



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

News from the quarter for October to December is always filled with celebration, festivals, holidays and fun activities for the children – in addition, of course, to the usual day to day activities they participate in. You will get to see these numerous activities in the pages of this issue.

Emphasis on educational improvements have been a major part of Bala Mandir's plans in the last few years, and the introduction and growth of the pre-primary Montessori Environment has been a great success story for the institution. The expanding scope of this methodology in Bala Mandir has been talked about in this newsletter.

Another major area that has been receiving much attention in the last few years is human resources – bringing in more professionals in all units and areas, who are able to bring in valuable and specific knowledge, expertise and experience to improve the quality of the services we provide – and most importantly, providing them with training and upskilling for them to constantly improve themselves. In every area, we have been conducting targeted programmes that have helped our teaching staff, caregivers, social workers, and all other staff across Bala Mandir up the ante and give their best. Of course, we also have some fun activities with them, as you can see in this issue!

As always, we look forward to hearing from you. Do reach out at the email ID given below for any feedback / ideas.

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WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS

A training programme was conducted for the teachers in Sathyamurthi High School on December 26th, by Ms. Padma Shankar and Ms. Pooja Bomb. The programme covered topics such as how to make classroom teaching more informative, how to write lesson plans, how to improve learning outcomes using the concept of Bloom's taxonomy.



NEWS BYTES: OCTOBER 2018 TO DECEMBER 2018

Programme by Dr. Sulthan

A session on drug and tobacco abuse was conducted by Dr. Sulthan in November for the school children, using videos and presentations. The session was informative and interactive, and children were asked to take a pledge at the end. Dr. Sulthan also conducted a session on oral hygiene for children in Standards IX and X.



Damodaran Pooja

On October 25th, a bhajan and prayer session was organised for the Damodaran Pooja in the Dining Hall by well-wishers of Bala Mandir, belonging to the Hare Krishna movement. They sang small songs and bhajans, and told stories of Lord Krishna.

Bala Sangamam

Sruti Kendra Trust organized Bala Sangamam, an interaction session between the Bala Mandir children, and the children from different backgrounds who attend their classes on religion and culture. They spoke to the children, sang songs, and performed drama. They also conducted games and small fun exercises.



Geetha Chanting Competition

The annual Geetha chanting competition was held within Bala Mandir by the Chinmaya Mission on October 2nd for children below Standard VI, and above. The winners received their prizes on December 12th – three winners were declared for the junior children (Sandeep, Raju and Anusha), and two winners for the senior children (Vanitha and Sandhya).

First Aid Training Programmes

The second year of training programmes on First Aid went off very well, with training programmes on conducted on December 18th and 19th for the teaching staff and social workers. 20 staff members participated in this interactive and practical session, and the participants were asked to try out how to do basic first aid, such as applying a makeshift tourniquet and providing CPR.



CHILDREN’S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Children’s Day was celebrated across units with great gusto. Competitions were held in the school for arts, craft, music, elocution, story telling and essay writing. To practice complete inclusion, the children were divided into 35 groups across the different standards. The highlight was the kolams – with coloured powders, and natural items from across SMHS (such as stone and sticks) included in it. Mrs. S. Subadevi, principal Judge City Civil Court, presided over the function, and distributed the S. Manjubhashini award for excellence in Music. She appreciated the display of art & craft work displayed by the students, as well. She also took a walk through Bala Mandir and interacted with the children in the Infants & Toddlers Block. As part of the function, the teachers performed a dance for the children. The children were provided special lunch by YRG Care’s Eco Kitchen. Children in the High School then watched the movie ‘Jungle Book’, while children from the Primary School watched Tenali Raman stories.



AKSHARABHYAS

The concept of an Aksharabhyas (translated as ‘writing practice’) is one where a child is initiated into writing and formal education for the first time. This was celebrated on the day of Vijayadasami, with 14 children participating. The children were asked to write the first letter in Tamil on the floor with one finger with the help of elder children and caregivers. They were then given slates and chalk to write the letter.



FOOTBALL CLUB

The Football Club at Sathyamurthi High School was first started for the school’s children, but has picked up popularity from other schools because of the excellent results of SMHS in inter-school competitions. The club run from Monday to Saturday, and has a fixed routine including stretches, exercises, learning ball skills and practice. It is mainly run by Mr Koteeswaran, with the help of two ex-SMHS boys, and is supported by Mr. Thanigaivel and Vetri Foundation.



CHRISTMAS CARNIVAL

Children from Standard I to Standard X took part in the Christmas Carnival at Savera Hotel, organized on December 24th by the Duchess Club. The carnival include organized games, snacks, and a magic show. The children had an excellent time, and enjoyed themselves tremendously.



S. MANJUBHASHINI MEMORIAL SEMINAR

The SMM Seminar 2018 was held at BMRF on 15th December 2018 on the topic 'Inclusion Beyond Barriers'. The panellists, who focused on different aspects of children and inclusion, were

- Dr Namita Jacob (Director, Chetna Trust), focused on disability
- Dr Aruna Rathnam (Executive Director, Madhuram Narayanan Centre), focused on barriers beyond language
- Ms Chitra Krishnan (Coordinator, Children's Programme, Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust), focused on the status of the institutional child



UNDERSTANDING MONTESSORI AT BALA MANDIR

Many of the children under the care of the institution need specialised attention and care for their psycho social well being, since they come from traumatic backgrounds at an early age. For many years, the search was on for an education process which would cater to these children. Bala Mandir has introduced this methodology of Montessori Method of teaching (which is well-known worldwide) with the belief that it is ideally suited for the growth and development of a child growing up in an institution, since it brings out spontaneity in the child and arouses the child's interest in self-learning. It also caters most effectively to individual levels of learning – permitting each child to move forward at his / her own pace, keeping the child's attention, and provoking a permanent love of learning. The self analysis and the developing ability of the child to correct his / her own errors helps the child's self esteem and encourages a great deal of self discipline and confidence .



