



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We are happy to present the fourth quarterly newsletter from Bala Mandir, covering the quarter from April to June 2015. It has taken some time to release, but we hope you enjoy it! Sincere thanks go out to the “news collectors” and reviewers, who have helped create this newsletter.

Since its inception, Bala Mandir has been all about the child. Our unit in Nagercoil, which completes 25 years this year, has upheld this vision to the fullest. You can read more about the unit, and its 25th anniversary celebrations later in this issue.

*Many of you reading this newsletter must also be aware of our eight core values. More information on this is available on our website www.balamandir.org. One value which we hold very dear is **integrity** – a value strongly instilled in us by our founders, which has continued to be the backbone of our 66 year existence. This year's functions and celebrations are based on the theme of integrity, and our annual sticker also encapsulates the same. You can find out more in our section on the year's sticker.*

With this issue, we complete one full year of BM Connect. It has brought us great joy and pride to share the different happenings in our units with you, and we hope that it has brought you as much joy to read about our activities and initiatives. Please provide your comments / suggestions / feedback to help us improve further!

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LAUNCH OF AC MECHANIC COURSE

The Bala Mandir Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has started a new course on installation and servicing of different kinds of air conditioners (AC mechanic course). The course has been launched with the support of Blue Star Ltd., who have provided their advisory and monetary support. The course will run for four months, including one month of on-the-job training, and will have 20 students per batch.

The inauguration of this course was held on June 29. Blue Star senior officials – Mr. B. Thiagarajan (Executive Director and President), Mr. Tojo Jose (Executive VP, Human Resources), Mr. S. Kalyaan (Senior GM, Corporate Training & Development), and Mr. R. Kannan (Deputy GM, Corporate Training & Development) – attended the function. They also addressed the first batch to inspire and motivate them. Trainees received uniforms and notebooks, and Blue Star handed over the syllabus for the course to Bala Mandir.



NEWS BYTES: APRIL TO JUNE 2015

Installation of Biogas Plant

As part of its commitment to preserve the environment, Bala Mandir has installed a biogas plant to meet part of its fuel requirements. The plant has been relocated from the nearby Gurudwara, who gifted it to Bala Mandir. Thanks to the technical advice and support of Mr. D. Suresh, the plant equipment was moved and commissioned. It was inaugurated in June.

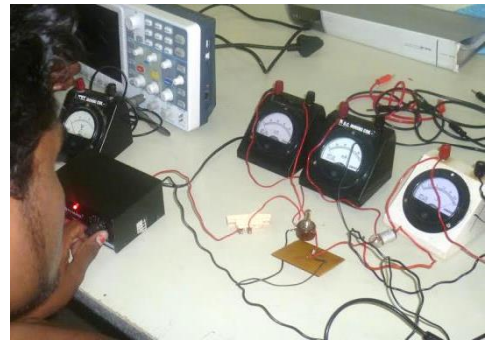


Orientation Programme for Staff

An orientation programme was held for all new staff, and staff who had changed roles in the last one year. The programme included an in-depth look at Bala Mandir's service activities across units. Close to 20 staff members attended the programme. The programme included an ice-breaker, presentations on the units, and a small game at the end. Participants appreciated and enjoyed the session.

Setup of Electronics Lab

A new electronics lab has been set up in the vocational training centre in June. This has been completed with a donation from the Rotary North. An accelerated electronics training programme has been planned for the students in the 4th semester, with the help of a Bala Mandir Member, Mr. Nandagopal. This will greatly enhance the skills and learning of the trainees in the Electrical course.



Adoption License Renewed

The long-awaited renewal of Bala Mandir's adoption license is completed, and the license has been renewed till December 2018. This will help Bala Mandir restart its adoption process in full swing, taking up pending cases with the Child Welfare Committee, and filing fresh ones for adoption of children.

Vandana weds Balaji

Vandana, who grew up in Bala Mandir, got married to Balaji on May 10. Vandana has been working in a legal firm and staying in Bala Mandir. Balaji works in a software company. The marriage was conducted in Madhavaram, by the groom's family. Bala Mandir's regular wedding donors helped provide a trousseau and other necessary items for the bride. We wish Vandana and Balaji a happy married life!



