



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The quarter between October and December 2022 saw a continuation of the march back to normalcy, with Bala Mandir opening out even further in terms of events, activities, and celebrations. Many events and activities were held in the schools, covered in our section in the last page.

The SGS Legal Programme was held in person after two years, as was the MNC Annual Day. Both events saw great participation, to filled auditoriums.

Many festivals came up during the quarter, including important ones like Diwali and Christmas, which were celebrated with great enthusiasm across our units. The different unique celebrations showcase how Bala Mandir has integrated cultural aspects into its everyday life.

We have a special feature this quarter. For many years now, Bala Mandir has provided an integrated learning support programme in its schools. The recent partnership with KaRe Therapy has taken this to the next level, and the results are heartening. You can read about this programme in our piece on Learning Support in Action.

Finally, as always, we hope that you enjoy this newsletter. Please do share your feedback, suggestions and thoughts at the email ID below. Happy reading!

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NO FLOODING — FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 4 DECADES!

Thanks to the construction of additional storm water drains in front of Bala Mandir (Home and Schools) as part of the Chennai master plan, this year there was no heavy flooding of GN Chetty Road, T Nagar, Chennai. This also meant that, for the first time in four decades, the usual flooding of Bala Mandir did not happen. Whatever rain water came into the premises could be easily pumped out using the systems put into place.

This was the result of many years of work of actively petitioning the Chennai Corporation for a more permanent solution to the issue of flooding of GN Chetty Road. The construction by the Corporation of a second storm water drain to the Mambalam canal also contributed to the relief. It is heartening that a persisting problem of many years finally seems to have a solution!



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NEWS BITS FROM AROUND BALA MANDIR

PTA meetings were held for the children in all classes, from Kindergarten to Standard XI. The meetings were a great opportunity for the parents to understand the progress of their children.



Training and community outreach programmes of BMRF continued during this quarter. In Gummidipundi district, the Early Childhood and Parenting community training programmes have been continuing, with 166 participants from 5 villages benefiting from them.



A three day training programme was held for teachers in Vidyalaya by the Madras Dyslexia Association, to build awareness on dyslexia, multiple intelligences and the importance of the skill of reading.



Tuition classes were started in the Chennai Home on the auspicious occasion of Vijayadasami. These classes were planned to enhance the academic focus of the children – with the help of Members, volunteers and staff, who are taking classes for the children.



BMRF conducted an orientation programme on early child care and development for Swadhar, an NGO in Pune and partner of BMRF's Network for Information on Parenting (NIP). The programme was conducted by Ms Maya Gaitonde in Hindi, to enhance their knowledge, to prepare for a three year integrated slum development project that they are doing in 14 slums.

Mr Ravichandran L (Member, Kinship Care Sub Committee) and Ms Akila (Head – Kinship Care) made field visits during this quarter to various families in the districts supported by the programme. The visits were eye-opening for the central team, and have helped them also for future planning.



Following a training programme conducted by Ms Lakshmi Priyadarshini on how to implement Montessori for 2-3 year olds, Montessori is now a regular part of the Bala Mandir Creche's curriculum.

Mr Sarath and Mr Vivekanandan from AhaGuru conducted an orientation on Math teaching for the teachers in Vidyalaya.



JJ Act Renewal Inspection was done by Mr. James DCPO North and the Protection Officer (I/C) South inspected Bala Mandir. They verified mandatory documents, visited the Home, and gave positive feedback.



The monthly meeting of unit heads and coordinators, SAMVAAD, continued with sessions conducted by HGS on inter- and intra-personal skills, and management of thought, breath and time.

FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS

Glimpses into the various festivals and important days celebrated across Bala Mandir!



↑ Greater Chennai Police E3 T Nagar joined Deepavali celebrations in the Chennai home



↑ The children received new clothes for Deepavali in the morning, as is the tradition



↑ The children across all age groups enjoyed bursting crackers in the evening on Deepavali



← Deepavali celebrations in the Nagercoil Home with new dresses for the children, and bursting crackers



→ Special Fancy Dress Competition for Deepavali in MNC



Karthigai celebrated with great gusto in the Homes in ← Chennai and → Nagercoil



↑ A Sathya Sai Bal Vikas class in session (left) and Sarva Dharma Day celebrations (right) in the Chennai Home, with prayers and aarthi



↑ Gandhi Jayanthi cultural programme in Nagercoil showcasing women's empowerment



↑ Christmas celebrations in the Home in Chennai with a drama and dance



↑ Christmas kudit made by the Nagercoil girls



↑ Christmas in the Creche



↑ Christmas cultural programme by the Vidyalaya children



↑ Christmas tableau in MNC

LEARNING SUPPORT IN ACTION – KARE AND VIDYALAYA

BM Connect looks at case studies of three children who have benefitted from Vidyalaya's Learning Support initiative

Based on its policy of zero rejection, Bala Mandir schools always had an inclusion programme in its schools to support children who needed special attention. As part of the re-engineering project started in 2019-20, it was decided to outsource this special needs programme to KaRe Therapy, who are running similar programmes in other schools. The KaRe team of special educators and various therapists operate from the Vidyalaya resource room and provide high quality professional service to the children who need learning support. Teams of special educators and shadow teachers work closely with the mainstream teachers to draw up an individual development plan for each child and ensure that they receive the required support for improvement. With this, the Vidyalaya team is now able to provide more comprehensive support to the children and also explain the process in a better way to the parents.



