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## **ANNUAL REPORT**

# **2020 - 2021**

**Building Entrepreneurial Eco-System in Tier II & III Regions**

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Nativelead is a one of a kind platform for empowered and established natives of various small towns to interact with aspiring entrepreneurs from the region. Through Nativelead, the leaders can invest their expertise, knowledge, contacts, wisdom, time and money in entrepreneurs to reap rewards that go beyond the monetary.

## Vision

To achieve inclusive growth through entrepreneurial success in small towns.



## Mission

Building and continuously improving the components of new age entrepreneurial ecosystem in the focused geographies.



## Positioning

We wish to position Nativelead as an organization that is focused on creating new age entrepreneurial ecosystem in the small towns to nurture early stage ventures.



"Small Matters"

# WHAT WE DO?

## We Help Create

- More Brands For Your Native
- More Intellectual Properties
- More Jobs
- Better Entrepreneurial Culture
- Better Ecosystem

## We Help Prevent

- Local brain drain
- Urbanization
- Outflow of local money & resources

## We Help Connect

- Investments
- Technology
- Markets
- Mentors
- Incubators & Accelerators
- Critical Knowledge & Guidance
- Media
- Government
- Large Corporate Establishment
- Research Labs
- Top Industry Leads
- Business & Social Forums





# NAGARAJA PRAKASAM

Co-Founder & Chairman

Oru naal Oru Medai Oru Kodi - that was the only thing in our mind early 2020! Very impressed to see Chennai Native connect under the guidance of Latha Pandiyarajan, taking this across x towns of Tamil Nadu, and we were about to witness the outcome on March 12' 2020. Then we were hit by the crisis of the century that made everyone shell shocked across the world. That's when we immediately started online Nalai Namathe, to start providing the moral support and bring-in positivity.

In the first NN' as a AMA format, I was very impressed to see the kind of participation and questions. NN went on non-stop for x episodes, positioned Natvielead as a thought leader amidst crisis. I was there at the last session as well and it was so heartwarming to hear the impact NN made in entrepreneur lives. Given that boost, Startup Tamilnadu'20 was a very bold move, that again turned out to be a runway success. I remember Rajan Anandan who spoke at the event mentioning, "Wow, 200+ people are eager to listen to us", I was telling him it was around 2000+ in the morning. Prelude to that was, non-stop pitching by 20 of the short listed venture pitching to our 40+ angels attending everyday saw 4 shortlisted ventures beating our 1Cr target - we were able to commit 2.x crores.

Another unexpected consequence of the lock-down was many people returning back to their home towns/villages. Reiterating our belief that by supporting the non-metro small town entrepreneurs we can improve employment opportunities there. Now with this reverse migration (I call them city returned) there is more work cut out for us and providing a great opportunity to Nativelead strengthening our focus to promote non-metro startups with Enable, Nurture, Incubate and Invest - that saw unprecedented 3 investments worth X xxxxxxxx amount. We also saw emergence of new leads for Rural Basket and Sankar of Karur chapter leading 3 deals - Carbon Masters, Happy Hens, Uzhavar Bhumi, making Nativlead an institution now!"

**Nagaraja Prakasam,  
Co-Founder & Chairman,  
Nativelead Foundation**



# LATHA PANDIYARAJAN

Co-Founder & Vice Chairman

“In the midst of every crisis , lies great opportunity” said Albert Einstein. The year 2020-2021 has been an extraordinarily challenging year with many of us understanding new words and jargons like pandemic, COVID, new normal, social distancing, work from home, study from home, quarantine, co-morbidity, ventilator etc etc. An unprecedented happening world over and every single person was , in some way, touched ( rather affected) by it. Nativelead too struggled with this pandemic but it also forced us to discover new ways of connecting , keeping in touch and doing our best to keep the spirits alive.

Our event “ Startup Tamilnadu 2020” which was supposed to happen in March physically could not happen due to the pandemic and the team worked together and made it happen virtually in August 2020. It was a great event with so much planning and execution by the team. We would like to profusely thank all the members and volunteers who worked hard to make this a success. It came out so beautifully and almost everything that was supposed to be done physically was recreated virtually. We are also grateful to our investors as we could mobilise investment for three budding companies – Rural Basket, Uzhavar Bhoomi and SP Robotics probably giving Nativelead a unique distinction of being an institution that could support emerging entrepreneurs even during the pandemic and recession.

Sivarajah and the team also continuously kept the entrepreneurship eco system alive by having engaging programs like “Nalai Namadhe” and “ Kadhaiyum Vidhaiyum” which also gave an opportunity to listen to various people and keep the entrepreneurs motivated and triggered with new ideas. Supporting and creating mass entrepreneurship is the vision of Nativelead and is the most important “need of the hour” at this critical phase of recovery from the pandemic. We will continue to work towards this mission trying to incorporate, add, support and nurture all that is required to create a conducive eco system for entrepreneurship that will help a “thousand flowers ( entrepreneurs ) bloom “ in the coming years.

Looking forward to people’s support to make this happen in an effective , sustainable and meaningful manner.

**Latha Pandiyarajan**  
**Co-Founder & Vice Chairman**



# SIVARAJAH RAMANATHAN

Founder & CEO

Challenging experiences are always exciting and give me a great amount of satisfaction. Nativelead was a first of its kind social impact model to build an ecosystem for new age entrepreneurship in small towns of Tamilnadu. Travelling through the evolution process of a unique initiative is something beautiful and productive as it leads to new development models for others to replicate.

We have made Angel investing inclusive and accessible to the dreamers of small towns. We are the pioneers to set the narratives of "Inclusive Mass Entrepreneurship" and "Small Town Ecosystem" for Tamil Nadu way back in 2012 which are now common phrases used by the mainstream public. What could be bigger than this for a social enterprise?

The COVID year of 2020 gave us a lot of problems and helped us convert them into opportunities. We were all set to run the Startup Tamilnadu 2020 mega event with over 1000 participants as part of our "Aayiram Pookkal Malarattum" project on 14th of March, but had to call off on 12th after investing over 6 months of hard work and money. The Government announced full lock down on the 18th of March and we immediately bounced back from April 1 with online sessions engaging over 500 entrepreneurs every day. Eventually, we managed to run the Startup Tamilnadu 2020 on the online platform in the month of August. It was a grand success. We clocked staggering numbers in impact measurement through the online version of this initiative which was best in the industry.

