

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

Issue: Ten

Quarterly Newsletter from RELIEF FOUNDATION

May, 2017

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### A Message from the Chairperson

Dear champion friends of Relief Foundation,

The stories we share here stand testimony to the years of work that have gone in before the emerging fruits ! The communities where our centres are, are live and responsive to the social issues that cause a downward spiral in values and hence the quality of living.

With children as our ambassadors, we are on a path breaking mission to bring in slow changes in the society, towards responsible living, giving importance to character building while educating their children. We have wonderful allies in our partner organisations who are offering information resources to provide to older students and parents.

We have entered new arenas this season. Book publishing - children's books of stories and poems is a new venture for Relief Foundation. We have also started preparing the ground for parenting programs in our rural communities.

From our earlier avatar of Child Rights and Juvenile Justice, our journey is a historical one, providing insights into how an organisation can undergo progressive metamorphoses with situation analyses of children, not only in the communities that are served, but also among young parents who are seeking new approaches to education for their children.

We hope you will enjoy this newsletter and will give us your feedback and thoughts.

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 Children:

Four more new children have joined Casa during this period. One of them is just 21 months and the eldest is three years. It has been a heartening change that more parents have welcomed the idea of enrolling their children in an educational space at such a young age. More inquiries have come for the children at that age group.

Acts of kindness in the younger community has now become a common feature. Be it bringing a mat for a friend in need or help winding up an activity of another child, the elder children (who have been with us for almost two years) come forward willingly.

The elder children have slowly moved on to the cultural materials with the beginning of Geography in the form of Globes, flags really exciting them. The younger ones who have come in are slowly settling down. The biggest challenge for the younger children is completion of an activity to its fullest. The moment that is achieved, they will

be able to quickly move on to higher challenges.

It was interesting to see how parents made an effort to implement some of the principles at home. One of the parents recounted an incident where his child was looking for the ease of wearing while buying footwear. The parent recognising the difficulty and with limited options available didn't hesitate to try out some from the girls' section for his boy. In fact his child picked an easy slip-on to wear and the adult respected his choice.

Towards the end of April, the children got to listen to a rendition of the veena musical instrument when Mr. Murali Krishnan, one of our Core committee members, visited our centre. He also sang the song that he played on the veena. The children who were present were prepared ahead of time and patiently sat through the ten minute performance in silence listening to the instrument keenly. One of the children wanted to touch the instrument and was keen to try his hand as well!

##### Tuition Children:

The months of Feb-Mar saw two new children coming for the tuitions. But few children from the Anna Nagar

area had dropped out. These two months thus saw a steady attendance of 6 children throughout.

During this period, the children with the adult cleaned up the surroundings of the centre. They canvassed with the local residents to join, who sent some of their children and together around 16 bags of paper, plastics and glass pieces were collected.

The local residents enthused by the effort came forward to procure a dust bin for the community from the local Block Development Office. Children also suggested having some signboards and the work on that is ongoing.



With exams round the corner for the two elder children, they themselves decided that they would be at the centre at 4:30 p.m. to have another extra hour to prepare. This was a wonderful sign that these elder ones, who were very much interested, found the centre inviting to spend more time. They even wanted to observe the younger ones and came on Ugadhi day, which was a holiday for them, when the centre was functioning.

Also during this period, on one of the Saturdays, the children were given the idea of spray painting and they came out with several designs.



The children were busy preparing for their exams. In spite of that, they allocated a weekend to prepare the signboards for the area outside the gate which was frequented by people to drink alcohol. The children, once they readied the sign, went out in search of wild bamboo make the

signposts stand. They also made a frame with thinner bamboo for their signboards.

On the second Sunday of April, the children along with a voluntary helper from the local went on to dig a pit and plant the signposts. The following couple of weeks, the children, while preparing for the exams, kept a keen eye on the impact of these boards. They found a couple of motorcyclists reading the sign and retreating away. This encouraged them greatly to see the fruit of their own work.



