



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Creating a newsletter for an institution like Bala Mandir is always an interesting exercise – there is so much going on always that it is difficult to decide what to cover, what to focus on, what to put in and what to leave out! Every quarter when I read through the reports and see the photos, I always feel proud and happy that I am associated with an institution that loves to put a smile on the face of children. I would encourage all of you who read this newsletter to come over to Bala Mandir and experience those activities and smiles, and the sense of happiness for yourselves!

It's not just the children – the staff also experience a sense of belonging with Bala Mandir as well, and this was best demonstrated when the Founder's Day celebrations were held in September 2017. The posters that our staff members made, about what they feel about Bala Mandir, were truly eye-opening and inspiring. Their ability to summarise what the institution stands for in such a succinct way impressed one and all very much. These are shared in a special feature on Page 4 of this newsletter.

The Children's Corner on Page 7 is now a continuing feature, with glimpses into the lives of the Bala Mandir children, and what all they get to do.

Do let us know what you think about this edition of the newsletter. Happy reading!

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TRIP TO VGP UNIVERSAL KINGDOM

On October 17th, the children went to VGP Universal Kingdom. The children thoroughly enjoyed the rides and the day. The trip was organized very lovingly by the Rotary Club, and included breakfast, lunch and transport.



NEWS BYTES: OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2017

Participation in Choir singing competition

The children of the Bala Mandir choir participated on behalf of Satyamurthi High School in the annual Choral Music competition held by Madras Youth Choir in November. The choir was conducted by Swapna, a senior Bala Mandir girl who has a natural flair for music, and is now undergoing formal training in it.



Karthigai Celebrations

Karthigai was celebrated as per tradition, with the lighting of lamps throughout Bala Mandir home. The children of Standard VI and VII put up a play on the birth of Murugan, and performed a dance.



Sarva Dharma Day

Sarva Dharma Day was celebrated in Bala Mandir on Sri Sathya Sai Baba's birthday, November 23rd. The children performed the Sarva Dharma dance about unity in the messages of all religions, and the Nallathamara Dance, about the five values of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa.



Christmas Celebrations

Christmas was celebrated on December 25th across units in Bala Mandir. As always, the children in the Home put up the nativity play. Special tea and gifts were provided to the children, with best wishes from Ms. Miranda Corti and her colleagues from the IFRS Foundation, UK.



Shakila weds Balaji

Bala Mandir girl and staff, Shakila, got married to Balaji on December 1st at Vadapalani Temple. Balaji runs his own transport business. While the marriage expenses were taken care of by the groom's family, Bala Mandir provided her with necessities. Shakila continues to make use of her formal training as a nurse, by working as a day staff in Bala Mandir.

EDUCATIONAL OUTINGS IN DECEMBER

As part of the December holiday break, the children went on their annual planned educational tour schedule:

- Standard VI: Puttur Temple, to understand the temple architecture
- Standard VII: Five temples of different religions, to understand Unity of Faith
- Standard VIII: Dakshin Chitra, to appreciate culture and architecture
- Standard IX: Tour of Chennai, a sight-seeing trip with guidance on various monuments



DEEPAVALI CELEBRATIONS

The children in the Home celebrated Deepavali with a lot of gusto and excitement. They all got to wear new dresses and follow the usual traditions of an oil bath and temple visit. They then enjoyed a special lunch, and got to play with crackers in the evening, along with the staff and volunteers from Bhumi.



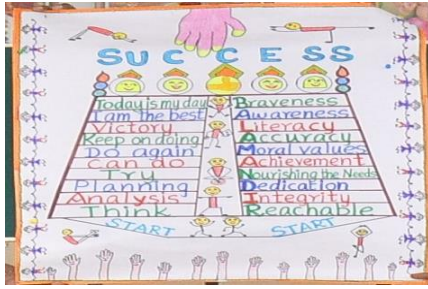
NEETA TALENT COMPETITION

As always, the children participated in the annual Neeta Talent Competition held by Rotary and won prizes.



WHAT BALA MANDIR MEANS TO US

As part of the Founder's Day celebrations held in September, **STAFF** of each unit presented a poster about what Bala Mandir means to them. These posters were discussed in further detail over October to December, with each unit providing a write-up explaining the thinking behind the poster. Here is a glimpse of the posters created.



Poster by Bala Mandir Primary School

“We consider Bala Mandir to be a ‘Mandir’ or temple for us and have depicted it as ‘temple steps’ in our poster. We have learnt many values in this temple, as are depicted on the left side of this picture. If we follow these values, we will definitely achieve success! The right side depicts what the vision that we believe Bala Mandir stands for. These are the factors that make us feel proud to work in Bala Mandir.”



