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A Message from the Chairperson

Dear champion friends of Relief Foundation,

We are happy to bring out the next issue of our newsletter for your reading and update on our activities. If children were allowed to explain about our centres, it would be more apt, since they are actually feeling a sense of kinship a lot more than the community. Response from the community has been particularly good this quarter, with many parents expressing solidarity with our moves.

Getting an education project on rails, with the full participation of the adults in the villages the centre serves, is a real time challenge, in this time and age, when materialism and freebies are sought even for basic responsibility fulfilments.

In such a situation, Relief Foundation can slowly say, chin up, that we are bringing responsibility before any rights seeking - leave alone freebies.

We are actively spreading educational and parenting concepts to aid village families raise themselves and their children, for building peaceful societies around where they live.

We have built our organisation only with the help of donors and well wishers like you and hope your cooperation will continue as our projects slowly expand and reach higher goals.

Best wishes till we meet next!

Vidya Shankar,
Chairperson

RF News

Updates from *CASCADE Montessori Rural Resource Centres*

Vallambeducuppam Centre

Toddler Children

As the academic year was closing in, extra attention was given to children who moved to a new school after completing 5.5 years of age. The schools that they join mostly would focus on traditional way of teaching. To help children to cope with that method, we introduced them to the alphabets in traditional way. While most of the children acquire the sounds of the alphabets by the end of 5.5 years and could easily read words, introducing alphabets in the way they are taught in other schools, would help the children to gain confidence.

As reported earlier, we are shifting our centre from Vallambeducuppam to a new place. The new village is Narasingapuram. We have identified a temporary place to run tuition centre in the evenings. This place is nearby the land we have bought to build a new centre. Being close to the land will help us to create awareness among the parents about the new centre and

also help us to be in touch with them regularly. While few children from Vallambeducuppam will get affected because of this movement, some parents have agreed to send their children to the evening classes to the new centre. We will constantly be in touch with the parents for other parenting programmes.

Tuition Classes

We have planned to restart the evening tuition classes for school going students from the next academic year, which is from June 2018. It was temporarily stopped due to some other important work. With the identification of new land and a temporary building to host the centre, we are planning to restart it. Using the Montessori materials and method, Mr. Paranthaman will help the children in gaining strong ground in concepts of Maths, Language, Geography etc.

Parents' conference

The yearly parents' conference was held from April 7, 2018 to April 12, 2018. As reported earlier in this column of the newsletter, parents conferences help both the parents

and the classroom adults to exchange details about children's progress and also clarify questions in various areas. A detailed report for the year was prepared and shared with parents. Parents were very happy to receive such a report about their children and also the time spent by the adult in answering their questions.

Parents' meeting

On 17th April, a Parents' meeting was held at our Vallambudukuppam centre. A newly created parenting literature was applied for discussion. The new content helped the participants in asking questions with the facilitator and also expressing their views.



Agriculture Update

Two of the total four goats have delivered kids. Both the kids are healthy. With this the total number of goats has increased to 6. The idea

of rearing goats is moving towards self-sufficiency as much as we can.

Meanwhile, on the 40 cents land, we have harvested ground nut and have sold it too. The yield was good. We are waiting for Tapioca to mature in order to harvest. This will mostly happen in the month of June or July. As wild boars damaged few crops, we had to safeguard it by installing some facilities in the field. With constant vigilance from our staff member Mr. Paranthaman, we are sure of harvesting it well.

Story Books

We found a volunteer who has agreed to help us with drawing the pictures required for each story in Tamil. Very soon we will launch our story books for children in Tamil.

Outreach

As part of outreach, we have identified two schools in Gummidipoondi to start Geography education for children. We will start with 6th and 7th std. children who will stay with us for a period of 2 and 3 years respectively. The idea is to give various skills through Geography education.

We have also partnered with another NGO who wanted us to give parenting sessions and Geography education for children in Periyakulam taluk in Theni district in Tamilnadu. Mr. Prasanna Bharathi recently visited the place. The idea is to have one session per month. We will keep you posted on the progress.

Training Programme

A training programme has been planned for our staff members starting from May 1- May 4 covering areas like Goal Setting, Gender Sensitization, Time Management, etc. (The programme was successfully conducted in May 2018. Updates will be given in the next issue of this newsletter). The programme was facilitated by Ms. Vidya Shankar and Mr. Murali Krishnan.

