



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The quarter between April and June is always an interesting one for the children and staff, since it is the time of summer holidays! Even so, as always, Bala Mandir was buzzing with many activities. The highlight was the Balu Sir Summer Camp – an annual feature, which the children enjoy a lot.

The summer holidays were also a time for the children in the Home to go for outings and enjoy themselves. Do see our special feature on the different innovative and fun outings and adventures the children had during this time!

Of course, as always, many special days and festivals were part of this quarter, and these are covered in this newsletter.

Also covered is Bala Mandir's new initiative: Kinship Care. This new programme – started last year – is supporting children who have lost a parent or both parents during the pandemic. The Kinship team kindly answered questions about the initiative and its impact, for this newsletter.

Finally, we thank Ms Swathanthra Sakthivel, who took out time to speak to us and share her journey and experience with Bala Mandir for our 'Meet Our Member' section.

We hope you enjoy reading about these and the many other activities covered. Please do share any feedback and thoughts you have on the newsletter at the email ID below.

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MOVING AHEAD

On 22nd April, the Madhuram Narayanan Centre celebrated 'Moving Ahead' – the graduation ceremony of the children who have completed Upanayan (the Early Intervention Programme), and 'move ahead' to either regular or special schools. The MNC programme 'Sanmargam' ('Good Direction') helps the integration of the child by handholding mainstream teachers for these children for three years.

During this year's programme the children from the last two academic years were included along with current year graduates. Dr. Rajamurali, a paediatrician practicing in Ambattur, was the Chief Guest, and gave an inspiring speech to the parents.

The children donned graduation gowns, received a school bag as a gift and exhibited their talents by presenting skits, action songs etc. This year the children performed two action songs on the monkey and on the elephant. The parents – an integral part of the Upanayan process – presented a dance and also shared their experiences.



Editorial Board: Leela Natarajan Rukmini Amirapu Sudha Lakshmi Rao Smita Aiyar Pooja Bomb
Vaijyanthi Desikan Sushmitha Chandrasekhar Sangeetha Mani Archana Natarajan

NEWS BITS FROM AROUND BALA MANDIR

A new **digitalised data collection tool, EpiCollect**, is being used by the field staff of BMRF in the Gummidipundi Project. The tool supports administration of surveys, collation of results and immediate feedback for the project coordinator, Ms S Vijayalakshmi. She conducted a one-day training on the tool for the field staff, who are now using it for interviewing parents of the children in the Anganwadi Centres covered in the Gummidipundi Project.



A seminar was held for the school teachers by Ms Maya Gaitonde on 9th June on '**How to Take Value Education Classes**'. She covered the role of a teacher in instilling values in children, and how to handle bad behaviour. The teachers also shared their experiences with the group. They were given handbooks on discipline, rules and the importance of value education.



A camp was organised in the schools for the children to receive their **COVID vaccinations** (1st and 2nd doses).

Primary health workers came to the school to administer the vaccination for the students.

The Rotary Club of Besant Nagar **donated aids and appliances** like gaiters, walkers, splints etc. for 32 children in MNC on 29th June. This is their 6th year of support.



BMRF trainer Ms Nirmala P conducted **training for 22 field staff** of the NGO Arunodaya Charitable Trust on the topic of '**Parenting Adolescents**'.



Ms Leela Natarajan and Ms Veena went for an **art exhibition in Kalakshetra Foundation**, where a Bala Mandir girl, Abitha M, is doing her Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts. She presented and explained the artwork she had done, which was part of the exhibition.



The **SMHS batch of 2003**, organised a **reunion** for their batch on 5th May in the school campus. The nostalgic alumni shared their fond memories and enjoyed playing games.

Staff from the T Nagar post office came for a camp in Vidyalaya for issuing **Aadhar cards** to students and staff who still did not have them. 61 children and staff benefited from this camp.



BMRF trainer Ms Nirmala P continued training programmes on **Child Development** for the **ICDS staff**, with four sessions being held in this quarter.

BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP 2022

The annual Balu Sir Summer Camp was held from 16th to 28th of May. The Camp was being held in full rigour after a period of 2 years. The Camp is held in the memory of Late Mr V Y Gaitonde (former Trustee and Treasurer of Bala Mandir), affectionately called by the children as Balu Sir.

60 children participated in the senior camp (8-10 years), while 49 children (toddlers) in the Home participated in the junior camp, that took place in parallel in the Infants & Toddlers Block. During the camps, various events were held, including arts and crafts, street theatre, mime and dance.

The Camp ended with a valedictory function on 28th May. The children were given certificates and prizes for their participation in the Camp by the Chief Guest, Ms G Kasthuri (District Child Protection Officer, Chennai). Glimpses from the valedictory function and from the Camp are given below.



