mind in the year 2010. Ram, had observed that a lot of talent was being wasted because they were not being utilized properly. Hence TQI, was conceived with the following objectives: -

- To be a non-judgmental listener to people’s ideas and their challenges.
- To appreciate any effort put by an individual towards progress in his life or somebody else’s.

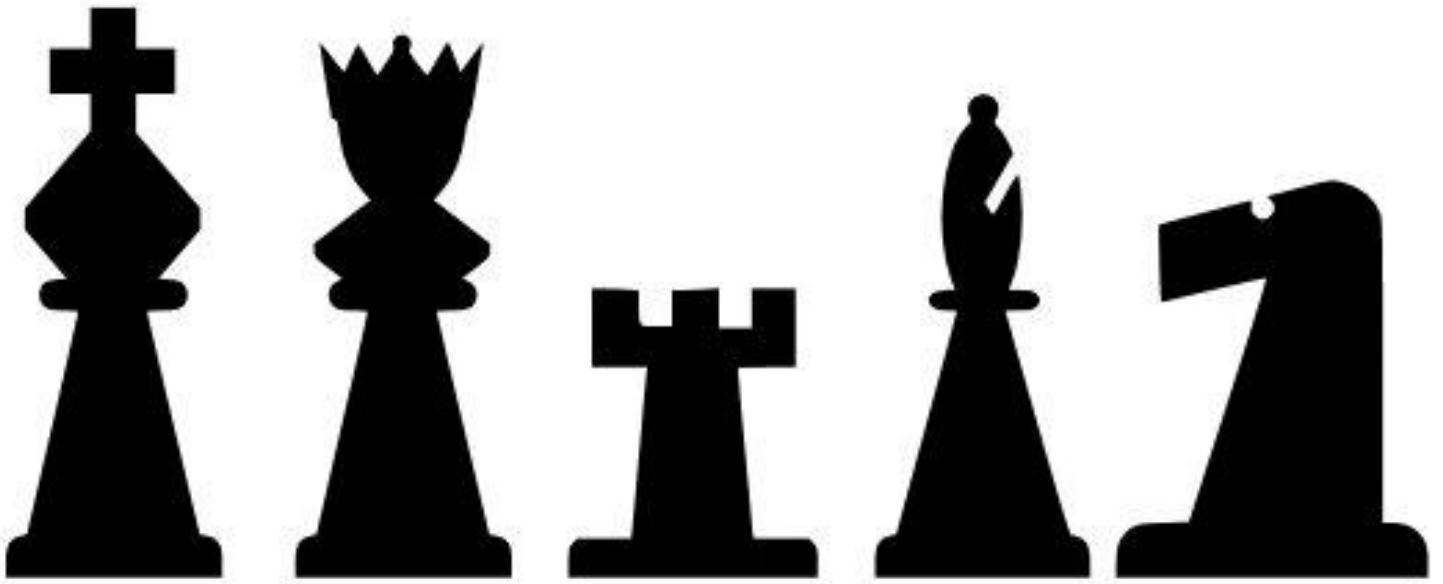
While, mulling over the idea of TQI one of Ram’s friend participated in a competition held by an IT firm. This guy was an introvert but a brilliant coder. He shared his idea with Ram and he just listened to it and gave him a pat on the back. This pushed the boy to work on his idea and he went on to win the competition. Now, this boy introduces Ram to his mom in the following way, “Ma, he’s Ram, he’s the one responsible for my success today and in the future too.” This opened up Ram’s perspective on the very real need for people to be listened to (non-judgmentally of course) and appreciated. Thus was born Talent Quest for India.

In the beginning we and our friends would gather together and go to an orphanage and spend time with the kids or clean up a particular street. Talent Quest for India was, is and will always be driven by the friendship we share among ourselves and the new ones we develop through our journey. The story of TQI will always be a testament to the power of friendship.

As we entered college (SRM University, Chennai) we found the environment both exciting and energizing. We found a lot of like-minded people (read both students and staff). We generally wanted to be socially responsible and take voluntary responsibility for those around us.

You’ll find Aravinth, one of our core members who is also an exceptional chess player. He went around participating in various tournaments mastering his game. He amassed experience along with trophies. He wanted to share what he had learnt with others. So, he went back to his district, Namakkal and organized chess workshops. Some of his students have gone on to win titles too in the local tournaments.

Kamal is a scholarship student who hails from a rural part of Tamil Nadu. He’s a voracious reader, an evolved thinker, an astute observer and most of all a great friend to all those who know him, he manages to hide all these with a quiet demeanor and an ever present smile. He has been mentoring students across government schools on career choices post their schooling and he has been ‘Kamal anna’ for a lot of boys and girls who attend college on a scholarship.



Venkatesh, is one who always chooses to remain behind the screen and does all the work for us. He always stands by his words and is known for pursuing excellence in everything that he does. He is a core member of the TQI Family. He has also played different roles and took up different responsibilities in TQI, right from Handling finance, to being an Express program trainer to coordinating the volunteers for The Wipro Marathon to writing mails and letters for TQI – he is there everywhere for us. He is the big Moral support for our whole family and he is the one who coined the name “Express” for our training program.

Now, these stories elucidate the fact that not all of us are super talented in any given field, but rather we tap into our own curiosity to explore the opportunities present around us.

Most of the projects we undertake have a personal connection with any of us. Most of our team members hail from rural districts in Tamil Nadu and studied in a government school. Once, they migrate they find the city crowd (English speaking) “too advanced”. Difficulty in adapting to the new environment takes a heavy toll on their self-confidence which resulted in stage fear. This can be quite debilitating on an otherwise bright and talented mind. To address this on a local scale we started a program called “Express”. To keep it short, we help individuals challenged with limited communication skills in English to develop curiosity and confidence to express themselves on stage and to one another in English.

I would want to tell you how we began with this program and how we are sustaining it.

Ram, who himself studied in a small town school and later shifted to Chennai suffered from the same problem. He went around the hostels and found many students suffering from the same problem. So, a few of us, Venky (Venkatesh), Kamal, Viswa, Arvinth and Karl Marx got together to create modules on grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, writing skills, listening skills and reading. Also, we had to deal with the dogma of English being too tough, unlearn able. We made sure to include a lot of activities which would engage them. Through role plays, videos, translation of Tamil Punch dialogues, interpersonal interaction and a heavy dose of fun, we managed to break through the dogma and made learning English learning fun and easy.

I'd like to mention 2 people who graduated from this program. Their story will help understand the impact of the program.

Gokul hails from Tuticorin and is quiet and a good-looking lad. He was severely limited in his English and had trouble communicating with people outside his circle. But, he more than compensated it with a healthy dose of curiosity and unyielding determination. He was determined to break free of his limitations and quietly read newspapers, wrote essays, learned new words, formed sentences with them and started communicating with people outside his circle. He slowly started getting confident and broke out of his comfort zone. He then went on to manage the Ullas project in Tuticorin overcoming challenges in managing the team, tracking the progress and also went on to take classes. He patiently worked through and documented the progress in a very professional manner. Now he handles Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Madurai districts as a cluster manager. Today, he also leads a technical team in college (40 people) and bagged a job in a respectable corporate company with a handsome pay package too! He regularly keeps interacting with people from similar background as his and motivates them.



Srinivasan (Seenu) is another such boy hailing from Tiruvallur. He shares a similar background to that of Gokul. Except that he is more outwardly, jovial and not so afraid to make mistakes. He was the district representative for Tiruvallur and he really understands the community mindset and their needs which helped him take the summit classes very effectively towards the students. His district won the Best district award too. He now manages, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Namakkal. Today he is involved in a lot of social activities with a leading NGO in Tamil Nadu.

These 2 have been passing on their learning to their juniors and sustaining the project.

Our advisor Mohan Anna was impressed with results of our efforts, he suggested us to reach out to the employees of a vendor company he was working with. The employees were mostly diploma holders. They had a different set of requirements. We included modules on business communication based on their needs.

The employees were great students as they would complete the homework assigned to them before entering the class. It was eye-opening for me on a personal note as most of these employees had at least 3 years of experience in their industry and training them was us, who still hadn't graduated from college. I learnt that learning transcends age and ego. We still keep hearing from them and some of them have found work overseas too.

Now, you might have observed that right from the planning to the execution was done solely by us without any external help. This is very important because each one of us has the capability to give; we just need to become aware of this fact. Just a few of us with the zeal to share and learn and with the focus to maintain a quality experience for the students were able to start "Express" and sustain it. I would like to reiterate the fact that talent is secondary; passion, effort and focus is primary for anything to succeed.

Our tagline reads, '*Connect, Explore, Share, Lead*'.

Over the course of this book you will observe how ordinary like-minded individuals explore the opportunity given to them to learn or pick up talents and voluntarily share their learning with other people thus becoming leaders.



Ullas Trust

Shaping Young Minds | A Polaris Foundation Social Initiative



Ullas Trust- An Introduction

Ullas Trust (A Polaris group CSR initiative) was started in 1997 with an aim to integrate Polaris with a larger community and enable them to enjoy the bliss of working with young minds in the country.

The primary motive of Ullas is to recognize academic excellence in students from the economically challenged sections of our society and encourage the “Can do” spirit towards chasing their dreams and aspirations. Very early in its evolution, Ullas decided to focus its energies on students during the most vulnerable stage in their journey – adolescence! This would translate into students from Class (Grade) 9th to 12th.

With these two-pronged criteria, Ullas selects students from Municipal, Corporation & Government schools every year through an entrance examination and a well-defined selection process. We call such students Young Achievers.

Ullas operates out of our campuses in Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi

Ullas has so far touched the lives of over 25000 young students in India and has been awarded India's best CSR Company by BSE - NASSCOM - Times Foundation in 2008.



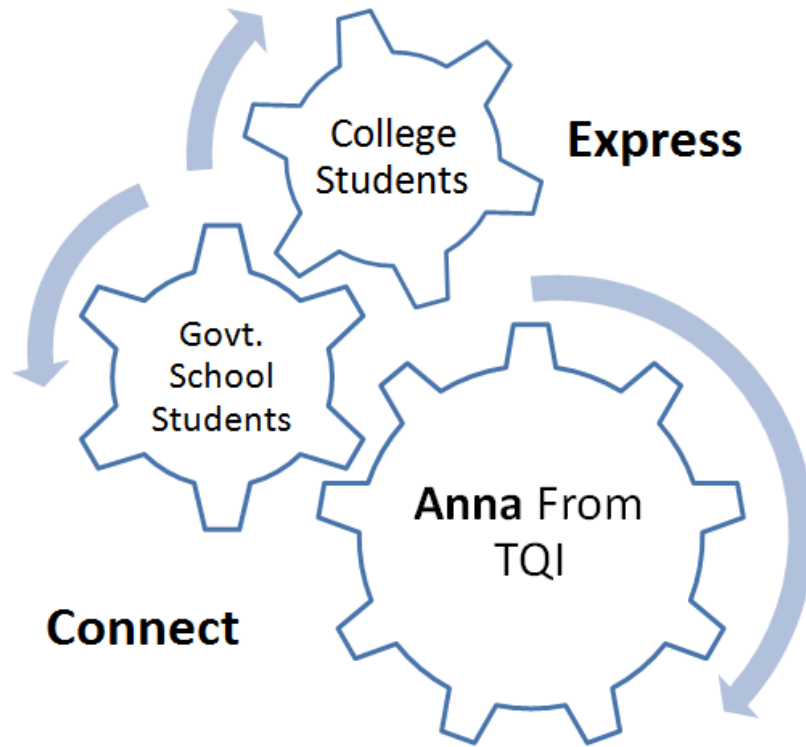
About The Ullas summit program

In order to give a head-start to the Ullas students, we have created a unique self-enrichment module called SUMMIT. The Summit program comprises of a personality development module conducted during weekends. The Summit Program is graded as Level 1 to Level 4, with Level 1 beginning for Class 9th and finishing with Level 4 for Class 12th.

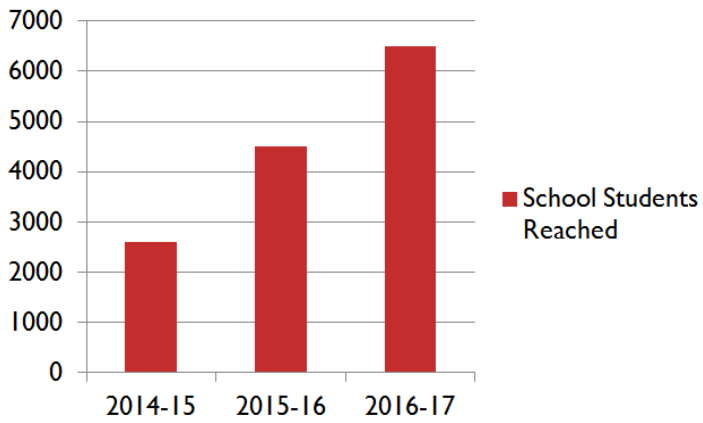
Each Ullas student attends their respective Summit module that comprises of 5 sessions of Personality development classes that comes to a total of 15 hours, meaning 3 hours per session.