The therapy initiatives are showing results, with many children demonstrating improvement in their walking, speech, day to day activities, and academics. Three such interesting case studies were shared by the KaRe team.

Case Study 1 – Girl in Standard III

A girl child in Standard III, identified as having cerebral palsy, was facing difficulty in walking, lacking interest in writing, and not being able to communicate well and play with her friends. Based on their diagnoses, the KaRe team worked with the child through speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, an individualized student plan and a shadow teacher to help perform her classroom activities.

The impact of this support was seen in her improved walking and confidence, in her independent eating and use of restrooms (which she could not do earlier), ability to now speak with clarity, and being able to recall lessons from memory. She is still a slow writer, but is now able to write on the line and form letters more legibly.

Eureka Moment

During an Annual Day rehearsal, the child finished her lunch early and then helped her friend finish her lunch by feeding her – truly a big step forward for the child!

Case Study 2 – Boy in Standard III

A boy in Standard III, diagnosed with cerebral palsy, had difficulty writing, including even holding a pencil, due to low arm strength. He was not focusing in class and required help to eat his lunch independently. His frustration with his lack of motor skills was also being manifested in defiant behaviour. The KaRe team worked with him through a shadow teacher and provided occupational therapy as well as speech and language therapy.

With the help of the team, the boy is able to walk better (earlier he needed support to walk). He is also able to eat his lunch with a spoon, and learnt to button his shirt and wear his own sandals. He is now able to read simple words and sentences, and is able to write 2 times and 3 times tables in Maths. His letter formation has improved considerably.

Eureka Moment

The child refused to have Lays chips as a snack, saying it is 'junk and unhealthy food', as he learnt in school. He mostly has fruits and sundal now.

Case Study 3 – Girl in Standard II

A girl in Standard II had been identified as being on the mild autism spectrum. This led to difficulty in focus and attention in the classroom. She was not able to control her impulsive behaviour, and was demonstrating aggressive behaviour at times. The child was provided with specific therapy to address her echolalia (repetition of words) and occupational therapy to work on her sensory needs, eye contact and sitting tolerance.

The results have been excellent, with the echolalia especially coming down. The child is able to dress herself, packs her own lunch and snacks and puts them in her box. She also keeps the house clean and goes to shops herself. With respect to academics also there is a big change, though she still does need to improve her writing and social skills a little more.

Eureka Moment

The child is particular about her surroundings and cleanliness, and takes a broom even in the class, after lunch, to clean up the area around her.

VISITORS TO BALA MANDIR

News bytes about four visitors in this quarter, supporting Bala Mandir in different ways

Mr Murali & Ms Shanthi – Children of Krishnagiri

Mr Murali and Ms Shanthi from the NGO 'Children of Krishnagiri' (COK) visited Bala Mandir for three days, corresponding with the Christmas break. During their visit, they spent time with the children in the Bala Mandir Homes, and told stories, played games, helped with art and craft, and participated in the Christmas celebration. The children enjoyed their time with them very much. Both of them also shared their views about the Home, and their enjoyment of the time they spent there.

COK will be helping Bala Mandir with the expansion of Kinship Care in a sixth district, Krishnagiri.



Volunteers from Deloitte

As part of their Impact Day, volunteers from Deloitte conducted a Creative Writing Workshop for students in Standard V to IX on 25 November 2022. They helped the children articulate the stories they had in their minds, and bring them out on paper. The stories were then presented by each child. This exercise gave a fascinating glimpse into the various sources of inspiration of each child – from stories about football players to Batman to traditional stories, to their own experiences. The workshop was set up with the support of Ms Deepa Senthilrajan, who has been volunteering with Bala Mandir since the pandemic.



Sattva – for Saint Gobain India Foundation

The organisation Sattva Consulting was selected by one of Bala Mandir's major CSR donors, Saint-Gobain India Foundation (SGIF) as a partner to study the impact of their CSR spend, as a best practice. As part of this, a member of the Sattva team visited the Bala Mandir Schools (both Vidyalaya and SMHS) to understand the operations and how SGIF has been supporting them. He walked through the premises and spoke to Members, teachers and other staff in Bala Mandir. His feedback was very good.

SGIF has been providing salary support for the teachers in Vidyalaya and SMHS (English Medium) for 9 years now.



Guru Krupa Foundation

Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) from the United States has been supporting Bala Mandir for the past two years with food and educational expenses for the students of Vidyalaya and SMHS. In November, the President of GKF, Mr Mukund Padmanabhan, accompanied by Mr Madhavan visited the schools to see the operations first hand. They got to walk through the schools, and also joined the students for lunch time in Vidyalaya.

Both the visitors were impressed by the work done by the schools. They also shared their feedback based on their observations of best practices in other institutions supported by them.



