



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The continuing lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to restricted operations in the different units of Bala Mandir. The units continue to learn and evolve in their response to the changing new normal. Of course, the priority continues to be the positive engagement of the children, while ensuring their safety. In this newsletter, we have looked at an overview of the activities in all the units from October to December 2020.

During this quarter, many festivals and functions were celebrated in Bala Mandir. It was wonderful to watch how the children celebrate these times with glee and joy, yet with the understanding of what each special day means, and how we can learn from it.

Different interesting activities of the children are covered in the Children's Corner. Special mention must be made of the Cognizant Shining Stars competition, where Bala Mandir came second at an all-India level in the final competitions held for different events. It was a remarkable achievement, for which the children and staff put in so much effort, and we congratulate them!

As the world slowly returns to normalcy, we hope that you and your dear ones continue to keep safe and healthy. We thank you for your support and good wishes for Bala Mandir in these difficult times.

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IN MEMORIAM: MR T V KINI

Bala Mandir mourns the loss of Mr T V Kini, an esteemed and long-standing friend of the institution, who unfortunately passed away in February 2021.

Mr Kini retired from L&T as General Manager (Finance) and was associated with Bala Mandir for over three decades, from the time of Mr P-H Mortensen. He joined the Executive Committee after that, at which time he created a plan to reorganize the financial systems in Bala Mandir. He used to come to the office and train the accountants and other staff on many aspects of Finance and Accounts. Further, he used to be the local representative of the Braade Stiftung Trust, one of Bala Mandir's largest donors.

Mr Kini and his family are themselves also large donors to Bala Mandir and supported the construction of the dining hall in the Vocational Training Centre. They also contributed generously to support vocational education trainees.

Mr Kini is remembered with great respect. Bala Mandir's deepest condolences go out to his family on their loss.



Mr Kini inaugurating the extension building of the erstwhile Vocational Training Centre (now Vidyalaya building)

THE LOCKDOWN STORY CONTINUES...

With the extended lockdown, the Home in Chennai continued to be a bio-bubble with a few relaxations. For new admissions or children returning to the Homes in both Chennai and Nagercoil, it was mandatory to carry out a COVID-19 test and undergo isolation. Children began returning to the Home in Nagercoil, and by end December, 17 children were back in the Home. Besides normal online studies in Nagercoil, the children enjoyed doing arts and crafts work, gardening and tailoring. The staff came up with new ways to engage the children, such as showing them motivational speeches and videos.



With the relaxation in the rules for the lockdown in Tamil Nadu, adoption processes could be restarted to some extent. Pre-counselling sessions for parents who signed up for adoption began from November onwards. Most of the follow ups for home studies conducted were however done through WhatsApp and video conferencing, and physical home visits were avoided as much as possible. In December a session was held for parents who have opted to adopt older children, where they interacted with other parents who had already taken older children in adoption. More such sessions will be planned in the future as well.



In the Primary School, regular physical classes continued to be held for the Bala Mandir Home children in the Cultural Hall, while day scholars were helped through WhatsApp. In the case of students who were not participating since they did not have smart phones, a system was worked out where the students collected worksheets from the teachers in the school once or twice a week, worked on them at home, and then submitted them back to the teachers in school and got doubts clarified.

The High School students continued to be engaged through WhatsApp classes for both Tamil and English mediums, with a sustained effort to get non-responding students to participate, which increased attendance. While the core teaching was through WhatsApp, online classes were held once a week for Standard VI to X for the children to clear doubts. Quarterly open-book examinations were held for the children online, in which the children did well.



In addition to these initiatives, the concept of peer-to-peer learning was introduced, in which students gave audio explanations of parts of the lessons. This helped reinforce concepts and engage them in active learning. Mental Maths classes were also conducted. Activities such as Mentoring and Spoken English continued to add value to the students. To build their creative sides and provide a platform to express their emotions, the students were given a topic for drawing every Saturday. One-one parent interactions continued, and online PTA meetings were also held.

The 24-hour programme of the Madhuram Narayanan Centre continued successfully as in the last quarter. A video clip was created of the children celebrating their birthdays along with MNC's traditional birthday song, and this was sent to all the class-wise WhatsApp groups to celebrate their birthdays. Planning of the Jivikam programme continued during this quarter.

