



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to the twelfth issue of Bala Mandir's newsletter. With this, BM Connect completes three years. The newsletter has been an attempt to capture happenings in Bala Mandir over the last three years, and it has been an incredibly interesting journey.

As an organisation, Bala Mandir is dedicated to values of child centricity, continuous improvement and a professional approach. These values are best encapsulated by the varied activities and initiatives undertaken by the institution, some of which are covered in this and previous newsletters. To take these initiatives forward, Bala Mandir has focused on recruiting the right kind of staff for different key roles, and providing training to them to ensure they are equipped and skilled to handle tough situations. Workshops, presentations and study circles are a routine part of a Bala Mandir employee's life! Examples of some of the workshops and programmes conducted are covered in this newsletter. This issue also contains a 'Children's Corner', which captures some of these initiatives in a little more detail.

As the newsletter enters into its fourth year, we welcome all of you as well-wishers, volunteers, donors, members and staff of Bala Mandir to contribute your own experiences and stories. Please write in to the email ID below in case you are interested in doing so.

Happy reading!

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SUMMER OUTINGS

Based on the intra-group competitions held as part of Bala Mandir's 68th anniversary, the different groups had rewards: Group C won the first place and visited the park and a hotel and went for a movie. The second placed Group B went out for a hotel meal and a movie. The third placed Group A went to the temple and for a movie.



Review of the Kitchen Functioning

A complete review was taken up of the functioning of the kitchen and food services. Work schedules of staff, menus, costing, performance levels, timing cooking processes, serving systems etc, were evaluated, under the guidance of a team of experts from Eco Kitchen. Gaps identified were addressed through suitable changes which were made with the cooperation of the staff. With reduced staff and an excellent work ethic, the kitchen has been functioning even better than before. Further review will be undertaken of store room processes and procurement will be taken up.

Standard V to Standard VI

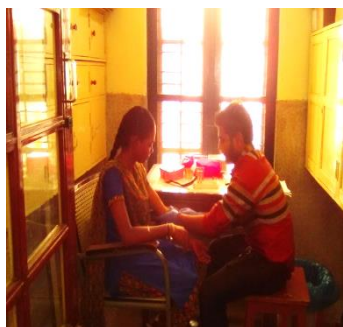
As a new initiative, the teachers of the students of Standard V did a formal handover of the children who were promoted to Standard VI. This initiative is to help maintain continuity, and ensure that details about the children were updated with the new teachers. This should help both the teacher and student settle better in the new academic year. A Farewell Party was held for the students of Standard V, and conduct certificates were issued.

Vocational Training Centre Field Visit

The Electrical trainees in the 4th semester were taken for a field visit on 2nd, 3rd and 4th May to Janani Electricals in Porur in order to get exposure to and see different types of Panel boards. This was to cover a new topic in their syllabus. The trainees were given practical training in assembling various types of MCCB with panels. The trainees really enjoyed this field visit, and got to learn a lot.

Staff Health Check-up

Dr. Suchitra and the medical team carried out health check-ups for all the staff members. As part of this, all staff members had blood tests conducted, and this was done with the help of YRG Care. The staff members were given their individual reports, maintaining personal confidentiality.



Occupational Therapy

A beginning was made with occupational therapy, which focuses on helping children with behavioural issues and special needs. In June, the main focus of the programme was on children in the primary section, and soon the other children will also be covered as part of this programme.



EVENTS IN THE NAGERCOIL HOME

Crèche Annual Day was celebrated on 1.4.2017. The function was presided over by Dr. Swarnalatha Raju, and Kavignar Tamilkuzhavi was the Chief Guest. The parents attended the function with great enthusiasm and enjoyed their children's performances. They also provided suggestions. The children who won the various competitions were given prizes.



Menstrual Hygiene Day was organized by Kasthurba Mathar Nala Sangam in the Home. About 20 participants including the Bala Mandir children attended the meeting. This function was presided over by Dr. Sumithra Raghuvaran. Thought provoking speeches given by Dr. Sumithra, Dr. Uma Selvan, Dr. Siva Kumari and Dr. Maya to educate the participants about the importance of this time, and methods to maintain health and hygiene, especially during menstruation time.



Tamil New Year was celebrated with great enthusiasm. Children and Staff went to the Shiva temple.



In addition to these:

Fresh Day Celebration was organized to 'freshen-up' and motivate the children to start the new academic year with courage and confidence. The event was organised by Mrs. Kanaga with help from four other volunteer women.

Dr. Indira Surendran, past President of the Nagercoil Home, was remembered on her first death anniversary. Her commitment to children's development and her involvement were recalled, and a special prayer was conducted in her memory.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

As it is well-known, one of Bala Mandir's values is child centricity, and this section captures some of the activities for the children in the last quarter. This includes sessions by social workers for development, functions and festivals for the children to learn about different aspects of India's culture, and personalised activities that make the children shine in their own light.