← Arts and crafts display during the valedictory function



↑ Invocation – ‘Sakthi Sahitha Ganapathim’



↑ Energetic dance on “Papparapaa”



↑ Traditional kummi dance



↑ Drama on ‘The Evil of Child Labour’



↑ Mime on the poignant theme of bullying



↑ Dance on “Veera Tamizhan”



↑ Alongside the Balu Sir Summer Camp, **Cookery Classes** were conducted for the children in the Home.

Mr Sekar from Ambience (the Home food vendor) conducted the sessions, including theoretical and practical sessions. The children were taught to make basic dishes such as idlis, dosas, sandwiches and soup – and about how to present food. They were also taught vegetable and fruit carving.

KINSHIP CARE — A NEW PROGRAMME

The Kinship team answers some questions to provide more insight into Bala Mandir's new initiative

What is Kinship Care?

Under Kinship Care, Bala Mandir provides support to children in “virtual Bala Mandir Homes”, where the child is in the care of a surviving single parent or a relative, in their own homes. These ‘next of kin caregivers’ receive help from Bala Mandir, so that they can provide the best care for the children. The goal of the programme is to help the children deal with the unexpected setback caused by the loss of the parent/s and improve their chances of reaching their full potential.



When was this started in Bala Mandir, and why?

In May 2021, after the second wave of COVID, Bala Mandir was called for a meeting by the Government officials to be prepared to support COVID orphans who may need admission in the Home. While none of the children were admitted in the Home, it opened our eyes to the problem. In July 2021, we decided to act on this by visiting the families of the affected children, after taking the concurrence of the Director of Social Defence. Based on this pilot study, we met the Principal Secretary for Social Welfare, and launched the Kinship Care programme in October 2021.

How does Kinship Care work?

Bala Mandir has a dedicated team of experienced social workers who visit the families and schools, and provide various support to help the children and the families to cope with the loss of the parent. This consists of paying part of the school fees, tuition fees, counselling the children and the family, helping the children improve their learning standards, helping the family benefit from the Government schemes etc.



Who are the beneficiaries?

From the list of COVID orphans provided by the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Bala Mandir has decided to support the children below 12 years of age in Chennai and four adjoining districts – Tiruvallur, Chengalpattu, Kanchipuram and Tiruvannamalai. In most of the cases, the children had lost their father, who was also the sole breadwinner in the family. We are only helping the needy families, based on socioeconomic criteria. We expect to support about 500 children, and will be continuing the support till they become independent. Currently this programme is not covered under any other government schemes.

What is the kind of support offered?

Bala Mandir pays part of the school fees. We also pay tuition fees, cost of books and other support needed. Apart from this we provide “Tabs” under a project called “Kai Mel Kalvi” with software for self learning of basic English and Maths. We also have a project “Read a Story”, wherein a remote volunteer helps the child improve reading skills through the phone. Counselling help is also provided for the mothers to help them deal with their problems. The Social workers are expected to track the children’s progress on academics and ensure that they attend school regularly.

What is the response so far?

The team is feeling positive about the progress made so far and the direction in which we are progressing. In a short time we have been able to scale up the processes and put in checks and balances while ensuring that the support is extended to the children on a timely basis. The new initiatives have all been managed well and the team is working hard to make all this a success.

What is the way forward?

The next phase is to get the donor support for Kinship care, so that it becomes financially independent and has its own source of funding. A sponsorship scheme has been drawn up, and the brochure for the scheme is available on our website. We are also exploring CSR tie ups for the programme. Since Kinship Care has strong social impact, we hope that we will be able to raise the resources to support the project. Depending on the success of the programme in these five districts, we need to look at how to expand the impact.

What we offer as part of Kinship Care Financial Support Awareness about available government grants, payment of school fees, and other support as required Holistic Development Academic support and tuition, emotional support through counselling plus nurturing special talents ...and Programmes such as Kai Mel Kalvi (KMK) Bridging learning gaps through tabs with pre-loaded software for basic numeracy and literacy Read a Story (RAS) Under this programme, volunteers from remote locations help children build fluency in reading English	Support Us You can help with contributions for sponsoring the education of these children. Educational Sponsorship per child per annum is Rs 20,000 or USD 260 With this sponsorship, you will truly make a difference to the life of a child. As a donor you will receive annual reports on the overall progress of the Kinship Care programme as well as the details of the children under your sponsorship. All donations to Bala Mandir are eligible for tax deduction under Sec 80G of the IT Act. How to Donate Online Transfer by Indian Citizen: IDFC FIRST Bank, Teyampet Branch S.B. A/c No. 10062871336 IFS Code: IDFI0000128 Online Transfer by Foreign National: STATE BANK OF INDIA, New Delhi Main Branch A/c No: 00000010097068741 IFSC: SBIN0000991 Swift Code: SBININBB104 FCRA Approval Number: 075900033 UPI Payment Scan QR Code below  Check out more options for donating on our website www.balamandir.org or reach out to us at +91 90031 64447 Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust New No. 8 (Old No. 126), G.N. Chetty Road T. Nagar, Chennai - 600 017, India P: +91 44 2834 192 E: main@balamandir.org W: www.balamandir.org
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CELEBRATING SPECIAL DAYS



