



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The quarter between October and December 2021 was busy, as always, especially with the schools reopening.

One of the significant issues that impacted the working of all the units was the flooding that happened at different times during the quarter. As always, the children, staff and Members stepped up to meet this challenge and handle the situation. It is a testament to the teamwork and cooperative spirit that is required for an organisation like Bala Mandir, that a few staff members from other units came to the Home during this tough time to support the overburdened staff.

Many new initiatives continued to be taken up across all the units, some of which are covered in this newsletter. We also have some news from the new activity of Bala Mandir, the Kinship project – do check out the News Bits page for more.

In some interesting news about BM Connect, an editorial board has been created for collation of information from all our units. The editorial board consists of Ms Rukmini Amirapu, Ms Sudha Rao, Ms Smita Aiyar, Ms Vijayanthi Desikan and Ms Sushmitha Chandrasekar, and is supported by Ms Sangeetha Mani and Ms Pooja Bomb.

With so much always happening in Bala Mandir, it is indeed difficult to capture everything in a newsletter – but I hope this issue gives you a glimpse into the myriad activities. I hope you enjoy reading this issue!

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DINING HALL IN BOYS' SECTION

A new dining hall was inaugurated on the second floor of the Boys' Section on December 30th, 2021, with bhajans and speeches by Mr Praveen J, Superintendent, and Mr P Natarajan, Member-in-Charge of the Boys' Section. This project, which was taken up to ease some of the space constraints of the Boys' Section, also included a dumb waiter, which was installed to lift the food which was cooked in the kitchen on the ground floor to the second floor. The hall is also being utilised as a study area by the children.



FLOODING IN BALA MANDIR

Flooding of the Bala Mandir campus is an annual feature and the Home team is usually well prepared to deal with these exigencies. However, this year, due to the incomplete Mambalam canal project and the unusual weather patterns, there were many more flooding days than normal. This time the problem started as early as September, when the High School was flooded on a few days and a school holiday had to be declared on one of the days.

The Bala Mandir team as well as the Chennai Corporation felt that the preparation for the flooding season was good, but nature proved this assumption wrong.



In the months of November as well as December there was about 2 feet of water inside the home and also parts of the school. All the children moved to the second floor in the Infants & Toddlers Block, Main Block as well as the Boys' Section. The staff and children quickly acted to ensure all important items were moved safely and in time.

The High School, Vidyalaya Primary School and the Resource Centre ground floor was flooded. This led to some damage of office equipment, books and computers which were on the ground floor. The schools and office cleaning up took time as also the restoration work and just as things were finally getting set once again, one more round of flooding happened. The team was much better prepared for the second round of flooding.

The challenges of this period were compounded by a few of the babies in the Home falling sick due to the change in weather, which led to some staff members having to be in the hospital with them. This year, along with the staff in the Homes who stepped up to support the children, some staff from the other units also came to the Homes to help.



On November 17th, 2021, after the first round of flooding, a big group of officials from the Chennai Corporation including the Commissioner visited and decided to demolish the High School compound wall to allow their vehicles to go into the Mambalam Canal for cleaning. Once the canal was cleaned, the flood water started receding faster and G N Chetty Road water was getting evacuated within a reasonable time after the rains stopped. However, the evacuation of water from the Bala Mandir took a long time and forced a rethink about the storm water pumping system.

The extensive flooding had a very adverse impact on the homes of the school day scholar children. Bala Mandir immediately provided them with provisions and relief materials, including rice, pulses, spices, tea, sugar, blankets, sanitary pads, masks and bedsheets. Bala Mandir also got help for this initiative from one of the mentors in SMHS, Ms. Mathivathani, who coordinated with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to help distribute part of the flood relief kits to the community and helpers working in Vidyalaya and SMHS. Since the children lost their uniform and books, Bala Mandir also decided to replace all the books and provide 2 sets of school uniform free of cost to the children, which could be used in the next academic year.



The sudden and unexpected flooding on the evening of December 30th, 2021, was yet another shocker event towards the end of the year. It has led to the thought of making the ground flood of the Main Block “flood-resistant”, so that unexpected flooding can be handled without much effort. Work is currently underway on this project.

Bala Mandir's new project, **Kinship Care**, is targeted at supporting children impacted by the COVID pandemic through a concept of "virtual homes". About 160 children from four districts of Tamil Nadu have been identified for support under this project. Social workers have been assigned for field work to work with these children.



