



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We are very happy to be releasing the second issue of Bala Mandir's newsletter – BM Connect, covering the quarter from October to December 2014.

At the outset, a huge thank you goes out to those who have seen, read and provided their feedback on the newsletter. Thank you for the appreciation, and for the suggestions and comments from your end. We hope to keep improving as we go along, and continue to keep the newsletter interesting and thought-provoking, and strike a balance between the past, present, and future – much as we do at Bala Mandir as well.

Sincere thanks also go out to those who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter. First, Ms. Malvika Mehra, who has created the new masthead for the newsletter. Next to contributors – those who took out time to write articles, and to those who helped with photographs. We have a group of people who also proofread the newsletter, and give us their valuable feedback – and thanks go out to them as well.

Any newsletter of this kind is possible only with the help of many others. Ideas, suggestions, and articles are welcome for the next editions. Please do write in with your comments, feedback, and ideas with your comments, feedback, and ideas to message@balamandir.org.

We hope you enjoy the second issue of "BM Connect"!

Editor

CONTENTS

From the Editor's Desk	1
Did You Know?	1
News Bytes (October to December 2014)	2
Festive Moments: Christmas	3
Flooding at Bala Mandir	3
Activities of the BMCLC	4
Urban Slum Resettlement	5
New Carpentry Course	5
No Child is Left Behind: Special Education	6
Bala Mandir and Braade Stiftung	7
Staff News	7
Meet Our President: Mr. V. Sethuram	8
Thoughts from the Study Circle	8

DID YOU KNOW?

Bala Mandir used to be addressed as just "Bala Mandir" or "the Bala Mandir" upto the year 1979. After the death of the first President, Sri K. Kamaraj, it was decided that, to protect Bala Mandir's interests, a group of Trustees would be the custodians of the assets of Bala Mandir, and provide guidance to its activities. These Trustees would be elected by the General Body for a period of six years. The name "Bala Mandir" was suitably modified then to "Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust" in the first Trust meeting held on April 4, 1979 (reproduced below from the Minutes).

SPECIAL RESOLUTION:

"Resolved that pursuant to section 11 of the Societies Registration Act 1975 and subject to confirmation by the Registrar of Societies as required under Section 11 of the Act, 1975, the name of the Society i.e. 'BALA MANDIR' be and is hereby altered and to the extent specified below that is to say:

BALA MANDIR KAMARAJ TRUST'

NEWS BYTES: OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2014

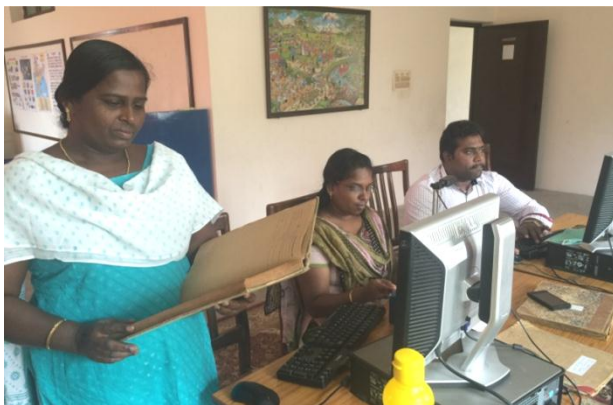
Bala Mandir's Children in Competitions

The children from Bala Mandir participated with interest and gusto in two competitions. The first was an inter-school choral music competition held by the Madras Youth Choir on November 15. It was a proud moment to watch one of the children conduct the Bala Mandir choir. The other competition was the inter-Home NEETA Talent Competition, where the Bala Mandir children competed in multiple categories. The children won prizes in all categories, and were adjudged the overall best Home. The children also participated in the finals of the Geeta chanting (14th chapter) competition held by the Chinmaya Mission.



Digitization of Old Records

Bala Mandir has undertaken scanning old documents, including legal papers and old meeting related documents, for preservation. Thanks to the generosity of our donor and with the help of Netstream Technologies, a third party, TRS, was identified to carry out this exercise. Scanners have been placed in Bala Mandir's premises and work is ongoing currently.



Orientation Programme by RASA

RASA – Centre of Theatre Arts and Special Needs conducts behavioural modification programmes for children through theatre art. Children from Standard IV and V in the Bala Mandir Home participate in these workshops regularly. An orientation to this concept was held by the volunteers for the caregivers and teachers who handle this age group, and for the social workers as well. The attendees found the interactive nature of the programme very interesting and reported that the programme was very useful.