We also did investments to the tune of xxxxx during the year 2020-21. Overall, it was an eventful year of exciting twists and turns.

Looking forward to making Tamilnadu one of the world's top 5 destinations for entrepreneurship.

**Sivarajah Ramanathan**  
Founder & CEO

# PEOPLE BEHIND FOUNDING TEAM



**Sivarajah Ramanathan**

Founder & CEO,  
Director | Winways Systems Pvt Ltd.



**Nagaraja Prakasam**

Co-Founder & Chairman  
In-Resident Mentor | IIM Bangalore



**Latha Pandiarajan**

Co-Founder & Chairman  
MD, Mafoi Management Consultants Pvt Ltd.



**VA Palanikumar**

Co-Founder & Director, Finance,  
Managing Director, Winways Systems Pvt Ltd.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Nagaraja Prakasam**  
In - Resident Mentor | IIM Bangalore



**Latha Pandiarajan**  
Co-Founder | Mafoi Mgmt Consultants (P) Ltd



**Sivarajah Ramanathan**  
Director | Winways Systems Pvt Ltd



**MVA Palanikumar**  
Managing Director | Winways Systems Pvt Ltd



**MV. Subramaniam**  
Managing Director | Future Focus infotech (P)Ltd



**URC Devarajan**  
Managing Director | URC Constructions Pvt Ltd



**CD Venkateshwaran**  
Managing Partner | Venbro Polymers



**Sriram Sankaran**  
Partner | Natesan Company



**Ligi George**  
CEO | Madras Suspensions Pvt Ltd



**Sankar Kanagasabai**  
Managing Director | Shree Renga Polymers

# CHAPTER GOVERNING BOARD

## Madurai



**S. Rajamohan**  
Chairman



**Edwin Samuel**  
Vice Chairman

## Chennai



**Latha Pandiarajan**  
Chairman



**Sivakumar Sadaippan**  
Vice Chairman

## Coimbatore



**Jayaram Govindarajan**  
Chairman



**K Premnath**  
Vice Chairman

# CHAPTER GOVERNING BOARD

## Erode



**S Ommshravana**  
Chairman



**C Mohan Kumar**  
Vice Chairman

## Karur



**Sankar Kanagasabai**  
Chairman



**Kaushik Selvam**  
Vice Chairman

# Journey of Nativelead

Nativelead Foundation was born in 2012, but its beginnings go back to several years before that. In the '90s, Madurai citizen R.Sivarajah set out to launch an entrepreneurial venture in IT, then considered a promising sector. He invested 15 years in the business, but found he was able to achieve little, especially in comparison to entrepreneurs who had launched similar ventures in Chennai and Bangalore.

In retrospect, he realized he had been driving blindfolded in business. He had no knowledge of the nuances of entrepreneurship such as business strategies, business models, financial planning or raising investments. It dawned on him that entrepreneurs in non-metro cities like Madurai lacked exposure to the knowhow of new age entrepreneurship and knew that they could not compete unless the playing field was levelled. Nativelead is the outcome of realizing the pressing need to create an ecosystem for new age entrepreneurship growth in non-metro locations.

As an IT entrepreneur, Sivarajah connected with industrial forums like the CII and Nasscom and also founded the regional association Software Industries Development Association (SIDA) with the objective of promoting the IT industry in southern Tamil Nadu. During his association with these social forums he came to believe, even more strongly, in the need to create a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the ancient city of Madurai. It would have to be a structured organization to promote entrepreneurship.

Ashwin Desai, another Madurai entrepreneur who was looking for ways to give back to the city which had helped him to establish himself as an entrepreneur, became co-founder of Nativelead. Sivarajah and Ashwin, along with other industry colleagues, formed Nativelead Foundation with the objective of supporting entrepreneurial missions of mainstream entrepreneurs and to create a culture of innovation & entrepreneurship among college students in tier 2 and 3 cities.

In 2012, the CII Madurai zone came forward to launch Nativelead as a skill development initiative and leading industrialists like R. Dinesh, Joint Managing Director of TVS & Sons, Karumuttu T Kannan, Managing Director of Thiagarajar Mills, K.S.Bharath, Chairman of Aparajitha, Dr.S.Aravind of Aravind Eye Care Systems, Ligi George of Madras Suspensions, M.D.Vel of Indian Foods and other industry leaders took a keen interest in the initiative, giving the foundation an impetus in Madurai.

The founders were fortunate to meet Sundar Madakshira, Vice President of SAP Labs, who was impressed by the unique model and took it to the CSR wing of SAP Labs which, in turn, sanctioned a reasonable grant, helping the foundation expand its operations. SAP's help went a long way in sustaining Nativelead in its fledgling year. The funding helped the foundation implement many of its plans for Madurai and other parts of southern Tamil Nadu.

They say the universe conspires to support good intent. In the case of Nativelead this intervention came in the form of two remarkable people - now Co-Founders -- Nagaraja Prakasam, known as Naga to all, and K Pandiarajan of Ma Foi. This association marked a turning point for Nativelead. Both of them came from southern Tamil Nadu, had established themselves elsewhere and were looking for opportunities to develop their native regions.

Naga's expertise as an angel investor and startup ecosystem activist helped Nativelead Foundation formulate professional strategies and structures. The present design of Nativelead, unique in the country, is the brainchild of Naga. The Foundation is based on the co-creation principle, which allows a limitless number of people to participate in all its activities.

The fundamental design of the organisational strategy has a four-pronged approach: Enabling, Nurturing, Incubating and Investing. This approach helps build a complete ecosystem in a given geographical region in which the foundation works. The co-creation principle drives the organisational culture of Nativelead and a number of industrial forums, corporate establishments and academic institutions have joined hands to make a positive impact in southern Tamil Nadu.