Bala Mandir Research Foundation continued its online training operations during this quarter. Learning Through Play based training was conducted for Suraksha, an NGO in Nagercoil, for 19 creche workers and office staff. Training was also conducted for 20 Anganwadi instructresses in partnership with ICDS. The Gummidipundi Project continued with the local NGO IWDI, through online contact with the community, under the guidance of the BMRF resource persons.

Bala Mandir also conducted its Annual General Body Meeting and completed all statutory formalities for the AGM as per the Societies Act. A copy of this year's annual report is available in Bala Mandir's website www.balamandir.org.



FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS AROUND BALA MANDIR



(1 and 2): Navaratri celebrations were from 17th to 25th October and a Kolu was set up in the Homes in Chennai and Nagercoil



(3) Ayudha Pooja and Saraswathi Pooja were celebrated on 25th October



(4, 5, 6) Vijayadasami was celebrated on 26th October in the Home and the younger children had their Vidyarambham on this auspicious day



(7, 8, 9) Diwali was celebrated on 14th November in the Home with new clothes and the bursting of crackers by the staff and children



(10) Diwali celebrations in MNC on 11th November

FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS AROUND BALA MANDIR



(11) Sarva Dharma Day was celebrated on 23rd November



(12) On Indian Constitution Day, Ms Deepa explained its importance



(13, 14, 15) Karthigai Deepam was celebrated with a dance and lighting of lamps on 29th November



(16) Karthigai Deepam celebrations in Nagercoil Home



(17, 18, 19) Christmas celebrations were made more special with Dr Reddy dressed as Santa Claus, which delighted the staff and children alike!



(10) Christmas celebrations in MNC

NEWS BITS FROM ACROSS BALA MANDIR

Ms Bhargavi Sundararajan & Ms Usha Ranganathan, two sisters who live in the United States sponsored Diwali dresses for all children and staff for the third year in succession. They also got accessories for the girls (chains, bangles, earrings etc.) and cape guns for the boys. Mr Thangamani coordinated the effort in Chennai with the Bala Mandir staff.



With a view to spend quality time with Coordinators and Members in Charge, a group called SAMVAAD was started in December 2020 to discuss various topics of interest and get participants to share learning, along with well wishers as well. Two sessions were conducted in December – Right and Left Brain functions by Dr Suchitra and Multiple Intelligences by Ms Usha Ramakrishnan

Vidyalaya moved into the newly renovated 'Braade Stiftung Block', which can accommodate double the number of students compared to the old building.



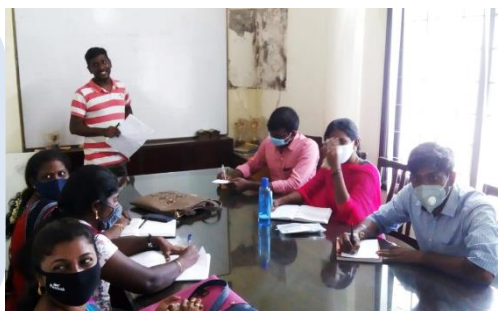
During the NIVAR flood in Chennai, all the residential staff and children worked together to clean the rooms which had flooded on the Ground Floor in the Main Block. The water that entered Bala Mandir was storm water from G.N.Chetty Road. To avoid this issue in the future, a solution was discussed with Smart City group to build an additional drain in front of Bala Mandir and also through SMHS to improve the storm water drainage.



The Rotary Club of Madras Besant Nagar, as part of its consistent support of MNC children since 2018, donated splints and gaiters. Splinting helps in increased range of movement and mobility, improved posture and joint alignment. Gaiters aid in giving stability to the joints, to maintain range of motion, to prevent deformity and contractures. This is the fifth time the Club has supported MNC in three years.



During this quarter, government meetings resumed. Superintendents Arulraj and Mercy attended a training programme by the District Child Protection Officer / Child Welfare Committee. PN and Arulraj attended a meeting held by the DCPO office.