Children's Day Functions

The annual Children's Day celebrations were held in the Schools and the Day Care Centre (DCC). In the school, the SM Award & Satyamurthi Award were given to winners who excelled in the music competitions held. Teachers of SMHS performed a group song. In the DCC, teachers and helpers together did Kolattam dance for the children. Ms. Kokila sang a song about Pandit Nehru. Ms. Ambiga narrated a story about "True Friends". The children enjoyed watching performances by their teachers!



FESTIVE MOMENTS: CHRISTMAS

December is a very festive time all around the world, and it was no different for Bala Mandir as well! Christmas was celebrated in the Home with a lot of enthusiasm. A group consisting of the junior and senior children participated in the celebrations, held on December 25th in the evening, which included an in-house production of the Nativity Play (with costumes and props created by the children themselves), a dance, and carol singing. The children were also given refreshments – a savoury snack, cake and juice – as a special treat for the day.



Joseph and Mary



The Three Magi

Following the performance by the group, all the children sang Tamil carols and songs in praise of all religions. The prayers usually end with the 'Sarvadharmā' prayer, in which God is addressed by the different names by which He is called in different religions. This gives children exposure to the concept of God in these religions, and helps build a truly secular mindset in the children.

The entire event was sponsored by Ms. Miranda Corti, through a Christmas cake sale conducted in her office. We wish to thank Ms. Corti and her team for their unstinting generosity, and for taking out time and effort to provide us with feedback on all our new initiatives!



The performance group

The highlight of the programme was the Nativity play, which included scenes of the angels appearing before Mary and Joseph, scenes from Bethlehem where baby Jesus was born in a manger, the shepherds who came to worship the newborn baby, and the visit of the three Magi, who followed the Star of Bethlehem and brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh for baby Jesus.

The remaining children from the Home, from young children under 6 to the hostel boys belonging to the vocational training centre, were enthralled by the imaginatively conceptualised play and the story behind the birth of Jesus.



Dance Performance

FLOODING AT BALA MANDIR

Heavy rains take their toll on Bala Mandir often. Till 2010, the interiors of the buildings, and the surrounding grounds were flooded with water every time there was rain. There was some respite for three years, since L&T ECC had raised the flooring for the Dining Hall, Kitchen and Main Girls Block. However, this year saw a repeat of the flooding situation in almost all areas due to blockages in the Mambalam canal near the premises.

Appreciation goes out to the caretakers and helpers who immediately moved the children to the first floor for their safety, and took care of them in this difficult situation. Thanks are also due to Mr. Murali from Shri Krishna Sweets, who provided the children and staff with food at no cost (as he has done in the past), since the kitchen and dining hall were flooded.



ACTIVITIES OF THE BMCLC

Bala Mandir Cultural and Learning Centre (BMCLC) initiative was started in 2009, for all-round development of children, through cultural activities. While these have been part of Bala Mandir's history for many years, bringing them under the BMCLC umbrella has meant systematic cultural inputs to the children every month. All functions and events in Bala Mandir now fall under this unit.

The different programmes of the BMCLC have brought together music, dance, drama, audio-visuals and interactive presentations to create a holistic environment for the children from the Bala Mandir Home and Schools to learn while they enjoy. Programmes are also opened to children and teachers from other schools and institutions in the city, for them to participate and make it an opportunity for them to discuss and absorb from one another.

During October to December 2014, three programmes conducted – the S. Govind Swaminadhan Legal Education Programme, Voices in Unison – the Choral Music Workshop and S. Manjubhashini Memorial Seminar. Glimpses from the events are shown here. Bala Mandir is thankful to the guests of honour and partner organizations for these programmes, who helped make the events successful, memorable and educational for the participants.

November 29: "Voices in Unison" Choral Music Workshop

In partnership with Madras Youth Choir



Instructors from the Madras Youth Choir have the children rapt



Learning the joy of singing together

November 22: S. Govind Swaminadhan Legal Education Programme

Topic: Child in conflict with Law based on the Juvenile Justice Amendment Act – "How Does It Matter to Me?"