The personality development classes are conducted based on specially crafted lesson plans that encompass Communication skills, confidence-building, memory skills, active team work, public speaking and leadership skills.

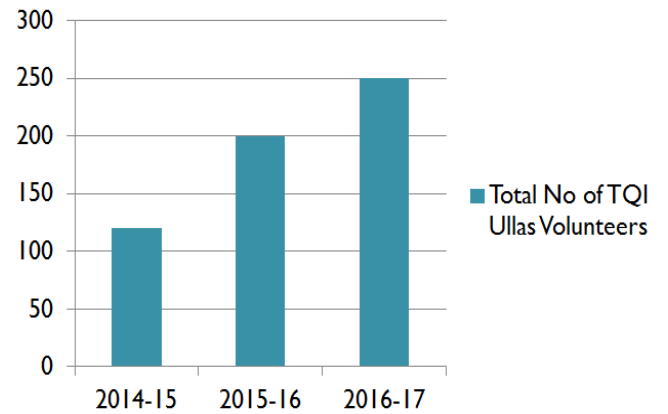
Talent Quest for India has been working with the ullas trust in a predesigned module to help the students of the government school students to develop a “Can do” spirit and explore the vastness of acquiring wisdom. The summit programs are designed in a cycle of four years from class IX-XII, termed level I-IV. Each Level is subdivided into V summits which are conducted by the TQI volunteers at various districts of Tamil Nadu. These summits are designed with module aids designed by the Ullas team. It has been TQI’s endeavor to guide the school’s students for the long term. Hence, to keep it sustainable we not only focus on the current batch of 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th students, but rather engage the new students who enter 9th standard.



School Students Reached



Total No. of TQI Ullas Volunteers



TQI- Ullas Project

Before taking up the ULLAS project we were celebrating DAAN UTSAV (Google it ☺) in various districts in Tamil Nadu. The experiences and the learning outcome inspired the volunteers.

The idea to collaborate with ULLAS first came up during the “EXPRESS” classes at the company. We felt it would be effective if we were able to “CONNECT” the district volunteers (college students) with the Government school in the same district.

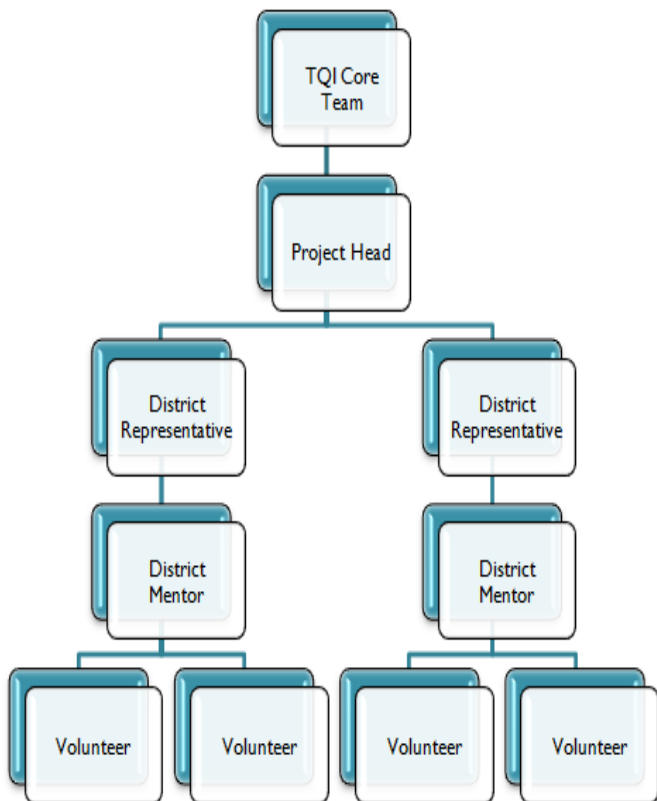
So, the plan was to recruit interested college students and train them in the ULLAS module and connect them with local schools in their districts. One of the fundamental reasons for us to take up the ULLAS project is, during the SUMMIT program we begin from 9th Standard and we continue moving with them for 4 years (9th, 10th, 11th & 12th) this establishes a firm relationship with the students and answers sustainability of the project over the long term.

In case of TQI, a group consisting of our friends went around to government schools and conducted competition, talent appreciation events in the school. We developed great relation with the school staff as well as the students which is key to our success. Thanks to word of mouth as well as Facebook a lot of our friends of friends began showing interest; steadily our team was expanding. But, we still were much unorganized in our efforts; this was always a point of contention between me and Ram. The main credit for TQI to grow strong organically goes to Mohan Anna.

The partnership between Ram and Mohan Anna as a Founder and Advisor is a match made in heaven. Ram always believed in the feeling of one huge family while Mohan Anna has a razor sharp focus and an organized approach towards meeting targets. When these two ideas got married, the result is the huge successful team, conducting focused quality service programs in their respective areas.

“Your concept is the mind that things should be a certain way cause’s pain in the mind. The cause of distress is set concepts in the mind”- Sri Sri.

The above story and the quote really sum up as to why TQI has been growing successfully over the years.



The Plan:

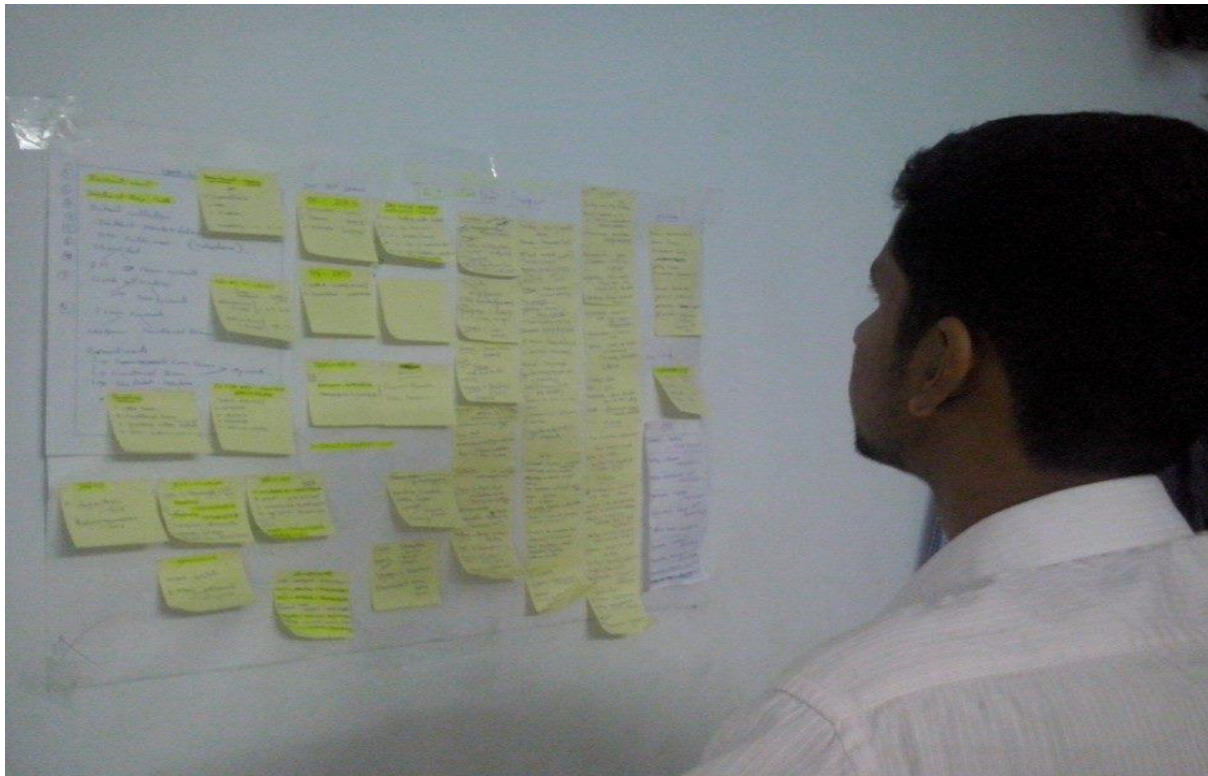
As mentioned earlier TQI is always supported on the bedrock of friendship, the TQI-ULLAS project was no different. The project was implemented through friends, their friends and friends of friends.

The credit for the organization structure goes to Mohan anna. So, in the 1st year the organization structure was in the following format.

In Dec'2014, while handling the ULLAS project through our college (SRM University) we decided to spread the project to other districts in Tamil Nadu, so we set about planning our operations for the 8 districts which we thought we could target. We prepared a proper project plan (ppt slides, of course), explaining the organizational structure, sharing our previous experience from the Daan Utsav in those Districts. We had a meeting with Col. Vidyasagar and Sukanya Ma'am who were representing the Ullas team. It was Girija and Preethi who managed to convince the Colonel.

There is an interesting story I'd like to share which really convinced the Ullas team about our potential. Girija was conducting classes at a Govt school in Kancheepuram district. She went to a particular class to talk to the students about the traditional food habits of our ancestors and it surprised her to see the students bring traditional food to school the next time she went. These kids in the school bonded with the mentors and shared about their dreams and their problems. So, this young girl came up to her and shared her struggle of a difficult house hold and how her father would return home drunk every day. The girl initially suffered through this silently. But, when Girija got to know about this she advised the girl to pour her heart out to her father and make him understand about the ill effects of alcohol. When she came home and confronted him about his habits, he was forced to take a reality check and had promised to kick his habit out and really connect with his daughter.

Thank you Girija and Preethi!



TQJ ULLAS SUMMIT PROGRAM TRACKING SHEET													
Sl.No	District Name	DR Name	District Mentor	School Name	DOD Status	Summit Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Strength	No of tea	
1	Tuticorin	Gobal	S.Jeyaraman	Govt Hr Sec School, Kaluthar	TQJ Completed DOD on (8.30 AM to 12 PM 02.02.2015)	Completed on (1.30pm-4pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on 11.02.2015 (9.30-12.30)	Completed on 21.02.2015 (10.30-12.45)	Completed on 24.02.2015 (10.30-12.45)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	220		
			T.Karansingh Raj	Govt Hr Sec School, Tharuvakkulam	Completed on (10am-12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (1.30pm-4pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on 11.02.2015 (9.30-12.30)	Completed on 21.02.2015 (10.30-12.45)	Completed on 24.02.2015 (10.30-12.45)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	92		
2	Tirunelveli	Vijaya Narayana	H.Subramaniam	Periyar Govt Hr Sec school - Cherasamakodevi	TQJ completed DOD on (1.30pm-4pm)07.02.2015	Completed on (1.30pm-4pm 14.02.2015)	Completed on 21.02.2015	Completed on 21.02.2015	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)02.03.2015	159		
3	Thiruvallur	Srinivasan	Vigneshwar.K	Govt Hr sec School, Kaaagsansathakiram	TQJ Completed DOD on (10 am to 12 pm 02.02.2015)	Completed on (10am-12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (1.00-3.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on 14-2-2015 (9.30am-12pm)	Completed on 16-2-2015 (9.30am-12pm)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)10.03.2015	142		
			Seetharam	Govt Hr Sec School, Pooneri	TQJ Completed DOD on (3.30 to 5.30 PM 04.02.2015)	Completed on (10am-12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 18.02.2015)	Completed on 20.02.2015 (9 am - 12.30)	Completed on 25.02.2015 (10.00am - 1 pm)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	240		
4	Trichy	Lochanipreethi	C.Harith	Sri Mariyanman Hr Sec School, Samsayapuram	DOD Conducted By Ullas	Completed on (10am-12.30pm 31.01.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (2pm - 4pm 14.02.2015)	Completed on 21.02.2015 (9.30am-12.30 pm)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	99		
6	Tirupur	Saraswathi	A.Sandara murthy	Municipal Hr Sec School, Kumar nagar Tirupur		Completed on (2.00pm - 4.00 pm 30.01.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 06.02.2015)	Completed on (1.30pm- 4.30pm 13.02.2015)	Completed on (1.30pm- 3.30pm 16.02.2015)	Completed on (10.00-12.30pm)28.02.2015	221		
7	Theni	Girija	V.Balasubramanian	Govt Hr sec school, Veeraspadi		Completed on (9.30 to 12.30 Pm 02.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 09.02.2015)	Completed on (2 - 4.00pm 13.02.2015)	Completed on (10 am- 12.30pm 16.02.2015)	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)02.03.2015	68		
			K.Suganthan	Govt Hr sec school,Theravaram Uthampalayam		Completed on (2.15 - 4.30pm 02.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 09.02.2015)	Completed on (2 - 4.00pm 13.02.2015)	Completed on (10 am- 12.30pm 16.02.2015)	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)02.03.2015	202		
8	Cuddalore	Sujatha	K.Niloon	Govt Boys Hr Sec School, Thittakudi		Completed on (2.30-4.30pm 30.01.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 06.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 13.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 20.02.2015)	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)02.03.2015	240		
			Manikandan	Govt Girls Hr Sec School, Thittakudi		Completed on (2.30 -4.30pm 30.01.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 06.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 20.02.2015)	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)27.02.2015	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)02.03.2015	143		
9	Salem	Dhanvarshi	P.Praveen Kumar	Govt Hr Sec School, Mullur		Completed on (10 am - 1pm 03.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (9.30am- 1.30pm 14.02.2015)	Completed on (10 - 1.00pm 21.02.2015)	Completed on (9.00-1.30pm)02.03.2015	228		
			Hanrikrishna	Govt Hr Sec School, Dhasarasackapatti		Completed on (1 pm - 4pm 04.02.2015)	Completed on (10am- 12.30pm 07.02.2015)	Completed on (9.30am- 1.30pm 18.02.2015)	Completed on (10 - 1.00pm 25.02.2015)	Completed on (9.00-1.30pm)02.03.2015	267		
10	Kanchipuram	Surya	Elaiya	Govt Hr Sec School, MM Nagar		Ullas Team conducted DOD on for 1 class 3.2.2015.	Completed DOD and day Jon (10am 12.30pm 10.02.2015)	Completed on (2pm - 4pm 13.02.2015)	Completed on (2pm - 4pm 19.02.2015)	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)23.02.2015	Completed on (2.00-4.30pm)02.03.2015	136	
						Merchise completed	Merchise completed	14 Schools completed	Merchise completed 4	14 Schools	2401		

