

BALA LAKSHYA JYOTHI (Lighting up Children's future)

Issue: Three

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

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A Message From The Chairperson

Dear champion friends of Relief Foundation,

As we move to the next quarter along with us, we have only overflowing joy of sharing the developments of the recent past. Our vision became the team's vision and every associate pounded in their might to make our mission stronger. We have new stories to share, new experiences that will reassure all on how the Universe has conspired along with cosmic forces to make our projects successful and the arrival of new committing allies.

Our journey has never been easy, yet the work with target groups of people have never before been so enriching, as we moved with them as partners for their children.

The numbers are slowly surging in our centres and we hope to make the best of impact in the times to come, given the calm sylvan surroundings and the camaraderie we share with the community.

Living life at a gentle pace in our rural centres, with lesser noise has been to the advantage of this wonderful system of education and its philosophy.

We look forward to your support and visit to these places and give us your thoughts on how to improve the reach of such work to many more! Thanking you for your association

Best wishes till we meet next!

Vidya Shankar,
Chairperson

RF News

Cascade Montessori Rural Resource Centre

Jamnamarathur Centre

After successfully completing the training programme, the assistants from Jamunamarathur returned and located a place on rent. As the construction of our own premises is still happening and is expected to complete by end of August 2015, we decided to start the centre in a rented place. The inauguration took place on June 13th 2015. The place was jointly inaugurated by Ms. Vidya Shankar, Mr. Alagappan from Take Solutions and parents. A short film followed by a discussion with parents was held sharing details about Montessori education. Details of what expectations parents have about their children's education were captured in videos and presented in our official Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/relieffoundation02032015>



Convincing parents of an education space that is not a school is a slow process and we are facing a challenge that is weakening with time. Home visits were made by the teachers to share information about the method of education. Parents slowly started coming to

put their children in the centre. Temple festivals are yet another local challenge to face as children take 2-3 days of leave because they have to accompany parents. We are sure that with our regular interaction we will slowly instill in the parents' minds the importance of education



From July onwards we have started the evening classes too. About 11 children have enrolled for this programme. With this the total number of children supported in this centre has gone up to 17 (putting together morning and evening). This is a great success for us in a short time. As we have always believed, good projects with good intention will receive its support.

Vallambudukuppam Centre

This centre was inaugurated on June 20th 2015 by Mr. Murali Krishnan, Mr. Parandaman and parents. Unlike Jamunamarathur where we recruited assistants, this centre has been started close to Parandaman's village his familiarity being to its advantage. Before starting the centre, a survey was conducted and parents were invited for the inauguration. The response was very good that on the first day of opening the centre, 15 children joined

the centre. Similar to the inauguration @ Jamunamarathur, a parents' discussion was held here too. We showed them a video about Montessori education and later they went around the centre to understand how the materials assist in children's education.



This overwhelming response gave us a pat on our conviction about starting such a space.



We have also started the evening centre in this village for children from other schools. The response to this move has been very good that we have 15 children in the evening now with new enquiries and requests for admission received on a daily basis. We are delighted to reach out to 35 children from this centre, which will soon touch 40. Reviews on the functioning of both Jamunamarathur and Vallambekuppam centres are made by RF project heads with regular visits.

Scope for new centres

We are still looking for a person to head our planned centre in **Melmangalam** village in Theni district. As we do not want to compromise on the quality of the services offered, the person recruited for this position is to be of a high bar. But we are confident of finding the right person soon.

Another interesting development that happened in the recent past is an expression of interest by a good friend of Relief Foundation. Mr.Subhash Arumugham, a person deeply committed to take Montessori Education, expressed his interest to start a centre in a place owned by his family in **Moulivakkam** near Chennai. Though it is close to the city, it is a semi-urban area where farming activities are still happening in the radius of 3-5kms. Relief Foundation will soon enter into an agreement and take up this place to start a centre in 2016. As the place is very close to the city and there are plenty of opportunities for Relief Foundation to expand its activities and spread Montessori philosophy, we decided to take up this project. Mr.Subhash and his family members are equally excited that such a centre is going to be come up in their place.

Education professionals, trained or willing to get trained in the Montessori philosophy, who are interested to work for us in these centres, write to us @ relieffoundationindia@gmail.com.

People who are interested to support or to know more about these projects can also write to us.

Happy School Programme

We had reported in the earlier version of this newsletter about a comprehensive tool we have evolved to assess schools on Child Rights. Before automating it, we wanted to make sure that the tool complied with every education law and guidelines given by Central and State Governments apart from other international organizations like UNICEF. Our requirement received a shot in the arm with a law student who interned with us completely checked the tool for its compliance. We are happy to say that she found the tool be extremely comprehensive and met almost all the requirements of local, State & Central Governments apart from International Organizations. This is what she has to say about the tool and her time with Relief Foundation:

"This internship helped me to understand the workings of the law in a practical way. By reading the acts and regulations in a very thorough manner, I was able to take in the way in which the legal system works. By applying this knowledge on to the tool, I could see how the law affects the working of institutions, and eventually the public. I also understood that a tool like the CRCI is required in order to make the public aware that every child is entitled to certain fundamental rights and these rights must form a vital part of any school that he/she is sent to."