On December 23rd, 2021, a free **Eye Camp** was held for the children organised by Rotary Club and Sankara Nethralaya. Eye check ups were carried out for 302 students from kindergarten to Standard X. The toddlers were also examined. It was identified that a few children required spectacles, and Sankara Nethralaya also provided the spectacles and lens free of cost.

In the Nagercoil Home, Childline conducted games and a cultural programme on the occasion of **Children's Day**.



Students from MOP Vaishnav College conducted a **five-session programme**, in the month of October 2021 every Saturday for students of Standard IX and X in SHMS. Subjects included Basics of Computers, Gardening (Theory session), Verbal and Non-verbal Communication, Craft and Warli Art.

The online **Study Circle** continued with the sharing of the history of Bala Mandir. During this quarter details were shared about Bala Mandir's foreign donors and support from across the world.

MNC has started a special school called "**Jivikam**" with a holistic programme focusing on the underlying cognitive processes in 15 domains for children with intellectual disability and associated conditions from the age of 6 and above till 18. Physical classes for the children under the Jivikam programme started in November, with two batches coming to the Centre on alternate days.



The NGO TULIR organized a workshop for the Administrative Heads of schools. On December 3rd, 2021, they visited Bala Mandir, to create **awareness about the POCSO Act**, which protects children from sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. This information was in turn shared by the administrative heads with the school teachers so that they could create awareness about such issues among school students.

Inspector Murali, S.I Perumal and Head Constable Ravi from the E3 Teynampet Police Station came to SMHS on December 18th, 2021, to address the students on the topic of **substance abuse and the consequences related to the same**.

BACK TO SCHOOL!

The Schools were reopened from November 2021 onwards for Standard I to VIII (Standard IX and X had already reopened). This led to a flurry of activities to ensure the premises were ready, and all protocols are put into place to ensure the safety and security of the children coming into school. This included staggered timings for different classes, provision of sanitiser in strategic places across the school, complete sanitisation of the school every week, availability of key supplies such as digital thermometers and masks, and mandatory double vaccination for all teachers. A Parent-Teacher meeting was arranged for the Vidyalaya parents, in which the teachers communicated the protocols put into place, and got the concurrence of the parents to send their children for the physical classes.



One of the key challenges was that the children were returning to physical classes in school after a long gap. To bridge the gap of nearly 2 years, an assessment was done for the children from Standard I to VIII to check their learning levels, and based on the results of this assessment, the classes were rearranged. Remedial classes were also planned accordingly in both the High School and Vidyalaya.

In the High School, class tests were conducted every day for the students of Standard IX and X to inculcate a habit of studying regularly. Learning goals were defined based on the reduced syllabus set by the government for all classes.

Along with academic focus, initiatives which were started during the lockdown, such as mentoring and Read-a-Story, continued. Football coaching was started for the boys from the end of October. The children's excitement upon returning to school was palpable. While there was a need to close the schools briefly in January 2022 due to the Omicron variant, they were opened up again from February 2022 onwards.



VIKALPA LAB

One of the interesting initiatives by the Satyamurthi High School was the creation of the Vikalpa Lab. The Lab is a workspace where young minds can give shape to their ideas through hands-on do-it-yourself mode of learning, which will increase their creativity and innovation. The main objectives of the initiative are to nurture technical and soft skills needed for their life, and to empower and engage students with meaningful projects which will open their eyes to future career options. In the Lab, the young children are given a chance to work with tools and equipment to understand different aspects of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math).

The Lab has been set up in partnership with Infinite Engineers, who have helped set up about 100 Makerspace labs across Tamil Nadu. They have also assigned dedicated tutors who guide the children in their experience of innovation.

The Lab was inaugurated on December 10th, 2021, by Executive Committee Member Ms Kalpakam Narayanan, in the presence of the President of the Education Committee, Mr Srinivasamurthi, and other Members, staff and well wishers. Since then, the Lab has been operating in full swing on Saturdays with weekly activities for the children and has become very popular with them.



FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS



← Navaratri celebrations in the Chennai Home



→ Saraswathi Pooja in the Nagercoil Home



← Ayudha Pooja and Saraswathi Pooja in the Chennai Home, followed by Vijayadasami celebrations, including Aksharabhyas for the children



← Deepavali celebrations in the Nagercoil Home



↓ New clothes for Deepavali for the children in the Chennai Home



↑ Karthigai in the Chennai Home



↑ The Nagercoil Home lit up for Karthigai Deepam



↑ Sarva Dharma Day



↑ Christmas celebrations in Vidyalaya, the Chennai Home and the Nagercoil Home

← Deepavali and Christmas celebrations in MNC

MNC ANNUAL DAY

The 32nd Annual Day of the Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children was celebrated in the Assembly Hall of the P-H Mortensen building on December 12th, 2021. Mr N Kumar, President of Bala Mandir, was the Chief Guest for the day. The theme of the day was ‘Animals’, and the animals chosen were deer, cow, monkey, horse, lion, tiger and elephant. The event was conducted **digitally**. Songs were composed on the animals chosen, and the children play acted the songs at home, which were videoed and sent to MNC, which were then collated for telecast during the event. The children who are part of the Jivikam group were physically present, and enacted a play in the garden area of MNC, which was also videoed.



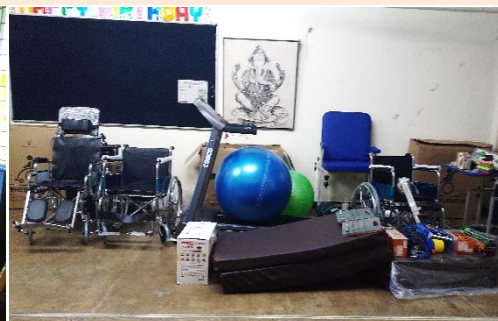
The programme was well appreciated by all the attendees.

Three special recognition awards were presented on the occasion: to Ms Priya Rajkumar, who had retired in 2020 after 25 years of service; to Ms Vimala Kannan, ex-Principal of MNC, for her long service of three decades; and to the Founder of and continuing inspiration to MNC, Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy, who the institution was privileged to honour.

MICRO FOCUS SUPPORT FOR MNC

The CSR division of Micro Focus, a large enterprise software provider, sponsored physiotherapy equipment for the Jivikam unit of MNC, which focuses on children above the age of 6 years. This included a motorised treadmill, a paediatric standing frame, a static cycle with a back rest, wheel chairs, a sewing machine and gardening materials.

The Centre Head for Micro Focus, Mr Chandramouli, inaugurated the Physiotherapy Room. Operations Manager – America Region and CSR Ambassador, Chennai – Ms Hanna Priyadharishini – addressed the gathering. She was very impressed with the work being done in MNC, especially with the empowerment being provided to the parents of the children. She promised future support for MNC also.

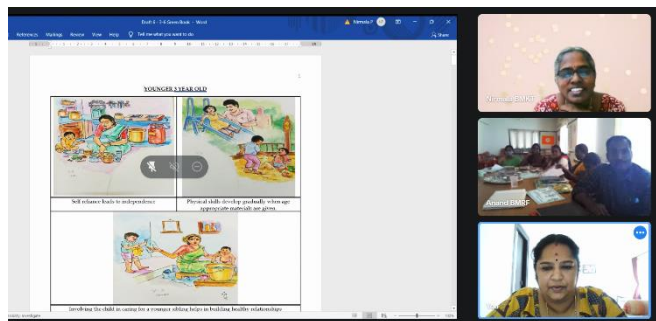


Mr. Sundar, Centre Head of Samarthanam, the NGO who had sourced and installed all the equipment also attended the event. The children gave a demo on the treadmill to the visitors.

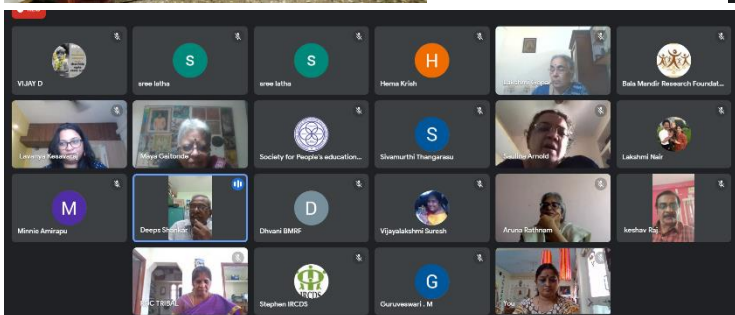
ACTIVITIES OF BMRF



← Training was conducted for the Supervisors from ICDS, Taramani. About 35 participants from districts across Tamil Nadu were trained. Child's milestones and the needed stimulations for reaching the milestone for age-appropriate activities were explained through 5 domains.



