

BALA LAKSHYA JYOTHI

(Lighting up Children's future)

Issue: Nine

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

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CONTENTS

Message from Chairperson	1	How can you support us	9
RF News	2	Contact us	10

A Message from the Chairperson

Dear champion friends of Relief Foundation,

This quarter has an interesting update for all of you!. We had our key project team completing their Montessori training, ready to enter our rural initiatives with a new level of consciousness and vigor.

The mood in our centres has been upbeat, receiving information that more programs are to be offered to the families and their children, both in house and outreach. The *CASCADE* family learning society (*CASCADE FLS*) has taken off into an autonomous entity, with guidance and mentoring from the Relief Foundation team.

Outreach programs for each of the 2 centres as well as the *CASCADE FLS* are bound to begin soon, in order to reach out to more families in each of their precincts.

Montessori tenets and good parenting practices translated into Tamil are our priority now, which can be distributed free to our village communities. We hope you will find the updates here interesting and useful. Your feedback and valuable suggestions are invited.

Best wishes till we meet next!

Vidya Shankar,
Chairperson

RF News

Updates from CASCADE Montessori Rural Resource Centres

Jamunamarathur Centre

Toddler Children:

The strength of the children at Casa was 12 by the end of January. These three months saw an addition of 4 new children. The incoming children were all in the age of two and a half years, an ideal age to start in the Casa. 2 of them joined in the month of December, while 2 others joined us towards the end of that quarter.

One of the practices followed at the Casa is with regard to the edible items that the children work with. Storage containers for cut or grated carrots and pounded channa is provided to the children. But the biggest challenge for them is to control their natural urge to eat it straight away and share it later with their friends. Of the 8 existing children in the Casa, 7 of them have slowly developed this self-control that enables them to have the joy of sharing and eating together. This development from the very beginning when all would simply sit around the person cutting the carrot waiting for it to be distributed, shows an

important aspect of the growth of this toddler community.

The eldest children comfortably say till 3:00 p.m. with an afternoon work cycle of two hours slowly setting in. The presence of peers in the afternoon is an important need for these children, indicated by the drop in activity in the absence of peers. The return to home time, with consent from the parents, is in the process of standardisation.



Tuition Children:

The months of November and December posed a big challenge for tuitions. The laying of new power cables meant the power supply was irregular in the area and most of the evenings were plunged in darkness. The children in this area reach home only by about 5:30 p.m. So the advancement of the tuition timings was also not possible. The center

procured kerosene for the lanterns and some candles to tackle the issue.

There were barely any students coming for tuitions in the month of November, with the parents' main concern being safety of the children in the night when they return. By the end of December, 3 students were regular and slowly in the month of January, the number of children attending tuitions picked up and reached close to 10.

The children continue their pre-set time table with Saturdays meant for handwork. The absence of power, coupled with the availability of newer materials, was also an opportune time to show them how our planet earth and our star Sun share a relationship in the darkness of the Universe. The children were very interested in the idea of how day and night came to be and had some interesting questions on that as well.



Materials and Training:

The final set of materials required for Casa that arrived in Chennai, were fully transported in these three months. The materials are being slowly added to the display for children's use as and when the children are ready for them.

In the month of December, Mani, our local candidate who is being trained, came to Jamunamarathur for some teaching practice. He raised some interesting questions that also helped the existing Children's assistant in thinking about why and how we were following certain practices. This led to some interesting discussions as well. It provided a wonderful platform for interaction and sharing of knowledge for all involved.

Update on Agriculture in our campus :

With winter setting in, the juice shop providing fruit waste had very low to nil business and they stopped providing the waste meant for composting. They have promised that this is temporary and should resume soon in the months of February-March.

The existing compost pit being filled up, a new pit was also dug to enable the transfer and mixing of the compost. This is important, so that

the earthworms at the bottom don't miss out in decomposing the waste at the top.

Parent Sessions:

The practice of having regular home visits continued. On one such home visit, the parent indicated how the household took up the task of cleaning a certain section which was done in a very haphazard way initially. The order in the environment is an utmost need of the first plane child that we had suggested to the parents as an area to focus in the last visit. The effort made by the parent in this case was heartening to see and more importantly reinforces how the home visits also have an impact on children's development.

The parents also took up the challenge of increasing the strength at the centre and in the month of December, they began setting up meetings with new parents for the same. The testimony of existing parents is a key ingredient that helps in spreading the word about the centre. The new meetings have been promising and the new parents even suggesting some more children on their own who could also possibly join the centre in future.

Challenges Faced:

The period saw turbulent attendance mainly from the elder children in the tuitions. This was mainly due to the power issue that was mentioned earlier. The parents soon realized that even at home the issue was the same. Some children found it difficult to complete even their homework at home. With the centre making sure that there was enough lighting, the children who came regularly were happy to use the facilities.

The lack of rains in the region meant that the vegetable plants that were holding on, slowly dried and withered off, in spite of watering the plants regularly every day. We hope to address this issue soon.