- Yashaswini Venkatadri (BA., LLB)
Jindal Global Law School

CASCADE-Family learning Cooperative^(SM)

CASCADE FLC is the guiding force behind starting rural centres. While the centre had plenty of interesting activities in the last quarter, we are highlighting important updates for our readers below:

- Though Sports has been an integral part of CASCADE ever since its inception, we finally have found a trained person Mr. Vivek to implement full time sports starting from primary children to Elementary. A parent is getting trained under him and will soon take over. This is an exciting news for us as Parents are our strength in this Family Learning Cooperative. Mr. Vivek will also be visiting our rural centres to train our teachers in the months to come.



- For the first time, an Open Day for grandparents and other relatives of children of CASCADE was organized on 28th June. The intent was to expose them to Montessori Philosophy and also to show them how the children learn. Few people tried to work on the material too with the

instructions provided to them. After the tour of the facility, a question and answer session was held for them to ask and understand the philosophy of CASCADE.



- CASCADE website has undergone a massive revamp. Apart from the look and feel, several changes have been made to the website. We thank Ms.Elakkiya Srinivasan for this stupendous work. She managed to complete the revamp within a short period and was very accommodative of all our requests. Very soon we will start a Quarterly E-Newsletter for our CASCADE network covering some good and positive developments in the world of children. We seek your feedback and comments on the website.
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- Subsequent to our visit made to Bengaluru to discuss our partnership with Dr. ChandraShekhar Balachandran of The Institute of Geographical Studies, a series of workshops were organized for

children and parents facilitated by him in Chennai on July 18th & 19th 2015. The workshop titles were "Sing along Geography" for children and "The Geo-connect with children" for parents. While children enjoyed and learnt a lot on how Geographical connections can be made in songs from various languages, it was an eye-opener for parents in the Geo-connect workshop of how Geography is linked with every subject. This was the first time that Dr. Chandra Shekhar spoke with CASCADE parents directly about Geography education. Parents have requested to have such workshops in future too.



- In an effort to consciously move plastic usage especially as carry bags, we launched a paper bag making session for our rural centre staff as

well as children and families at CASCADE Thiruvanniyur.



- **Reading seminars** for parents and teachers have begun from July 2015 after a break for summer. New topics for discussion have been included. The highlight of this quarter's reading seminar is that, about 6 parents/teachers who have registered for various AMI Montessori Diploma programmes, which are going to commence from August, are regularly attending these discussions and are greatly benefitting from them. AMI programmes are very intensive and require regular reading sessions apart from extensive writing work. In order to provide a strong foundation in Montessori philosophy and also initiate reading and writing practices among the candidates, these special reading seminars have been launched. These programmes will continue on every Saturday. When the parents/teachers complete their AMI Diplomas, they will undertake various responsibilities in different projects of Relief Foundation. We are extremely happy that our experiment

to spread Montessori Philosophy is gaining momentum every year.

Please visit our Facebook page and website for updates about this initiative.

www.cascadeflc.org

<https://www.facebook.com/CASCADE.Chennai>

Teachers' Lab

Teachers' lab initiative was launched 4 years ago to address the gaps of qualified teachers for the schools that we managed then for a Corporate Foundation. Through this initiative we had trained several teachers who were already part of the school and new teachers who completed fellowship with us. Several parameters were arrived at and candidates were selected after rounds of tests and interviews in order to make sure that quality was given its prominence. The main prerequisite we had for new teachers was they should be ready to work in rural areas. RF ran 3 batches of training through this initiative. We had to stop the fellowship programme in the middle after our exit from the Corporate Foundation as we were seriously consolidating our work.

Ever since we launched the Montessori Rural Resource Centre project, we wanted to revive this initiative. We are happy to share that Teachers' Lab was re-launched in May 2015. Any candidate who is ready to undergo 1 year of intensive training with a

stipend and 3 years of commitment to work in a rural centre is eligible to apply. Strong English communication skill is an important requirement to qualify for fellowship. Those with good Tamil skills can apply for Teaching Assistant positions. Based on the need, we will select those candidates. RF will fund the training programme (ONLY for rural centres). All training programmes for our own projects and other schools will be routed through Teachers' Lab. As soon as we re-launched the website, 2 candidates immediately applied for teaching assistant positions.

Our readers are encouraged to share this with interested people so that rural areas can also receive best trained teachers. For more information please visit www.theteacherslab.org.in

Donor Update

Relief Foundation has a scheme to sponsor a child in a rural centre. Sponsoring one time, though is encouraged and supports us for short term, if donors commit for a long period of time it certainly strengthens the project and motivates us to do better as we need not look for new donors every year for that centre/child. A strong donor base and funds are major contributors for the success of every NGO's work.