The multi-faceted K Pandiarajan, who is also a seasoned entrepreneur, has dedicated time to the Foundation amidst his busy schedules and was instrumental in encouraging Sivrajah to start Native Angels Network, the investment facilitation arm of Nativelead Foundation, as funding is an important aspect of entrepreneurship,. Later, Naga got it up and running with his wide network of contacts and domain expertise.

In October 2014, Madurai's native entrepreneurs proved their commitment to developing this ancient town, when 29 high networth individuals came forward to join the initiative on the first day, a significant milestone in the entrepreneurial history of Madurai. This is a first of a kind model and Nativelead and NAN are today well known in the start-up ecosystems across the country.

In the year under review, Nativelead has seen its operations and initiatives streamlined further and acquiring sharper focus in its six chapters: Madurai, Karur, Coimbatore and Erode, plus the satellite chapters of Trichy and Tuticorin. The Foundation's ever growing activities are now conducted through four dedicated forums: Native Startup Circle, Native Mentor Circle, Campus Startup Circle and Native Angels Network.

### **Native Connect Circle**

Besides these, one significant development in the last two years was the Native Connect Circle. The circle was created to rope in people from small towns who have moved to Chennai and established thriving enterprises there. This platform enables them to give back to their native places and support entrepreneurship in small towns, whether through investing, mentoring or providing market connects. The last aspect is crucial since enterprises from small towns will, at some point, have to grow and market themselves in the metros of India and overseas. The Native Connect Circle enables that leap.

## New Operational Model

Nativelead Foundation was established in 2012 and three years later, NAN took shape as a sub-forum. Operations were mostly centralized even after chapters were launched. At present we have close to 250 members and a slew of activities. We became aware that mentoring, for instance, cannot be served effectively by a centralised system. The decision was made to shift to a more democratic model. Professional consultants were engaged to restructure Nativelead.

The result of these efforts is now a two-layer decentralized model. A Central Governing Board has been set up and comprises one or two senior members from each chapter, one of whom is the chairman of the chapter governing board. These are the statutory board members, while the founding members remain as permanent members.

The second layer is the Chapter Governing Board with separate by-laws. Each chapter has a governing board with a chairman, vice chairman and executive committee managing the chapter. Separate bank account for chapters gives them financial independence as well. There are vertical responsibilities within the governing board.

With this organizational set-up we continue to build on the four key pillars of the Nativelead mission:

Enabling: Inculcating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation

Nurturing: Mentoring and guiding students or startups who are serious about their enterprise. Validating their business ideas and supporting them through the journey

Incubating: Identifying bankable ideas helping to further these through incubation. Providing tech-based incubation support and an advanced form of nurturing.

These three can be managed effectively at chapter level.

Investing: While nurturing can include mentoring and providing market connects for startups, not all of them can be considered for investment. It is the promising, scalable ideas that can attract investment.

With our foot on the accelerator, we have been able to make a tangible impact in the last year. We currently have 242 investors across the state. Nine investments have been made with one venture maturing to allow a 4x. There are 75-plus mentors who work with Nativelead and some 200-plus startups are constantly associated with us, with a 100 more being involved from time to time.

Building an entrepreneurial eco system takes the commitment and endurance of a marathon and we at Nativelead are poised to take on this challenge with the support of all our stakeholders.

That was our journey till 2018-19.

### **Overseas Exploration**

We have decided to explore opportunities for Native Connect in the US and CEO Mr.Sivarajah Ramanathan made a visit to around 5 cities in the US in November 2019 and held talks with many potential Tamil investors.

This process-oriented aspect is handled by the Central Governing Body through a professional secretariat team and consultants. This body also creates organizational policy and supports programs at chapter level.

### **COVID Dynamics:**

#### **Aayiram Pookkal Malarattam & Startup Tamilnadu 2020**

We wanted to make the year 2019-20 a year of turning point and the beginning of a new milestone. With this objective we have designed a 10-year Roadmap plan in the name of Aayiram Pookkal Malarattam – a project to create 1000 Startups from the small towns of Tamilnadu in the next 10 years. The plan has annual segments and every year will end with a mega event “Startup Tamilnadu”. The idea is to identify and support 100 startups every year, so that we will be achieving the 1000 startup mark in 10 years.

We started the process in the month of November 2019 by organizing around 14 programs in the name of Thedal at 14 different small towns to identify Startups functioning in the respective towns. We shortlisted 100 startups through these Thedal programs and divided them into 5 cohorts to conduct 5 intensive boot camps at 5 different locations.



## **Startup Tamilnadu 2020**

The agenda is to expose all the 100 Startups to our investors and mentors during the Startup Tamilnadu 2020 event scheduled to be held on March 14th 2020. Early March was the time where the uncertainty started and we took a conscious decision on March 12th to call off the event despite several months of hard work and sizeable amount of expenditures.

## **Beginning of the New Normal**

FY 20-21 was an extraordinary Year. Despite being a year global pandemic and recession, it was the year that we discovered what we are and what we have become. In addition, those highlights, we will be delighted if you could please send your Message for the Annual report.

Please find the below Highlights of FY 20- 21 for your reference.

1. Our Investors have invested for three companies in the FY 20-21: Rural basket, Uzhavar Bhoomi and SP Robotics.
2. Nalai Namadhe was a super hit show of the year conducted from April 2020 to May 2020 that motivated the crowd with mind blowing speech and session through our Prospect Investors.
3. Startup Tamilnadu virtual summit 20-21 online event left everyone dumbfound in terms of technology, performance and networking.

# The Way Forward

- ◆ We will continue with the Aayiram Pookkal Malarattum initiative by organizing the 2nd edition of The Startup Tamilnadu 2021 with more impact and content.
- ◆ Planning to organize a 100-hour Accelerator program called Native Axil.
- ◆ Launch of Startup Thamizha! – an online media show featuring live pitching and other startup programs in association with an execution partner.
- ◆ Initiating the process of establishing an Angel Fund.
- ◆ Launching an online learning portal in Tamil.

# Milestones



## 2012 - The Genesis

Nativelead Foundation launched as a co-creational platform for promoting and supporting New-Age entrepreneurs in Madurai and other parts of Southern Tamilnadu.



