

# BALA LAKSHYA JYOTHI

## (Lighting up Children's future)

Issue: Seven

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

August, 2016

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## A Message From The Chairperson

Dear champion friends of Relief Foundation,

Greetings!

The last quarter saw a flurry of activities towards consolidating our 3 centres' Parent education programs. Our model of education where families are proactively involved with a heavy stake in running of the centre seemed to have gained interest among International Montessori educators. Our work is to be presented at the AMI EsF (Educateurs sans Frontieres) to be held at Hyderabad between 31<sup>st</sup> July and 13<sup>th</sup> August.

Our rural centres also saw a fillip in the activities with volunteers coming in from France to engage with the 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**

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### **Updates from CASCADE Montessori Rural Resource Centres**

#### **Jamunamarathur Centre**

##### **Toddler & Primary Children**

The centre remained open during the month of May. On an average we had 4 (out of 12) children coming during the month. The presence of elder siblings or cousins at home during the vacation led to the irregular attendance. It was heartening to see that, those children who came just went on with their day to day work as usual. This is not unusual as adults alone need holidays, whereas children are always ready to work.

The next two months saw children coming regularly. Three of the eldest children moved to a traditional school while we had four new admissions during this period.

The annual reports of the older children (those who were in the centre for 6 or more months) were given. The parents patiently listened while we discussed the report and had a number of questions as well. While we scheduled a 15 minute period, each of these discussions actually took close to 45 minutes. This also presented us an opportunity to drive down some of the best practices at home as well.

##### ***Tuition Children***

The centre was kept open in the month of May. The evening class children turned up for classes mainly on PT (Physical Training) days.

The remaining days had irregular attendance. But we were happy that children showed interest to come to the centre even during holidays.

They also took interest in the Art and Craft book. One Wednesday, they decided to work with papers and glue to make ornaments, miniature models. They used some origami paper and set to work. Soon we had a variety of ornaments/models for display. The children had to read the instructions and got our help for that and from then on it was completely their efforts.





In the month of June, the older children took up the task of making a complete list of books in the library. Apart from being a reading exercise for them, they also got to know what the books were about. On completion of the exercise, the children asked for specific books to refer and thus a library system where they record what they take was also evolved.

During the fourth weekend of June, the children were shown a documentary on the Life of birds.

### **Agriculture Update**

The pilot for mushroom cultivation had some contamination and had to be disposed. This proved to be a good learning experience to understand how we can cultivate the same in future. We are taking tips from our local partner organization in this regard.

The garden has been tended to regularly and the brinjal and chilly plants started bearing fruits. The neighbours and the parents were interested to buy organic vegetables from the centre and the sales picked up in the

month of June. The compost pit continues to be used for regular composting of vegetable waste from nearby hotels. More such pits are being dug for transfer and driving of compost.

The gardener has also been given the responsibility to dig pits for planting fruit bearing shrubs and trees instead of cultivating a crop this year.

### ***Materials & Training Update***

The ordered set of materials arrived in the month of May along with several books and a book shelf for the children. The new materials meant for the Casa environment were set up in the larger room.

By the end of May, the toddler and the Casa environments were separated completely. The smaller room was assigned exclusively for the Toddlers and the larger one only for the three- six year olds. The ellipse for the 'Walking on the line' was also added to the flooring. The book shelf and the books were arranged with the help of the tuition Children on the first Saturday of June.

The assistant from Thoppur came up with a list of materials for which he needed a refresher on. Some of the new materials were unknown to him as well. The afternoons were used to give him the presentations and let him practice as well.



### *Parent circles*

The parent circle meetings were consistently held on every Saturday during the month of May. From June onwards the meetings were made fortnightly.

The meeting on 25th of June was addressed by Mr. Ganapathy, our assistant, along with Ms. Vidya Shankar. Mr. Ganapathy addressed the parents for the first time and he did a good job. This was a very interesting session as parents of CASCADE FLC, Thiruvanmiyur, who were on a visit to Jamunamaruthur were also part of it.