25 YEARS OF SERVICE: NAGERCOIL HOME

This year marks 25 years since Bala Mandir opened a Children's Home in Nagercoil, the Annai Sarala Illam, catering to orphan and destitute girls.

The trigger for setting up this Home was in response to the urgent need to combat female foeticide and infanticide – at that time rampant in Nagercoil and Kanyakumari districts. A 'Transit Home' was first set up in 1987 from where children were sent to Bala Mandir in Chennai for adoption and care. In May 1990, this was converted into a full-fledged Home for orphan and destitute children, under the guidance of Sarala Amma. The Home started with 25 girls.



The first child in Nagercoil in 1987



The first Nagercoil Home

Sarala Amma was a friend of Vedamma, a Trustee of Bala Mandir. She took charge of the Home and its running. The dedication and commitment she showed set the tone for the running of the Home from then on. The physical location of the Home has moved over the years from its initial location to Ramanupthoor (when the Home was named "Annai Sarala Illam") and then to its current location at Irullappapuram (in 2004), and the values and processes set in place continued. Today 43 girls are housed in the Home, and receive an excellent education at nearby schools. Plans are afoot for expanding services, for which a new building will come up shortly.

In keeping with Bala Mandir's vision, mission and values, an atmosphere of holistic development has been created for the girls. The facilities in the Home include a study room, a library, a kitchen with a supporting biogas plant to provide fuel, a spacious playground and a pet corner. A medical programme runs through the year for regular check-ups and medical intervention when needed. The Home has a day care centre (crèche) for children of working women from deprived backgrounds.

Many activities run in the Home through the year, including arts and crafts, yoga, music classes, and an annual excursion. Functions and festivals are also celebrated with enthusiasm and gusto. Caregivers and crèche workers are provided with learning opportunities through programmes on child care and development.

Girls who have completed their stay at the Home are rehabilitated, with support provided for higher education. Over seventy girls have completed their graduation and post-graduation and professional courses. Many of them are also married and well-settled in life..



Activities in the Home

To commemorate 25 years of its service to children, the Nagercoil Home organized a Silver Jubilee celebration function on June 18, 2015. Mr. Sunil Paliwal – MD, Aavin (earlier District collector of Kanyakumari and a well-wisher of Bala Mandir) – was the Chief Guest. Mr. Sajjan Singh Chavan, District Collector, Kanyakumari and Ms. Meena Dev, Municipal Chairman, Nagercoil, were Guests of Honour. Founder members were honoured. The children then put up a cultural programme. It was indeed a significant moment for Bala Mandir to celebrate this milestone!



CHILDREN’S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: STICKER PROJECT

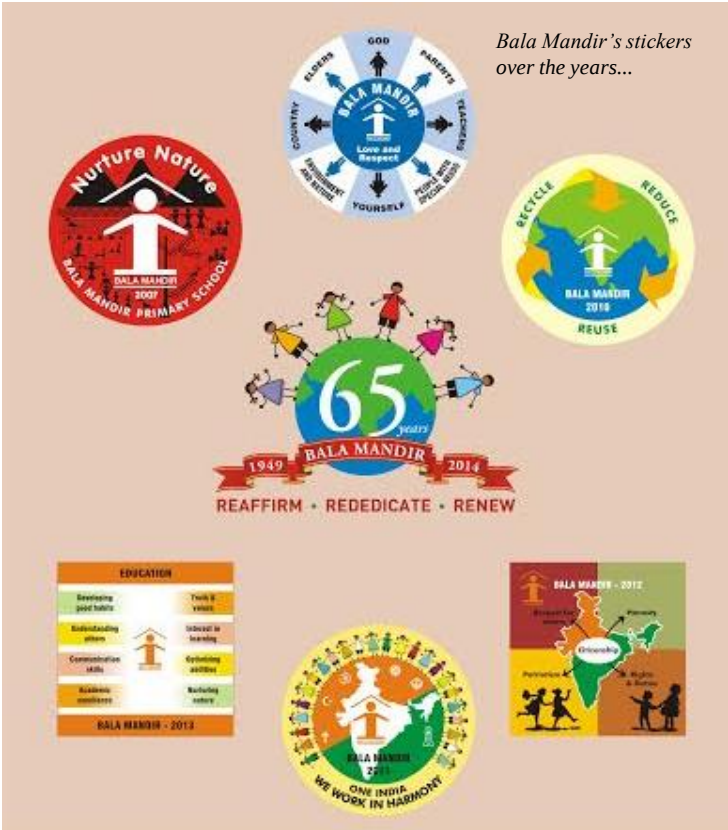
Building the spirit of contribution and “giving back” is an important value in society. As an organisation working closely with children, Bala Mandir believes that developing this value in the character of children inculcates a great sense of social responsibility in them.

