

BALA LAKSHYA JYOTHI

(Lighting up Children's future)

Issue:18

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

June, 2019

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A Message from the Chairperson

Dear friends and well-wishers of Relief Foundation,

Greetings!

As we begin this new academic year, for us it an immeasurable amount of learning. We believed in strengthening the Rural centres with better infrastructure and personnel, and our belief turned into action, resulting in what the centre and its beneficiaries richly deserved - a simple yet elegant classroom for 3 to 6 year old children, with adequately trained staff and a trainee at hand to support, each of our centres.

The support and good will from each of you have made this possible. Children are now coming in to enrol, given the rich ambience of the place and the pleasant approachability of the staff. Removing fear, while restoring faith among families about the new way of education, that envelops the family's responsibility seems to catch the imagination of youth and young parents who are visiting our centres to know more about the significance of this new educational approach.

We welcome you all to visit our place with your family. Your goodwill and cooperation alone have been our catalysts for such permanent positive changes happening in these communities,

Best wishes till we meet next!

Vidya Shankar,
Chairperson

RF News

Updates from *CASCADE* Montessori
Rural Resource Centres

Jamunamarathur

Toddler/Casa:

As the end of the academic year neared, 2 of our older children geared up to move to the first grade in other schools. These children studied in our centre in the last three years. Their progress in Language and Mathematics was phenomenal during the last year. Of the two children, the elder girl, wrote the names of younger children in their art work in Tamil on her own. She was very comfortable with her responsibility in the class and carried herself with poise and grace in the class.



The other child started with us from the beginning of July 2015 at quite a young age. As his parents wanted him to spend some more time with us, he was in for another 6 months focusing on Math and Language. In Math, he was able to write up to 1000 comfortably with little help from the adult. The time and concentration required for such an accomplishment was indeed a testimony to the progress of the child at our centre.

The next tier of children was not far behind with their age spurring them into further explorations every day. Children go through the materials step by step overcoming one challenge at a time and when they revisited materials, they were able to discover subtle differences which they did not notice earlier. Sometimes these were posed as questions to the adult in the environment. One such instance happened with a four year old who was curious to know why there was no '10' in the material called Spindle Boxes which introduced the sequence of numbers from 1-9 and 0. Such

questions indicate their expansion of understanding.



Outreach Sessions:

The children from the city CASCADE centre visited Jamunamarathur in the month of March along with Mr. Murali Krishnan. They had more sessions with our agriculture consultant, Mr. Viswanathan. A Casa child from the

city centre also accompanied his elder brother during the last visit. It was an interesting experience for the children in the centre to work with this new entrant. The child, three years of age, was comfortably collaborating with other children in the village centre and got to complete the matching of entire set of Geometric cards for the first time.

Mr. Prasanna Bharathi continued his monthly visits to Jamunamarathur and in March, the children in the Athipattu village got an opportunity to work with the didactic material used in the Casa. Our Casa guide Mr. Mani also accompanied him with a selected set of materials and showed the usage of the materials to the children.

Materials and Training:

The final quarter at Jamunamarathur saw the environment being added with higher Mathematics materials. The materials for memorization of Unit combinations and Fractions were the new additions. More writing samples in English and Tamil were also added keeping in mind the outgoing students in our centre.



A new children's assistant, Mr. Ezhumalai, joined us from May this year. He is from a nearby village and is a post graduate interested to get trained in the Montessori pedagogy. He began his theory training at our City office in the month of May and is to continue his training through practical experiences and demonstrations in the classroom.

Mr. Mani got an opportunity to visit the Puvudham school in Dharmapuri district along with other staff members of RELEIF Foundation. It was a familiar but new experience for him. The construction of the buildings and the measure taken to save water in that school were some of the important learnings from the visit. He was also intrigued by the production of bio-gas for cooking. A lot of parallels were also drawn with regard to handling of children, usage of dry toilet. Visits like these are arranged to strengthen the understanding of the staff members and also to learn some of the best practices of other organizations.

Agricultural Update:

The dry season continued and plant irrigation became tougher with scarcity of water on the hilltop. Tractors were engaged once a week, especially in April-May and the fruit grove was kept healthy and green throughout. The flowering season began for most of the fruit trees and the flowers were removed to maintain the steady growth of the plants.

The first harvest of the honey boxes was done in the month of April. One and a quarter kilograms of honey was harvested. Within a month another kilogram of honey was ready to be harvested. In both instances, it was the additional top box that was harvested leaving the bottom boxes for the bees to consume.

Parent Sessions:

An open house session was conducted in the month of February and a general parents' meeting was held by Mr. Murali Krishnan in the month of March. He spoke about the importance of parents' testimonials to spread the good word about their experiences to the community. Each parent was given 5 pamphlets to talk to at least five different families about the centre.



Open had a low reception on the day, a lot of people who were invited, began visiting the centre later on over the next couple of months. On the day of Open house, the parents were curious as to what new materials were added and how it will help their child's growth further.



Voice of the Parent:

Mrs. Ragini (name changed) is a parent of one of the outgoing children. She went to enquire about admissions for her child in a nearby school and she talked about that experience with us.