↑ Training was conducted for the field staff from the Gummudipundi project on age-appropriate home-based activity and stimulation activity of children in age group of B-6 years and how to involve parents in this activity.



← A meeting was held on October 8th 2021 with the partners from BMRF's Network for Information on Parenting (NIP), Tamil Nadu chapter. The meeting had large participation.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

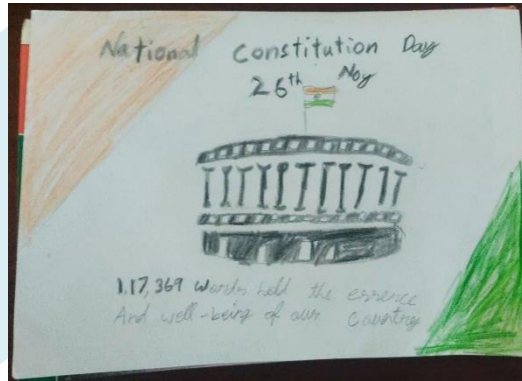
For Child Safety Awareness Week, a drawing competition was conducted by the DCPO office, in which the children from kindergarten to Standard XII participated, and drew interesting pictures on the themes given.



The children remembered Bala Mandir's founder, Thiru K Kamaraj, on his Memorial Day, and sang bhajans on the day.



On the occasion of Constitution Day, November 26th, 2021, the children drew pictures related to the constitution, and took a pledge to uphold it. The pictures and recording of the children taking the pledge were shared with the DCPO.



During the Christmas holidays, the children played traditional games, as well as had story telling sessions, English grammar sessions, activity-based learning classes, mental Maths sessions, and writing assignments.



On the occasion of Children's Day, the students of SMHS took part in a drawing and singing competition. Pens and chocolates were distributed to the children.

For Gandhi Jayanthi, the children in the Nagercoil Home presented a patriotic cultural programme.



BADUKU TRAINING PROGRAMME

Young staff members, just starting their careers as caregivers and social workers, went through an intensive personal development workshop for a period of three days, conducted by SAMVADA BADUKU. The objective behind this programme was to enable them to discover their own strengths and align them better to the role expected of them in taking care of the children in the Home – as well as to encourage them to become role models who can motivate the children to aim for excellence, develop to their full potential, and help them inculcate the right values. The programme was conducted by Ms Ishrath and Kiran Kumari from the institute, who ensured they made the sessions interesting and energising for the participants.

The programme focused on helping the participants understand themselves, answering questions such as “Who am I? Where do I come from? What are my societal values?”, etc., leading to introspection about self and society, and the role they are playing in Bala Mandir in that context. The programme began as online sessions, but it was felt that in-person sessions would work better for the group. Following the workshop, the trainers shared a report with their observations and additional steps that could be undertaken to further the journey of self development for the participants.



TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN VIDYALAYA

The teachers of the Vidyalaya Primary School underwent a few training programmes during this quarter on various topics, for knowledge and skill enhancement.

On November 29th, Bhumi fellow Shreyas Aaditya conducted an online session about child sexual abuse for the staff members. The session included practical advice such as the symptoms to look for, and how to handle any disclosures about abuse.

On December 4th, Ms Preethi Krishnan, Member in Charge of the Early Childhood Care and Development programme, conducted a team building workshop for all the teachers. The participants in the programme enjoyed the experience.

On December 11th, Vidyalaya's academic partner organisation, AhaGuru, conducted a training programme on English and Maths teaching, facilitated by Ms Manju Parkavi and Mr Sarath.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Uthradevi, Counsellor, Main Block
- Bhami V, House Mother, Main Block
- Sankar A, House Father, Boys Section
- Rajendiran N, House Father, Boys Section
- Adlin Jebila, House Mother, Nagercoil
- Vijitha, House Mother, Nagercoil
- Sowmiya, House Mother, Nagercoil
- Siddharth P, Social Worker, SMHS
- Poonthalir, Teacher, SMHS
- Mehabooba Rahmath, Teacher, SMHS
- Malini R, Teacher, SMHS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Somaskandan P R, Finance Head, Accounts
- Shruthi Srinivasan, Personal Assistant to HGS, Administrative Services
- Sivasubramanian K, Social Worker, Kinship
- Gayathri P, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Deepa M, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Saranya R, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Jeyapratha K H, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Snega R, PT Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ashwini K, Special Educator, MNC
- Kalapana M, Special Educator, MNC

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