## 2013 - Outreach Program

Supported by SAP, a German Multinational, carried out an intensive Reach-Communicate-Engage to create an ecosystem of emerging entrepreneurs and other stakeholders in small towns of Tamil Nadu.



## 2014 - Investors Network

Launched Native Angels Network, an Investment Arm, with around 20 Angel Investors. This is India's first Angel Network to be started in a Tier 2 City.



## 2015 - Initial Investments And Footprint Expansion

Made two investments. Received Mainstream media



## 2016 - Community Engagement Forum & Footprint Expansion

Established Erode and Tuticorin Chapters. Initiated Community Engagement Forums such as Native Startup Circle, Native Catalysts Circle and Campus Startup Circle to focus on specific target groups.



## 2017 - Expansion Of Investors Network And Footprint

Established Karur Chapter. Crossed 200+ Investors and became the largest regional angel network in



## 2018 - Organizational Remodeling

Revamped the Organization and created a framework for a decentralized and democratic operations model. Installed a new statutory board.



## 2019 - First Metro Chapter

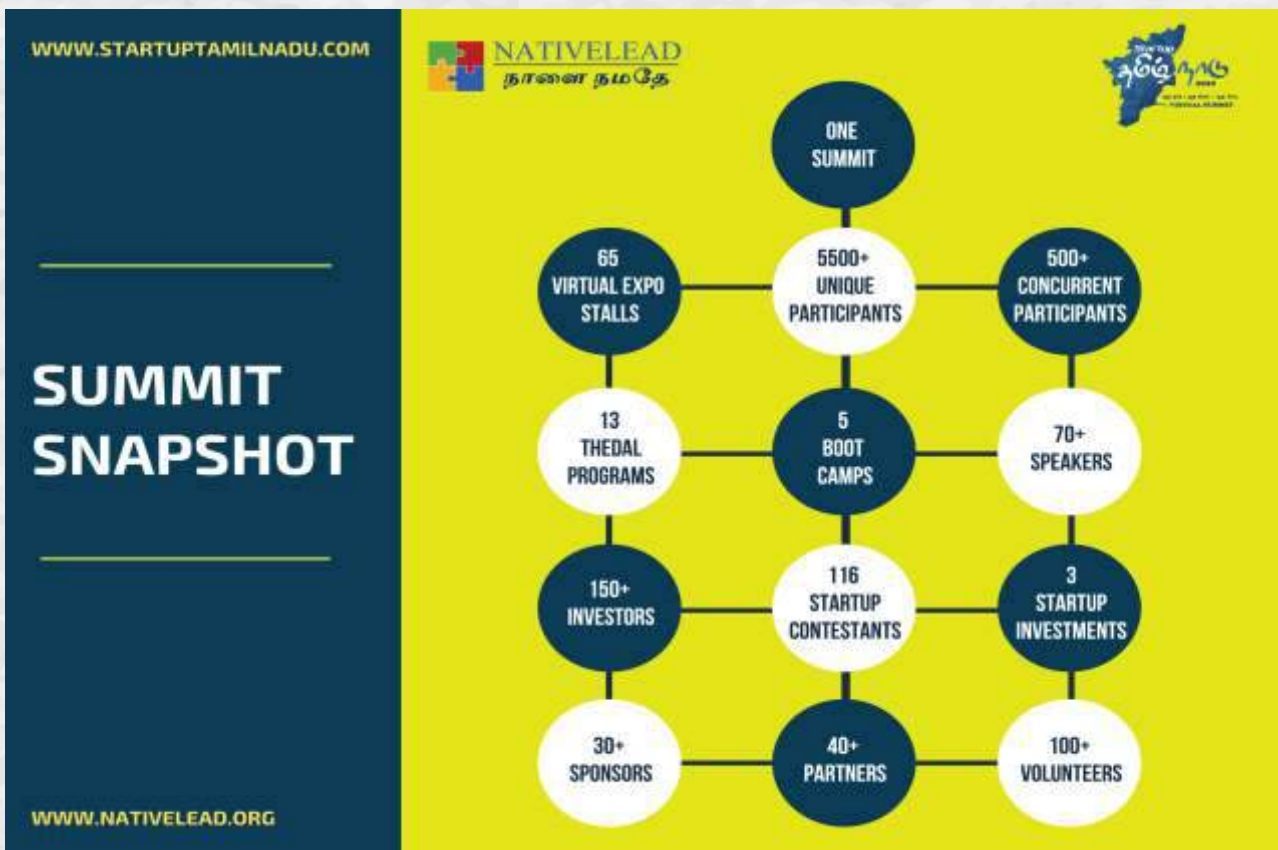
Launched Native Connect Circle, a new off-shoot with the objective of connecting Chennai-based investors and mentors who could help the small town ecosystems to thrive.



## 2020 - Startup Tamilnadu Initiative

Launch of Startup Tamil Nadu Community | In the process of establishing Overseas Native Connect Chapters.

# Startup Tamilnadu 2020



# "Oru Naal, Oru Medai, Oru Kodi" Pitch Competition

"Oru Naal, Oru Medai, Oru Kodi" Pitch Competition was conceptualized with the singular purpose of identifying investment-worthy and innovative startups that could make an impact at the grassroots level of emerging small towns and cities across Tamilnadu.

## SELECTION PROCESS



[www.startuptamilnadu.com](http://www.startuptamilnadu.com)

**3 Startups for Funding**  
**3 Startups for Deep Mentoring**

We are delighted to share that, with our sustained efforts, we have been able to zero in on six ventures that are making a difference in the lives of people from different strata of the society.