TQJ tracking sheet

Now, that ULLAS trust entrusted us with the project, we set about the implementation of our plan. It took Ram and the core Team about 20 days to form a proper team.

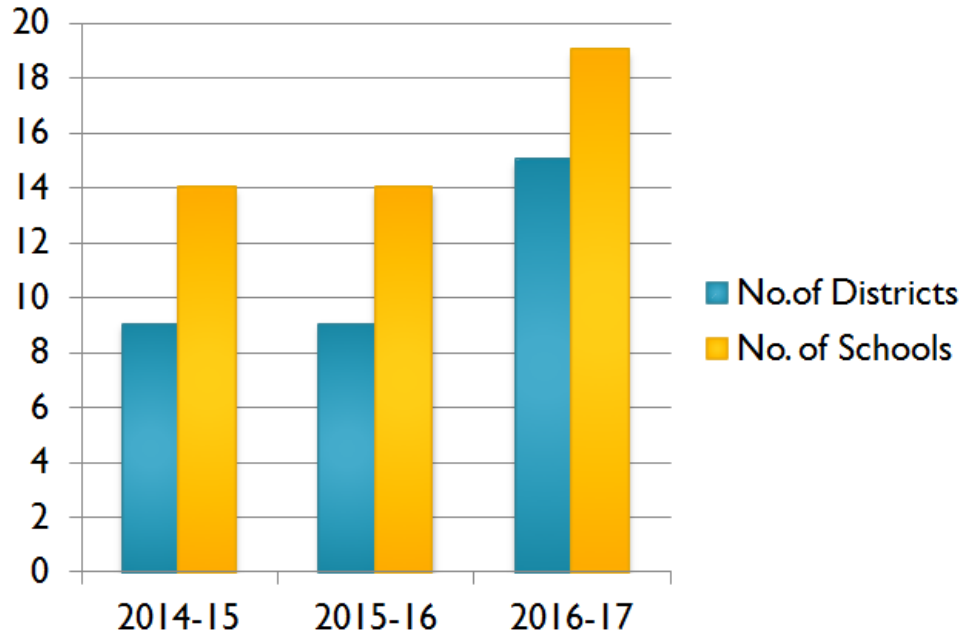
Now, this is where the importance of networking and friendship comes to the fore. Ram and the team exhausted their contacts called them or pinged their Facebook friends and spoke to them about the project and gauged their response towards the project. Ram, himself had spoken to about 500 people during that time. He claims that the entire process was like a mini MBA; where he picked up marketing skills while talking to the people about the project. Some of them actively volunteered to support the project and many others appreciated the effort being put in by us. This was a nice opportunity for us to connect with those passive friends of ours from school and college. In fact, Ram's school friend Paranthaman had provided the contact of a friend in a college, Tuticorin who formed the team there. Apart, from this we got to learn about the finer aspects of the HR, Operations and Finance. All in all, the 1st year of the project helped us to understand the functioning of a small corporate entity. We also learnt how important was documenting everything that was being done only in the 2nd year of the summit progress.

The entire project in the 1st year (based in 9 districts) was managed by Harish, who did an exemplary job of communicating with the District Representatives, helping them implement the projects, helping the team overcome road blocks and documenting the progress. These words seem less when I describe about the effort put in by him to manage the project efficiently.

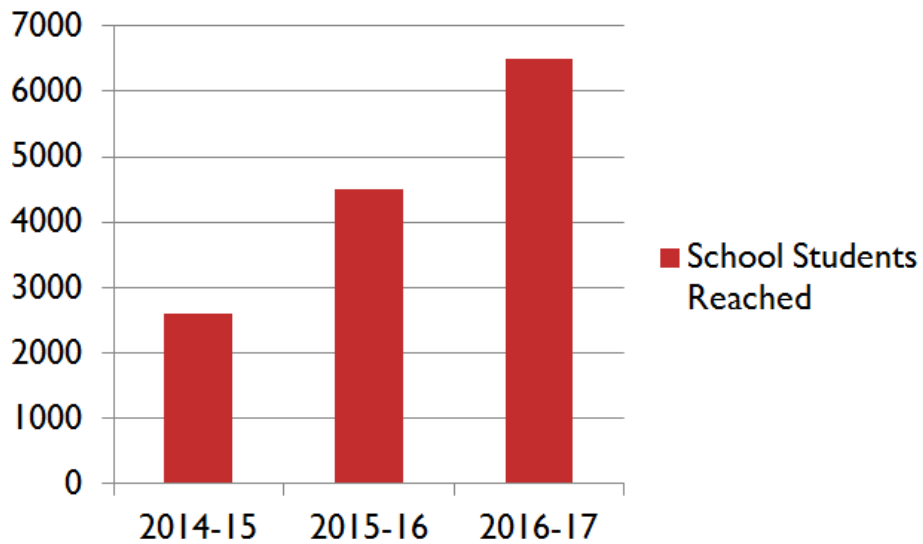
Once the interested candidates were interviewed they were given 2 days' time to form a team. The details of the District Mentors and the district members were documented in our TQI forms and thus maintaining a database of our volunteers' network. Once, the teams were set up, they were allocated schools or in some cases the teams found their own schools. Thus, began the summit program for a period of 5 weeks in 8 districts.

Evolution of the TQI Ullas Team:

