



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to another edition of the Bala Mandir newsletter, BM Connect!

As always, the quarter of April-June was an interesting one, with many activities over the summer holidays, including the annual Balu Sir Summer Camp. Other outings and learning activities were organised, and our children who stayed back for the summer holidays in the Home were kept very well occupied. Some of these are covered in our Children's Corner in this newsletter.

A group of children and staff from the Chennai unit also travelled to the Nagercoil unit to enjoy some time together. The result was an excellent exchange of ideas and a fun time for the children, who got to interact with each other. More about this trip is covered in this newsletter.

A major event in this quarter was the closure of the Bala Mandir Vocational Training Centre. The VTC had been providing vocational skills education to youth in difficult circumstances, but due to different challenges, the decision to close down this unit was taken in 2018. This newsletter covers a broad overview about this unit of Bala Mandir and its activities over the years.

You can read about other such activities as well. As always, please do share your feedback as well to the mail ID given below. Happy reading!

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PARENT-TEACHER MEETING IN SCHOOLS

The general Parent-Teacher meeting of Bala Mandir schools was held on June 30, 2019. This started with a prayer, followed by a welcome address. A video of the Bala Mandir Parenting Villupattu was shown to the parents. The school topper of this year Chandhini Parveen shared her experience in this school and the support given to her. Students in learning support classes also shared their experiences. School activities were shown via slides and explained by the students. Present developments, like giving newspapers to each child to enhance their Tamil language, were also showcased by the students as a skit. The Honorary General Secretary explained about the support provided by Bala Mandir to improve academics, and the support provided for further education to those who have completed 10th standard in SMHS.



NEWS BYTES: APRIL 2019 TO JUNE 2019

Road Laying in Bala Mandir

A long pending need for a paved path for the milk van to get to the kitchen to deliver milk has been addressed with the construction of a new road. This will also be the road to the new Cultural Centre. The road is made of paver blocks, which reduces the risk of flooding and helps with water management.



Vidyalaya Graduation

April 12th was the graduation ceremony of the first batch of English medium Grade 5 students passing out of the Vidyalaya Nursery and Primary School. The day was celebrated with great enthusiasm, along with students from Bala Mandir Primary School.

English Enhancement Workshop

An English Enhancement Workshop for Teachers was conducted every morning for 5 days in April. Ms. Anuradha from the CHAI group conducted a workshop on 'Phonetics.' She also provided inputs on how to make reading easier and teach grammar, especially for students with learning difficulties.



Annual Refresher – Madhuram Narayanan Centre

MNC has been conducting five day refresher courses since 2011. The eighth refresher was held this year. About 150 special educators and therapists working in the Government Early Intervention centers in the districts of Tamilnadu participated and benefited.



Tattvaloka Harikatha Summer Camp

5 children attended a one week Harikatha Summer Camp conducted by Tattvaloka. As part of this, they learnt slokas, bhajans, drama and yoga from 9am to 3.30pm, and performed a drama finally. They met and interacted with students from other schools.



Visit of ITE Students

11 students from ITE Singapore visited Bala Mandir on 26th and 27th June 2019. They visited MNC on 26th and SMHS on 27th. They spent time with children in Vidyalaya, teaching them some craft work and playing games with them. They also presented a programme of song and dance for the children.



A MEMORABLE TRIP TO NAGERCOIL

Over the summer holidays, 13 senior girls and 5 women staff members went from Chennai on a week's trip to the unit in Nagercoil. The trip was planned to increase exposure and interaction between the two Homes. Permission was obtained from CWC of Chennai and DCPO to carry out this trip.

On arrival, the visitors were warmly greeted by the secretary and superintendent in the Nagercoil Home. The girls from both Homes had a mutual introduction, followed by an interaction session among the staff and girls of both the Homes. The girls from Chennai sang a few Bharatiyar songs. Ms. Jasmine from Nagercoil and Ms. Veena from Chennai spoke to the girls on the importance of education and career to develop their potential. The visitors then ate some delicious food prepared on a traditional wood stove. Then an itinerary was planned for the visitors for their holiday.

