

## BALA LAKSHYA JYOTHI (Lighting up Children's future)

Issue: One

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

January, 2015

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### A Message From The Chairperson

We are happy to re-launch our quarterly newsletter "Bala Lakshya Jyothi" after a gap of several years. While the primary reason was due to many quick changes that occurred as our organization matured. We were managing a Corporate Foundation and their projects for more than 10 years, Relief Foundation focused on gaining enough experience in the field of education especially working with children in rural areas. We exited from the corporate foundation last year and have started several initiatives on our own with our learning from the ground. We wanted to renew regular connect with our donors and wellwishers through this newsletter that had stopped in 2004!. Just as the phoenix that comes alive from its own ashes, Relief Foundation, from its experience, has gained more strength, knowledge, and determination to re-launch several initiatives that spoke of our quality of work, care & commitment for children and above all an important mission in providing safe learning spaces for children. Through this newsletter, which will henceforth be sent to all our contacts on a quarterly basis, you will be excited to read updates about various initiatives of ours and how meaningful intervention makes the required impact in the lives of children and their families. You will find in this newsletter several updates of our activities since April 2014 and hence this would be elaborate . You can stay in touch with us through our website [www.reliefoundation.in](http://www.reliefoundation.in) for regular updates. We are re-applying for FCRA account that we closed 3 years ago, in order to bring in our foreign donors who supported all our school building related and training activities, back into our circuit.

I take this opportunity to thank each and everyone who have bestowed their trust on us and have remained with us all these years. We sincerely look forward to receive your feedback on this Newsletter and also our work. We also need your continued support to make a difference in the lives of children.

Best wishes for the NEW YEAR!

Vidya Shankar,  
Chairperson

Founded in 1998, Relief Foundation was set up with the aim to prevent the exploitation of children. We provided counseling and direct support for affected children and sought to bring a greater degree of humanity to the juvenile justice system in Tamil Nadu.

The insights gathered during the years have all pointed to the need for safe, accessible, and engaging learning spaces for children.

Today, our small team of educationists, corporate professionals and activists bring their unique experiences towards the one common agenda of improving the future of our children's education. Our strategy for furthering access to quality education relies on effective school reform, teacher capacity building, and helping communities establish small schools in extremely underserved regions.

This involves addressing major concerns in the areas of:

- ✓ existing teacher training curricula that is inadequate for the needs of an actual classroom setting
- ✓ school curricula that is uni-dimensional and solely exam-oriented
- ✓ assessments that only slot students rather than use it as an opportunity to address their learning difficulties
- ✓ respect and humaneness in all aspects that do not feature in the mandate of school's governance

We believe that

- safe schools; caring relationships; challenging experiences; opportunities for voice, choice and contribution promote positive student development
- we can empower teachers to be facilitators of knowledge and more; that they can also be encouraging and nurturing adults in children's lives
- strengthening communities is at the heart of making children feel safe
- you can participate in definite ways to create educational environments that are relevant to the needs of a child



### **Career Counseling**

Today's young people require right career guidance at the right age to choose a course @ 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> std. levels. This paves way to build a career path for them at a later stage. Not everyone is keen to pursue professional courses. There are many who still are not aware of the advantages in choosing a skill based courses available in ITIs and Polytechnics. Relief Foundation meets such children either individually or as a group and gives them the required counseling. Bala Mandir students who had completed 12<sup>th</sup> std. were provided with individual career counseling on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Similarly, inmates of Ashram (a Project ran by Shriram

Foundation) were given individual career counseling which helped them to successfully choose career paths and settle quickly into courses of their choice.



### **Educational Sponsorship**

While the Government provides free education up to schooling, there are many students from private schools, colleges and polytechnics need financial support to continue their education. While RF occasionally directly sponsors few children's education, it arranges for donors to sponsor needy children who pay the colleges and schools directly. From the financial year 2015-16, RF will start its own Sponsorship scheme. The plan is to support about 250 children every year.

### **Cascade Montessori Rural Resource Centre**

After having worked in the field of education particularly in rural areas for several years now, RF felt the need to launch its own educational initiatives in villages. While in the past RF had supported various schools in villages, this is the first time it has started its own initiative in a village called Jamnamarathur in Javvadhu Hills, in Thiruvannamalai district in Tamilnadu. A survey was done to identify the needs in this tribal belt. With positive response from the community, we decided to recruit people for training. For the first time, we have recruited two tribal youth (well educated) from Jamnamararthur who will undergo intensive training for 2 months in Montessori Education in Chennai. They will go back and work as assistants, while a person with good English knowledge and other skills will be trained to be the main adult. An NGO called Centre For Indian Knowledge Systems, which works in Javvadhu Hills for the past 4 years, has agreed to work with RF in this initiative especially focusing on the environmental issues. RF is happy to partner with CIKS and learn from them as well. RF is looking for funds to support building infrastructure for this centre.