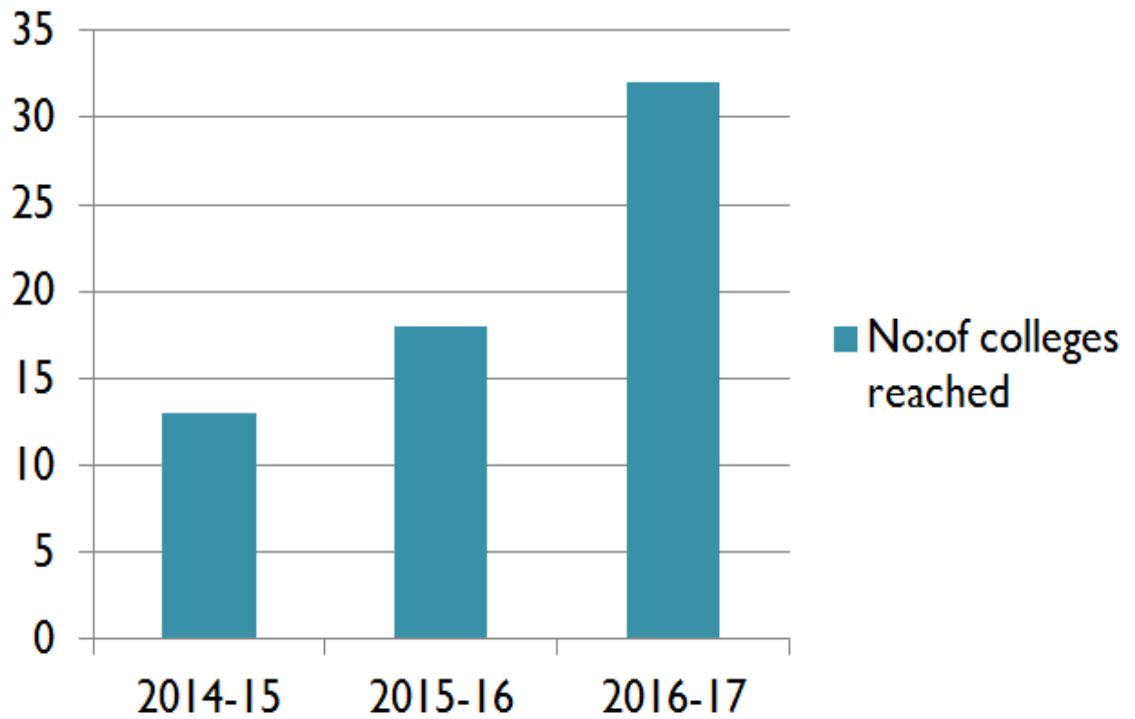
TQI Ullas three academic year growth



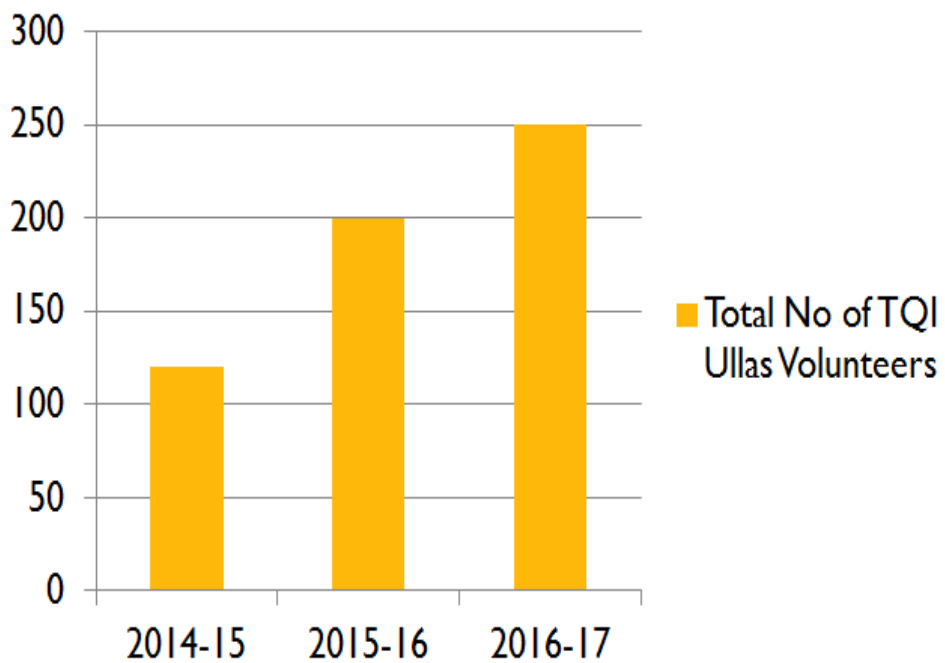
School Students Reached

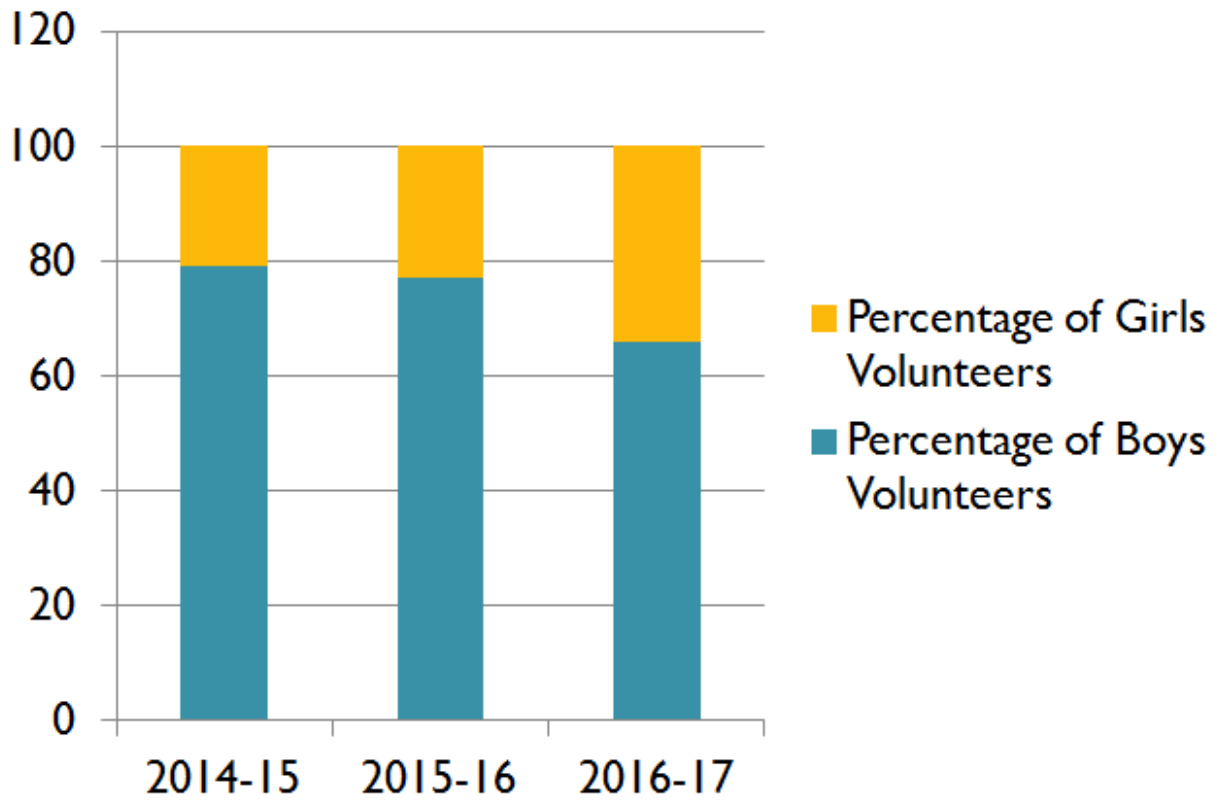


No. of colleges reached

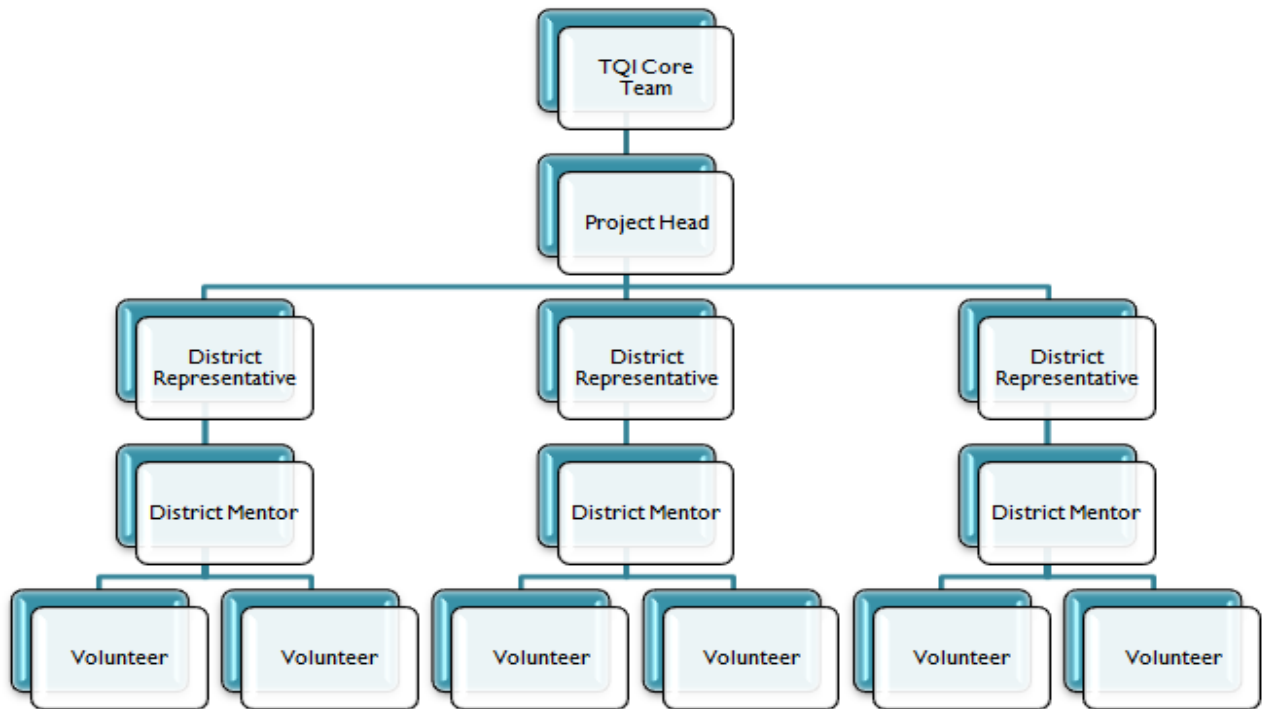


Total No. of TQI Ullas Volunteers

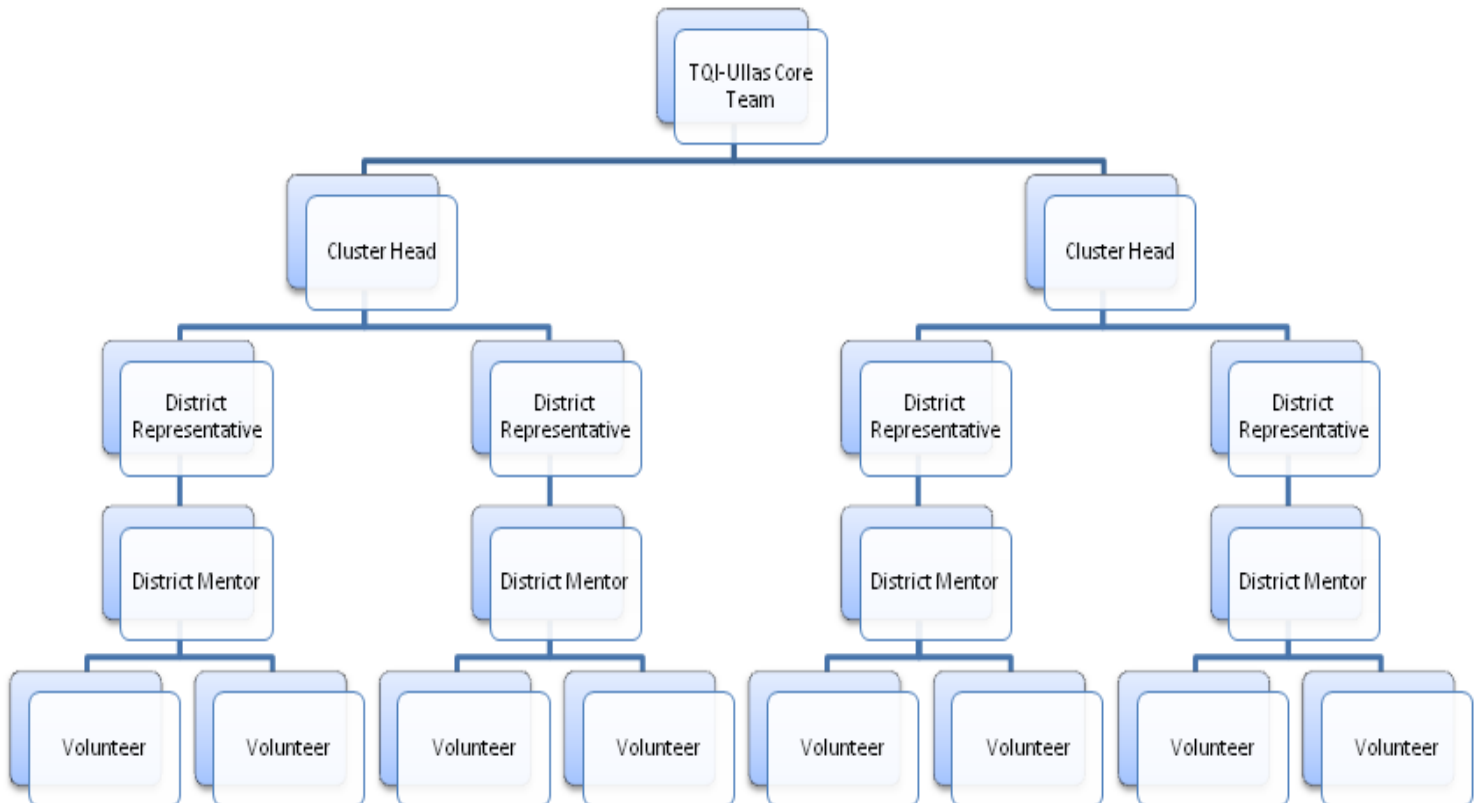




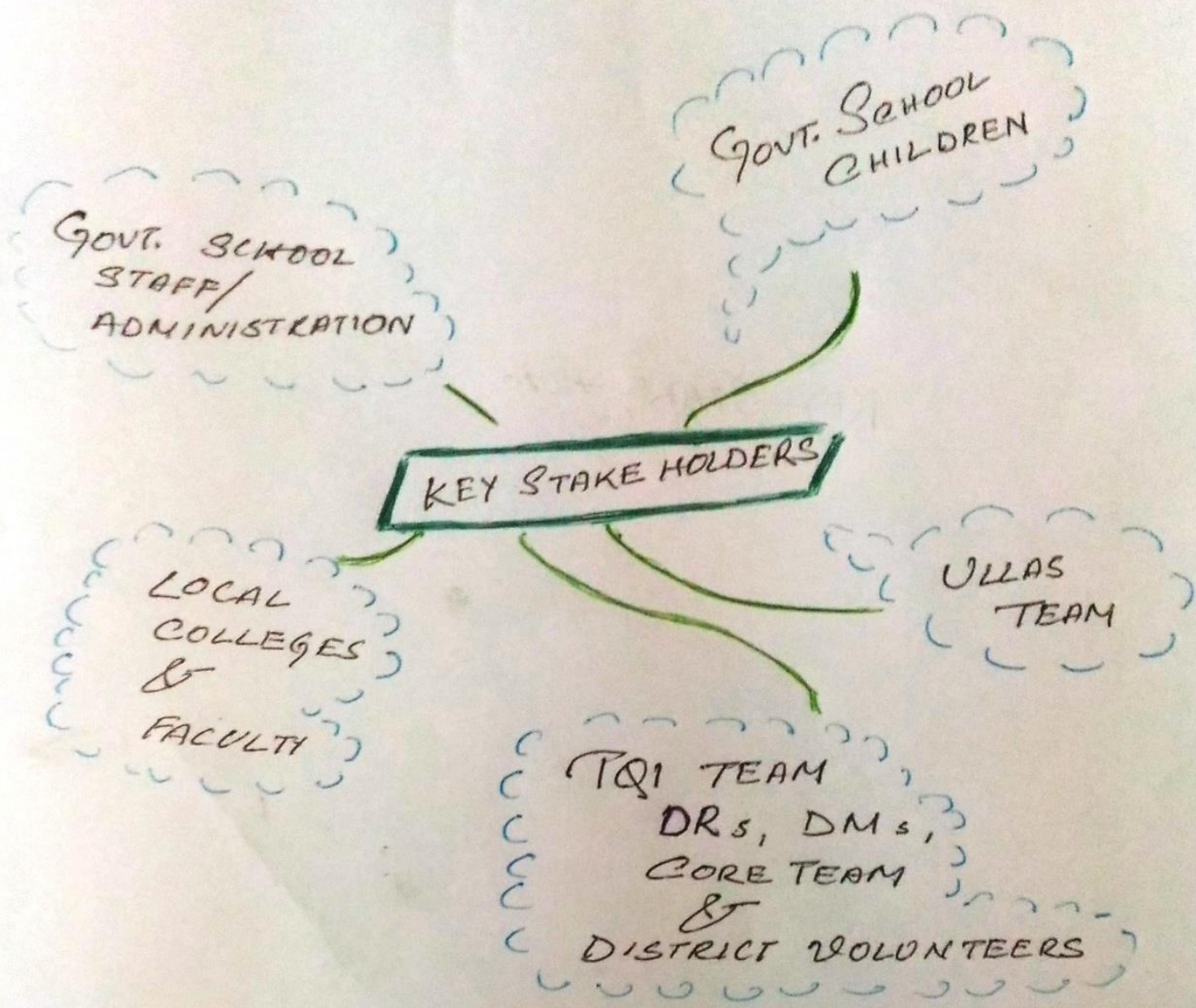
Organization Structure of TQI



2nd Year Organization Structure



3rd Year Organization Structure



District wise Journey:

Challenges are essential for any initiative. Challenges bring their own set of teaching and overcoming them is what brings a greater sense of fulfillment. The biggest challenge was to make this dream of Ram a collective dream for the team. Ram and Mohan Anna had absolute belief in the project and they had to instill this belief in the core team and the other volunteers. They had to instill confidence and belief in the purpose of the initiative. They had to break through self-doubt and offset the team's inexperience through constant motivation.