Youth Sports Club

Sports play an important role in development. From our experience and also based on very research findings, when young people's energy, especially in the age group of 14 to 20, is wasted it leads them to get into depression unable to handle failures, or to find alternate ways to handle pressure,

etc. Further, they get into habits like alcohol consumption and other forms of substance abuse.

Sports keeps them together and also healthy. Relief Foundation is planning for a Youth Sports Club in Gummidipoondi taluk, similar to the one in Jamunamarathur. Through this sports club, good sports will be promoted while Life Skills and few parenting programmes will also be given on a regular basis. The idea of giving inputs on parenting emerged because village youth marry quite early. By educating them what it means responsible parenting, we can prevent the cycle of neglect in villages. We are planning to do this separately for boys and girls.

Jamunamarathur Centre

Toddler/Casa:

The months of February and March saw the addition of 3 new children of which one child went to the Casa and the other two to the Toddlers section. This period saw an average attendance of 10-12 children daily. This period saw the eldest children moving up in Mathematics and Language sections. At the other end, the younger ones, who transitioned into Casa, were slowly moving on to higher challenges. The middle group children were the ones exploring with the material.

Among the elder ones, Mathematics soon became the new fashion. Almost through March and April making numbers and operating on them became an everyday chore. The sharing of responsibilities in the Decimal Operations was a sight to watch. Particularly, when the adult suggested that they can count together, the children alternating the workload was truly mesmerizing. The increase in level of confidence in handling the materials was also quite visible. In Language, the children slowly moved from writing single sounds to writing words in cursive. Of the three who were writing, one improved his control by leaps and

bounds to move onto writing in four-ruled paper. Soon notebooks were also procured for the child to satiate his need to write.



Among the second year children, explorations with Sensorial materials were going on with great interest. The work with Brown Stairs and Pink Tower was an everyday occurrence. The Brown Stairs built like a tower was an eye catching experience that almost all the children tried their hands at it. Some interesting variations involving the Pink Tower also came about to be seen.



Of the 3 newbies, two of them slowly transitioned into Casa in the month of April while the 3rd was too small and continued to work in the Toddler. During this time our youngest child in Casa spent an hour in the Toddler to act as a role model (without him being aware of it). His anticipation to the younger ones' needs and providing unasked help were some truly heartwarming observations for the adult.

Based on observations from Mr. Murali Krishnan in November, it was decided that the children needed to be in the Centre by a certain time for them to have uninterrupted work cycles. So a time was fixed to close

the gate and was introduced for the first time in the month of December. The children were getting accustomed to the closing of the gate at 9:30 am. It was more difficult for the parents to get used to it. But by end of March, most of the existing parents realised the benefits of the rule and tried their best to bring their wards on time.

Outreach Sessions:

The outreach to the Elementary school in Jamunamarathur continued in the months of February to April. In total, twenty sessions were conducted during this time. The children during this time slowly worked out that their freedom to read books comes with the responsibility to maintain silence.

The ten students in the 1st standard had some interesting outcomes to show as well. The books with fewer pages were finished faster than the ones with many pages. The satisfaction of finishing a book completely was much greater than the curiosity to read something new. The children slowly began to look for the satisfaction once their initial curiosity was satiated.

One of the other important outreach programs is to create awareness

about the Montessori philosophy in villages. Three such sessions happened during this time - one at Thimiramarathur, one at Thoppur and one in the valley right behind the Centre. A total of about 60 parents were reached out to. The parents were shown a video of an example classroom and how it worked, relating to their own life. The adults watching were very much intrigued and promised to visit the centre to find out more about it.

As part of our effort to reach out to adults in the community, we conducted a program where we helped few women to fill in an ATM card application. Most adults in the town stand in a queue with their AADHAR cards outside the bank to withdraw money from their accounts. Our own helper akka and gardener were among the women who attended. The women were also shown how to use the ATM once they received the card.



Materials and Training:

During this period, some of the new materials that were added include the Mystery Bag, Object Box, Capital and Small letters. The Mystery bag was a big hit with the children. The bag contains miniature objects that children's Stereognostic sense helps to figure out. The bag is presented in a game format which is most enjoyable for the children.

The two adults also sat down for regular reading sessions during this time. The topics read include Self-correction, an art article by Maren Schmidt and Role of the adult from the book Secret of Childhood. The sessions helped the adults to kindle thoughts on the happenings in the classroom and relate to the theories behind them. The constant touch with the books helped to reinforce the knowledge and spurred them to work with greater awareness in the classroom.