Apart from this centre, awareness is being spread to interested individuals and NGOs through personal and skype conversations. In the next one year, we expect another 3 more centres to come.

### **Cascade- A Family learning Cooperative**

CASCADE Family Learning Cooperative is a Montessori Resource centre that functions in Thiruvanniyur for a group of families in learning. Children attend Montessori sessions at the centre regularly through the year. Their parents come in for Study circles and reading seminars. Our rural teachers benefit from this centre, participating in orientation courses, and discussion forums besides observing our classrooms.

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

[www.cascadeflc.org](http://www.cascadeflc.org)

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



### **Child Protection Policy**

As a recommended practice, we have evolved a Child Protection policy for all the staff and members of Relief Foundation. It is published in our website.

## **New Initiatives**

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### **Website**

Relief Foundation website has been completely revamped. Now you can read our 16 years of journey starting from the Juvenile Homes, how we entered into Education, the challenges we faced and the innovations we made, etc., apart from various updates about our work. Check our new website @ [www.reliefoundation.in](http://www.reliefoundation.in). We will be very happy to receive your feedback.

### **Cascade Montessori Rural Resource Centre**

After having worked in schools from cities and semi-urban and rural areas for several areas now, we are completely convinced to take this wonderful methodology to rural areas. Starting Montessori Resource Centres is our first step towards taking Quality Education to children in villages. These resource centres provide education of the contemporary kind, relevant and holistic starting with the toddler age groups who will attend Montessori sessions along with their parents. On completion of 3 years of age, they will continue in a primary Montessori classroom in the same premises.

The next plan is to expand it to be a centre for community dialogue and development as well. From our past experience, we have developed a model that works with all stakeholders in the child's education, in order to make learning useful and a lifelong experience for the entire community.

A model Resource Centre is now our focus project, in Jamnamarudhur village near Polur town, Thiruvannamalai District, Tamilnadu. Talks are happening for such similar resource centres in Erode, Periakulam and Tirunelveli.

### **Happy School Programme**

A school has to be a **Happy Place** for children to feel secure and respected. The environment needs to be inviting and the adults should play constructive roles. Research shows that when children are happy, their learning improves. With years of experience working in and offering support to schools across various part of the country, we are now in a position to offer evidence based training information to schools which are keen to become a hub of learning and social reform starting from Infrastructure to Classroom Practices and Governance.

Relief Foundation has embarked on creating a matrix based on UNCRC to aid schools

become much sought after by children. The Happy School Programme consists of a continuous engagement between the school and Relief Foundation.



### **Consulting for Existing/New Schools**

Various schools are in touch with us asking for support either in handling behavioral/academic issues of children or building infrastructure for the school.

- ❖ Relief Foundation donated a set of 30 activities with an information kit to start their own Resource centre for children at Gurukul Balwadi at Hebri, Karnataka
- ❖ Provided classroom material and management support to the teachers and school head for PBVK School in Shimoga District, Karnataka
- ❖ Skype sessions for parents and teachers for CSR Memorial School in Madurai. These sessions include parenting skills, discussions on behaviour, classroom management and developmentally appropriate teaching practices

#### Education Statistics for the year 2014 (Source: UNICEF)

- Totally 2,02,491 primary schools were sanctioned until 2013-14 under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- 99% of India's rural population now have a primary school within 1km radius
- Gross Enrolment Ratio improved from 96.3 in 2001 to 118.62 in 2012-13 at primary level and from 60.02 to 81.15 at upper primary
- Primary level drop-out rates declined significantly from 39% to 5.6% in 2012-13 (Annual Report, MHRD, Government of India)
- There is still a huge out-of-school population of more than eight million children in the age group of 6-14 years
- Of the total enrolled in school, about 42.39% drop out before they complete class VIII

#### Annual Status of Education Report 2014 (ASER)

- In 2014, 30.8% of all 6-14 year old children in rural India are going to private schools (increase from 29% in 2013)
- In 5 states (Manipur, Kerala, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Meghalaya), private school enrolment rates in the elementary stage are greater than 50%
- 75% of children in standard VIII can read Std. II level text, which indicates 25% still cannot read (All India)
- 25.3% of children in Std. III could do a two digit subtraction
- 19.5% of children in Std. II cannot recognize numbers up to 9



## How you can support us?

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- ❖ 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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