To successfully implement a single summit program, the above mentioned stakeholders play a very important role as you shall see subsequently.

As explained above each of the key stakeholders play a very significant role in the success of the projects. And the key factors to make them a part of this initiative is their trust on us. This was the second big challenge.

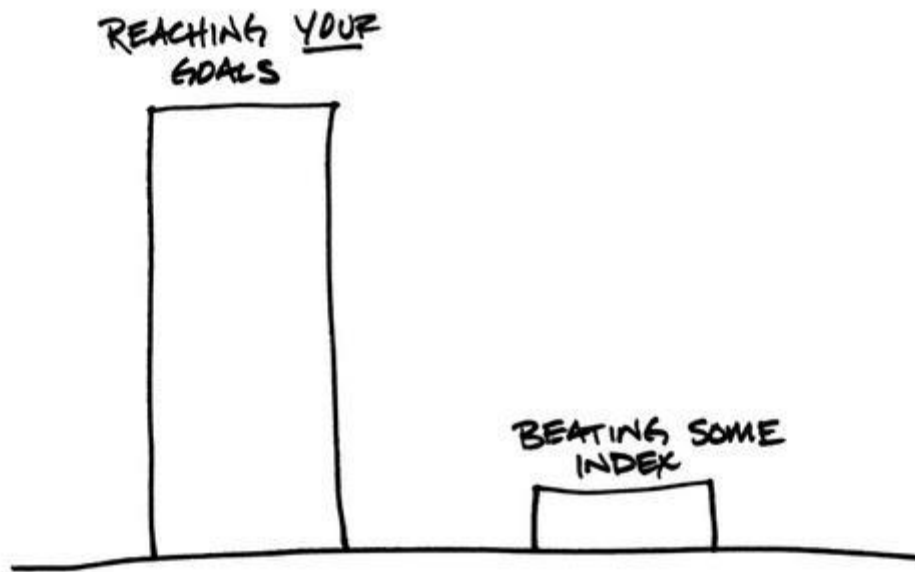
The factors are listed below: -

1. Convincing the ULLAS team that this project could be implemented at scale, without the comfort of the college.
2. Secondly, convincing the team members, motivating them and placing our trust on them.
3. Establishing our credentials with the Government school staff and planning them about the program and stating the benefits for the students and asking for their trust on us.
4. As stated earlier we had decided to connect the various college students of the districts. This part proved to be more challenging than the others. The District Representatives and District Mentors went to the respective colleges and negotiated with the staff explaining the vision and enlisting the college's support.
5. In the end, the school students whom we were actually targeting began to trust us and began understanding that we were doing it all for their good alone. This was the fun part and over a period of time the bonding grew deeper.

Some of the stories which I'll be mentioning next will somehow cover the above mentioned points as you shall see.

As per the organization structure the district mentors are responsible for setting up teams, conducting the classes and documenting the progress and communicating it to the district representatives. While each of the mentor had their own ways to overcome challenges in their districts but all of them have transformed into leaders in their own right by overcoming self-doubt through persistence, planning and execution. This defines our **"LEAD"** part of the motto.

Next, the district representatives are responsible to build the relationship with the team and the school. They also need to get the progress update from the mentors, document it, monitor it and communicate the progress to the core team. Their set of challenges although shared with the mentors also had their unique problems as mentioned below.



WHAT YOU SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT...

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Salem:

1st academic year (2014-15):

Mentors:

Praveen who was the District mentor for Salem in the 1st year of TQI- Ullas project. He was studying at Paavaai Engineering College, Salem. He made a memorable video which beautifully depicts the way the classes are conducted in the schools (you can check it out at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmo4x3cBWm4&t=5s>). He was the winner at the ICTACT's Youth Talk event and that helped him network with a lot of college students. He passed on the information about the project and elicited response from the students. He interviewed them and selected a few of them and formed the team within 2 days. This man was a personification of excellence as the following facts will establish it. The only challenge he claims that he faced was, he wasn't being very efficient in engaging the students. He says, 'when we go to conduct classes the aim was to motivate students to learn, initially only about 10 or 15 out of 50 students were interested in the classes or finishing the homework. The same set of students would participate in discussions while the others would remain mum throughout the class. But, they overcame this roadblock by recognizing the students who finished the homework publicly in the classes in front of the other students and urging the other students to come up on the stage. Slowly, the students opened up and they voluntarily came and reported their home work to the team members.

Initially there was a centralized authority with all the control remaining in Praveen's hands and the team consisted of 2nd and 3rd year students with Praveen being in the final year. This was done to effectively moot out any kind of conflicts arising between the team members. Later, he would delegate tasks like interacting with the Headmaster and collecting the reports from his juniors thus training them. His juniors still keep reporting to him about the progress being made to this day.

He reminisced a particular event where the classroom was littered full of paper and the students were rushing home. He and a friend started picking up the littered paper seeing this; a student by the name Mohan from that class called up his friends and joined these 2 in cleaning up the room. He says, 'had I asked them to keep it clean and "advised" them to keep the surroundings clean they would've mostly ignored, but on seeing us practice what we preached the impact was more forceful. This was a huge learning for us.

Hari Krishna was the District mentor of Salem for 2 years. He was studying at VMKV, Salem. Majority of his team was full of non-Tamils but very enthusiastic students. They solved this problem by pairing a Tamil (Junior) with the non-Tamil (Senior) student. This was done in such a way because the junior Tamil student would participate, learn and lead in the next year. In the 2nd year of the Summit program the govt. School Headmaster had refused permission on Saturdays, so they had to go only on weekdays. Many of the students had labs and couldn't bunk classes. So 2 groups were formed "On-site" and the "Off-site" teams (IT industry-ish ☺).



“The Off-site” team would not be able to go due to their academic commitment and so in the



morning they would get together prepare the lesson plans, attendance sheets and the activities. The "On-site" would collect all the material and conduct the classes in the afternoon.

As a team they were surprised to see the unity among the school students and their maturity at understanding the fact that somebody has come over to their school to do something good for them and learn voraciously.

Representative:

Dhanversh, the TQI volunteer, who has worked as the District Representative of Salem for 2 years has taught us that one does not need to be commanding to be a successful leader. Of course, the quality of a successful leader, i.e., to bring out the best team at the very first attempt, is possessed by him. The evidence of this fact being the Salem winning the Best Team award at for the first academic year of TQI-Ullas collaboration. The people, who had worked with him pointed out inter-personal relationship as the best quality of him.

Dhanversh's quality of modesty was pretty clear, when he was asked about his success at the first attempt, for which he replied, "The mentors from my Salem district, Harikrishna and Praveen have to take the credits for the success, because they had done more than what was sufficient to achieve the targets on time with perfection in work. It was not very tough to handle the team, because they were the best in taking voluntary responsibilities".

His ability to maintain the friendliness and reach ability irrespective of the working hierarchy makes him something more than what he looks like. His persistence and the vision to beyond the present made the Salem district TQI sustain better than any other teams. He had brought in the idea of bringing in younger volunteers so that they could take the Ullas summit for a longer period of time and he was one of the people responsible for the formation of Namakkal district with the support from Paavai college students.

He is one of the good learners and he adapts to the situations easily. When asked about his experience at TQI, he told, "My communication skill has improved as I had gained the confidence to talk with people of all kinds and to face the stage with minimal fear. My English-speaking skill had also improved which eventually boosted my confidence to communicate with people even more. I had become a team player and I had also learnt how to supervise a team with regular follow-ups and discussions with the team. Overall I had become more responsible working with TQI."



2nd academic year (2015-16):

Mentors:

Yuvaraj has a friendly countenance with those around him. He always believes in taking everybody along rather than being from the front. He is a great team player and allows for his team members to grow by giving them opportunities to make mistakes and learn. He faced a few challenges while gathering the team together and helping them move together, but through his team skills he managed to overcome that. He also successfully maneuvered around the permission problem in the school by repeatedly pursuing the HM. A girl from 10th class is a big fan of him as he motivated her during her 9th class, she still keeps asking about him.

3rd academic year (2016-17):

Mentors:

Sambhasan Banerjee (SamBy) has been with the TQI team for about 3 years now. Apart from the TQI-Ullas project he set up the TQI blog, he represented TQI at the national Daan Utsav meet 2016 in New Delhi. He is currently the District Mentor of Salem. You must also note the fact that he is the only non-Tamil Speaking Mentor in the entire team. He was mentored by Hari. His diligence and sense of purpose is what has made him a stand out performer on a consistent basis. The team's dedication was so thorough that the school had actually asked them to come late for the class instead of being early to the class, because the teachers would have a hard time controlling the students once these guys entered the school. His story reinforces the fact that language is definitely not a barrier for impact instead it serves as stronger reason for the students to appreciate the efforts put in by a person to make a difference to their lives. He is now able to address a crowd more effectively.

Manasa is the district mentor of Salem. She always makes the team's energy is high. She also has the knack to pick the right people for the job just like an HR manager. She made sure that the individual egos were managed efficiently for the overall success of the initiative. Also, the school had a change in the Headmaster and the new HM was a bit skeptical about the project's benefit, but after observing positive behavioral changes among the 10th class students during the course of the sessions, the Headmaster was convinced. Her entire team this consisted of fresh faces and she managed to mentor the team and bring out the best in them. As she recollects her happiest memories from her days as a mentor she says, "Once, while taking sessions for 11th students a student walks up to her and says, "akka, I'd like to be like you. I'm very impressed with the way you take classes and all these days I've only had the opportunity to watch you take classes from the outside". While the team was making a video, she observed and learnt and made a video too", which she has kept as a surprise for all of us. She put all her thoughts into a letter and sent it to Manasa through a 9th class student. Today, both of them bond really well. She



learnt how important preparation for an initiative was. Also, managing time and people were key to the success of the project.

Tirupur:

Mentor:

Sundaramurthy was the district mentor for Tirupur for all the 3 years. He was studying in Dr. NGP Arts and Science College, Tirupur. He was also the only mentor from an Arts and Science college. He was one of the most efficient mentors. He initiated by bringing his close friends whom he could trust and began taking classes with them. He would neatly allocate the classes to each one of them in such a way that one classes would consist of a teacher and an assistant. This way he eliminated unnecessary conflicts between the team members. He would regularly follow up with the volunteers collect the reports and mail them back to the district representative. He would also collect feedback from both students as well as the teachers. The biggest challenge he faced was in getting the permission from the school headmaster in the 1st year he would repeatedly went to school, explained the whole module to HM and after roughly about 2 weeks the classes began.

In the 2nd year the Headmaster was a different person so they had to begin from the scratch. Initially the Headmaster was difficult to be convinced. Later, Sundaramoorthy would help him out to solve a problem in his computer and explained him the module in a detailed way. The Headmaster was thus convinced and allowed the classes to resume once again. He was also the 1st winner of 'The Best District Mentor Award'. He also helps in managing the Coimbatore classes.

He shares a beautiful memory of a student from the 1st year of the Summit classes who was thoroughly insecure and would never come up on stage and participate. Sundaramurthy counseled him and inspired him to participate more in the classes. In the 2nd year the same student participated in 'The Tamil Illakiya Mandram' program and was awarded the 2nd prize.

Representative:

Saraswathi was brought through the ranks and tested through various initiatives like the Food awareness campaign in the hostel mess. She was in charge for celebrating Daan Utsav in Tirupur, with support from Sundaramoorthy. The event became a huge success. This prompted us to test her district for the Ullas project. She formed a team with Sundaramoorthy as the district mentor. Her key strength lies in delegating work effectively.



Trichy:

1st academic year (2014-15):

Mentor:

Harish was the District Mentor of Trichy in the 1st year of the TQI- Ullas project. The way he went about project and sustained it serve as a model for sustainability. He was studying at NIT, Trichy and thankfully he had aced his placements and could focus fully on the project. The smartest thing he did was to involve more of 1st year students who were enthusiastic about taking classes in the school. They conducted all the classes under his guidance. He also trained his juniors on managing the school and the students due to which the team is successfully continuing their effort. Most of his juniors in college actually were his friends from school. When asked how did he manage the sustainability of the team he says, “I had complete faith in the team and we have a whatsapp group through which we keep sharing ideas and I keep following up with their efforts from time to time. His mantra is to involve more of 1st years and tap their energy.” He remembers once when one of his teammate had excused himself for that week as he wasn’t doing well, the students constantly enquired about his well-being and took his number and called him up to enquire about his health. Also the students were curious learners and almost always exceeded the assignments given to them, especially anything related to art (painting).