Agricultural Update:

The 90 saplings planted in November needed a constant maintenance cycle of irrigation, weeding and pruning. Pruning involved not only cutting off lower branches but also pruning new flowers so that the tree would grow

fully before bearing fruits. Apart from these, occasional pest attacks were also addressed through organic treatment.

The honey boxes that were setup were added with two more boxes in the month of February. The original two ran into problems and had to be taken off. Garden lizards posed a big threat for the young bees and started feeding on them. The boxes were relocated but in vain. The new boxes were constantly monitored for the same risk and steps were taken for protecting the same. The boxes were also given a temporary thatched roof to provide respite from intense heat in the month of April.



Meanwhile, close to 7kgs of tomatoes were harvested intermittently from the plants that grew out of the compost used for mango plants. Apart from them the Centella ('வல்லாரை') greens, to the tune of half a kg, were also harvested from the garden.

Parent Sessions:

There were four parent circle sessions held during the time. One of them was conducted by Mr. Murali Krishnan during his visits. The other three were conducted by Mr. Hari. They covered the following topics:

- Development of Language (two sessions)

- Continuation of Social Development

- The Absorbent Mind

Development of Language sessions dealt with the development from the pre-natal period all the way till 6 years of age. This was mainly in the form of a discussion. The parents were also able to relate it to their own child's early years. During the Absorbent Mind session, the parents were shown a demonstration of a sponge absorbing water of two kinds and how the brain works the same way. It had a strong effect on the parents. The Social Development session saw more role-plays to show the development stages of the same in a child.



Case Study:

R. Raghu (name changed)

4 years 1 month

Male, Jamunamaruthur

Raghu enrolled in our Centre at the beginning of the academic year 2017-18. He was pretty fast at grasping from the early months and his progress through Practical Life activities and Sensorial activities were pretty fast. But the child for some reason shunned all water activities. He would simply refuse any presentation on water activities, even when the materials were attractive or the activities were simple.

Fast forward, the past three months has been a revelation from this child. Now that he understands the working of the community, he slowly opened up to the idea of working with water activities. He has, in fact, voluntarily requested for presentations on

washing. Apart from that, his explorations of Sensorial materials have been an eye opener even to the adults. His awareness of the peers and keen observation of his role models has really spurred his progress all along. He has mastered all the sounds of the English alphabets in record time and is in the cusp of moving into the realms of higher Cultural presentations. His eating by self, which was pretty slow in the beginning, has now improved and his appetite for more work has also grown.

Challenges Faced:

Challenge: Water shortage in the hilltop was a problem in the month of April with the motor working overtime to quench the thirst of plants.

Solution: Extending the bore pipe length and setting up temporary tanks in the field had helped address the situation to an extent.

Challenge: Parents of some children were angry that their children were not let in beyond 9:30 a.m.

Solution: A separate session on the importance of an uninterrupted 3 hour work cycle was held for the parents to convey the need for such a rule.

Majority of the parents agreed on the need and saw the benefit of the same.

Voice of the parent

Parent name: Ashok

"My son is always interested in learning something new. He has reduced his TV viewing by almost 75%. He is also ever ready to help us in the household work. All these changes we have seen since joining CASCADE here. He also willingly gets ready for class in the morning, though he needs help.

We had no idea about Montessori education before we moved to Jamunamarathur. Now after one year, I realise that this is probably the best and advanced education system that my child can get. This is because it is least burdensome on the child. There are no uniforms, shoes or books that he has to carry every day. He just has to work on his capabilities and the system is also child centric accordingly. Even now (this was recorded during the short summer break) he is asking me when I can go to class?

One other thing that we've realised is that we, as parents, are a big obstacle. Controlling ourselves has been the biggest challenge more than the child or teaching here. "

Other initiatives

GVGC Chennai - Course on Geography

GVGC (Geo Vidyaa Geography Centre) is an initiative by [TIGS](#) - [Relief Foundation](#). Through this we organize programmes for children, parents and teachers as well. One of the goals of GVGC is to take Geography education

to rural and urban children. And for that to happen, teachers are the best candidates, because they regularly interact with children.

We had reported about a new course called "Developing the Geographer's Eye" in this column of the newsletter. The next session on "Latitudes and Longitudes" was happened in the month of April. The participants had lots of fun too. A new batch is expected from August 2018. Please write to mjkrishnan76@gmail.com to know more about this.

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. We can receive **foreign currency** through our partnership with **Rotary Club of Madras East Trust**. Those who wish to donate, please write to us.

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