In its own way, Bala Mandir has been encouraging this through an interesting and unique “Children Help Children” programme. Through this initiative, children from city schools purchase a sticker with a message, from Bala Mandir, for just Rs. 10 each year. Children stick these on their books, and see it every day. The amount collected through this initiative goes towards the provision of educational aids, and upkeep and improvement of facilities in the kindergarten and primary schools at Bala Mandir. This has led to another understanding and interpretation of CSR as “Children’s Social Responsibility”.

The stickers for each year, from 2008, are designed keeping in mind relevant and thought-provoking social messages, such as respect for nature, patriotism, understanding the meaning of education, protecting the environment, and important values in life such as love, empathy, and inclusion. This is also in line with the theme that Bala Mandir uses each year for its functions. The school children who purchase this sticker look forward to the message every year!

The message in the 2015 sticker was also taken up for discussion in the study circle for the month of June. The underlying theme for the sticker is Integrity. Integrity is a value which Bala Mandir holds very close to its heart, and it is one of the pillars of its code of conduct. The sticker is a reflection of how integrity is viewed in India, across religions, languages and regions, depicted in the form of a map of India, superimposed on the colours of the Indian flag. India or ‘Bharath’ has ‘Bh(ava)’ – thoughts emerging from the head, ‘Ra(ga)’ – words emerging from the heart, and ‘Th(ala)’ – deed originating from the hand. Oneness of the head, heart and hand is depicted on the map of India. The messages ‘Sathyam Vada’ and ‘Dharmam Chara’ translate to ‘Speak the truth’, and ‘Walk on the path of righteousness’ respectively. The entire sticker emphasises the core message of having integrity in every aspect of life – in the thoughts we think, in what we speak, and in actions

Bala Mandir would like every child to subscribe to this value in his / her life. This sticker gives each child food for thought on the myriad ways in which one needs to preserve integrity in one’s life. It serves as a reminder to the children who have purchased it, to speak the truth, to walk on the right path, to serve as role models for others, and to be responsible young citizens of India.



CONGRATULATIONS!

It was a proud moment for Bala Mandir when Yasin, who completed his high school education in Bala Mandir’s Satyampurthi High School, received a prize from the Late Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on the completion of his degree, for achievement in studies. Bala Mandir congratulates Yasin!



BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP

The Balu Sir Summer Camp was held for the second consecutive year between May 1st and May 15th, for children from the Bala Mandir Home, and from nearby slums. The fifteen days were packed with various activities, ranging from dance, meditation, mime, skits and craftwork – all aiming at teaching the children new arts, while also educating them on social issues. The children were also provided with food on all days. The camp ended with a valedictory function, with presentations from the children on what they have learnt.



Skit on importance of playing games



Remembering 'Balu Sir'



Craftwork display



Mime on social awareness



Fusion dance



Sharing experiences

VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE ANNUAL DAY

The Annual Day of the Vocational Training Centre was held on June 27, 2015. The Chief Guest for the programme was Mr. Reguraj, Managing Director, Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF), Bangalore. The trainees put up a cultural programme – beginning with a dance, followed by a play targeted at building awareness on skill development and explaining the importance of skill training in the Indian context, and finishing with a yoga display. The valedictory function was also held for the first batch of trainees who completed the “Carpentry for Interiors” course.