### Materials and Training:

The materials are added in installments so that children don't get disoriented with too much of a change. They are added keeping in mind the current needs of the eldest child as all of them are higher challenging material.

Other than that material making for some of the basic material is also in progress. One of the parents during

the parent sessions observed that we have embroidered our classified pictures pouches with some of the items inside. She was also keen to notice that only few had it. She immediately volunteered to help adding more embroidery to the pouches. As of now she has completed close to seven of the pouches.

The children's assistants have also been involved in adding more beauty to the environment. They help with the embroidery, carpentry fixes, cutting papers and charts for children's use, etc. These all form a part of their hands-on training.



In the month of April, a couple of new wooden armchairs were added to the classroom along with a stand for books for the reading corner. The children simply loved the experience and while they already were attracted to books, this inviting new addition kept them pulling every now and then. The limited number of chairs also

provides an important opportunity for children to wait their turn at the reading corner and how to tackle similar situations.

Later in the month, the embroidered pouches were stitched and added to the display. This gives the children greater detail to choose the pictures they want to see.

### Parent Sessions:

The parent circle sessions have been restarted on a regular basis since February. Four sessions were held so far and a series of topics were talked upon during these sessions including

- Work as a basic instinct
- Interference from the adults in child's work
- Freedom in the classroom and home
- Firmness as a need but not an enforcement

The first couple of sessions saw a low attendance from the parents and the regular parents have asked for the others not attending to be fined! The same was conveyed to the rest and the latest session saw more parents coming in. This was a significant development as parents have realised the importance of discussion with their peers and the need to have them.

In the month of the April, Mr. Murali Krishnan, visited the centre. He also addressed a parent meeting. The meeting was attended by majority of the parents of the younger children. In this meeting, the parents were revitalized with regard to the basic tenets of being part of our centre. The need for their involvement to the fullest possible extent was called for and the Parents also responded to the call positively.



### Agricultural Update:

The compost from the hotel wastes was harvested and they were used for the plants in the garden. It took a good part of a month for the gardener to complete the process.

During this process it was noticed that the dried tomato seeds in the compost germinated into little plants and now the gardener is involved in recreating bunds for transplanting the young saplings. The waste from the juice shop will be continued starting this month.

The little tomato saplings were all transplanted by the second week of April and they survived the transplant successfully. The plants have begun bearing fruit starting from May.



### Challenges Faced:

The parents of young children, who have just joined, expect the children to be alone at the centre without their presence for longer duration. This is being addressed in the parent circle meetings. The children take time to trust the adults and that takes time.

With the toddler environment separate and a significant number of children expected there, the routine for the adults has had a change. The elder children tend to go behind the adult on and off when the adult moves between the rooms. The presence of two adults becomes mandatory on such days. The elder children are also prepared constantly for such situations and are slowly getting used to it.

Meanwhile, a sudden unexpected gust of wind and rain shattered a few windows in the centre during the last week of April. The children were safely having lunch when the incident occurred. The damages were cleaned immediately. The windows would be replaced soon.



### Vallambudukuppam Centre

#### Casa (Toddler & Primary):

The quarter has been very successful with no major problems reported except for the clash in the village among fishermen that stopped us from keeping the centre open for few days. About 08 older children have successfully completed their 2 years with us and are moving to a new school. Out of this, 07 children would get into first standard in the nearby government English medium school at Vallambedu kuppam with our consultations. We managed to convince the parents for two reasons:

- To encourage children to use the Government facility
- To help them to use our facility in the evening so that they can continue to receive our support

We have got 12 new admissions for the new academic year so far and we are sure that we will get more admissions in the June.

#### Tuition:

There were totally 10 children in the tuition till the end of April who got benefitted from our centre. As we decided not to take children beyond 8<sup>th</sup> std., we were able to focus on helping and improving the basics of these children who studied in different schools, both government and private. We also helped these children in their school's year end cultural programmes and supported them in clearing their doubts and questions also giving tips for their annual exams. We are happy to say that our tuition children have won several awards. Some of them are:

- Neatness award
- Overall good participant
- Class wise ranking awards and etc.