1 & 2 – Rama Navami celebrations in the Chennai Home
3 – Excellence & Exemplary Awards for the children for the last academic year, distributed on Tamil New Year's Day in the Chennai Home
4 – Enjoying together on Tamil New Year's Day in the Chennai Home
5 – Yoga Day in SMHS anchored by volunteers from Sky Yoga
6 – Yoga Day in Nagercoil with Chief Guest Dr K L S Geetha
7 – Celebrations anchored by Bhumi for World Environment Day in the Home in Chennai



TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The teachers of Vidyalaya and Satyamurthi High School attended multiple training programmes and workshops during the summer break.



← Orientation programme by AhaGuru



→ Training by Asha Kanini on the app and teaching methods



← Workshop by Ms Swathanthra S on the qualities of a teacher



→ Workshop by Ms Preethi on classroom culture



← Team building activities for the teachers



→ Orientation by KARE on 'Inclusive Education'

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

Ms Mahima Poddar from The Kindness Centre spent time in MNC on 26th April and conducted '**Flower Art**' to mark 'Kindness Week'. Different flowers were distributed to the children, who soaked them in water and created a small portion of concentrate. The children then used the concentrate and stuck soaked flowers on paper to make designs. The children enjoyed this different activity, which was meant for fine motor engagement and addressing sensory issues.



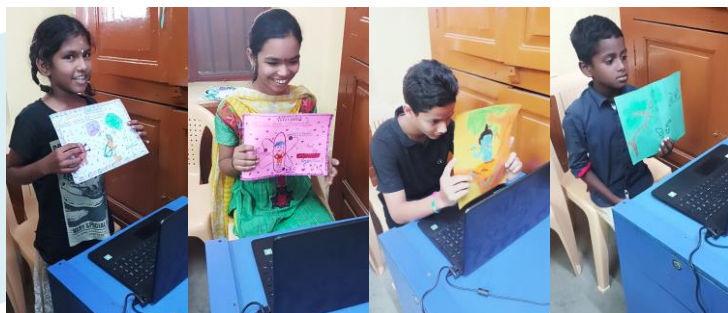
A '**graduation ceremony**' was held on 13th May for the children in Vidyalaya moving from UKG to Standard I, and from Standard V to VI.



As per tradition, a **special pooja** was held on 28th April for the students appearing for the Standard X board exams, to pray for their success. A '**graduation ceremony**' was held on the following day, where the children were also given advice on preparation for the exams. Earlier, on 13th April, Ms Joe Nisha Arvind (a counselling psychologist and motivational speaker) had **addressed these children to motivate them** for the exams.



Ms Avanti of Midam, Pondicherry conducted an online 19-day '**Krishna's Butter Programme**' for the children in the Home in May **based on the Bhagawad Gita**. She explained important concepts related to the Gita, and their implementation in daily life. The children exhibited artwork they had done to depict the various values discussed.



An initiative '**Tout Your Talent**' was taken by the Bala Mandir schools to exhibit the talents and learning of the students on 23rd and 24th April. The event in Vidyalaya was conceptualised by AhaGuru and the children participated in activities in stalls set up for Maths, English and Tamil.

SMHS students showcased skills they had learned at Vikalpa Lab through experiments like paper tower, robotic arm, snap circuit, sound activated switch, salt water alarm and cotton ball launcher. Parents were also invited for these events and were elated seeing their children participate.



MEET OUR MEMBER: MS SWATHANTHRA SAKTHIVEL

Ms Leela Natarajan (Hon. Joint Secretary) shares glimpses into Ms Swathanthra's involvement with Bala Mandir

It was a pleasure to speak to Ms. Swathanthra Sakthivel, who has been part of Bala Mandir since 2005. She is an Executive Committee member and a part of the Vidyalaya Primary School. An epitome of grace, she exudes calmness in her demeanour and conversation.