AhaGuru continues to support Vidyalaya activities. The Vidyalaya teachers have prepared skill charts for the Home students, based on the AhaGuru skill tests administered. These charts help track the skill levels of each child, which in turn helps make a remedial plan. AhaGuru workbooks were distributed to students.

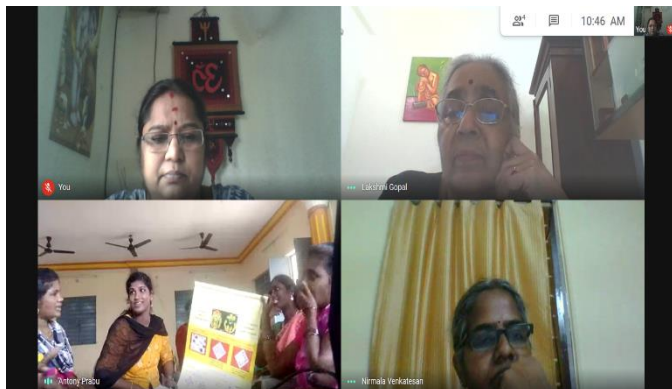


The online Study Circle continued in this quarter. In October the topic was remembering Sri Govind Swaminadhan (past President). In November, the topic was holistic development of the child through Bharatiyar's song Odi Vilaiyadu Paapa. In December the theme was 'Holidays are Holy Days'.

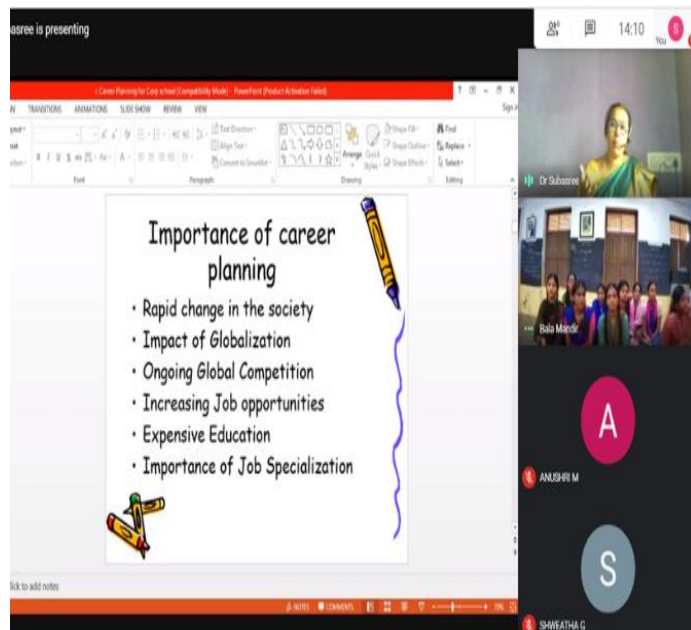
BALA MANDIR RESEARCH FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES

In the month of October BMRF professionals trained the staff from IWDI on Conducting IEC (Information, Education & Communication) activities in the community on the topic of Brain Development. The objective of the training was to help field staff understand how to disseminate the importance of stimulation and brain development to the community through activities. Initially the participants were made to carry out the activities and the trainers facilitated them. Resource persons imparted the required knowledge to the field staff on how to disseminate the content to the community and provided clear instructions on how to conduct the activities.

The participants were asked to demonstrate the activities as they would do it for the community. The field coordinator directed the field staff to perform the activities. Each field staff said a positive statement for stimulating the brain and formed a star with the ribbons to show the connections in the brain. The brain game was also demonstrated by the field staff with the example of a mango and how the child experiences the 5 senses and the developments of the domains. Handouts were given to the staff on highlighting the importance of brain development and stimulation activities.