The city parents shared their experience on how they handle the children at the centre when they come along and some best practices at home as well. The parents of Jamunamaruthur also had a lot of questions for them. It was a wonderful learning and sharing experience for both sets of parents.



### *Challenges overcame*

- We had the centre open all through May except for a few days of training in Chennai. The idea that children don't need holidays proved right, but they were swayed by the presence of other school friends or relatives being at home. Hence the irregularity of attendance that month
- With regard to the older children, their parents couldn't resist the usual practice of sending their children off to grandparents' house and the tuition attendance was affected in the month of May.
- We are still working with the Panchayat to get our water connection
- The howling winds of the Tamil month of 'aadi' had damaged a few windows. They were fixed recently.
- The center also wears a new look now with blue metal sheets added to the area where the grill gates were placed. This was necessary as the rain water used to flood the snack and covered area where children had their food. The sheets were finally laid and constructed by end July and have

been very effective considering the heavy rains during the last week.



### **General update**

The annual summer festival at Jamanamarathur happened on the 2nd and 3rd of July. Though we couldn't get a stall of our own, the opportunity was utilised completely to raise awareness about the centre. Few banners were designed and placed at prominent places and one of the banners was worn as a cape by our staff members who walked around the festival area. The mere idea of wearing a banner like a cape attracted people's attention and a number of them were willing listeners to our little pitches about the centre. Parents from as far as Arni (about 100km) and as near as Vellaikottai (1km) had come. This was a wonderful way to spread the message. We also got an opportunity to speak the audience during the last day of the festival. After this event, new visitors keep coming to our centre on a weekly basis either for admission enquiry or to get more information.

### **Vallambudukuppam Centre**

#### **Pre-primary(CASA) Children**

Our centre successfully completed its first academic year by end of April. However, we kept our centre open for our children to come and use them throughout summer 5 to 6 children came to our centre the whole of May and used the facilities till 1PM in the afternoon. Those who stayed back in the village used the facility.

3 children joined the local school after successfully completing one year with us. They are coming to our evening centre and will continue to receive the benefit of our environment I. As regards new admissions, the names of the centre has spread to different villages that we have got four new admissions from other villages too. There were couple of children who dropped out due to various reasons. New admissions are happening through the year.



#### **Tuition Children**

After giving a break for two months, we opened our centre in July 2016. The evening classes too entered its second year of

support for the village children. The highlight of the centre as regards tuition centre in this year is that, we have 4 children who are continuing with us after completing one year with us in the *CASA*. While they will continue to use many of the *CASA* material in the evening, we will also slowly start developmentally appropriate practices for them, as the plane of the children is completing different. Our aim is to slowly start an elementary environment in the evening so that children who move from *CASA* could use it. We are also aware of the financial implications it has and also the training required for the adult to extend such a level of support to children. We are confident of reaching that goal soon.

### **Parents' Circle**

We want the parents of our centre's children to be a part of its development. This is easier said than done, because it requires them believing in such a kind of education, willing to pay the minimum fee that we charge (as reported earlier in the previous issues of this newsletter, we do not offer it free to children. We charge a small token of amount as fee, as we want them to take part in their children's education), discussing the challenges they face and also giving out suggestions to improve the centre. Our parents' meetings are aimed towards making this possible in a structured way. We have monthly parents' meetings.

In the month of June, we had a meeting with the parents where we discussed about the fee, visits by a group of volunteers in August, planting saplings in villages as another

initiative of Relief Foundation in partnership with another trust, etc. Parents are taking an active role in deciding the fee along with the centre head. They also discussed various other activities of the centre. .



### **CASCADE-Family learning Cooperative<sup>(SM)</sup>**

#### ***General Update***

Parents who have had their breaks from their AMI Elementary Diploma course took active participation in giving presentations to children regularly. This gave them a firsthand experience of presenting to children in a typical Montessori environment. Children were

very cooperative and received the lessons with great interest.

Parents who have registered themselves for either AMI elementary Diploma or Primary Diploma programmes have started attending the pre-course, which involved reading chapters from Dr. Montessori's books, discussions, planning for the course, etc.