Representative:

Preethi was the district representative for Trichy district in her 1st year. She exhausted all her contacts but to no avail, despite all the setbacks she pursued the goal of starting the summit classes in the government schools in Trichy. With the support of Harish, Trichy is one of the most sustainably continuing teams with consistent performance year on year. From a protected environment to travelling to the classes all by herself she inspires us all with the growth she has shown us. She is an up and coming poetess too. She now manages the SRM Tamil Mandram and the cluster head for Trichy, Cuddalore and Perambalur districts.

TQI has always been kept women empowerment as a top agenda and focusing on making them socially responsible to generate massive positive change as you shall see.

2nd and 3rd academic year:

Mentor:

Shashank is the current district mentor of Trichy, he is Harish junior in college. He reveals that his family was very supportive when they learnt that he goes to the government schools to conduct classes for them. They were appreciative of the effort he was putting in to improve the lives of the students in the school. He continues the legacy left by Harish and conducts classes for students across 9th, 10th and 11th classes. He transitioned from being a volunteer to a mentor over the course of the 3 years he has been involved. He quips, “initially we went to the schools in the morning and to wake up early was a huge challenge (☺). We would plan our sessions in the corridors of our hostel. Later as I progressed to being a mentor, I had learnt the importance of planning.” He now leads his team and conducts classes for students of the 3 years.



Representative:

Srinithi, celebrated TQI- Daan utsav 2015 at her district and was a volunteer in different projects of TQI. She took charge as the representative of Trichy and successfully completed 3 summit programs within the deadline. She learnt the importance of communicating clearly and efficiently.

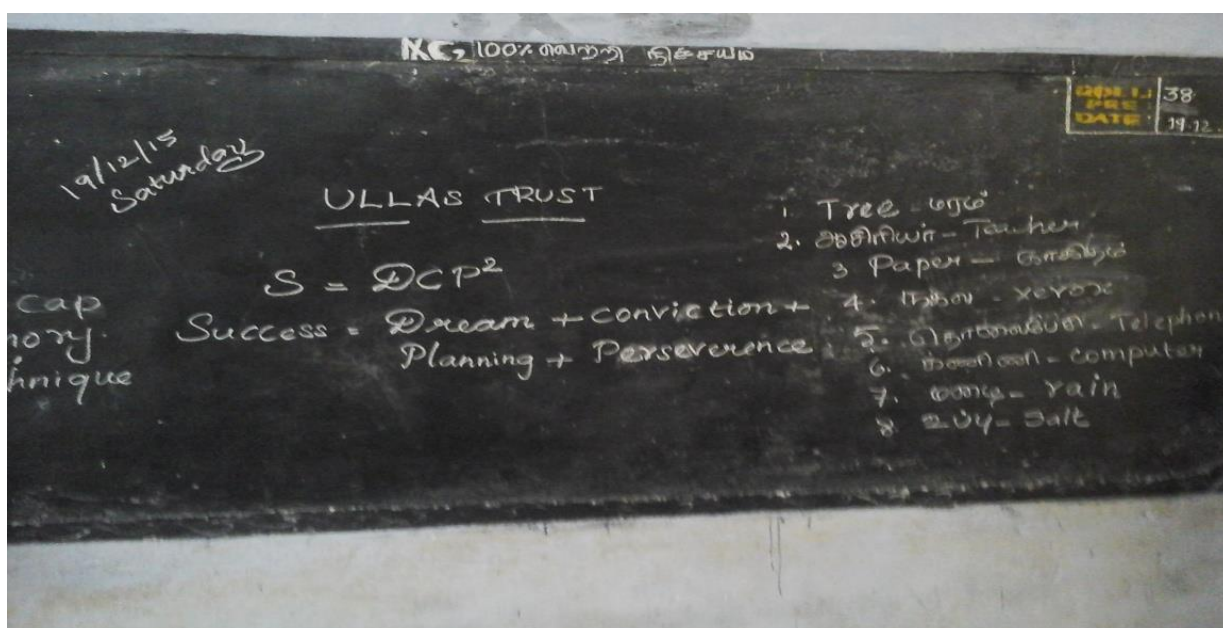
Tirunelveli:**1st academic year (2014-15):****Mentor:**

Sudhan was the district mentor of Tirunelveli district. He formed a team with his classmates and even without support from his college, he and his team would go on Saturdays to the school. Initially they decided to focus on a local school in their own locality but they were repeatedly refused the permission to conduct the classes in the school, despite giving the assurance that the existing class timetable would not be affected and the students would really benefit from the program. The team also faced immense challenges in convincing the Headmaster of the school they were going to go. Even after approaching through the proper channel the school initially simply sat on the directive from the District education Office. Luckily, for him he spent some time convincing the Headmaster, which was well invested as he was very supportive of this initiative till the very end. In their first class only a handful of the students attended the sessions. But from there on, there has only been an increment in the number of students in each class. Sudhan shares how important these lessons were when he started working in the corporate industry. The importance of documenting the progress and the team effort required to succeed in any initiative were some of the biggest learning he claims to have got through this. Also, he understood the importance of friendship while forming the team for the project which is exactly how TQI was formed (friend- friends of friends and their friends).

Representative:

Volunteering and interacting with the society is a fancy hobby for the modern elites, but it is more of a mutual learning and development process for people like **Viswa Narayanan**. Knowing Ram from the beginning of his college life, he was able to see TQI's growth without being a part of it.

Initially he was roped in for generating ideas for events such as Ullas summits, Express workshop at college and NTN etc. The main factor that pulled him towards TQI was not the service attitude (which he claims to have never had), but the wide open area for bringing in innovative ideas. "Connecting the urban privileged students to the rural students" was his main purpose of joining TQI.



An opportunity opened up for him when TQI planned to spread the Ullas summit program to villages in different districts of Tamil Nadu. He was contacted to bring in volunteers from his district, Tirunelveli. He was not a socially interactive person, so he had to break his boundaries to communicate with people so as to involve them in the activities of the program and help them to take this responsibility. Finally, he roped Sudhan in, a person who never said “NO” for anything.

Viswa had to handle the team formed by Sudhan and a team which came from TQI as a value addition. After a few interactions with the teams, one of the teams gave up and there was a situation, where there was a need of a team to go to a particular school and there was a need to find a deserving school for Sudhan’s team (A nice Catch-22 situation, eh? ☺).

When he was lagging behind, there was a thought of motivation popped up in his mind, which said, “Mr. Arun Jain, the initiator of Ullas had no relation with my district. Even TQI has no relation. But they all have built up an opportunity to solve the educational needs of village students. If I could not take this to the school, I am betraying those students”. That thought boosted him to go meet people, focus more on the goal, find the right people and connect them all. He got inspired by the younger volunteers, who could convince almost anyone and get things done. All that was needed from him was to find the right people and deliver a detailed explanation about the concept of the TQI- Ullas project.

These incidents embedded into his mind and he approached the school where he had studied and worked as a part time teacher there. Even after getting employed at a private company, he spent a lot of time in taking up a lot of responsibility for their CSR activities.

He was more surprised than others when he heard that the team in Tirunelveli was reformed twice by the resilient mentor, Sri Ganesh Bharathi, who had simply refined and redefined the theme of Ullas at Tirunelveli and resurrected it whenever required. That incident proved that he had identified the right leaders at his place.

2nd and 3rd academic years (2015-17):

Mentor:

Sriganesh Bharathi was the District mentor of Tirunelveli. His family was initially not too keen on him spending too much time on this project. But, then he convinced them of his passion to do something for the kids. He also faced problems in convincing his college to allow them to conduct classes. They had initially refused as the school was really far off from the college. There was mixed response from the college, while some of the faculty really appreciated the cause behind the program, the others were not keen about the project. He faced huge challenges in keeping the team members engaged in the summit program initially. Later as when the summit progressed they were able to see the difference through the topics covered in the manuals. There was a boy who was studying 10th standard but he ran away from school. He actually was interested in getting educated but found the entire process difficult. Bharathi, spoke to him, listened to him and allowed him to vent out his frustration. Then after a while, Bharathi returned to the school for a session, this boy sees him and comes running to him saying that he has passed

in all the subjects. The joy with which he shared the news moved him. The student's curiosity to learn and gain knowledge kept the mentors on their toes and pushed them to learn new things. He learned how to form and sustain a team through this project.

Representative:

Mahadevan is Sudhan's brother. He took charge and the first year was a cake walk for him as his brother and Viswa helped him with his duties and also trained him to handle responsibility. In that year he reconstructed the team with the help of his friends and mentor Sriganesh.

In his second term as representative he began facing many a road blocks. As the HM got transferred, the team need to start from square one once again. The team convinced the new HM to allow them to take classes, but the team from his college collapsed due to personal problems. He went on to search for a new team from different colleges and formed a more effective and dedicated team. The new team planned and scheduled the classes and took them more effectively which made the school authorities more comfortable and happy. The Tirunleveli team noticed a ninth class boy was finding it difficult to even write his name in English and they reported about it to the HM and asked them to give special attention to him. The HM eventually allotted a teacher to improve his English, which showed results.

Tuticorin:

1st academic year (2014-15):

Mentor:

Jeyaram was the District mentor at Tuticorin. He was studying at NEC, Tuticorin. His parents were teachers and supported him fully. He battled through health issues to support the project with the help of Ajay. They went class to class in their college to talk about the project with the students and met with lukewarm response. They then decided to do it among their friends itself. Then the thought of the future sustainability made them approach their juniors. The juniors were initially reluctant as it was completely out of their comfort zone, then about 3-4 of them volunteered. The seniors constantly kept motivating the juniors and after a few classes the news spread among the juniors and more number of them volunteered for the project. He asserts that, "I never knew that I had the potential to spontaneously talk on stage and interact with the students, it was a happy realization knowing that even I could go and conduct classes for people."

2nd academic year (2015-16):

Mentor:

Ajay was the district mentor for Tuticorin. He expresses about his experiences of being involved in the TQI-Ullas project in the following words, "The root of my leadership traits lies with the guidance of our one and only Ramasubramanian #RamAnna. The proud and satisfactory moment was when the children performed wonderfully in front of the Ullas team. It was truly showing the fruit of our classes. Now, when I went as a chief guest to the same school I felt honoured and



related. After 2 hours of interaction, I found their care was not just by words but truly as a brother.”

3rd academic year (2016-17):

Representative:

Essakiammal is a find of TQI’s Express program in the first year. She performed consistently well and came out of her comfort zone and went on to conduct Daan utsav in 2015 and 2016 at Tirunelveli.

After getting recruited as Representative of Tuticorin her commitment and dedication to the project has been incredible. She faced lots of challenges both while managing the team and with the permission in schools. The team members couldn’t go to schools as their college became strict and many went for part time jobs. She called each one of them and empathized with their predicament and gave them solutions on how they could manage both the commitments efficiently thus bringing them back on track. She always invested time to build a strong relationship with the members which helped her to motivate them to volunteer. As the district members had exams and the school had given permission only during that time, Essakiammal went to the school all the way from Chennai with her brother and effectively took the class and stood as an example for “a leader not only shows the path, but also walks the path.”

The happiest and emotional moment for her was when her cluster head Gokul scolded her for travelling alone to the school to take a class. She felt so happy that she got a caring brother through TQI. I always feel happy to read those amazing feedbacks from the students.

Theni:

1st and 2nd academic year (2014-16):

Mentor:

Suganthan was the District Mentor of Theni district. The quantum of difficulties they faced in convincing the school authorities and the decision to ultimately drop that particular school is testament to the determination of the mentors Suganthan and Bala. Young school students of class 7th would fight with their classmates on caste issues and mostly end up in beating the daylight out of each other. There was zero interaction between the girls and the boys and the staff vehemently discouraged them from taking classes in the school, despite which they went ahead. They found that the students were smoking and drinking outside the school premises. These school students hardly had any interaction with their parents and any kind of support from home. They then became “Annas” for the school kids and listened to their problems patiently. When asked, “how did they manage to build and sustain the team?”, he almost immediately quips, “We are first and foremost a part of the TQI family and hence there were no seniors or juniors within the team.”

He also adds, “the kids generally look forward for the class completion bell and the moment to run off from the class. But, at the end of their 1st session they asked, “anna, why are you leaving



so soon? When are you coming next?” He learnt that even he could add a difference to someone’s life. On a lighter note, after the summit program he realized how great and important his school teachers were owing to all the mischief he had done in school.