Scenes from the play



Valedictory function



Mr. Reguraj's address



Dance performance



Pyramid display

ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL: INAUGURATION

In its existence over 66 years, Bala Mandir has prided itself on how it is able to respond to the changing needs of society. In recent years, there has been considerable demand from parents living in the nearby urban slums and many others from economically deprived backgrounds for English medium teaching in the schools, over and above the spoken English classes which were being conducted.

In response to this demand, Bala Mandir began English medium classes for pre-primary and Standard I in the year 2014. In 2015, a complete revamp has been undertaken of the structure of the schools, with the English medium now being brought under the new “Bala Mandir Vidyalaya Nursery & Primary School”. This marks a move towards social integration of the institutionalized child with the child from the slums. The school has a well-defined bilingual curriculum that also focuses on Tamil in addition to English.

A function was held for the inauguration of the English medium school on June 4. A pooja was conducted, to pray for the auspicious beginning of the school. Members, teachers and caregivers attended the function.



The new English medium school will be completely self-financed by Bala Mandir, with the parents contributing only a small share of the educational expenses. Bala Mandir is fortunate to have sponsorship from donors, especially Saint-Gobain India Foundation, who stepped forward to extend their support for this important initiative.

Children who had been in the Day Care Centre and English medium pre-primary sections earlier have joined this school, and the response from the community has been positive. This school will enhance year on year upto Standard V and ensure that it is able to meet the requirements and aspirations of the community to the best of its ability.

CUSTOM SOFTWARE IMPLEMENTATION

Previous newsletters have made mention of the planned move to custom software, being developed for Bala Mandir by Netstream Technologies, with the generous support of a donor from Singapore. The software is targeted at making administration smoother and more efficient in five different areas:

- **Children’s Data:** To track details of all children on a regular basis, and provide reports on their status
- **Donations:** To capture details on donors, all donations for the year, and provide system generated receipts and reports on donations received, and integrate with the Tally accounting
- **Meetings:** For attendance and storage of documents for various meetings held, for easy retrieval
- **Address Lists:** To have address lists for various events and print envelope labels (a process which used to be done manually)
- **HR:** To maintain all HR data for each employee of Bala Mandir, and provide HR reports to management

CHILD	LIST	REPORTS
CHILD BEHAVIOUR REPORT		
CHILD PARENT VISIT		
CHILD HOSPITALIZATION REPORT		
CHILD PHOTO		
CHILD SCHOOL REPORTING		
CHILD MEDICAL REPORT		
CHILD LEAVE REPORT		
CHILD DISCHARGE		

Bala Mandir has now implemented these five ‘modules’, and is in the process of transitioning all the manual records to this system. The reports generated from these modules will help us meet our compliance requirements, and also ensure we are completely accurate with our data.

Thanks go out to the thoughtful donor and Netstream Technologies, who have provided relentless support to ensure the system works well, as per Bala Mandir’s requirements. Thanks also go out to the members and staff who spent their time and energy on testing and debugging the system.

CLUB ACTIVITIES IN THE HOME

To build an environment of social interaction and a sense of family and fun, the children in the Bala Mandir Home are divided into three clubs or groups (A, B, C) – called Alamaram (Banyan Tree), Mottum Malarum (Buds and Blossoms), and Inaintha Kaigal (Joined Hands). Boys and girls across age groups from Standard II to Standard X, are divided into these three groups, which are supervised by different matrons / wardens.

The groups get together on Sundays and holidays, and records from the get-togethers are maintained in each group's club activity book. Their activities include meetings and innovative interactions about various interesting topics, decisions on behaviour change, suggestions to the Management on rules they want to change and introduction of others, career option aspirations, menu suggestions etc. These are then studied by the senior management, and action is taken as considered appropriate. Club activity books also contain craft and art work by the children (shown here).