Swathanthra was born just before independence, and hence the name! She is the daughter of Bharat Ratna Sri C Subramaniam, who has been a great influence in her life as a role model. He was a man of principle and integrity, and a loving father who ensured that his three children were looked after very well. Her mother too belonged to an illustrious family and was essentially a very simple person. The marriage of her parents was an inter-caste one, something revolutionary for those days.



Sri CS got immersed in the freedom movement, and post-independence went on to become a Minister. Swathanthra and her sister Aruna moved to Vidyalaya from Church Park School, and enjoyed their holistic learning experience. Swathanthra completed her BA Sociology at Queen Mary's College – with the unique subjects of Psychology, Philosophy of Religion and Ethics – and then diversified by joining the Catering Institute, learning baking and cooking. She attended a 9-month Teacher's training course to experience it, and after successful completion joined as a pre-Primary teacher, and continued for several years teaching. While in service, she went on to do MA in Sociology, followed by B Ed and M Ed. She has authored books for kindergarten children and also for Primary (in collaboration).

Aruna and Swathanthra married brothers – both doctors. Swathanthra's husband Dr Sakthivel is a very well-known neuro psychiatrist, always willing to help the poor. The couple have a son Dr Ashok, a urological surgeon, and a daughter Ahalya, an entrepreneur.

Swathanthra had a rewarding 22-year career at Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram, first as a teacher and then Head Mistress of the Primary Section – fulfilling her passion of teaching Pre-primary and Primary children. She conducted workshops to carry forward her ideas – that this is the age where good values are imparted, loving relationship between teacher and student becomes important, and there should be sharing of ideas between teachers, with no ego involved.

It is at Rajaji Vidyashram that she met Maya Gaitonde, Honorary General Secretary of Bala Mandir, as a Value Educator. At her behest, Swathanthra joined Bala Mandir after her retirement in 2005, a new experience for her in the service sector. She took up the role as Correspondent of Primary School. Later, she was also Correspondent of Satyamurthi High School for some years. Vidyalaya teachers are being guided by her to teach Tamil in an interesting way, since she feels that lack of learning the mother tongue is a lacuna to be overcome. Along with these roles, she held the post of the Hon. Joint Secretary of Bala Mandir for many years until recently.

Among other things, she was the Correspondent of Vidyalaya Schools, between 2013-16. She continues to be a consultant to Chandrakanthi Public School in Coimbatore for the past 10 years.

Swathanthra has a strict schedule of Yoga, Meditation and Exercises. She has moved from reading fiction to spiritual and value-based books, does restricted viewing of television and listens to light classical and light music. She does travel trips with her fun group of 8 college mates.

Swathanthra's philosophy is 'parents and school shape a child's character, personality and habits. We need to respond, not react to situations, and try to find solutions for problems, without getting bogged down. Happiness is in being content with what you have, with self-esteem and good health.' She feels very fortunate that she has been involved – first with Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram, and now continuing with Bala Mandir – two institutions started by great luminaries to make a difference to society.

We wish Swathanthra the very best in the coming years!



OUTINGS DURING SUMMER HOLIDAYS

During the summer holidays, the children who were in the Home in Chennai got to enjoy several outings. These outings were a mix of educational, cultural and fun activities.



← The children enjoyed shopping in different stores in T Nagar. They were given some money and they had the experience of learning to shop on their own. The trips were organised by the staff.



↑ 66 children and 7 staff members went to Marina Beach and enjoyed themselves.



→ The children enjoyed a trip to VGP Marine Kingdom and Snow Kingdom. This trip was facilitated by Mitra Seva Foundation. The children learnt a number of interesting facts about the wonders of the underseas, while Snow Kingdom was a very different experience for them.



↑ A special outing to the Chennai Harbour was organised for the Home children. They visited Sagar Anvisheka, a Research ship of the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT). Besides understanding various aspects of the ship, the children also enjoyed snacks prepared in the ship kitchen.

The visit was arranged with the help of Dr Rajasekhar of NIOT and coordinated by Mr Meeran who also arranged for transport.

→ Children from Standard I to X went to the ICF Rail Museum. The children learnt more about the railways. They also travelled on the new Metro.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Akila S, Head, Kinship Care
- Saranya D, Social Worker, Kinship Care
- Chandraleka S, House Mother, Children's Prog.
- Kowsalya N, House Mother, Children's Prog.
- Theodora Fernandez P, Special Educator, MNC
- Ramajeyam R, Special Educator, MNC
- Sangavi C, Physio Therapist, MNC

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Kranthi D, Teacher, Creche
- Bhavani M, Teacher, SMHS
- Devakumari N, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Priyanka R, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Sandhiya A, Helper, Vidyalaya
- Lemo R, Helper, Vidyalaya
- Premalatha M, Helper, Vidyalaya

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