## WINNERS



[www.startuptamilnadu.com](http://www.startuptamilnadu.com)

# KEY STATS

## VIRTUAL SUMMIT

- Total 19 Hours
- Total 26 Tracks
- Virtual Expo
- 10 Pitches

## DAY ONE

- 3 Power Talks
- 1 Power Panel
- 1 Masterclass
- 1 Fireside Chat

## DAY TWO

- 5 Power Talks
- 3 Power Panels
- 1 Masterclass
- 1 Fireside Chat

[www.startuptamilnadu.com](http://www.startuptamilnadu.com)

## PARTICIPANTS' SHOUTOUTS



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DIGITAL PARTNERS

TECHNOLOGY PARTNER



VIRTUAL EXPO PARTNER



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# How Nativelead Works

## Nativelead Angels Network

### **Investing Local**

Native Angels Network is the driving engine of the entire Nativelead platform. Angel Investors are high net-worth individuals who invest their own money in start-up companies in exchange for an equity share of the business and who can add value to the company by providing proactive advice, industry connections and mentoring support. Unlike a bank loan or other types of debt financing, equity capital gives an ownership interest in the company invested.

## Nativelead Startup Circle

### **Leading Nativepreneurs**

Nativelead Startup Circle is a forum for the regional Startup companies and aspiring entrepreneurs to network; gain knowledge; get access to brainstorming partners, potential markets, coworking spaces in multiple cities and other general business services. Startup Circle also works closely with Nativelead Angels Network.

## **Nativelead Mentors Circle**

### **Sharing Wisdom**

Nativelead Mentors Circle is a subforum for mentors and startup catalysts over 40 years, of age with experience and expertise in various industries - their domains and functionality. The members of this forum are individuals with a passion to share their wisdom with aspiring entrepreneurs; they validate and improve their ideas, plans and decisions. Apart from sharing their own expertise, they also help the startups find further help by referring them to other agencies and people who fit the bill.

## **Nativelead Campus Circle**

### **Trigger Your Passion**

Campus Startup Circle is a unique forum designed by Nativelead to inculcate the culture of innovation & entrepreneurship amongst students. Nativelead is working with a vision to establish Campus Startup Circles in all the institutions in Tamilnadu.

# Companies we have invested in



1.



Rural basket was started in Tirunelveli in June 2019 by Mr. Palanirajan V- Former Sales Professional turned Entrepreneur from Karaikurichi. Rural basket was initiated with the vision of sourcing a wide variety of "traditional" organic products from the rural hands of Tamilnadu to urban areas.

Mr. Palanirajan identified that farm-fresh and organic products has demand among customers in urban areas. He visioned commencing a start-up in the motive of connecting micro-farmers, farmer producing organizations, women entrepreneurs and small-scale producers from rural areas and collectively channelising their products through Rural Basket to consumers.

Nativelead Foundation, led by Mr. Sivarajah Ramanathan, played a major role in the creation and development of Rural Basket. Nativelead's expertise is building and continuously improving the components of new age entrepreneurial ecosystem in focused geographies. Mr. Palanirajan pitched his business idea to Nativelead in 2017. Nativelead saw the potential in Mr. Palanirajan's ideas and provided assistance, guidance and mentorship.

Nativelead initially focused on incubation- building products and help them gain market traction by connecting Rural Basket with various sellers, Women Self Help Groups (WSHGS), entrepreneurs and connected Rural Basket with Mr. Prabakharan Murugaiah of Tiliconveli TechPark, Tirunelveli for additional guidance.

Nativelead helped re-building the brand, tested various new strategies and attempted developing various business models to develop a scalable business model. The outcome was the 'Click and Mortar' – a B2C model. Rural Basket hit the online market in 2019 and progressed greatly.



In 2020, Rural Basket participated in Nativelead's initiative called 'Startup Tamilnadu 2020' where Over 100 angel investors from India and the United States came together to evaluate ideas from 100 entrepreneurs from across small towns in Tamil Nadu.

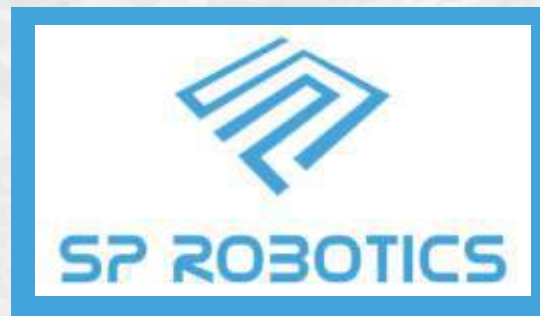
Rural Basket represented their unique E-commerce model, bagged the first place in the event and was funded by over 21 angel investors an amount of 56 lakhs. Shortly after reaching this milestone, two physical outlets were opened in Tirunelveli. The business outlets eventually extended to Dharmapuri and Chennai as franchises and has also flourished to be successful.

Rural Basket is now an online/offline platform to supply traditional groceries through their unique click and mortar model. The startup's mission is to create 10,000 Ruralpreneurs and open 100 franchise stores across Tamil Nadu by 2025. Rural Basket offers about 15 categories and 500+ SKUs of pesticide-free, healthy, and "traditional" groceries, including daily needs items like rice, dals, millets, spices, oil, and other eatables as well as ready mixes, native snack baskets, home and beauty products, and the occasional handicrafts sourced from rural artisans.

The startup has partnered with over 15 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and 50 women Self Help Groups (SHGs) across Tamil Nadu to source a wide variety of "traditional" organic products.

Rural Basket and has created a tremendous impact along with Nativelead by showcasing the determination to keep alive Tamil Nadu's traditional food practices and craftsmanship through Rural Basket.

2.



SP Robotic Works is a platform to learn, build and showcase Robotics, IoT (Internet of Things), Image Processing, Virtual Reality (VR) and other next generation skills or education. The courses in Robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), Image Processing, Virtual Reality (VR) and more are structured, AI-Based, offered both in the online and offline smart-class mode. The learning is completely practical with hands-on kits.

While there are multiple companies like Lego, Sphero, littleBits, and Makeblock that create educational robotics products, these are inclined towards the toys segment and DIY kits. According to SP Robotics founders Sneha and Pranavan, their USP is that they are teaching not just robotics but also emerging technologies.

Their products are open for exploration. People can make mistakes and learn—they are not plug-and-play. And the learning that happens with the product tracks the analytics of skills gained, which differentiates SP Robotics.

3.