"The school authorities pressed me to admit both my children (the elder one

6.5 and the younger 4.5) in the school as soon as possible and told me not to worry about their development as that they can pick up academics from 6th standard easily.

I was alarmed and told my husband that they simply want to fill numbers. I convinced him that majority of the learning happens in the first years and if that doesn't happen, our children will find it difficult later on. My husband agreed and decided that it is best for my younger one to continue at CASCADE. The elder one, we were looking to put him in a government-aided school as we were not convinced about other schools here."

It was heartening to know that parents were looking at the kind of approach to education a school has before enrolling their children. The role of the mother in convincing the decision maker of the family was also a significant milestone for us considering the conservative community.

Case Study:

Rajesh (name changed)

3 years 4 months

Male, Jamunamaruthur

Rajesh is a child who has been with us for the past year and half. He already has an elder sibling in the class and was expecting another sibling in the last quarter. This meant he had to be with his mother away from the school for close to 2 months. He had come back to us intermittently in the month of March.

The confidence with which he went about his work took us aback. From how he was when he entered the centre to how he conducted himself after he came back from break in June 2019 was quite moving. It showed the visible change in the progress of the child. He remembered most of the rules in the class and was composed in shifting from one work to another without any inhibition or distraction.

Narasingapuram Centre

New building Inauguration

After having functioned for about a year, the new centre in Narasingapuram was finally

inaugurated on 17th April 2019. Ms. Vidya Shankar, Chairperson and Founder Trustee-Relief Foundation, Mr. Murali Krishnan, Project Head-Relief Foundation and Mr. Harikumar, CASA Director, CASCADE Chennai, participated in the event along with other staff members, parents and friends from the nearby villages.



After the inauguration, the environment was set up with materials for parents to come and see and also to admit the children. As of now,

about 5 children have started to attend the sessions.



First Parents' Meeting

On 20th May 2019, after the Montessori materials were displayed in shelves, a parents meeting was convened. Mr. Murali Krishnan introduced Montessori education as a developmentally appropriate way, different from other practices in conventional schools. After that, parents had a walk around the environment wherein Mr. Paranthaman introduced and explained some of the material to them.

Training

In order to take Montessori education to new villages, we have recruited 3 new trainees. They are from different

villages. All the three will work as assistants and get on the job training by our trained Centre Heads. They will receive 3 days of practical and theory training every week..

Other Updates

Volunteering Program at Elavur Government School

Two students from Loyola College, who were interning with us, organized a session for students from 6th std to 9th std at Elavur Government Higher Secondary School in Gummidipoondi Taluk. Dr.Sivaraja (Physiotherapist) from Chennai facilitated the session primarily focusing on maintaining health and preparing for the exams in an effective way.

More than 100 students attended and benefitted from this programme. About 7 teachers from the school helped in successfully conducting the programme. We take this opportunity to thank Dr. Sivaraja for his time and also the teachers for their support. Our staff - member Mr.Prasanna Bharathi assisted the volunteers in conducting this program.



Geography Programs

Geography programs have been conducted for the last several months in 2 Government Schools of Gummidipoondi Taluk. In February & March, Geography Programs were conducted in Elavur & Methipalayam schools for middle level students. Totally 60 students participated in this programme. Our Staff - Member Mr.Prasanna Bharathi has been conducting these sessions. As schools were closed in the months of April & May, sessions were not conducted. They would resume from June 2019.



Home Library Scheme function

As part of home library scheme, we distributed the books to middle school students of Jamunamarathur Forest Middle School. Thanks to several donors who contributed towards this. The School administration arranged for a function in this regard. TVS Zonal Director Mr.Ponnurangam chaired this function and provided the books to the students. He appreciated our project in his address.



Parents Meeting

We are regularly conducting monthly parents' meeting at Athipattu village of Javvathu hills. On a regular basis, about 15 participants attend this programme. We take various parenting topics like using positive language, developing communication skills, asking for assistance etc. In addition to this meeting, from the month of May, we have started to demonstrate our Montessori materials to the local children of that village. Regular participants of our Parents' meeting have agreed to visit our Cascade Montessori Rural Resource Centre as a group to observe and learn. This is part of our expansion programme. Our staff members Mr.Prasanna Bharathi and Mr.Mani coordinate these meetings.



Parents Meeting at Perungattur Model Elementary School

In the month of March, our staff member Mr. Prasanna Bharathi addressed a monthly parents' meeting in Perungattur model elementary school. Around 60 parents (both mothers & fathers) participated and benefitted.



Geography programs in Javathu Hills

We conduct Geography programs for middle level students in different Government Schools of Javathu hills area. Jamunamarathur Forest Middle School, Veerappanur Forest Middle School, Perungattur Model School and Aaattianur Government School benefit from these sessions. In addition, Thumbaikkadu Government School and Aalanjanur Government Schools get this session periodically. Around 200 students participate and raise many questions in showing their eagerness. Our staff member Mr. Prasanna Bharathi conducts these sessions.

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. 25000/- 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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