The visitors visited the historic Muttom beach, Thirpirappu falls, rubber estates, Pechiparai reservoir, Mathur Canal Bridge and the two thousand year old Adikesava Perumal temple on the first day, with guidance from historian and writer and Secretary of BMKT Nagercoil, Ms. Uma Kannan. The girls were astounded to know that the 115 ft. high bridge with a length of 340 metres, (built by our founder Sri K Kamaraj), is the second largest bridge in Asia and was a drought relief measure to serve the surrounding taluks and along with the reservoir provides water for drinking and with irrigation. They were fascinated by the intricate architecture, sculptures and pillars at the temple, enjoyed the waterfall and realized the importance of team work while taking the pedal boat ride.



They then visited Suchindram temple, Vattakottai, Dhathatreya temple, Kanyakumari the southernmost tip of India, Thirvalluvar and Vivekananda memorials, the Kanyakumari Temple and other sites of interest such as the Gandhi Mandapam, Kamaraj Mandapam and Light house etc. on the second day. The monolithic musical 22 ft. Hanuman and 13 ft. Nandi statues, the unique echoing Brahma-Shiva-Vishnu Trimurti deity, the ancient coastal fort, the memorials and meditation hall at the Rock, and the wondrous meeting of three oceans at the tip were a sight to behold. The girls enjoyed singing bhajans at the Sai temple. The highlight of the trip was the Performance of the ancient art of Tholpavaikoothu by a group on the third day using shadow puppetry to highlight lessons of life from the Ramayana, which the girls found very interesting.



The last day saw mutual entertainment by the girls with the Chennai girls performing a skit, dance and bhajans and the Nagercoil girls performing a dance.

BALU SIR'S BIRTHDAY

Story Telling sessions were organised on June 13th, 2019 for the children of DCC & Vidyalaya in memory of Mr. V.Y.Gaitonde who was fondly known as "Balusir". This year Mrs. Janaki Sabesh was invited for story telling sessions for children of Standard I to V of Vidyalaya & Bala Mandir Primary School. She is a passionate and a professional story teller, actor, and a media & marketing professional. She is the author of The Jungle Story Telling Festival, a picture book for children. The children thoroughly enjoyed the captivating and interactive sessions.

Mrs. Preethi Krishnan conducted the story telling session for LKG, UKG & DCC children. She recently joined Bala Mandir as a volunteer for the ECCD programme. Her sessions were stories mingled with activities involving the children. The children were delighted & happy.



WORKSHOP BY MADRAS YOUTH CHOIR

Bala Mandir, in collaboration with Madras Youth Choir, conducted a 2 day workshop in Indian Choral Music on 27th and 28th June, 2019 for school music teachers. The turnout was very encouraging, with 20 participants. The sessions were interactive with basics of Indian choral music. 5 songs – 3 in Tamil and one each in Bengali and Telugu – were taught by the instructors of MYC. The compositions revolved around national integration, human and social values, unity and cultural diversity. The pickup was very good and indeed it was a joy to hear all the voices singing together. Lyrics of a Tamil song were given to them to compose based on the guidelines provided. Feedback was very positive.



GRADUATION AT MADHURAM NARAYANAN CENTRE

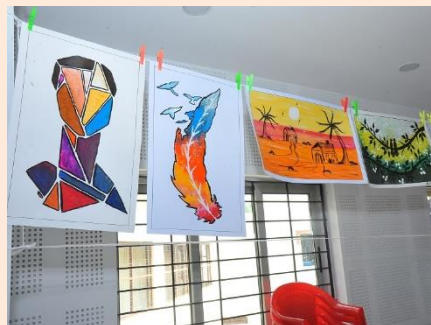
On April 12th, 2019 there was a celebration of graduation of the children of Madhuram Narayanan Centre who moved ahead to other special and mainstream schools upon completion of the Early Intervention Programme, Upanayan. So far 125 children have been successfully enrolled in the mainstream schools / special Schools, over the past 12 years. This year 16 children completed the programme. 9 of them moved to Mainstream Schools (including Bala Mandir Montessori) and 7 to other special schools.

The Chief Guest for the day was Kalaimamani Dr. Ambika Kameshwar Founder Director RASA. The children donned their graduation gowns, received a school bag as gift and exhibited their talents by presenting skits, action songs etc. This year's theme was "Sathana Kaikarigalum Suvaiyana Unavum" meaning "healthy vegetables and tasty food". The children performed a skit about the taste and nutritive value of different vegetables. Parents spoke about their experiences in reaching thus far. The function came to an end with the National Anthem.



BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP

The sixth annual Balu Sir Summer Camp was held from April 29th to May 10th at the Rajagopalan Hall in SMHS for children between Standard III and VIII. 65 children participated. The session began everyday with Yoga for half an hour, followed by an hour where children could choose the activity they liked between dance, skit and mime. The second half saw the kids indulging their creativity in Art and Crafts. The camp ended every day with a wholesome lunch provided by Eco Kitchen. Simultaneously, an in-house Summer Camp was held for the 75 toddlers in the Home, where children learned songs, dance, and art and craft. They had a variety of teachers demonstrating a puppet show, storytelling and performing. The children also enjoyed playing team games and were provided a healthy snack and drink sponsored by the Rotary Club of Chennai Utsav. The Valedictory Function was held on May 11 at the Cultural Centre Hall where children performed different styles of dancing to underline the theme of National Integration. A skit, Pudhiyadhora Ulagam, and a Mime performance, Digital Vilaiyattu, were staged. The Chief Guest, Smt. Tamil Selvi, Chair Person, Child Welfare Committee, Chennai distributed prizes to the children, staff and camp facilitators.



YOGA DAY

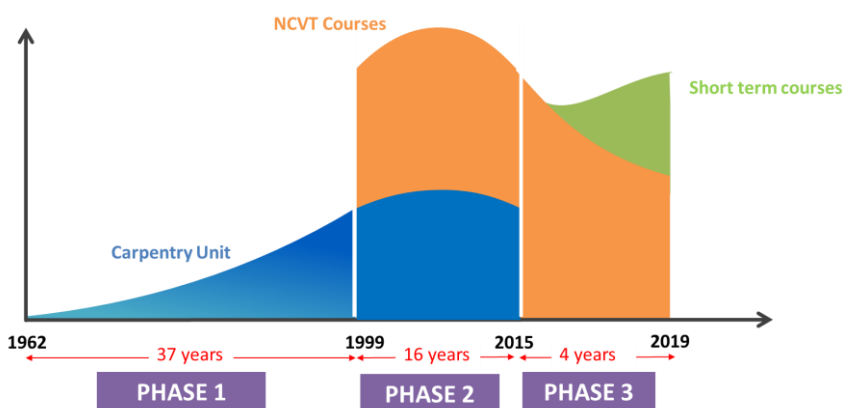
The children of Bala Mandir Primary School, Vidyalaya and Satyamurthi High School together celebrated the international yoga day in the SMHS premises. Volunteers from Sky Yoga helped children perform various asanas. They also educated the children about the benefits of yoga. The programme ended with students being given nutritious snacks.



BALA MANDIR'S VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

The closure of the Bala Mandir Vocational Training Centre was a major event in June 2019.

From the early 1960s, Bala Mandir recognised the need for vocational training for school dropouts, physically disabled youth, and those who were not able to continue their mainstream education, to provide them with skills so they can be financially independent. The carpentry, laundry and screen printing units provided these children with these basic skills. The unit also made and sold wooden items. The unit also developed toys and educational aids for ECCD.



In 1999, the Industrial Training Centre was set up, based on the changing needs of skill education, for youth from difficult and poverty-stricken backgrounds with educational qualifications of 8th pass/ 10th fail / 10th pass. The Centre offered one-year courses on carpentry, and two-year electrical (started in 2000) and fitter (started in 2008) courses. These were NCVT government courses. In addition to this, the training also covered employability skills, life skills and spoken English classes. The trainees received excellent jobs on completion of the courses. The unit also continued to manufacture and sell learning aids and toys, school furniture, and Montessori self-learning material.



In 2014, the one year NCVT carpentry course was discontinued and in its place a short term 6 month course on "Carpentry for Interiors" was started with 4 months of training in Bala Mandir and 2 months on the job training. This was designed in consultation with industry players. In 2015, a short term course on "Installation and Servicing of different types of Air Conditioners" was started with active support from Blue Star. The course included 3 months training in Bala Mandir and one month on-the-job training at a Blue Star distributor.



