

**An Interview with:**

**Ms. Saraswathi**  
**Tamil Nadu, India**

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To **Saraswathi** every child has the innate potential to be creative and curious, and has the capacity to discover the world in his or her own way. She believes that education should enable every child to blossom and discover its potential to the fullest extent. That is why the 45-year-old MSW (Master of Social Work) has decided to dedicate her life to child centered learning to improve the quality of school learning and teaching in Tamil Nadu, India.

With a diploma in social development from Canada, Saraswathi has worked with a number of NGOs like Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) and Alarippu, both in New Delhi, India. As a CRY ([Child Relief and You](#)) Fellow, she receives an annual budget of Rs. 96,000 for her work from CRY.



When the Tamil Nadu government decided to revise the textbooks for classes I, II and III, Saraswathi worked with different state resource groups to bring out a child centered book which would kindle the interest of children, challenge their minds and give space for their creativity. These new textbooks are currently being used in government and aided schools throughout Tamil Nadu since June 2001.

Saraswathi's interactions with children have convinced her that stories have an enormous potential to enthuse children and open up a whole new world. Saraswathi is currently working on bringing out stories in Tamil for primary school children in card format to make learning an enriching experience.

HelloLife.org thanks **Poonam Chengappa** for conducting this interview.

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**What inspired you to initiate this work?**

Though initially my professional qualifications as a MSW prompted me to work with an NGO (Non Governmental Organization), it is my interactions and experiences with children in different school situations that gave me the necessary direction in my work. Often transit school children are not given much opportunity to explore creative activities. This motivated me to work with these children, to sustain their interest in school activities.

When a city transit school run by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board decided to have a 15-day workshop, I pitched in with art, painting, storytelling and dance. The response from the children was tremendous. They shed all their inhibitions and participated with so much enthusiasm!

***What is a typical day at work like for you?***

It varies widely - from absorbing days when it is difficult to distance oneself from the task at hand to days lost in mundane things or in waiting for official things to move.

***What are some of the major obstacles that you have faced in your work and how were they dealt with?***

Obstacles such as resistance to ideas and the inability to influence decision-making directly do confront me sometimes. Making the process collective, consulting, and sharing the merits and constraints from time to time generate support to cope with different issues.

***Does your work lead to interaction with government bodies and if so, what is the experience of working with officials like?***

Yes I do have to interact with government bodies and officials. It is a mixed response that I get. Some people are sincere and willing to take new ideas forward, but others are not willing to give any weight to innovations. The openings created help to reach out to vast numbers.

***What are your future plans?***

I am currently working on bringing out stories in Tamil for primary school children in card format to make learning a more enriching experience for them.

If you are reading this interview and are motivated by the work of Ms. Saraswathi, then you can consider making a small donation through CRY to support the work she is doing by going to <http://202.71.136.120/home/donor/donationList.asp>. Please mention that your donation is for Ms. Saraswathi's work on child-centered education, and it will be considered as part of CRY's "Adopt a Project Scheme". She may be contacted via CRY at:

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Hello Life ([www.hellolife.org](http://www.hellolife.org)) is a voluntary effort dedicated to improving the lives of people worldwide. The aim is to embrace life: and to help those less fortunate to embrace it as well. Hello Life periodically features an extraordinary individual initiative or South-based organization that has made the difference where it counts: at the grassroots.

One of the core aims of Hello Life is to link up and share information on South-based initiatives that so far have an inadequate web presence. Hello Life volunteers will aid such organizations to develop a web presence of their own. It is hoped that this will catalyze their work and further the overall mission of improving the lives of people worldwide.

Do you know of a unique individual initiative or small South-based organization that has made a difference to people's lives? Would it benefit from the publicity of being featured as the "Helping Hand of the month" on HelloLife.org? Then share it with us at [helpinghands@hellolife.org](mailto:helpinghands@hellolife.org).

Join Hello Life and become part of our network: Send a blank email to [hellolife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:hellolife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) and receive updates on network activities, featured stories and the latest "Helping Hand of the month".