MNC ANNUAL DAY

The 33rd Annual Day of the Madhuram Narayanan Centre was celebrated on 12 December 2022 at the Bengal Association Auditorium in T Nagar. Mr N Kumar, President of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust and Vice Chairman, Sanmar Group of Companies was the Chief Guest. The children, parents and staff put up a performance called ‘Kurai Ondrum Illai’, showcasing the latent capabilities in children with intellectual disability. The programme highlighted the positives and progress of the children beautifully through music and drama. Special mention must be made of the mothers, who went up on stage with their children and helped the children perform, as is done each year. Their positivity, despite their day to day challenges, was reflected in the theme for the programme.



↑ Mothers supporting their children in putting up the different pieces in the programme; bottom right – the musical support team

SGS LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

On 15 October 2022, the 8th SGS Legal Education Programme for senior students was held in the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. This is held since 2009 in the memory of Late S Govind Swaminathan (SGS), past President of Bala Mandir and eminent lawyer of his time. The topic for this year was ‘Digital Well-being and Cyber Security’. The programme began with a talk by Mr N L Rajah about the persona of SGS, followed by an inspirational talk about the legal profession by the Chief Guest, Dr Justice Anita Sumanth (of the Madras High Court). Students from seven city schools made presentations on the day’s topic. Mrs Lalitha Chandrasekharan and her colleague Ms Harini R from Ramana Vidyalaya then summed up the event, with important do’s and don’ts that children should follow for digital well-being.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

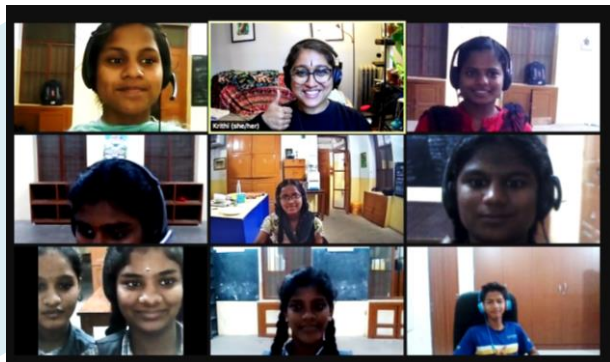
The Home children participated in Bhumi's **Neeta talent competition** in various categories like clay modeling, paper dressing, poster making, rangoli, quiz, group dance, group song etc. Sapana (Standard X) and Karan (Standard XI) won the first prize in poster making.



Zonal level sports meets were held in Chennai and Nagercoil, where the children from the Homes participated in many games, including throwball, relay, running, long jump etc. In Chennai the girls' throwball team won first place, while in Nagercoil, the girls won the 200m running and the long jump.



Music technology classes were held for the Standard IX to XII children in the Chennai Home every Saturday by Ms Krithi Rao from the United States. The children got to learn about programming beats and creating loops of music using different software online. The children were able to see how their music was coming to life online and also learnt about western music, notes and different types of music. This unique initiative was enjoyed by the children very much.



On 26 December 2022, '**Veer Bal Diwas**', the birthday of Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was celebrated with a quiz and a singing competition in the Nagercoil Home.



Indian Constitution Day was celebrated in the Chennai Home on 26 November 2022. Children drew pictures related to the constitution and took a pledge.



During the Christmas holidays, the children had learning based activities – making colourful artwork, paper decorations, drawing, reciting Thirukkural etc.

SCHOOL EVENTS

Glimpses into various events held in the schools over this quarter!



Drawing competition in SMHS for World Mental Health Day in October 2022



Physical Education classes with Decathlon – inauguration function



SMHS students participated in a drawing competition in the nearby Gurudwara



15 students attended a Drug awareness session held in Vijaya Mall by Police Boys & Girls Club



Free notebooks were issued to students by a team from Puthiya Thalamurai



Kalam Education Centre conducted a competition for Children's Day in which 15 students won medals



An Interact Club was inaugurated by Rotary Club of Madras Northeast in SMHS



Children's Day events in Vidyalaya, including spelling, colouring, rhymes etc. with Chief Guests from the Inner Wheel Ladies Club who sponsored prizes



Children's Day events in SMHS, such as fireless cooking, rangoli, debate, science experiments etc., with prizes given by police from E3 Teynampet Station

HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Gandhimathi Kalidass, Caregiver, I&T Block
- Amutha M, Caregiver, I&T Block
- Bindhu C, Nurse, I&T Block
- Sivadurka S, Educator, Nagercoil
- Meenakshi N, House Mother, Nagercoil
- Vidhya S, PT & Yoga Teacher, Nagercoil
- Ramya V, Assistant Teacher, Creche
- Samundeeswari M V, Helper, Creche

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Divya Bharathi K, Montessori Specialist, Vidyalaya
- Rahmath Nisha K Y, Assistant Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Rashika Balathandapani, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Muthulakshmi V, Administrator, Vidyalaya
- Vinsia A, Physio Therapist, MNC
- Seetha Lakshmi J, Physio Therapist, MNC
- Padmashree S, Administrator, Donations

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