We are very happy to share that many new individual donors have committed for long term sponsorship support for our children in Gummidipoondi centre. All of them have

known about us and the work we do for some years either directly or through our well wishers. When we started the Vallambudukuppam in Gummidipoondi Taluk, we were confident of getting funds, as good and true initiatives are always supported by people. Today, after receiving such positive responses from so many donors, we are confident of filling the funding gap we have right now for this financial year in running the centre. We are sure of receiving sponsorships for all the children from the next financial year onwards. The highlight of this sponsorship scheme is that, a donor can choose to support a child for as many years as possible. Donors can choose to make full payment or quarterly payment according to their wish.

Soon we are going to launch another donation scheme for our existing and new donors, in which an individual/a company/a group can choose to support the monthly consumables for our centres either as money or in kind. The sponsorship amount received from individual donors does not cover these costs. We also do not want to raise the sponsorship amount. By creating options to contribute in small amount, we are sure to reach out to many interested people who may not be able to fully sponsor a child but still may want to contribute in every possible manner. Such donors will find this donation option very interesting. We will soon share the details and publish it on our Facebook and Website too.

Fund raising programmes

Our committee member Ms. Juliette wanted to raise funds for the ongoing construction work of our Jamunamarathur Centre. We launched an online crowd funding campaign through a website called "indiegogo". From the first day of its launch until today, we have managed to raise about 585 British Pounds of the total 7200 Pounds, which is our current fund requirement to complete the building. Though the fund raised was less, it had generated so much goodwill. The project has reached so many people outside India. It was also a difference experience for us to understand how crowd funding works. The building construction project is still open to receive funds. Those who specifically express interest to donate for building can write to us.

Tamil Montessori Video

We would like to record our sincere appreciation and gratitude for Mr.Ramesh Bhaskaran who developed a Tamil Montessori Education awareness video clip for us completely free of cost. Apart from editing the video, he has also arranged for a voice over in Tamil and English explaining how the philosophy works. The script and the unedited video were given by us. This video was very useful for us during our parent interactions in both the centres at the time of launch.

Montessori Parenting Course

Parents play a very significant role in the lives of children. Particularly their role in education need not be overemphasized. Unlike in the past where joint family system was the practice, today's world mostly practices nuclear family system for various reasons like work, travel, etc. There was an advantage in a joint family system to learn from the elders at home. But with young couples living alone, both working, children's needs are hardly understood.

With nearly 19 years of working with children and families across economic criteria Relief Foundation wanted to share its knowledge with young parents and those who are interested to know parenting skills. That's the idea behind launching the course "Montessori Philosophy and Parenting". The course offers various minute but important skills & details for parents to know about their child's developmental needs and their role in that.

2 young parents have joined this programme and are currently undergoing the course. We have also published the details on the web: <http://cascadeflc.org/parenting-course>. Those who are interested to join or want to know more about the course, please write to us @ cascadeflcchennai@gmail.com

New Initiatives

- We have started two new important initiatives in our Rural Resource Centres.

- In our Jamunamarathur Centre, we are building an Eco-San toilet (Dry Toilet). The waste generated out of it will become manure and land fill at a later stage and will be used for our gardens. We are probably one of the few who are trying out this new methodology. People are more than welcome to see once the construction gets complete.
- In our Gummidipoondi centre, we have built a septic tank (built before we thought about building Dry Toilets) and regular wet toilets. Instead of wasting the water through regular clean up using tankers, we got in touch with ReStore who gave us a micro-organism based powder that specifically eats the human waste and converts it into manure. The water thus off those germs can be directly used for gardening from the septic tank. No chemical is used to clean the toilets.
- Relief Foundation has become an official partner of Omprakash Foundation, an organization for International Volunteers in the US. Though we are getting enquiries from international volunteers (few had volunteered in the past too), the volunteer base is huge and gives a scope to invite different talents. Once we received our FCRA approval, US donors can donate through Omprakash to claim

tax exemption. We can also receive donation in kind through them.

- Ms. Vidya Shankar is launching a course on Home Schooling through an online coaching network called Classle. While the main reason of this initiative is to spread the concept of Home Schooling, it also will raise funds for our projects.

Other important updates

- Ms. Vidya Shankar chaired a session on Juvenile Justice reform processes at National Judicial Academy in Bhopal
- Ms. Vidya Shankar spoke on Pudhu Yugam Television channel and Radio One FM channel on Home Schooling
- Relief Foundation coordinated and sponsored along with the Criminology Department of Madras University and Stella Maris College, Chennai, a programme on Victimisation and Women's Empowerment
- Relief Foundation has launched audio awareness programmes on Parenting and other topics through Sound Cloud account. This will be available for download for interested people. The idea is to develop this further into a special programme for interested parents and individuals who subscribe for download. This is in a very early stage of its launch. We will give more updates about it in our next issue.

How you can support us?

- ❖ Sponsor a child - towards cost of educating and supporting the family of children in our centres in rural areas - Rs 15000/- per year
- ❖ Sponsor education - towards cost of supporting a child's education till the age of economic independence identified by Relief Foundation, after a due diligence screening process. Rs 6000/- per year per child including educational resources, home library, home visits and counseling sessions for families for responsible living and linking them to various Govt schemes where applicable.

Note: All donations made to Relief Foundation are exempted under Sec. 80G of the Income Tax Act of India

Contact us

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