Sessions by Social Workers

Saturday regular activities are conducted in craft, playing with toys, looking at books and storytelling for the children in the infant and toddler block. Star and teddy bear stickers are awarded for good behaviour and manners. The sessions are conducted by Jennifer A and Jennifer E (social workers). A session was conducted on good touch / bad touch by Deepika and hygiene and cleanliness by Saranya for junior girls

Yoga Day

On June 21st, Yoga Day was celebrated. Dr. Kalavathi Sekar organised the programmes. 250 students and all the teachers took part in the programme, which had Pranayamam, exercise, asanas, and Surya Namaskaram.

Cooking Classes

Cooking classes were conducted at the end of April for children (both boys and girls) in Standard X who were being discharged and rehabilitated with their families.

Shopping and Excitement!

Orphan children who stayed in the institution over the holidays were given an interesting experience. For the first time, they were given spending money and could buy what they needed for themselves. The experience was exciting and educative for the children.

Functions in Bala Mandir

Rama Navami was celebrated on April 5th, followed by the Rama Navami drama on April 27th. Tamil New Year's Day was celebrated on April 14th with a drama and dance prepared by the Standard X boys and girls by themselves.



Rama Navami Drama



Tamil New Year's Day



REFURBISHMENT OF THE MAIN BLOCK

After the unprecedented floods of December 2015, Bala Mandir has been repairing and renovating all its buildings in a phased manner. One of the last buildings taken up for renovation was the “Main Block” which is the oldest building in Bala Mandir dating back to 1951. It was renamed Ramnath Goenka Block in 1994 and it houses the junior and senior girls. The aim of the renovation undertaken was to greatly mitigate the long standing problem of the girls suffering hardships during the internal flooding of the building in almost all monsoons.

After checking the structural stability of the building and the improvements needed, the building was taken up for renovation. An additional 1850 sqft of new living space and 6 new toilets were added as part of the project, and this additional space was created by enclosing two terraces to create new rooms. This space was to house the library, recreation and study room needed to meet the new regulations (under Juvenile Justice Act) for increased space per child as well as added facilities. The project scope also included waterproofing, repairing all toilets, some structural repair, mosquito netting and painting. The estimated cost for this project was Rs. 55 lakhs. Bala Mandir was fortunate to have Temasek Holdings Advisors India Pvt Ltd and The New Indian Express Group supporting this project.

Work started in March 2017. Since the children residing in the block could not be initially vacated from the building because of the possible disruption that would have affected their studies and exams, only the ground floor was taken up for renovation in the first phase till end of April, during which time the girls stayed in the first floor rooms. In the second phase, the girls moved out into the Boys Section building and the boys moved to another building in Prakasam Street to facilitate full-scale work to be carried out at a faster pace. While the work on the entire first floor was going on, the ground floor was used only for very essential activities. All the work in the second floor – waterproofing, change of water tank and creating two new rooms from open terraces, and repairs to windows and staircase went on in full swing. Complete repair work and outside painting was carried out as well.

The ability of the children and staff to adjust to different circumstances at critical times is a great strength for Bala Mandir and this was demonstrated once again. The different moves were managed very well, and the children were extremely cooperative and supportive of the entire refurbishing process. This project completed the entire revamping process undertaken for the Children’s Programme buildings – infant and toddler block, Daswani Boys Block and Ramnath Goenka Girls Main Block.



Main Block corridor – under construction



Main Block corridor – after renovation



First floor new rooms under construction



Waterproofing on the second floor



New rooms after refurbishing



Outside painting and finish

WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES

As part of staff development initiatives, Bala Mandir conducts many training programmes for the staff members, and encourages them to participate in workshops and different kinds of activities to increase their effectiveness. A glimpse is provided below into the kinds of activities undertaken.

JJ Act Provisions

In April the social workers presented a complete evaluation of the Bala Mandir Children's Home based on the J.J. Act – each one taking on a different section. The presentation was in depth and while it revealed all that we are doing well, it also identified gaps and challenges that need to be met.

Workshop on National Curriculum Framework

The emphasis of the workshop conducted by Mr. Murali Krishnan for teachers in the High School was on the need to see the school curriculum as an integrated system and not compartmentalise subjects. He discussed the guidelines for the subjects in detail and highlighted the problems faced by teachers and suggested solutions for the methods.

Fifth Saturday Teacher Programmes

April 29th was a fifth Saturday (typically used for training programmes) and as recreation for the teachers in the Day Care Centre and Vidyalaya, an art form called dancercise was organized by Ms. Panna and conducted by Ms. Leka. All the staff participated and enjoyed the programme. Ms. Seena conducted a number game after this as well.

Learning Through Play Calendar Training

Ms. Lakshmi Gopal concluded her LTPC Training programme with sessions held on 4-5 years, and 5-6 years, with a focus on 'parenting' for the staff involved in the Early Childhood programme. Role plays were held where teachers also played the role of the parent (mother) and shared their understanding from LTPC.