Farmers Fresh Zone, a Kochi-based agri tech -startup, is creating a new path in the marketing of organic vegetables produced by small-scale farmers in five districts of Kerala. The company offers the 200-plus farmers in this network an online platform to sell their produce without the intervention of middlemen, thereby ensuring a reasonable price for the produce. Farmers Fresh Zone was founded by Pradeep P S, a graduate in computer science.

Coming from an agriculture background, Pradeep realized the need for proper marketing of agriculture produce when he noticed some of his family members themselves were finding it difficult to sell their produce at a reasonable price. This prompted Pradeep to explore the possibilities of e-commerce for marketing of the produce of farmers. Thus was born Farmers Fresh Zone. Farmers from Thrissur, Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Palakkad and Wayanad are now part of this network.

The company also conducts market studies and alerts farmers regarding the prices. This helps them to produce what customers are looking for. Through door delivery and sale through outlets, products are delivered to the customer within 24 hours of harvesting, doing away with the need for cold storage or freezer facilities. The two-year-old company, through the door delivery and four outlets serves 10,000 customers in Kochi city alone.



## Event Highlights



The lockdown clamped in the aftermath of CORONA-19 spread for the most part of 2020-21 was a severe body blow to the Indian industry. With no clue of what the future had in store, many industrial units, especially MSMEs and startups, grappled with new normals. For Nativelead, the lockdown turned out to be productive. It meant a brief migration from the real to the virtual world.

The three initiatives launched during the period kept entrepreneurs energised and helped them to come to terms with the reality staring at their face. Nativelead utilised the virtual space to its advantage by launching 'Naalai Namadhe,' an event to strategise and instil confidence in the mind and heart of entrepreneurs; 'Kathaiyum Vithaiyum' to share knowledge and experience with industry leaders as participants and 'Aadukalam,' a platform to pitch startup ideas. No evening was spent ruminating. On the contrary, they added loads of confidence in entrepreneurs and sharpened their resolve to bounce back.





நாளை நமதே  
*Redefine Yourself.*

This thoughtful event kicked off with a talk on "Managing the challenges of running a venture in these uncertain times" by Nagaraja Prakasam, Chairman, Nativelead, on April 2, 2020. An event an evening meant that the participants went to sleep with a clear head and a lighter heart. The sessions were conducted with topics like crisis management, financial management in critical times, strategies to fly through the turbulence, emerging opportunities, blooming out of recession, the art of networking, how early-stage companies can navigate COVID-19 times, fundraising and due diligence, light up the darkness and opportunities in healthcare. Some of the sessions like 'psychology and neuroscience of successful entrepreneurs' and '360 caring and sharing' added value to the evenings.

Naalai Namadhe was organised from April 2 to May 12 and on November 28 and December 12, 2020. Prominent speakers included Shrinithi Venkatesa Mohan, Founder, Sashwam Life School; Sidharth Selvam, CEO, ThoughBit Technologies; Mafoi K. Pandiarajan, Minister for Tamil Culture; A. Velumani, MD, Thyrocare; Kannan Gireesh, CEO, Live Life Education; Suresh Sambandam, CEO, Kissflow; Hemalatha Annamalai, Founder, Ampere Vehicles; N. Sugumar, MD, Anil Foods; J. Sujith Kumar, AVP, Infosys; Subramanian Krishnan, Founder, Shastha Food, USA; Latha Pandiarajan, Co-Founder, Mafoi; Kumar Vembu, CEO, GoFrugal Technologies; Kabaly, Corporate Trainer, Muscat; Ganesh Radhakrishnan, CEO, Wharfedale Technologies Inc.; Mike Murali, Chief Fun Officer, Capgemini; C. K. Ranganathan, Chairman, CavinKare; Caldwell Velnambi, Founder, ERP Logic, USA, and C. K. Kumaravel, CEO, Naturals Salon Spa.

## Kathaiyum Vithaiyum



This was a unique session in which the speakers shared their entrepreneurial journey -- the ups and downs, tears and joy, defeat and celebration. It was held between May 16 and August 29, 2020. In between, a 'virtual school' was conducted for entrepreneurs on May 17 and 24.

The resource persons included Vetrivel Palani, Founder and CEO, Uzhavarbhoomi Agro Products; P. Shanmuga Priya, Founder, Unique Thread Sarees; Aazhe Senthilnathan, CEO, Langscape Language Solution; Suresh Kumar G., CEO, MacApp Studio; S. Rajmohan, MD, Enviro Care India; C. K. Kumaravel, CEO, Naturals Salon Spa and Manick Rajendran, Founder, Thendral.

## Aadukalam

As the name suggests, it provided a playing field for entrepreneurs to pitch their new ideas or deliberate on existing ventures. The event facilitated entrepreneurs to look at the different possibilities post-COVID-19 lockdown. The first meeting was addressed by Ashwin on June 7. Subsequent events featured Sidharth Selvam, Co-Founder, Thought GST; Deepa Muthukumarasamy, CEO, Some More Foods; Suresh Gobalakrishnan, Co-Founder, Locali; M. Noyal Jerald, Co-Founder, Truck Taxi; Ravi Sengi, Founder, RA Vikas; Rajeshkumar Seetharaman, Co-Founder, Grandmaa's Care, and Mukeshkanna Nagaraja, Founder, 2020 Shoppers. Aadukalam, which began on June 7, went on till September 5. Suresh Sambandam, CEO, Kissflow, spoke about Startup Mania 5.0 on September 27 while Prabhakaran Murugiah, CEO, USA Angel Investor, talked about Aarambam, the Startup Contest, on October 8, 2020.



# Partnered Events



## Startup Mania 5.0



Nativelead did not allow the pandemic to quell the spirit of entrepreneurship during the lockdown. It adapted to the new normal and hosted Startup Mania 5.0 on the virtual mode. The main aim of this annual idea contest is to promote the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among college students and aspiring young innovators across Tamil Nadu. The competition and subsequent conclave, the two major modules of Startup Mania, identify, showcase, support and mentor innovative ideas across the State, especially in rural areas.

### The participants were divided into two categories:

A. General (student/innovator/startup): Innovators, startups and UG/PG students and research scholars from Science, Engineering, Medicine, Polytechnic and Management streams from across Tamil Nadu.