Students from Madras School of Social Work did concurrent field work from 20th October to 12th November under the guidance of Ms. Vijayalakshmi. As part of this, they organized a Community Organization on the topic 'Career Guidance' for students from Standard IX to XII on 7th November. The resource person was Dr. Subasree, Assistant Prof., PG Dept. of Psychology, Madras School of Social Work, whose expertise is in teaching, research, training and counseling. Topics for the training included Life Skills, Career Planning and Counselling, Counselling Skills, Employability Skills, Personality Development, Emotional Intelligence, Interpersonal Relationship Building, Mental Health, Parenting, Motivation, Marketing and Positive Psychology. The children were extremely enthusiastic and interactive throughout the programme, which was conducted in an interactive manner and included stories as well.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CLASSES

OT classes are conducted for five Bala Mandir children by Ms Padmavathy and Ms Gunasundari with the guidance of Ms. Fathima from the Madhuram Narayanan Centre. Twice a week, OT Assistant Ms. Yasmin coordinates with the teachers through a call or WhatsApp video call and records the progress of the children.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

Gandhi Jayanthi was celebrated on 2nd October in the Homes in Chennai and Nagercoil. In Chennai the High School children drew portraits of Gandhiji and did voice recordings about him to send to their teachers. In Nagercoil a special prayer was conducted. On the same day, Sri Kamaraj was also remembered, since it is his memorial day.



During the Christmas holidays, the children did craftwork, drawing, and handwriting practice. The High School children learnt about provisions, how to use weighing machines and how to weigh items, and about manufacturing date and expiry date. They also learnt to count coins and rupees.



In the High School, the children made greeting cards on the themes of Christmas and New Year

On 14th November, Children's Day was celebrated in the Home.

Caregivers Ms Kasthuri, Ms Deepa and Ms Rajalakshmi conducted competitions like proverbs, Thirukkural reading and speech about Pandit Nehru. High school children participated in various events like singing, drawing and storytelling and recorded them and sent them to their teachers.



The children belonging to the Junior Choir of the Madras Youth Choir participated in online programmes held for Children's Day and to celebrate Mahakavi Bharatiyar's birthday.



Geetha Chanting competition organised by volunteers from the Chinmaya Mission was conducted online on 13th December. A total of 59 boys and girls from Standard II upwards participated in the competition.

Over 20 children participated in the Shining Star competitions held online by Cognizant Technology Solutions on 19th December and won prizes at the Chennai level. Various events like singing, drawing, dance, poster making, elocution, spell bee etc. were held. Bala Mandir then participated at the national level in March 2021 and came second across India, with many of the children getting individual prizes at the national level.



MNC ANNUAL DAY

On 12th December, the Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children completed 31 years of service to children in the age group birth to six years, with intellectual disability and associated conditions providing them early intervention. It was a special day for MNC, since it brought to the front the last thirty-one years of tireless and dedicated work put in by the Founders, Management Team, Staff, Children and Parents. As is done every year, a theme was selected so that the children could perform on the theme.

This year the theme was ‘**Stay Safe, Stay Healthy**’. The cultural programme was an audio-visual presentation compiled by the teachers from the videos and audios presented by the children, recorded by the parents, in their home environment. The parents sent recordings of the children maintaining the strict pandemic guidelines given by the government – washing hands often, using a mask and maintaining social distance. The message came out in the action songs, skits, mono-acting and mock conversations with members of the family duly recorded and sent to MNC.

The Chief Guest was Mr N Kumar, Vice President, Sanmar Group and President of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust. Dr Aruna Rathnam, Executive Director, welcomed the gathering and recorded the dedication and passion with which the parents are managing their children under the stressful condition of COVID-19. They were continuing the training under the guidance of the teachers through an on line 24-hour home-based programme.

Mr N Kumar addressed the gathering and gave a message of hope and support. He said that many philanthropic individuals and organizations had helped the parents during the pandemic, and he thanked all of them.



‘KARPOM KARPIPPOM’

As directed by the Government of Tamil Nadu, both Primary and High Schools started the ‘கற்போம், கற்பிப்போம்’ (‘Karpom Karpippom’) adult education programme. A volunteer, (a Standard XII student) is selected and trained by the Government. Specially developed books are also provided free of cost by the Government. The role of the schools is to facilitate the programme by identifying volunteers, enrolling students to participate, providing classrooms, and monitoring it.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Rajini Bhagwandas, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Subhashini E, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Krithika V, Special Educator, Vidyalaya
- Rajalakshmi, Caregiver, Main Block

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mercy Selvakumari V, Superintendent, Infants & Toddlers Block
- Nishok A P, Caregiver, Boys Section
- Veil Manikandan Logidass, Caregiver, Boys Section

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