In partnership with TULIR – Centre for prevention and healing of child sexual abuse



The Chief Guest, Justice Thiru M.M. Sundresh, delivers his address



Interaction with the school children

December 13: S. Manjubhashini Memorial Seminar & launch of BMRF's Balar Padalgal

Topic: Children's Rights & Responsibilities with the theme Engalukkum Urimai Undu (We have Rights too)



Launch of the Tamil poetry book for children, Balar Padalgal, by Smt. Nirmala Lakshman with Dr. Anandalakshmy and the Hon. Gen. Secy.

Trainees from the Vocational Training Centre performing a dance to motivate children to become better citizens



Bala Mandir children perform a play depicting what kind of rights children have

URBAN SLUM RESETTLEMENT

One of the major moves by the Government, which was on the anvil for some time and is likely to create a large impact on the numbers in the Bala Mandir Schools and Day Care Centre, is the relocation of the slum dwellers to Ezhil Nagar and Kannagi Nagar, which happened in November 2014 and December 2014. Close to 300 children from the Bala Mandir schools are and will be affected by this move.

The Social Workers and the teachers of the Primary School and High School visited Kannagi Nagar to assess the situation and what the effect is likely to be on the children of Bala Mandir. The reports from the Social Workers and the Focus Group Discussion with the teachers after the visit showed the relocated parents were happy that they have a concrete house to live in, despite the bad environment, poor sanitation and hygiene, and some worries on safety of the adolescent children. Shops and medical care were also not sufficient to meet the requirements of the relocated families. Some parents also found themselves without a job due to the relocation, and were looking out for appropriate jobs in nearby areas.

Parents who worked in places near T.Nagar were dropping off their children to school, but most children needed to wake up early, travel on public buses to school, and reached home late. Parents were looking to transfer their wards to corporation schools nearby instead, to prevent these issues, though there is currently a paucity of such schools.

The immediate requirements of the parents was for transport arrangements for the children, and Bala Mandir decided to get bus passes for the remaining portion of the term. The school also provided the children with nutritious porridge (kanji) at the start of the day, to make up for the breakfast that the children were missing because they needed to start early from home. The management team of Bala Mandir is focused on assessing the longer term impact upon the schools, and working out an appropriate strategy for the schools to continue to serve the society, as it has in the past.



Vacated Houses on November 26, 2014



Bird's Eye View at Gangaikaraipuram

NEW CARPENTRY COURSE

Carpentry trade has always been close to Bala Mandir's heart, having started the carpentry unit way back in 1962. In 1999, Bala Mandir started the NCVT course in carpentry.

However in the last several years the carpentry course has not been very popular and not only has the number of trainees come down but it was noted that most of the trainees did not pursue a career in carpentry after completing the course.

With a view to address some of the problems faced, Bala Mandir Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has launched a new course in carpentry with some significant changes:

- Bala Mandir own certified course targeted at carpentry interior work
- Curriculum developed in close consultation with the industry players
- Short term course: 4 months in Bala Mandir VTC + 2 months on the job apprenticeship
- Apprenticeship sponsored by industry players enhances prospects for quality job

The first batches of 10 trainees have been undergoing training at the VTC. The enthusiasm and interest shown by the trainees and the industry players is very encouraging.



NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND: SPECIAL EDUCATION

Social Worker and Counsellor at Bala Mandir, **Ms. Vijalayakshmi Suresh**, talks about the need for special education initiatives in Bala Mandir, and how this makes a huge difference in the lives of young children.

“If special children are unable to move towards education, the education should go towards them”- Swami Vivekananda

As a budding social worker in 2002 my learning from Bala Mandir was “no child should be denied education or admission in school despite their academic level, behaviour, or background. The real challenge of Education is to enrich children with difficulties and not just the children who excel in academics.

Remedial Intervention classes were started in early 2000 in Bala Mandir in the name of Learning support class for Vidyalaya Children by Ms. Meenakshi, Special Educator. It was more a catch-up class, especially for children entering Bala Mandir without any prior educational background.

But it was mostly during the School Enhancement Project 2010-13 that the concept of Special Education was implemented in the real sense. Children from the school were evaluated on various parameters. Based on expert advice, Bala Mandir appointed a Special Educator in September 2011 to review and improve the situation for the students between Class VI and IX. The improvement in academics seen in that academic year led to two more special educators being appointed for primary and middle school.



The process that is followed is detailed in the chart on the right. Time tables are created so that children do not miss their extracurricular activities. Also, the children who do not face difficulties in all subjects attend special classes only for those subjects in which they are weak. Once the child has picked up pace, he or she is brought back into the mainstream class. A special educator usually has 4 to 5 children per class.