Bala was the district mentor for Theni in the 1st year. He got introduced to TQI through Srinivasan the District Representative of Tiruvallur. He had a catch 22 situation, his college permitted him to take classes during the weekend while the school asked him to take classes only during weekdays and not on weekends. The school was initially very reluctant to give the permission for conducting the classes; the reason being- the students were very unruly; they wouldn’t listen to you. The permission was secured by Girija (the story has been shared at another place) after persuading the HM for only 1 class. And after that class, the HM was able to perceive the student’s interest to attend the classes and permitted them to conduct the subsequent classes. Some of the happy memories he shares are, “there was a girl who used to actively participate in all the activities, she broke down all of sudden one day while sharing about her family’s problems and she offered to bring breakfast for another girl, who shared that she would always come hungry to the school. The team had given them an assignment to write up about their favorite leaders. The school was located in a remote village in Theni and there was no internet connection available anywhere in that village and these students would catch a bus and travel all the way to Theni, found out an internet café and get the work done there. This really moved the team. These students had also made beautiful working experiments.” Today he takes classes for students through a leading NGO and the experience with TQI-Ullas has helped him gain confidence while taking these classes. The feedback collected from the students would have a lot of poems written by the school students.

Representative:

Girija was the district representative for Theni. Theni has always been a very challenging district as mentioned above. And challenges seem to bring out the best out of this team. Girija is who she is today, due to all the personal cum professional challenges that she overcame. She thankfully had great mentors in Suganthan and Bala. In the school in Theni the Headmaster had categorically listed 11 points as to why the classes must not happen. Some of them like - students were very unruly, people would misuse the school premises and the teachers were facing huge problems in finishing the portions, but she stuck to her guns and told him this is the school we want to focus on because there’s a very real need for reform among students in the school. This was the pivot for Theni to become one of the more successful districts. These are some of the challenges faced by her –

- To convince her family to allow her to work in the project.
- To convince the HM to allow them to take classes in the school
- The HM’s had changed the next year so all the effort went waste and they had to start from the scratch.
- To manage conflicts arising within the team.

She learnt from her mistakes and sustained a regular correspondence with the HM of the school, which took care of the permission part. She sought out the experience of the senior mentors and



took this up and set up a team and got the summit done in that district with the help of the Tirupur team. Today she manages Theni, Tirupur and Coimbatore.

3rd academic year (2016-17):

Mentor:

Shanmugam is the district mentor for Theni district. He shares his experience, “TQI is a like a sea, with every swim we learn something new. My experiences as a mentor are so different from the ones when I was a member. When I lead a team, I realized how many different people thought and how to handle them. It also gave me a confidence and a sense of responsibility to face and handle every situation. Getting permission from the HM, meeting with staff reflected a Corporate environment. I broke through my shyness. One of the most beautiful memory I recollect was, when we started the class with a Thirukural and a girl repeated the same with perfection. I was pleasantly surprised by her talent and that observation made me realize a lot. It was difficult to convince the HM without the letter of COE but other than that every memory is sweet.”

CUDDALORE:

1st academic year (2014-15):

Mentors:

Manikandan was mentored by Sarveshwar and followed after him. His passion for conducting the classes endeared him to the students. He shares, “while we were asking the students to share their aim in life one of the students rose up and confidently asserted that he would want to follow Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's footsteps. The confidence and intensity with which he shared that dream really shook us up.” He learnt how to handle any kind of situation smoothly in a calm manner.

Nilson is a very warm hearted person. He is a very innovative thinker and conducts his sessions in a very out-of-the-box manner. He is a silent operator and pursues excellence in whatever he does. The HM called up and informed that post his sessions the students were behaving in a very disciplined manner. The students started wishing the teachers good morning, spoke in a palatable language and dressed better. He picked up communication and management skills while working on this project.



Representative:

Perseverance is the one word that describes **Sujitha Ramesh** in the perfect sense. Also, she is known foremost for her abilities to quietly pursue her goals with relentless determination and this one quality makes her a unique person. Her growth from being a soft-spoken girl from a small rural town in Tamil Nadu to handling a huge team in multiple projects under Talent Quest for India has been a phenomenal success. Her qualities as a kind, level headed and humble leader will always set her apart from the crowd. The perfect example of her adaptation to unanticipated situations is when she took the responsibility of handling two teams in Cuddalore district to conduct Ullas summit classes. She had proved it to everyone that, breaking through one's comfort zone would do miracles when she started interacting and managing mentors from the opposite gender. She took the ceaseless efforts of travelling alone to different places and negotiating with the people in higher position to overcome failures.

The real heroes are born in time of disaster. Disaster in her case was literally a disaster, in the form of Chennai floods. Cuddalore was badly affected by it. When everyone gave up, her motivating words inspired the teams, schools and every responsible people to strategically work together at a better pace to complete the summit classes, for which she received TQI's 'Best District Representative Award' for the academic year (2015-2016).

When asked about her views on working with TQI, her modest reply is as follows:

"I have had an equal learning from the children for whom I had conducted classes. Anger management, creativity, good food habits and even taking positives from failures are all the results of the learning from those children."

2nd academic and 3rd academic year (2015-17):**Mentors:**

Sarveshwar was the district mentor of Cuddalore, he shares his experience, "TQI shaped my life with a confidence to face a gathering, shattering my stage fears and bringing out the presentation skills in me. Every challenge didn't seem tough because it was a step for self-learning and agile leadership. My wonderful moment was when I was honored by the school HM along with people from Ullas during the Touch the Soil event. It touched me so much and made me more committed towards the welfare of the kids. I realized how important our classes were when I saw the once tough teachers turning to respect us."

Swetha was a district mentor from Cuddalore district, she reminisces about her time in TQI in the following way, "from a shy little girl to a leader is purely because of TQI. Interaction with the kids was the point of self realisation towards keeping ourselves updated and positive always. Every question posted by them kindled our interests to give them more inputs than usual. We were also able to find a few shy one's who in the beginning wrote questions in the feedback, but later turned out to be a stage performer themselves. The only challenge was with staff who were rude and tough to handle, but we could convince them too with our perseverance. I also found an inspirational person in Mohan Anna to whom I haven't spoken much but admired a lot. Thanks to TQI for giving me a way to share my happy moments."



Representative:

PonKarthika overcame the fear of talking to a stranger after becoming the representative of Cuddalore.

Tiruvallur:**1st academic year (2014-15):****Mentor:**

Vigneshwar met Ram at ICTAT youth talk. They bonded well and thus was born the Tiruvallur team with Srinivasan as the representative. He managed the team efficiently and effectively and brought out the best out of them. He motivated the students to participate better and appreciated them in front of the entire class for their performance. He along with his team conducted a prize distribution ceremony for those students who performed consistently. He shares, "during that function we missed giving a gift to a student and he started crying and all of a sudden, a girl came forward and told him to give the crying boy her prize. That stumped me."

2nd and 3rd academic year (2015-17):**Mentor:**

Dinesh is the district mentor for Tiruvallur for 2 years. He entered the project in a very incidental manner through a friend's email. Initially, he didn't have a clear picture of what was expected out of him and what was he going to do. He faced a lot of breaks and delays at every stage. He had doubts about the project itself. Then as the teaching aids and other learning material arrived from Ullas and he went through the modules he found how relevant the topics were with the students' requirements. When he began taking sessions in the school, he understood the module's impact on the students. Then he began forming a team of students who were studying in different colleges. With Srinivasan's help they managed to get the permission from the school to conduct the classes there. Once, the school's permission got managed the team members had a problem, their colleges didn't permit them to go for the classes. On a personal front, his Department Head had asked for his parents to meet him. Somehow the issue got resolved and he managed to form a team and conduct their 1st session for 10th class. In the 2nd year he expanded the team from 6 members to 40 members from various colleges through friends of friends and he allotted them to each class on specific dates forming a team of 2 people/ per classes. The headmaster in the school had changed and the situation was again back to square one. The new HM began questioning the motto and the was creating problems and questioned about the benefit for the school from Ullas. Even after explaining the cause and the benefit behind the project he didn't budge from his stance. He shifted the timings to the evenings after school hours. From 3-4:30 they had classes for 10th. The 10th AHM had a different perspective about the project. The strength post lunch was always low. They somehow managed to conduct the classes. While classes in all the other standards were proceeding smoothly, 10th standard was the only cause for concern. Despite Pongal holidays they managed to complete the Summit within the calendar year. When his friends



keep asking why does he still keep going at it despite all the struggles, to which he says, “somebody out there who didn’t know me at all chose to trust in me to get the work done. Secondly, the love from the school students was one which drew me every single time.” He also adds, “without my team I would never have come this far and they are my responsibility.” His friendship with people was also tested in the process. He learnt to understand people’s mentality and their reaction under different situations, time management and how to respond to people and when to be strict and when to be supportive.

Erode:

1st academic year (2015-16):

Thanks to **Divyabharathi** as a representative and **Naveen** as a mentor for opening Erode up, for TQI. This gave us more confidence to include more districts in the next academic year.

2nd academic year (2016-17):

Samuthra Bharani is a product of TQI Express and came out of her comfort zone went to her native to celebrate Daan Utsav 2015. She, after being selected as Representative of Erode district for TQI ullas project faced challenges from both within her team and the school.

The 2015-16 Erode team dropped off as they had attendance problems in their college and the Erode school was also not ready to take up the program this year. She didn’t lose hope and bounced back with enthusiasm. She formed a new team with the help of Tirupur mentor Sundaramurthy for Erode.

She called the HM many times to explain about the importance of that class to 10th but ending up getting a dangerous warning from HM saying if she calls again she won’t be given any class thereafter. She was taken aback but kept her cool and waited patiently. The HM was going through a treatment at that time and she constantly would enquire about the HM’s health regularly through messages. In the end, her personal bonding and patience paved the way for the HM to call her and agree to give both 9th and 10th to her. The team led by Shyam went on to take the classes effectively which made the HM to give classes next year too.

New districts included in 3rd academic year (2016-17):

Coimbatore:

Mentor:

Jeevasurya is the district mentor for Coimbatore who was earlier handling Tirupur and voluntarily took responsibility for Coimbatore and built up the team from scratch. She handled both the districts. She confidently convinced both, her parents as well as professors to allow her



to volunteer for the project. In the initial few classes she conducted sessions for 150-200 students all by herself. She later overcame communication gaps with her teammates and lack of support from the college and ensured everyone followed proper time management with respect to the project. Thankfully, the school in Coimbatore was very supportive of the initiative. Her biggest takeaways were, “she learnt how to adjust, manage and to overcome communication gaps with the team. She was able to overcome her stage fear.”

Representative:

After successfully celebrating Daan Utsav in 2014 and 2015 in Tanjore district. **Ajay** took charge as the representative for Coimbatore for 2016-17 academic year, which is the most challenging district for TQI.

Ajay too faced problems with college and school but he and his Coimbatore team lead by Jeevasurya were skillful and selfless in their motive to teach kids. The team dropped off as the college became strict and didn't permit them, Jeevasurya took her family members with friends from other colleges to complete the classes. Initially, the school was reluctant to believe in them but after the competition conducted by the team there for Daan Utsav 2016, the school was happy to give one class to check how the team would handle the students there. The team took this as a test and impressed the HM and went on to finish the summit effectively.