## **A. Two events**

### I. Idea-cum-Business Model Competition

This was intended to identify, showcase and support the innovative ideas of students, budding startupreneurs, startups, entrepreneurs and working professionals on the same platform. The event offered attractive prizes, along with mentoring and incubation support.

### II.Startup Conclave

The aim of this event was to provide opportunities for aspiring students, young innovators and startups to meet successful business leaders and gain valuable insights through interaction. This will create the most compelling environment for a vibrant startup ecosystem in the region and generate new business opportunities. Startup Mania 5.0 was virtually inaugurated by Suresh Sambandam, Founder and CEO, KissFlow, on August 14 with a power talk on 'Entrepreneurship for dream Tamil Nadu.' The launch was preceded by a vigorous online and social media promotional campaign among institutions of higher learning in Tamil Nadu.



The contest was conducted by Nativelead, Erode, in association with CII-Young Indians, Erode Chapter, and TBI, Kongu Engineering College. One hundred and five entries were received from student innovators from 37 colleges in 11 districts and 35 entries were from other innovators and startups in 13 districts across Tamil Nadu. Nineteen entries were received under the 'Accessibility' theme from seven States across the country. The entries were screened by a team of experts from CII-Yi and TBI, KEC, on November 28. In all, 38 ideas (25 from students, eight from other innovators and startups and five under 'Accessibility') were chosen for the preliminaries.

Three panels comprising 14 members reviewed the ideas online on December 10 and 11 and shortlisted 18 entries (10 from students, five from other innovators and startups and three under 'Accessibility') for the boot camp and finals.

## **B. Boot camp**

The virtual boot camp was held on December 17 for the 18 entries with experts identified by Nativelead. Topics like 'Financial modelling,' 'Business Models' and 'Presentation Skills' were covered at the camp. The resource persons were R. K. R. V. Kannan, Chartered Accountant, RKR Associates, and Manik Rajendran, Founder, iMMi Life, New Jersey.

## **C. Finals**

The final pitch was conducted online on December 19 in which three juries comprising experts chose the top three winners among students, two under 'other innovators' and the best under 'Accessibility' theme.



## **D. Grand Finale**

Startup 5.0 culminated in a conclave and announcement of the Innovation Award on December 19. Ganesh Radhakrishnan, CEO, Wharfedale Technologies Inc., USA, delivered the keynote address on 'Future Startups' in which he explained his entrepreneurial journey to an audience of 150. This was preceded by a panel discussion on 'Support systems for aspiring innovators and startups.' The resource persons for the discussion were Prateek Madhav, Co-Founder, CEO, AssisTech Foundation; Palani Rajan, Founder, Rural Basket, and Siddharth Nair, Founder, Xfinito Biodesigns. It was moderated by S. Gowrishankar, Urologist and angel investor. Earlier, S. Nagarajan, Director, EDII, Tamil Nadu, delivered the felicitation address.

Cash prizes of Rs 30, 000, Rs 20, 000 and Rs 10, 000 to the top three in the students' category respectively; Rs 25, 000 and Rs 15, 000 to the winners in other innovators category and Rs 30, 000 for the winner in Accessibility category were announced. The awards were sponsored by the Entrepreneurship Development and Innovation Institute of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

## **E. Winners**

### **I. Students**

1. Garland Stitching Machine - TRS Bala Saravanan, Thiagarajar College of Engineering, Madurai.
2. Puro 'o' Bottle - B. Sudeep, D. Raghul Raj, Kongu Engineering College, Perundurai.
3. Swatchata Sewormtricity - S. Hafila Khairun, A. Alphin Punitha and D. Charithra Iswarya, Holy Cross College, Trichy.

### **II. Others**

1. Refurbot i -- Nanda Kishore Kumar Rao and Uma, Electrofur Solutions.
2. Automatic Egg Incubator -- D. Gunaal and M. Sibi, Sri Aanoor Incubators.

### **III. Accessibility**

1. Adhesive Non-Surgical Hearing -- Raman, Lakshmanan, Backyard Creators.



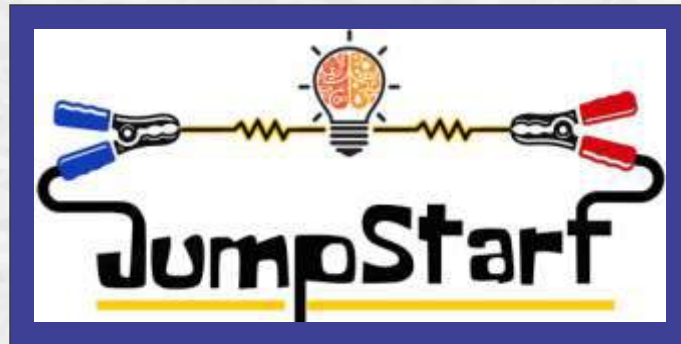
CII's Young Indians (Yi), which is keen on promoting innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives throughout the country, had its Madurai Chapter join hands with the Nativelead Foundation, an organisation with a focus on building an ecosystem for new-age entrepreneurship, in the sixth edition of 'Aarambam - The Startup Contest. Yi, Madurai Chapter and Nativelead Foundation introduced Aarambam in 2015 as an initiative to encourage and build entrepreneurship skills among students and support young entrepreneurs in taking their business ideas to the next level. The 2020 contest had 144 entries in the students' stream and 26 in the mainstream. Among them, 25 from students and 26 from entrepreneurs were invited for evaluation in the preliminary round. Ten entries from both categories made it to the finals.

A panel of experts evaluated the entries and chose the top three contestants on the basis of new-age entrepreneurship. Four innovative ideas from the mainstream entrepreneurs were selected for scaling up to the next level. Prabhakaran Murugaiah, Chairman, TiliconVeli Tech Park, participated in the virtual valedictory session on November 8, 2020, and announced the winners.