The FLC is now emerging as a separate Registered society, that is run by families, under the guidance of Ms. Vidya Shankar. This model has evolved after 5 years of piloting it.

### **Parents' Visit to Jamunamarathur**

During the month of June, parents of elementary children visited our Jamunamarathur centre along with their children. The main idea of the visit was to expose new parents to rural life and also to show how both the rural and urban models of CASCADE work in tandem. This visit also gave an opportunity for the urban parents to meet the rural parents. They had an active interaction between themselves sharing their experiences. The session was coordinated by our Jamunamarathur staff Mr. Ganapathi and also Ms. Vidya Shankar. Apart from this, children also had fun visiting the lake and the falls.



### **TIGS Workshop for Children & Parents**

Dr. Chandra Shekhar Balachandran, founder of The Institute of Geographical Studies and partner organization of Relief Foundation, visited Chennai in July and conducted a workshop for children and parents.



For the first time, we have launched a Monthly newsletter on Geography and also activities of Geo-Vidyaa Geography Centre (GVGC) in Chennai. We have launched it as an e-newsletter, which would be sent to interested schools every month. The first newsletter was sent in July to major schools in Chennai. The purpose of the newsletter is to let schools know about the existence of our Geography Centre and also make use of its facilities. Those who are interested to

subscribe for the newsletter can send an email to [gvgc.chennai@gmail.com](mailto:gvgc.chennai@gmail.com)

The visit also gave us an opportunity to review our programmes and also participation & paper presentation by our CASCADE Chennai children in the International Geography Youth Summit to be held in September in Bengaluru, organized and coordinated by The Institute of Geographical Studies. Dr. Chandra Shekhar Balachandran also spent time with the children who are on our special Geography Over Distance (GOD) programme, an initiative of GVGC, Chennai.



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>

### **Fellowship Update**

Mani's, our fellowship candidate, training programme is on track. Both theory and practical topics have been given the required number of sessions during the weekdays and weekends. Mani has 1 year of classroom experience. So, during the theory & practical

sessions he is able to connect to the Montessori philosophy and link them with many of his experiences in the classroom. As such, Montessori's philosophy is not a theory alone but a practical approach to education.



### **Partnership update**

Huma Pharma volunteers, a group of Pharmacy students from Paris, have come to Chennai to hold several sessions for parents & children in our centres. The sessions are scheduled to happen during the first and second week of August. Details about the sessions will be shared in our next issue of the newsletter. Before they arrived, we finished translating the content on health & hygiene, alcoholism, etc. into Tamil for distribution.



### **Training Update**

As part of staff knowledge development initiative, a 3 day training programme on Grace and Courtesy practices in classrooms was conducted. Staff members from both the rural centres and city centre attended the programme. Several simple, but often neglected, topics were discussed with real time case studies as examples.

### **Sponsorship Update**

With the arrival of new academic year, we started receiving sponsorships for our centre children from various donors. We take this opportunity to thank them for their trust and support. We are still in need of sponsorships for few more children. Please check the section on "How you can support us" for the new sponsorship amount.

People interested to donate can write to us @ [relieffoundationindia@gmail.com](mailto:relieffoundationindia@gmail.com)

### **Happy School Programme**

With support from Congruent Solutions, we have completed development and testing of

our comprehensive tool that could assist every school to implement the fundamental rights of children in their campuses. We take this opportunity to thank Congruent Solutions and its team for the wonderful support extended in completing the development. We will very soon launch this tool in the market. Please follow this column in the forthcoming issues of newsletter for more details.

### **AMI-ESF Conference**

ESF (Education Sans Frontiers) is an international body, which works along with several individuals and organizations to take the Montessori movement forward under the aegis of Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), an organization founded by Dr. Montessori at Netherlands.

An international AMI-ESF conference is being held in Hyderabad from July 30 to August 13. Ms. Vidya Shankar has been invited to speak in the conference on the topic Building Montessori Families. More details about her participation will be shared in our next issue of this newsletter.

## How you can support us?

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- ❖ 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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