Parents are very happy about this progress in their children.

**Visitors:**

Mr. Murali Krishnan, our core committee member, visited the centre on 22<sup>nd</sup> April to discuss with parents. He had a detailed discussion on center's future planning, how could parents participate to take the school to the next level. He also had discussion on some of the problems like non-payment of fee, attendance, cleanliness, food & hygiene and participation of parents in study circles. He recommended forming a committee of parents with the centre head Mr. Paranthaman to look into these issues, in particular, the issue of admission and fee payment. Parents have agreed to form the committee.

**Study circle and parents meeting:**

Study circles happened on every first and third Saturdays between 2 pm and 3.30 pm. In the last quarter, four special parents meetings were conducted focusing on the following:

- older children's first standard admissions
- How does the centre support in continuing the

Montessori learning in the evening sessions

- How to increase the centre's reach
- Future plan of the centre
- How to get involved in meetings and study circles

**Challenges:**

Non-payment of the small fee that we collect and attendance of children to school and parents attendance in study circle are the two primary issues that we are facing on and off. Through regular personal discussions, home visits and study circles we are trying to address these issues. We are confident of resolving them with regularly attending parents being spokespersons on the benefit of this centre's inputs for their family.

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

CASCADE Family Learning Cooperative has become an independent society by itself. It is called **CASCADE Family learning Society**. Relief Foundation continues to support the initiative. We encourage our readers to go through

its website and Facebook page to know more details about this initiative.

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

## **Other initiatives**

### **Meetings in villages**

For the past few months, we have been conducting awareness activities and programs for rural parents on child care and parenting practices. In that respect, we had meetings with parents directly in two villages in Thandrampet Taluk of Thiruvannamalai district. Sadakuppam and Thenkarumbalur were the villages in which we had meetings.

Sadakuppam awareness meeting witnessed the presence of 22 mothers and held in the building of Women Self Help Group. This meeting was arranged with the help of Self Help Group. This meeting was very responsive and welcoming. We did not expect this crowd for the first meeting. It was encouraging to see that parents wanted to know more about child care practices. Finally, the participants expressed their wish to have these types of meeting

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

periodically in future.



The meeting at Thenkarumbalur witnessed the attendance of 15 people (95% were mothers). This meeting was highly interactive. These participants also expressed their willingness for this meeting to be conducted periodically in future.



At the end of both the meetings, the participants (parents) were given feedback forms and were asked to write their opinions. We designed a flyer with inputs for parents. We discussed that in detail and distributed one each to all the parents at the end of the discussion. The flyer had quotations and points touching the essence of Montessori philosophy on child care and development.

We are happy to say that the people of the rural area are keen to receive inputs from us. As of now, we are making arrangements to conduct further meetings in these two villages and few nearby villages. We are also training a local person, our staff member Mr. Prasanna Bharathi and his wife to take this forward so that it can be done frequently.

### **Book Publication**

Relief Foundation is in the process of releasing story books for children in Tamil as we felt children need to be read out good stories that have practical connections especially touching daily life. The idea is to also assist in Tamil language development.

We have recently completed writing about 30 stories for elementary children who are in the age group of 6 to 12 years. We are in discussion with few publishers in this regard to take it forward. We will keep you posted on further developments.

### **Survey**

Relief Foundation has been regularly releasing small audio clips on specific parenting issues or questions. They are 5-7 minutes clips in Tamil. We wanted to expand the audience and also wanted to understand the needs of people to produce more such clips both in English and Tamil. Towards that, we recently initiated an online survey. Once the survey results are consolidated and reviewed, we will start sending short audio clips to parents through our Facebook page. Readers are most welcome to share their thoughts on this if anyone wishes to listen to specific topics. Please send us your requests @ [relieffoundationindia@gmail.com](mailto:relieffoundationindia@gmail.com). To view the survey, please visit the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VWL5D6C>

## **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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