By December, 20 children in Primary school, 36 children in Middle school, and 27 children in High school undergoing special education classes. 18 of these children across classes are expected to rejoin the mainstream classes after the half-yearly review.

Process for Special Education

Class Teachers refer child not doing well in academics to Special Educator

Basic functional assessment on reading, writing, and numeracy is carried out by the Special Educator

Child is classified as per categories – difficulty (lack of interest or issues remembering), delay (lack of inputs due to circumstances) or disability (clinical problems)

An individual plan is drawn up for the child after discussion with the psychologist and coordinator

Individual programmes are carried out as per time table designed with the necessary classes as required

Monthly reviews are conducted by Special Educator, Coordinator and Social Workers, with further inputs taken from the doctor

Based on reviews and inputs from them, individual plans are revised and children doing better are sent back to mainstream classes

Regular quarterly reviews are conducted with the Special Educators by the psychologist

Special education classes have meant that the quality of the education and help that we, at Bala Mandir, are able to provide to the children, has gone up. With the appointment of special educators, especially for the primary classes, learning disorders and disabilities are being found and addressed at very young ages. Even for the children who face severe learning challenges, rather than pushing them to study when they are not able to, we are able to speak to the parents, and rehabilitate them by redirecting them towards vocational skills.

It is definitely challenging, especially as social workers, when we speak to parents about these issues, in order to convince them about the need for special education. However, the knowledge that even a child with severe learning issues can get a better future, and become a contributing member of society is very satisfying.

BALA MANDIR AND BRAADE STIFTUNG

Mr. P-H. Mortensen (PHM) set up the Braade Stiftung (a philanthropic Foundation) in 1985-86 after the demise of his wife Gerda Mortensen. The sole beneficiary of this Foundation is Bala Mandir.

From the early 1960s till 1975, PHM was the GM of L&T ECC and both he and his wife were closely associated with Bala Mandir through Mr. V.Y. Gaitonde. Mrs. Gerda Mortensen spent hours playing with children. PHM, a Carpenter by training, involved himself with setting up the Bala Mandir Carpentry Unit. Through L&T ECC, he helped build Bala Mandir German Hall, the Dining Hall, and the 1st floor of Hospital Block, and along with John Hover facilitated milk supply through ACA, Denmark from 1966 onwards (which continued since then till 2013).



PHM and Manjubhashini



Braade Stiftung and Bala Mandir Family

From 1985 till his demise in 1993 – PHM made yearly visits to Bala Mandir and discussed with Ms. Manjubhashini and other Members before making contributions to Bala Mandir. After his passing away his friend Mr. Finn Moefelt (Director, Danish Bank) and subsequently Mr. Lars Pettersen took over as Chairman. Braade Stiftung has two meetings per year – one in September to discuss the Annual Report, and the other in March after the visit to India in February.

The Foundation supports Bala Mandir annually for the Children's Programme (in Chennai and in Nagercoil), various building projects in the Bala Mandir complex and at Nagercoil, infrastructure improvements, and support for yearly repairs and maintenance. Since 2004 a yearly amount towards infrastructure additions is also being provided for. The Gerda Mortensen Boys Block, the Infant-Toddler Block, the Store Room building, the old Vidyalaya Block, the Nagercoil building and the PH-Mortensen ITC are all buildings donated by Braade Stiftung.

Each year in February, the Chairman and members spend time in every unit of Bala Mandir, enjoy a sponsored meal with the children, and participate in activities like school project, sports day, prayer time, play time etc. The visitors are entertained through Bala Mandir's Annual Cultural programme performed by the children every year, and celebrate an evening of togetherness – commemorated very aptly as "Friendship Day"

The relationship between Braade Stiftung and Bala Mandir, which started with PHM, continues to date. Decisions for support are taken only after discussion and mutual agreement. While Bala Mandir on its part has been completely transparent about its development, and change in services and finances, the Foundation has been accepting and understanding, not involving itself with the day-to-day working of Bala Mandir, but only reviewing the work going on. There is complete care, concern and mutual respect on both sides.

The relationship with Braade Stiftung is truly a cherished "Friendship" that has given Bala Mandir trust and support through many years, and we are thankful for all they have done, and continue to do for us.