A Pre-Primary Montessori Environment was started in 2013. This is an Environment in the Kindergarten section of the Day Care Centre, exclusively for children aged between 2 ½ and 6 years. The children have blossomed under this, and their learning has improved significantly. As a special initiative, the Vidyalaya children (above 6), who are in need of Learning Support, are also being helped through this Montessori pre-primary environment, to catch up with their peers in the mainstream, and their progress is being monitored as well. Recently 9 children who completed their ECCD in MNC also joined this Environment. A special educator takes care of learning support interventions.

The success of the Pre-Primary Montessori led to the next logical step of establishing an Elementary Montessori, targeted at children between the ages of 6 to 10, focused on primary education. The focus is on a basic foundation with math, language, sensorial, cultural and 'exercise of practical life' (EPL) learning. Here the children work part of the day and strengthen their concepts. This enables the transition of the children from Pre-Primary Montessori and parallel functioning of the Montessori method with the 'activity based learning' methodology that the children have as part of their formal schooling. A well-trained teacher looks after this Environment exclusively.



Post the merger of MNC with Bala Mandir, the ECCD-Montessori Environment that was in MNC has now been moved into Bala Mandir. This currently has 10 children with special needs. Their development is being monitored along the MNC's well-established Upanayan Scale, and an evaluation will be done alongside the MNC School curriculum. Children from Bala Mandir's Day Care Centre (aged 2-3 years) are now being included into this Environment as well, in order for all the children to experience a mutually inclusive learning space. The focus has been to improve the support for children with learning difficulties with increased attention on the children.

The teachers have been specially trained for the purpose and they work towards helping children with learning difficulties and delays as well. A course specially designed for Bala Mandir upon request, and conducted in Tamil / English by the Nishkam Trust, covered over 300 hours with sessions covering theory of the methodology and practical implementation, allowing the participants to absorb the concept fully, with interest and understanding.

The implementation of the Montessori system, and its ongoing integration with the mainstream education in Bala Mandir has provided great results so far. The addition of MNC's Montessori adds a new dimension to this initiative.

CELEBRATING FESTIVALS IN BALA MANDIR

Various festivals were celebrated between October and December. The children were taught the importance of each festival, and the significance of the rituals that form part of it. They perform very-well scripted dramas and dances, produced and choreographed in-house, and also use costumes which are created imaginatively by the tailoring unit.

Here are some glimpses of the celebrations of the different festivals!



Navaratri was celebrated with golu in the Home for ten days, with all accompanying rituals, and Ayudha Pooja celebrations on the ninth day across all different units.

Diwali was a fun event in the Home with many members and their families joining in the celebrations, enjoying bursting crackers with the children.



Many lights lit up marked the celebration of Karthigai Deepam in the Home



A beautiful drama, depicting the importance of all religions, was the highlight of Sarva Dharma Day



Christmas was celebrated in all the units of Bala Mandir, including the Home, Vidyalaya and the Primary and High Schools



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

The under-14 and under-17 football teams went for a friendly match at MCTM School in Alwarpet. The children had a great time playing. The under-14 team lost 1-3, while the under-17 drew 1-1.



The importance of physical education is reemphasized with special PT classes for the senior girls in the Home



The children have been learning how to play guitar and harmonium as part of their regular activities.



The children who are part of the Madras Youth Choir's Junior Choir participated in the programme held by the Vanavil Cultural Centre, celebrating Subramania Bharati, at Kalaivanar Arangam on December 9th



The children visited the home of Bala Mandir's founder, Sri K. Kamaraj, on his birth anniversary to pay homage



The senior girls performed a dance for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, Nungambakkam, on December 25th



The usual club activities were held for the children, including learning sessions, simple games, and discussions on important topics.

EVENTS IN THE MADHURAM NARAYANAN CENTRE

On December 12th, the Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (MNC) completed 29 years of service to children. As is done every year, a theme was selected for the children to perform on. This year's theme was 'Malaigal' or 'Mountains'. The symbolism of a mountain as strong, steadfast and magnanimous was brought out through the performances. The Chief Guest was Mr. L Lakshman, Chairman Emeritus, Rane Holdings Ltd., who has been spearheading CSR initiatives of the Rane Group, and is the Managing Trustee of the Rane Foundation.

In addition, on the last Friday of every month, the birthdays of the children in that month were celebrated with cakes, snacks and a get-together with special guests – Mrs & Mr Meera Reddy, and Mrs & Mr G. Suryanarayanan, who are generous donors to the MNC, were the guests this quarter.



Mr. Lakshmanan addresses the crowd



The Annual Day programme



Birthday celebrations in November

STAFF OUTING

The staff, including caregivers, in the Children's Programme went for a day's outing to Mahabalipuram. Caregivers are usually with children all day, so it was a great break for them, while the children were looked after by teachers.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms Pooja Bomb, Academic Coordinator, SMHS
- Ms Kamala, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms Sivarathi, Accountant & Storekeeper, BMKT Nagercoil Unit
- Ms. Shantha, Helper, Children's Programme
- Ms. Mookambigai, Helper, Children's Programme
- Ms B. Manju Thanammal, Special Educator, Madhuram Narayanan Centre

Bala Mandir is hiring!

Bala Mandir is always on the lookout for qualified and professional staff, across all the units, in roles such as social workers and teachers. Residential positions such as wardens / assistant wardens / helpers are particularly difficult to fill, and the importance of quality staff in such roles in a service organisation cannot be stressed enough. Candidates who are interested can approach Bala Mandir's main office for further details.

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