Teacher Enhancement Programmes

BMPS teachers attended a workshop on 30th May held by Mr. Kirthivasan of Altius Foundation on how to teach Mathematics effectively. On 31st May, Mrs. Sumithra Gautama (KFI), held a workshop on the topic of Empathy. On 15th June, Vidyalaya teachers had a meeting with Mrs. Uma Raman on additional activities to develop English vocabulary for each chapter.

Workshop on "School 2009"

School rules were reiterated for the teachers of both BMPS and SMHS, and they also suggested changes that they wish to make for the next academic year, through a workshop conducted by Ms. Seena Hariharan.

HR NEWS — APRIL TO JUNE 2017

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Panna Appachu, Coordinator, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Abirami, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Subashini, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Savithri, Helper, DCC & Vidyalaya
- Mr. Pradeep, Social Worker, VTC

Welcome back to Bala Mandir!

Ex-staff members rejoined BM in this quarter:

- Mr. Rajagopal, Admin Manager
- Ms. Subhashini, Social Worker
- Ms. Divya, Accounts
- Mr. Prabhudoss, Helper, SMHS

Performance appraisal was completed for the staff, with self reviews by employees, and appraiser review by the Coordinator and Member-in-Charge for each unit. The management team reviewed the appraisal ratings. The feedback the staff has given for the improvement of Bala Mandir's services demonstrates their positive attitude and commitment to the institution.

BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP

The fourth annual Balu Sir Summer Camp was held from May 1st to 13th. 88 children participated in the camp, and learnt different activities like Mime, Play acting, three styles of dancing – Freestyle, Kathak and Dandiya. They chose the activity which interested them. Every day began with Yoga and “Light” Meditation and the different activities followed. The children were given refreshments during mid-morning and Sri Krishna Sweets sponsored their lunch for the duration of the Camp and the valedictory lunch was given by YRG Care. Ms. Rajani Seshadri, Executive Coach, was the Chief Guest for the Valedictory function, and gave away certificates and medals to all the participating children. In her speech, she encouraged the children to focus on all round development, apart from academic excellence and take every opportunity to show case their talent. The Camp is conducted with the financial support of the V.Y.Gaitonde Endowment.



MEET OUR NEW PRESIDENT: DR. ANANDLAKSHMY

Dr. S. Anandlakshmy has become the President of Bala Mandir from July 2017 onwards. Presenting an insight into her life, background and the family values which make her the person she is today.

Dr. Anandlakshmy belonged to a family which had – to use her own words ‘lovely parents’, three sisters and a brother. Very unusual for those days, it was a family which believed in equal rights for girls and boys with full autonomy. The parents gave space to the children to choose what they wanted to do. There were lively round table discussions to make decisions. Their house had a huge library with a large collection of books and this inculcated the reading habit in her. Her father was in the Railways and hence the family moved a lot, and she studied in different schools. But this disruption in their lives did not make a difference, since the home front was a solid base for all of them. They did go to stay in hostels after a certain age.

Theirs was a home with a difference. There was respect for all religions, nothing ritualistic only spiritual learning, and liberal thinking. This gave the children of the family the mental strength never to grumble about anything – their hostel living, the chores they had to do. By the time they were 15, they were taught washing clothes, cleaning and cooking. They were made to realise the value of an individual. The family bond is very strongly evident, with the members having dinner together every day.

Dr. Anandlakshmy says that she has never been ambitious, never thought of attaining anything, but things just fell into place. She has been a lucky person who has had the good fortune of interacting with the Dalai Lama multiple times. After completion of her graduation and her B. Ed, she started off as a teacher at Vidya Mandir, Mylapore, which she was instrumental in establishing. She then received a Fulbright Scholarship at Bryn Mawr, one of the top colleges in USA, where she completed her Masters and Post Masters. Her research was based on child development.

Then followed a stint in Delhi where she was exposed to the music, arts and culture scene of the place and made plenty of friends. She was working with the Lady Irwin College where she served as a Director of the college. She had a full life and was part of many committees but without a second thought, left all of it, to take care of her ailing mother.

Dr. Anandlakshmy, has travelled widely in India and abroad, as she was invited to attend conferences. She says settling down abroad was always an option, considering how much she travelled out of the country, but this did not attract her. Over the years, she has been actively volunteering as advisor for NGOs such as SEWA and Volontariat in Pondicherry (for which she was President for 10 years). Her free time is taken up with books, puzzles, music.

Dr. Anandlakshmy's association with Bala Mandir has been for over 20 years now. She has mentored and guided the Bala Mandir Research Foundation with her knowledge and expertise. She has served as a Trustee of Bala Mandir. Now, as she takes over her new role as President of Bala Mandir, she says it is an honour conferred on her. She is happy that she is amongst like-minded individuals, and believes that one needs to have good principles, respect, strong personal values, and a strong conviction to serve.



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