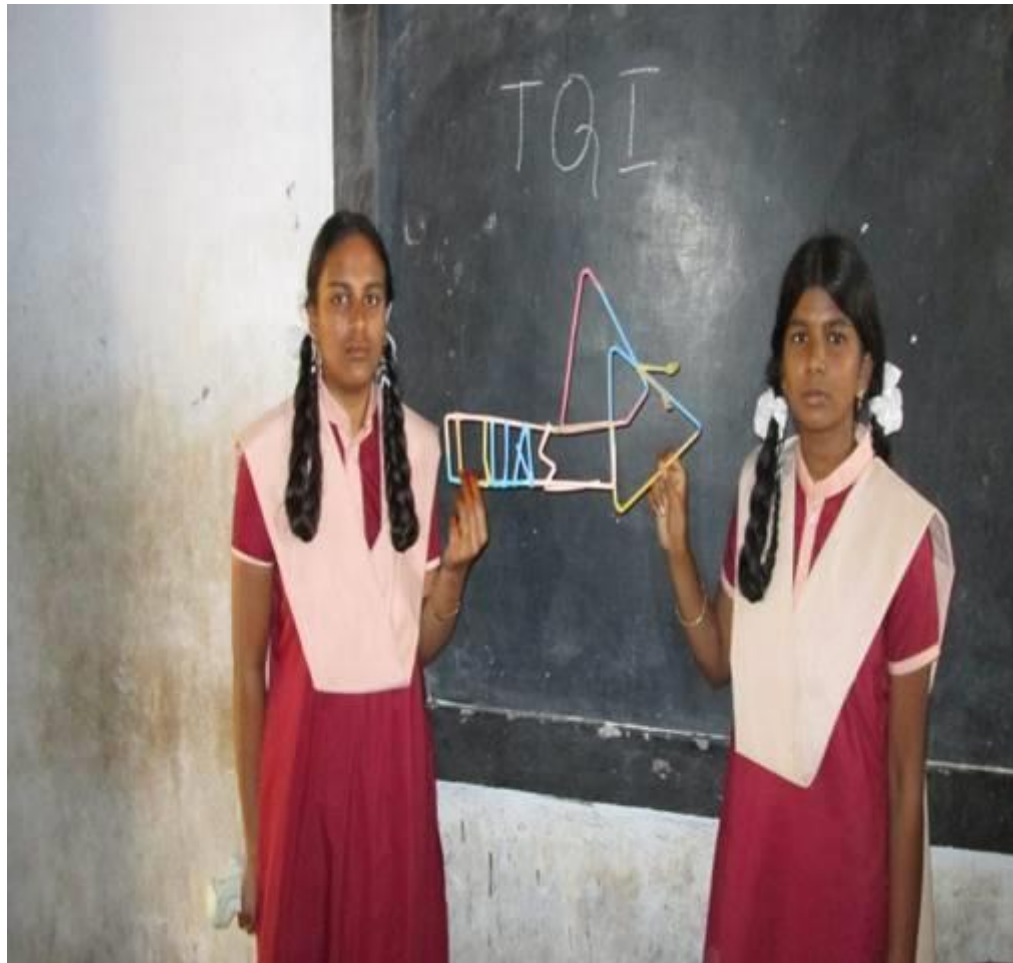
Namakkal:

Mentor:

Nirmal is the district mentor of Namakkal. He had a few not so good experiences in his life which he translated as learning for the students in his school. He guided them to stay away from all that is negative and instead motivated them to stay positive in their outlook. He was earlier attached to the Salem team and volunteered to start the TQI- Ullas activities in Namakkal. Forming the team was the easy part as he claims but choosing the right school was the more challenging part for him. He had to drop 2 schools due to various reasons. In the current school he initially found the students to be lacking in motivation to excel in their academics and through the Summit 1 he has sought out to motivate them to pursue excellence in their academics.

Representative:

After celebrating Daan utsav 2015 at Erode district **Gowtham** took the charge as the representative for Namakkal district and learnt to be an effective team player.



Perambalur:

Mentor:

Karthikeyan shares his experience of the TQI-Ullas project in the following way, “the trust that our volunteers have earned from the teachers is well proved when the teachers voluntarily requested the volunteers to teach a few tough topics to the students in our way of teaching. If that was significant enough, the proof of trust got strengthened when the teachers shared the weakness of a student and asked the volunteers to give special attention on that student focused on the way to come out of the weakness. The HM of the school got surprised when students were obedient during 5 summit classes.” When asked about the secret behind the trust earned, the volunteers said that they got inspired by the school students from under privileged background, who come to school regularly with a longing and curiosity to study and learn more so that they are given an equal opportunity to be able learn effectively and have fun in the process.

Representative:

Parthiban is a find of The TQI Express program. He celebrated Daan Utsav 2015 and 2016 in his district and went on to become the representative of Perambalur. He faced the problem of bringing the team together but he brought them together by building a strong personal relationship with each one of them.

Dharampuri:

Mentor:

Satish is the district mentor for Dharmapuri. He’s currently managing the local team and conducting the summit classes. He adds, “the students are very interested in drawing and plans to conduct a valedictory function and have planned to gift books to the students to enhance their knowledge.” He had also learnt to interact with people without any inhibition.

Representative:

Jeevithra has been a part of the TQI Family for 2 years and involved in many activities of TQI. In 2016-17 academic year she formed the Dharmapuri team for Ullas project and took charge as representative.

She faced many challenges and overcame them with patience and commitment. As most of the team members were in their final year in college and the 9th class strength was close to 300, she went on to convince her juniors and their family in her district to form a young and sustainable team within the stipulated time given to her. The school at first didn’t give her the permission to conduct classes, but due to her commitment to take classes for them she pursued the HM continuously and convinced her about the importance of these classes for the students.

The college where the team came from refused to give On-Duty leave at first, but on seeing these students’ commitment and selfless motto one of the department started to support them to take classes in the school.



One of the girls in her Dharmapuri team had stage fear but after going to the school and addressing 50+ students she lost her fear and started loving teaching as a profession and wants to become a professor. That girl after a particular time was not allowed by her parents to go to school for various reasons, but Jeevithra talked with their parents and convinced them too, to be a part of the TQI Family.

Madurai

Mentor:

Meera is the leader of TQI's 1st all women district team. She is Vel's sister's friend. Despite domestic problems she is an excellent orator in Tamil and always looks forward for any opportunity to serve the society. She has completed all her Summit classes successfully for the current year. 2 girls in her class had a long standing feud between them. They hadn't spoken to each other for a very long time. She and her team arbitrated the issue and both of them spoke to each other for the 1st time. This is her happiest memory from this year. We wish her many congratulations for this feat.

Representative:

Vishnupriya being a final year learnt the art of time management by being a representative of Madurai. She convinced the HM of the school with her effective communication skill and kept a close eye on the team's growth and student's feedback.

Resurgent districts:

Kancheepuram:

Through SRM University's Social Club we took classes in a school in Urapakkam. After that through TQI-Ullas we took a different school in the district, which didn't last for more than a year. This year we returned to Urapakkam school after 2 years. The love and the memories remain intact with the students. Most of the cluster heads and the representatives of TQI 1st took their classes in this particular school. Now, the same tradition follows. The sessions are on a different level due to the history and the pedigree of the people taking the classes.

Harish was the Project Manager for the first ever TQI- Ullas season. He just had hope of doing a good job but nothing beyond that. On a lighter note the biggest challenge he found out to be was to convince both Ram and Mohan anna on a single idea. Ram would say yes to a particular and Mohan anna would summarily reject it and the converse is also true. Also, we had a lot of inflow of data like the attendance record, the volunteer count and so on and so forth. Now, all this data was flying all over the place and was totally meaningless. Most of us were downright poor with our Excel skills. In times like these one realizes the importance of Mohan anna's supervision. He patiently guided us on data aggregation and management through Excel and we were able to



track the performance of the team members (you must have notice the tracking sheet above). Most of the verbal updates were converted into reports and data. This improved the efficiency. We set up regular reminders for the district representatives and the mentors to get the work done and the updates sent. The training and the guidance under Ram and Mohan Anna helped him document better, communicate better via e-mail and negotiate with different parties. Today he is cluster head and regional head at a leading Edutech company where he leads a team of 250 people and 10 managers reporting to him. He once went to receive feedback from one of the schools in Tirupur, there was a student in 8th standard who began smoking at a young age. He confessed to Harish that he started smoking just to show off. But, after Sundaramoorthy's classes he understood that what he was doing wasn't correct and he promised to kick out the habit. The teacher added that, "as a teacher I can only teach what is being given in the 30-40 pages of the book, but what you are doing is giving them value based lessons which is more important for him to lead a good life."



Special Mention

We would like to thank our 2 pillars of support Dr. A. Nagappan, Principal- VMKV Engineering, Salem and Mr. J. Saravanan, Training & Placement Officer- Dr. Navalar Nedunchezhiyan College of Engineering, Cuddalore. Each of them have gone out of their way to support the TQI- Ullas initiative. They were responsible for forming, nurturing and mentoring the students on planning and execution of ideas. They share in the concept of holistic education for students and themselves contribute with fresh approaches and ideas regarding the project. Nagappan Sir has specially dedicated a separate room for the TQI team in their college and encourages the students to make use of it as an office space for various activities. Saravanan Sir has been a major driving force for the students in Cuddalore to keep them focused on the project. He also makes sure the students maintain a balance between their academics and their TQI activities.



Team Ullas's feedback on TQI

Sukanya Ma'am has been a rock of support for TQI from the Ullas team. She heads the team at Ullas trust and spearheads their various initiatives. She has been an inspiration for all of us. She treats all of us as her own kids which is very endearing.

1). What made you (read Ullas) trust TQI in the first place?

Sukanya Ma'am – We were drawn to your earnestness, sincerity and purity of thought in wanting to give back what you all felt was important, so that, the students following you are better equipped and aware. Also we were impressed with your selflessness and the sheer passion to do good.

2). How do you envision a future for TQI?

Sukanya Ma'am – I see a beautiful banyan tree growing organically- sheltering many, transforming many, touching many, giving to many and continuing to grow deep into the ground and spread its goodness all around. I see that the purity of purpose continues to grow brighter and brighter and be the all-consuming flame for TQI.

3). Any special memories that impacted you?

Sukanya Ma'am – What is most inspiring to me is about how you care for every one of them in the team and look out for them and accept them for what and who they are with no conditions or strings attached. You as “Ram anna” befit that title and how Mohan as the stern father compliments the role you play so well and underneath all that stern disciplinarian is a lot of love and compassion. You guys are an inspiration and I am so glad that our paths crossed ☺.

Thank you very much ma'am. ☺

Poornima ma'am is the coordinator from Ullas trust for TQI. Being kids, she always treated us with utmost professionalism and considered and took care of our requests in a timely manner. She is an 'Akka' for all of us here in the TQI family.

We asked her what she liked about TQI.

She replied, “I believe that the potential of students is equal to atomic energy. It can be used as the most creative source or it can become the most destructive source. Student's knowledge, power, position and prosperity can create like nothing or they can destroy like nothing will. It depends on how it is directed. And how it is directed depends on the direction of intelligence. Hence, the 3-year successful journey of TQI with Ullas proved the intelligent direction by TQI core team especially Ram that determine the pace of each progress. TQI- their forum, their team itself is unique to me for their approach in both ways professionally and personally. What I had done or contributed towards the program gave me the feeling of completeness.”

Thank you very much Poornima akka. ☺



Founders speak

“I wish the TQI family must grow from strength to strength in rural India by connecting friends and family, exploring the opportunities available to them, sharing their knowledge with each other and lead a happy and a successful life in a responsible way.”

- *Ramasubramaniam. G*
Founder
Talent Quest for India

“In the next 5 years I would like to see TQI in all of the villages in India bringing light in the lives of the rural students.”

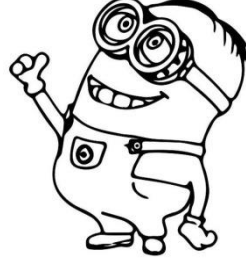
- *Mohan. K. V. L*
Advisor
Talent Quest for India

“I already see the volunteers turn leaders by being self-sufficient and responsible individuals. Over the next few years I would like to see them bring massive shift in the rural students’ perception of life and their thought process through their activities on a larger scale. I would also wish the team to create a large localized leadership pipeline for the movement to grow in the exponential way it has been over the last few years.”

- *Madhusudhanan. B*
Co- Founder
Talent Quest for India

“I would like to see TQI grow along the Latitude (i.e. district(s)) and the Longitude (i.e. state(s)). I would also like to see at least 1 event conducted by the students in each district where students shall come from various parts of the district to celebrate the spirit of TQI. Similarly, I also envision a yearly event happening in each state where students from different districts shall come along to keep up the spirit of service. I would also like to see more penetration happening in the government schools through the TQI clubs in the coming years.”

- *Kandavel. S. S*
Co- Founder
Talent Quest for India



www.talentquestforindiablog.wordpress.com



<https://www.facebook.com/Talent-Quest-for-India>



talentquestforindia@gmail.com

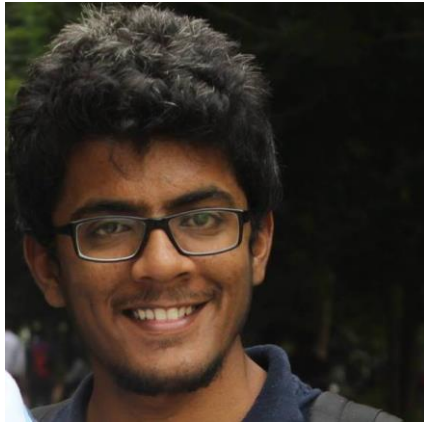


<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKOPsI0U3kR4QeVXjIITqSA>



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Dear reader,

The book you must have or will be reading now, is as much my story as being a witness to the journey called TQI as much as it is about TQI. You will find stories about people who showed personal courage, shattered their self-made beliefs, pushed the odds and rose above the situations to emerge as leaders in their own right. And it is my sincere belief that you will enjoy reading about these stories as much as I have writing them. In case you feel you could contribute in any way or we could help you in anyway do connect via our social media, we would love to hear from you. 😊

Love
Fox Madden