STAFF NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mr. P.R. Srinivasan, Principal and Coordinator, VTC
- Mrs. Suganya, English Medium Teacher, High School
- Mrs. Sheela, English Medium Teacher, High School
- Ms. Priyanka, English Medium Teacher, Primary School
- Ms. Sivagami, Social Worker
- Ms. Manimala, Matron, Main Block
- Ms. Parvathi, Matron, Hospital Block
- Ms. Esther, Helper, Day Care Centre,
- Ms. Mohana, Helper, Day Care Centre
- Mr. Prasad, Gardener

Launch of the "Employee of the Month" Award

In keeping with Bala Mandir's value of "Continual Improvement and Striving for Excellence", an award scheme is to be launched shortly, for the "Employee of the Month", as motivation for the employees. It is proposed that an employee who goes over and above the call of duty, and demonstrates Bala Mandir's values in action will be chosen for the award each month, from across different units, based on citations and nominations from Unit Heads and Members-in-Charge.

MEET OUR PRESIDENT: MR. V. SETHURAM

In the 65-year old history of Bala Mandir, one person who has been a constant for many of them is our current President, Mr. V. Sethuram. Affectionately addressed as “Sethu”, his support and guidance in matters has been critical for Bala Mandir running as it has for many years. His involvement with Bala Mandir started in the 1950s, when he was brought in by Smt. Manjubhashini, near whose house he used to live, and through Mr. E.L.Viswanathan, who was the Office Secretary then.

Sethu Sir became the first Hon. Joint Secretary of Bala Mandir in 1963 to help with the day to day administration and supervision of Bala Mandir. In his own words – “My main role was as a stopgap for handling difficult situations with people.” He fondly tells stories of the days when Manjumma used to call upon him to come from the office to handle certain issues which were too difficult to be entrusted to anyone else. He also talked about the strong ethical history of Bala Mandir that continues today – “Manjumma would question every donor who walked into Bala Mandir to find out if the money was obtained through scrupulous means or not. In case she was unsatisfied with the replies she got, she would refuse to take the money.”

In 1977, Sethu Sir was elected to become the Hon. Treasurer, and in 1993, he became the President of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust.

Sethu Sir has seen Bala Mandir almost from its inception till date – and he finds that Bala Mandir has been able to adapt to change reasonably well. He speaks with interest about how he finds small changes very fascinating – like the Arya Samaj weddings for the orphan girls, where the rituals are explained in detail. “Things are different from when we were all working here, but the changes have been positive. One of the main good things today is how there are many Members involved in the running of Bala Mandir, taking charge of specific Units and running them. It is important that the right people are involved and working. It is good for the future of the institution”, he concludes. The example he has set himself – of availability, care and concern at every stage – is definitely a huge inspiration to other Members.



THOUGHTS FROM THE STUDY CIRCLE



Buddham Saranam Gachchami... Sangham Saranam Gachchami... Dhammam Saranam Gachchami... I seek refuge in the Buddha... I seek refuge in the Sangha (the community or society)... I seek refuge in Dharma (truth or righteousness)...

During this quarter, the Study Circle took up a discussion on the evolution of culture in organizations, as exemplified by the words above and interpreted by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. Organizational Culture can, in a nutshell, be explained as “the way we do things” in an organization – it includes the conscious and unconscious beliefs, values and ritual systems which encompass working in a particular organization. The discussion was also extended to Bala Mandir, and how its values came to be, and why it is important to understand and internalize these values.

Culture is first formed and nurtured in an organization through the values of the founder – the “Buddha” who defines the way the organization runs, and develops and embeds cultural elements in it. Bala Mandir’s child centric approach, integrity, and spirit for teamwork are values passed on through the ages, from the founders – Sri K. Kamaraj and Smt. S. Manjubhashini. Slowly, as time passes and the organization grows, and more professionals join, the organization’s own values emerge – values of the “Sangha”, based on the values passed on by the founders, but further enhanced and articulated. They become the “way of working” for the staff. In Bala Mandir, currently these values have been articulated as the Code of Conduct, and shared often with staff so that they understand them. Once these values are fully internalized, they slowly turn into the personal values of the staff working in the organization – the “Dharma” through which they operate. This means that the Code of Conduct does not remain just a “way of working”, but instead develops into a “way of life” for all the people associated with Bala Mandir. It is this that Bala Mandir is looking to achieve through sessions such as the Study Circle as well.

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