However, in 2018, after a long period of introspection on the challenges faced (including the need for segregated hostels for VTC trainees, drop in the popularity of NCVT courses, and financial viability of the unit), the BM management made the difficult decision to close down VTC operations and focus on other core activities, while continuing to work on life skill development among schoolchildren. A farewell function was held on June 8th, 2019, where a retrospective on the VTC was presented, different people shared their experiences, and the last trainee batch of the VTC graduated.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

The children enjoyed cycling during the summer holidays. The junior and senior children rode on their cycles in the portico.



Interesting and fun holiday activities were conducted for the children, as seen below. Ms. Sharadha (volunteer) taught painting and music, Mr. Naresh (social worker) taught guitar, and the children watched and enjoyed Discovery movies and the movie Ramayan.



A Games Carnival was arranged by Mr. Thanigaivel and team. Games like archery, golf, basketball and football were played. Children and staff of the Main Block and Infants & Toddlers Block played and enjoyed themselves.



An interactive story telling session was held by Ms. Lalitha and Ms. Radha of Grandma Tales Time, highlighting stories from the Ramayan, with the use of puppets.



DR. ANANDALAKSHMY — A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

A gathering of family, friends, associates, former students, admirers, sishyas and colleagues gathered at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre to celebrate the life and cherish the memories of Dr. Anandalakshmy, former President of Bala Mandir.

A video highlighted how Dr. Anandalakshmy was a guiding force of Bala Mandir, especially the Research Foundation.

HGS Ms. Maya Gaitonde, Honorary General Secretary, shared her experience of being mentored by Dr. Anand and read out the tributes and memories that had poured in from across the country from the many people whose lives Dr. Anandalakshmy had touched.

The In My Own Way (IMOW) Parenting tool, a project Dr. Anand mentored, was released on the occasion, and received by Indu Balagopal, her sister. The author, Usha Ramakrishnan, shared how interested Dr. Anand was in the project.

Suma Balagopal, her niece provided us a glimpse into Dr. Anand's life journey, through a picture presentation, that traced Dr. Anand's life journey from her childhood with her twin sister, born into an erudite family, to how she became a visionary in early childhood care with a global perspective but rooted in Indian cultural ethos. The rare images showed her early life, the travels that enriched her and the experiences that shaped her.

Recalling Dr. Anand's impact on their life several speakers came forward to share their personal interactions with her.

N. Ravi (Chairman of PTI), a former student of Vidya Mandir (of which Dr. Anand was a founder), shared how gratified he was when she remembered him after many years when she met him in a professional setting.

Prabha Sridevan, (Former High Court Judge), extolled Dr. Anand as a personification of Bharathiyar's famous words in "Oli Padaitha Kanninai" as a true visionary with simplicity, commitment, strong speech, clarity of thought, inclusive compassion, integrity, firm tread, courage of conviction, and a true guiding light with her inspiring presence and words.

Andal Damodharan (Former Chairman of Indian Council of Child Welfare (ICW)) recalled her commanding presence and steadfast defense of her positions on early childcare and development with policy makers and peers while promoting the introduction of Activity Based Learning (ABL) by the Tamil Nadu government in primary schools.

Leela Natarajan (MIC, Children's programme) and her team sang songs of Dr. Anand's favourite composers – Muthuswamy Dikshitar, Bharatiyar and Sethumadhava Rao, ending with the poignant Santhi Nilava Vendum.

Gautama of KFI spoke of her openness to new ideas and thinking and keenness to learn from others and change her stance on issues and ideas if presented with convincing arguments.

Jaya Krishnaswamy (Director of MNC), recalled her long association with Dr. Anand with whom she shared a vision to make unstinting efforts to strengthen childcare, early education and intervention to enable the inclusion and integration of all children especially foundlings, underprivileged children and special children into mainstream education and society.

It was indeed a celebration of the life and times of a true guiding light of Bala Mandir.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mr. Ranjith R, Office Assistant, MNC
- Ms. Marla George, Occupational Therapist, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Merlin Joice, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Mr. Rukmangathan, Warden, Children's Programme

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Usha, Accountant, Bala Mandir Nagercoil Unit
- Ms. Suganya, Social Worker, Children's Programme, Bala Mandir Nagercoil Unit
- Ms. Selvalatha, Matron, Children's Programme, Bala Mandir Nagercoil Unit

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