The first prize of Rs 25, 000 went to Swathi of Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Krishnankoil, for her idea, 'Food packing using Seemai Karuvelam extract.' The first runner-up, who got INR 15, 000, were Sneha and Santhosh of Agricultural College and Research Institute, Madurai, for their 'Fixalt,' a salt extracted from underwater plants, which provides health benefits and helps in fighting diseases. The third runner-up, who received Rs 10, 000, was Senthil Kumar's team from Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi, for its 'Wax and granite dust brick,' which will be useful for the fireworks industry. In the mainstream category, special recognition was accorded to the ideas pitched by Arul Pushpam (Achiever's Essential) and S. Kalaiarasi (Thremear). The runner-up idea came from Ramkumar (SPI Edge Bottles). And the winner of the sixth edition of Aarambam was Sandhya and team of Patti Foods.

The event was sponsored by VVD Gold. The co-sponsors were Pearl Shipping Agencies, Sahayamatha Salterns and Subramany.

## Jumpstart 2020



Nativelead, in association with CII-Young Indians, conducted Jumpstart 2020, a business ideation competition for current college students. Participants were asked to present a workable business idea to solve a social or business problem and win cash prizes and an opportunity to convert the idea into reality.

A total of 114 students submitted their ideas for consideration by October 31, 2020, of which 44 were shortlisted for the preliminaries. An expert jury shortlisted 22 ideas for the final round. Owners of these ideas made a virtual presentation on November 21 in the finals. Among them, the top three were chosen for cash awards. They also became eligible for mentoring by Nativelead to transform their ideas into reality.

The grand finale had Suresh Gunasekaran, Co-Founder, Mac App Studio, delivering a motivational talk. Paulin Monisha of Holy Cross College, Trichy, won the first prize of Rs 25, 000 for her idea 'Smartified Dustbinology;' Durga Devi of Sethu Institute of Technology, Pulloor, bagged the second prize of Rs 15, 000 for her 'Wee Care -- a non-invasive foetal stress monitoring device'; the third prize of Rs 10, 000 went to 'Robotian,' an idea created by Mohammed Ithyas of Trichy.

The event was sponsored by VVD Gold. The co-sponsors were Pearl Shipping Agencies, Sahayamatha Salterns and Subramany.



# Media

## RuralBasket raises ₹5 million from Nativelead Foundation

Our Bureau | Chennai | Updated on December 08, 2020

RuralBasket, a Tamil Nadu-based farm-to-home, online, traditional grocery company, on Tuesday announced that it has raised ₹5 million from Nativelead Foundation.

The funding will help the company increase its footprint to 22 retail outlets across the State by 2022, RuralBasket said in a press release. The company will also expand its product offerings with the new round of funding along with strengthening its brick-and-mortar model, it added.

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"We started RuralBasket in 2017 with an aim of bringing farmers and consumers one step closer to each other. We want to be a one-stop shop that offers these products by cutting down middlemen and also empower consumers with the knowledge of produce that they consume," Palani Rajan, CEO of RuralBasket, was quoted in the statement.

Published on December 08, 2020

## MADURAI Entries invited for Aarambam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MADURAI, OCTOBER 14, 2020 20:29 IST  
UPDATED: OCTOBER 14, 2020 20:48 IST

SHARE ARTICLE

Entries are invited from students and mainstream entrepreneurs for the sixth edition of *Aarambam* – the startup contest organised by Young Indians (YI) in association with Nativelead Foundation.

Speaking to reporters, YI chairman G. Kalyana Sundaram said the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) was encouraging youngsters to come up with innovative ideas that can be put to use in industry and gave them identity as entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship vertical chair Sharmila Devi said the contest, conducted since 2015, was aimed at encouraging students, on the one hand, and entrepreneurs, on the other, as they could move on to the next level.

Aspirants should send their entries to [www.aarambam.in](http://www.aarambam.in) before October 31 with their business ideas. The selected entries (both students and mainstream) would be invited for virtual evaluation on November 20. The prize winners would get ₹25,000 (first), ₹15,000 (second) and 10,000 (third) prizes, she added.



R Sivarajah of Nativelead foundation said the nation was poised towards 'new age entrepreneurship' and technology coupled with innovation were the main features. A venture fund would be started from Madurai.

Poornima Venkatesh, co-chair YI Madurai chapter, said *Aarambam* would be a great platform for students as they could showcase their ideas, and if they worked out, they could move forward with an entrepreneur tag swiftly.

The speakers also recalled the success story of Happy Hens, a startup initiative which *Aarambam* had encouraged a few years ago. Hence, the idea and mental preparedness were important.

## Online counselling launched to help entrepreneurs

THIS | Updated: Nov 27, 2020, 12:16 IST

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MADURAI: To help entrepreneurs who are undergoing mental stress and depression during the lockdown, Thehrine - an initiative to provide **psychiatric counselling** - was launched on Saturday.

The initiative, jointly organized by Nativelead Foundation, an NGO working for the development of entrepreneurs from smaller towns, and CareMe, a digital healthcare platform, was inaugurated by C.K. Kumaravel, CEO of Natusals Salem and Spa through video-conferencing. More than 100 entrepreneurs, budding entrepreneurs and business people took part in the event.

B. Sivanigan, founder of Nativelead, said the programme has been designed to alleviate stress levels and eliminate mental barriers that are adversely impacting the productivity and well-being of these individuals. Just a 15-minute message to 9030766766 will do to initiate the process, he added.

Manick Rajendran, director of Thehrine and founder of IAM, Life, said entrepreneurs are taken through a carefully curated process of initial online assessment to identify mental health issues, followed by three live telephonic one-to-one counselling sessions with mental health experts, and follow-up interactions according to their necessity.

Addressing the entrepreneurs, Dr. Karmanj Cooray, a psychiatrist, said he has been receiving a large number of calls from small businessmen to well-established ones seeking help.

"People should open up to friends, relatives and colleagues to get perspectives and help to get out of a problem. Keeping the mind diverted from negative thinking, developing a couple of habits as a stress buster and being grateful for what they have, instead of thinking what they have lost, will help a lot. Business people should set up a long-term vision to get away temporary setbacks," he added.

Management consultant **Aruna Subramaniam** and Sharmisga Priya, founder of Unique Threads Sarees, also took part.

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