Poster by Satyamurthi High School

“We have depicted Bala Mandir as a banyan tree. Similar to a banyan tree, Bala Mandir has always provided shelter for students. The values provided by Bala Mandir are like the branches of the tree, always reaching for the sky. Just like the roots of the tree go deep within the earth, the roots of Bala Mandir are deep-seated, with holistic development of children.”



Poster by Social Workers

“The ladder represents Bala Mandir – every step is child centric and related to the child’s progress. The thumb impressions depict how we are all united by a common cause. The orange hands reaching out of the ladder denote how we continue to support children even after they are rehabilitated. The balloons show the positives, like hope, rising above problems and achieving the impossible, that the children carry with them always.”



Poster by Vocational Training Centre

“The bridge of Bala Mandir is constructed with a strong foundation and many pillars, consisting of our staff, well-wishers, donors etc. On the bridge itself are the values of Bala Mandir’s code of conduct. Other things highlighted in this poster represent different aspects of Bala Mandir – such as a light house giving light in darkness, and an elephant which is not only active and strong, but also wise enough to use its strength appropriately.”



Poster by Day Care Centre

“The poster depicts a mother hen protecting and nurturing her chicks under her wings, just like our organization. The chicks represent the different units of Bala Mandir. As a whole, we are dedicated to improving the education, nutrition, health and safety of children, and creating awareness among parents. The goal is to bring up healthy, independent and happy individuals who, going forward, become valuable citizens of our country.”



Poster by Children's Programme

“In this, the children are depicted as the Sun, and the different activities of Bala Mandir are shown as planets, revolving around this Sun. These activities are Care & Protection, Health, Education, Secularism, Social Relationship, Extracurriculars / Sports, and Rehabilitation. All these activities work together for the holistic development, welfare and future of the children of Bala Mandir.”

ELEMENTARY MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT

A new Elementary Montessori Environment, catering to the children between ages 6 and 10 years, was inaugurated on October 21st, 2017. This environment was created with the support of L&T Construction. Mr. Sukumar, Vice President & Head – Finance, Accounts and Administration, L & T Construction graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. A well-qualified teacher has also been appointed specifically for this environment, to guide the children.



PARENTS VISIT OUR SCHOOLS

Open House was conducted for parents of children in the Day Care Centre and Montessori sections in October and November. They interacted with the teachers to understand more about the performance of their children. Parents of the Montessori students spent about an hour in the environment, watched the children handle the materials, and observed them the various learning processes, which have brought about so many positive changes in their children!



S. MANJUBHASHINI MEMORIAL SEMINAR

The S. Manjubhashini Seminar was held by BMRF in December, on the topic “Competition is not the best strategy for children”. Panelists Ms. Vidya Shankar, Ms. Kesang Menezes, and Ms. Arundhati Swamy, presented the points of view of a teacher, parent and counsellor respectively. The discussion was preceded by a debate (*Patti Mandram*) on the topic by the students of Satyamurthi High School.



FIELD TRIPS BY VTC TRAINEES

Junior Fitters in the VTC visited PCFCT, Walajah in December. They observed gas cutting and gas welding. Each trainee was then made to do the same. This gave them good practical exposure. The importance of safety measures was emphasised



Electrician and Fitter Seniors were taken to ICF in December. Fitters saw the process of building coaches from base to finishing stage. Electricians saw how concealed wiring and fixing of switches are done and brought into the control panels in coaches.



HR NEWS – OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2017

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Lizy Pushpalatha, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Hemamalini, Residential Social Worker
- Mr. Balaji, Warden-cum-Teacher
- Ms. Mariya Selvi, Coordinator
- Ms. Brinda, Montessori Teacher

Staff Enhancement

The helpers and caregivers took off half a day from their usual work, to meet in the AC Hall in the Resource Centre, and go over the Bala Mandir overview, done for them in Tamil. This gave them a more in-depth view into the workings of different units in Bala Mandir.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

The children went to Mylapore Fine Arts Club to watch the play "The Tempest". The children enjoyed the story, which was full of adventure, magic and supernatural characters. The story was narrated to them in advance so they could appreciate the English dialogues.



Smilie Day was celebrated in the Home in October. The children enjoyed themselves and received small gifts like balloons and masks marked with smilies to mark the occasion.