Vallambudukuppam Centre

Casa:

There are 09 older children in the age group of 4½ to 5½ years and 14 new children in the age group of 3 and 4 years. We have 23 children in the morning session. Though attendance was an issue due to various reasons, on an average about 19 out of 23 children attended the sessions regularly. We talked to the parents to stress the importance of coming to the centre

regularly. The older Children regularly made their work list and started their work. Children who had difficulties in choosing work were supported by the adults by giving options from which they chose their work. Ultimately, the idea was to help them to choose their own work guided by their Will from within.



Tuition:

We have 16 children who come regularly in the evening. Of the 16, 14 are going to have their exams from March end onwards so the quantity of time spent in using the material inside the environment has been reduced to 30 minutes on a daily basis. In this time, they focused on Geography, Arithmetic and Language areas. The remaining time they focused on their school work. Parents have reported that this support has greatly helped the children.

The regular sports session on Thursdays continued in the nearby school ground. On Saturdays, they spent time on drawing, making paper models like origami, indoor games etc.

Visitors:

This quarter, we had two "Master of Social Work - MSW" students from Kerala. As part of their internship

work, they made home visits and met with about 50 parents who either benefitted from the centre in the past or currently send their children to the centre. They submitted a report based on this survey. It covered extensive details about what parents liked about our centre, what improvements were needed, etc.



Study circle and parents meeting:

Parents' study circle happened regularly on every first and third Saturdays between 2 pm and 3.30 pm. The adult read from a Montessori book and discussed the lines with parents. Parents who were regular were able to see meaning in many of these sentences and shared constructive feedback from their side as well. Followed by this home visits were made casa's parents who were not attending study circles due to various reasons. Such meetings were used to share feedback, share

thoughts, and discuss questions raised by parents.

CASCADE-Family Learning Cooperative^(SM)

Sports Session

Regular sports sessions for few children from CASA and all elementary children happened on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This was apart from the indoor games that happen daily. Children enjoyed cooperative games and gross motor activities

Pottery and Tailoring

Mr. Pani regularly visited on alternate Saturdays and conducted Pottery sessions for few children from CASA and elementary. Children always looked forward to these sessions.

Geography session by Dr. Bala

Dr Balachandran visited the GeoVidya Geography Centre - Chennai (GVGC-Chennai) between 4 and 7 November 2016. During this trip, he conducted a session on 'Mapping the neighborhood', and a session on 'Why geography education?'

In the mapping workshop, children mapped the Sriramnagar area near *CASCADE* and learned how spatial relationships can be shown on a sketch map.

In the second workshop, parents and children found out about why geography education is important and what the *GVGC-Chennai* is doing in this area. They also learned about the International Geography Youth Summit (IGYS) - 2016 and how children benefited from it. At this session, Vaaman Sonathi (11), shared his research that he presented at IGYS-2016 on the connections he found between his inner geography and the outside geography that he saw.

Apart from these, he, Mr Murali, and Ms. Vidya held discussions on various strategies to strengthen the geography education at *GVGC-Chennai* and other locations where RF has started working. As part of this, we discussed preparing geography education materials in Tamil for use in training of, and dissemination to, teachers in the RF centres to enable geography education appropriate to those children.

Christmas Celebrations

Celebrating festivals is significant for children to acquire culture. Christmas was celebrated in *CASCADE* with Skits, Carols, Decorations and Cakes. All the children took part. A child narrated a story on Christmas celebrations.



Pongal Celebrations

Children of *Cascade* were fortunate to experience the traditional festivities of Pongal. Understanding the significance of Pongal, swaying to the rhythm of south Indian folk dance (Kummi), offering pot rice to Sun god were revealed by the children.



Metro ride

"One must travel, to learn."- Mark Twain. An exciting trip on the local Metro with our little stars



Cooking

Eating well balanced and **healthy food** can help children stay calm and focused. In CASA (primary) Friday afternoons are spent relishing nutritious yet mouth-watering recipes cooked by our very own tiny chefs. Very soon we will resume cooking in Elementary as well.

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

www.cascadeflc.org

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

How you can support us?

- ❖ Sponsor a family - towards cost of educating, mentoring a family with children attending our Montessori Rural Resource centres in one of our rural centres - Rs 20000/- per year

- ❖ Sponsor a child in our evening classes in rural areas @ Rs.10,000/- per year. These are children who finish 3 years of primary Montessori classes in our centres in the morning and join other schools to continue education. They use the facility in the evening and continue to receive support for their elementary education.

- ❖ Sponsor education - towards cost of supporting a child's education, studying in a school, 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 Government schemes where applicable.

- ❖ Sponsor an awareness program - towards creating awareness programs in our centres for the community, we require material as well as human resource support. To conduct the following programs in our centres, per session the costs including all the expenses to cover about 30 families would be Rs 20,000. Resource persons and materials, besides flyers would be used for these programs
 - Alcoholism
 - Importance of education
 - Girl child protection
 - Hygiene and healthcare
 - Healthy living medicine free
 - Self employment
 - Career options for youth

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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