For the December holidays, the children were taken to the nearby Super Market and Petti shop, ATM, Bank, and Post office to understand how each of these operate. Each child got some money to purchase items on their own in the supermarket. In the Post Office they posted cards that they made, and were thrilled when the cards came to the person in Bala Mandir to whom they were sent. They also had an interesting interview with the Bala Mandir postman. Apart from this, they played traditional indoor games and learnt crafts like spray painting and drawing.



On November 24th, the teachers and students of Vidyalaya got to experience 'preparing food without fire' by preparing fruit salad and vegetable salad

The children enjoy gardening in different part of Bala Mandir. They are allocated various areas where they plant vegetables and medicinal plants. They love this activity and learn a lot from it!



MEMBER SPEAK: MS. PREMILLA RAJAN

Ms. Premilla Rajan, Member-in-Charge for the Medical Programme, shares her experiences with Bala Mandir.

Twenty-three years ago, Leelamma, daughter of our beloved founder Manjumma, a family friend of my in-laws from Trichy days, was our neighbor. I had just relocated from Dubai, and was a full time caregiver for my ailing mother-in-law. Leelamma, upon learning I was a freshly retired School Principal, felt I could be of use at Bala Mandir. A visit to meet Manjumma was arranged – that diminutive simple woman, clad in white Khadi saree with twinkling eyes opined she could use my help at the schools run by Bala Mandir.



It came to pass that I became a part of the Bala Mandir as a member of the General Body, later graduated to the Executive Committee and was given charge of the schools. I was also a member of the BMRF. It was a hectic time then– ‘bye laws’ were being written and I do recall the time spent working on that with Maya, who was then an assistant to HGS Manjumma!

There was much to do. All the experiences gathered in the schools that I had run in India and in the UAE; what I had gleaned as a teacher in various schools all over India in general, and at Rishi Valley in particular, came to help formulate and lay down practices at the BMPS and the SMHS. For me, it was a delight having a good Headmistress in Ms. Aravindh, who readily agreed and implemented several of the suggestions, like forming four houses for the school population – with assigned colours / leaders / mottos / ideals to live up to. The Morning Assemblies were revamped with more pupil participation, activities were encouraged, and Art and Projects / Exhibitions became part of the curriculum! I recall that the first Project day in the schools was an overwhelming creative response to learning. Sports became integral to the system and Sports Days were exhilarating! My visits to the schools daily were made possible by my husband, the late Col. Rajan, who took over the care giving of my mother-in-law, allowing me to spend quality time advising the teachers and the Head Mistress.

Accountability was my watchword, so screening pupil work by the HM was made mandatory; staff had to clearly ‘correct’ pupil work on time and not at their whim! I would periodically do a spot check to ensure the system was up and running. Question paper setting too was a supervised activity! ‘Shram daan’ day was introduced on Gandhiji’s birthday October 2. All of us wielded brooms to clean the school / grounds! The old files that had accumulated all over the office room, were catalogued year wise, stored in cartons freeing up shelf / floor space! There was a great sense of participation and accomplishment. Discipline was a watchword and we brooked no nonsense. Remedial classes for the weak after school was given to the few who could stay back; battling the illiteracy of the underprivileged was indeed a monumental task. Time rolled on but the momentum was kept up; though the HMs retired and newer ones came in; The systems were in place.

In 2009 we relocated to a Senior citizen’s facility at Coimbatore, hence moving away from BM and Chennai; however I continued on in the General Body. We returned to Chennai in 2013. This time, the HGS Maya gave me the Medical Unit to work upon and I became part of the Executive Committee once again.

Much has happened since then; we have grown into a remarkable institution like a huge Banyan tree. The workforce has increased with young social workers / assistants / doctors and specialists. The under privileged have greater access to learning / better health care / nutrition. There is greater acknowledgement of staff contribution in different areas, computer literacy is accepted as a must by all staff; we are digitized to a great extent. What never ceases to amaze me is the energy that is so palpable at Bala Mandir. The children smile and greet affectionately; there is an unique bonding between staff / social workers / teachers / doctors / specialists / unit heads, which is informal and one feels one has come home! The ambience is one of friendship, caring and sharing.

Today with my let downs in health after numerous surgeries, it is tough to punch the clock even on a weekly basis; the management has accepted that inadequacy on my part. The computer affords ‘working from home’ so that’s what I do! Fortunately the band of social workers are on the same wave length, so work at the Medical Unit does not suffer from my physical absence! The Medical unit is now seeing an upsurge of documentation / ready fact finders / information access – all through our Excel sheets and reports. I do manage a monthly visit to touch base with my band of workers. The idea overall is simple – to offer the best we can in the best possible child centric way!