Once a year, in March, inter-club competitions are held, including rangoli (kolam), elocution, essay writing, and indoor and outdoor games. Marks are awarded for winning, as well as for participation and effort. The club activity books are also adjudged based on the quality of interaction recorded, and the craft and art work display. Marks are also given for academic achievement and improvements in academics. These marks are all added up, and clubs are assigned I, II and III prizes. In April, just before the summer vacation begins, individual club outings are organised, based on the prize won. The I prize winner group goes to a theme park, the II prize winner group goes for a movie and for a meal at a restaurant, and the III prize winner group goes for a beach outing and for a meal at a restaurant. This year, Alamaram came first, Mottum Malarum came second, and Inaintha Kaigal came third.

The club activities help build the children's thinking processes, sense of belonging, interactive capabilities, competitive spirit, and teamwork from a very young age. It also emphasises the importance for all-round development, while also highlighting the importance of participation. The children look forward to the treat in store for them through the year!



ORIENTATION FOR TEACHERS

In time for schools reopening in June, an orientation programme was held in end May for the teachers of Satyamurthi High School and Bala Mandir Primary School. The orientation had a talk by erstwhile Coordinator of the Schools, Mr. J. Muralikrishnan, about the expectations from teachers, and a session on motivation conducted by Rotarian Mr. Neelesh Bomb, who is an entrepreneur and management consultant. Mr. Bomb also sponsored lunch for the day. The session was very well-received by the teachers, who felt that it was a perfect "re-energizer" to get them back to work with motivation and enthusiasm!



MEMBERS' CORNER: MRS. PRAMILLA SHANMUGAM

Veteran Member, Mrs. Pramilla Shanmugam (Pramilla Amma) was in charge of the baby and toddler section for a long time. She continues to support Bala Mandir marriages, and help staff. Endowments from her Trust have supported Higher Education and Vocational Training for many years. Mrs. Leela Natarajan and Mrs. R. Lakshmi spoke to her about her life and her service at Bala Mandir. Excerpts from the interview:

How did you come to Bala Mandir?

My late husband, Mr. Shanmugam, was very close to Manjumma (Founder of Bala Mandir, Mrs. Manjubhashini). She treated me like her own daughter-in-law. I never thought I was fit for social service, though she kept calling me to come to Bala Mandir. When my husband passed away in 1974, I went through a tough phase. Manjumma came to me and took me to Bala Mandir, and I began spending time there. In many ways Bala Mandir brought me back to the real world and eased the sorrow of my loss. Manjumma wanted me to supervise the staff and make sure things are running smoothly for the children. The organisation slowly started growing on me. I used to plan the way the rooms were allocated, how the staff would be placed there, appointed matrons, and so on. I used to focus a lot on cleanliness, making sure the children were well looked after, that the matrons were doing their jobs well, and that the processes I was setting in place were being followed. I retired in 2003, after about 27-28 years of service but continue to be in touch with Bala Mandir.



What were some of your other interests?

I like helping those in need. I did a stint of volunteering at an old age home as well. But my biggest hobby was breeding dogs. I was a member of the Madras Canine Club. I had a Lhasa Apso, which I had entered into a dog show. I absolutely did not expect it, but my dog won "Best in Show"! I gave up this hobby in around 2003-2004. Before my marriage, I completed my Junior Cambridge, but by the time I gave my Senior Cambridge, I was married.

You must have seen many changes in Bala Mandir over the years...

Yes, in the older days we could hardly afford to buy clothes and other items for the children. I used to get my Bombay Dyeing bedsheets and get them cut up to make different things. There were times when we would have shortage of food for the staff, times when the grounds would be fully flooded – many such incidents occurring from time to time. But the staff was able to pull through, and handle the crises well. After the passing of Manjumma also, we were not sure how things would go, but Maya was able to take it forward. We saw a lot of growth in those years as well. In 2003 when I retired, Bala Mandir was well equipped to handle issues. The staff had also increased by then.

Any memories with the staff?

I had really good staff. I was very strict with them – I used to be particular that they should tie their hair into a bun and not wear flowers, since the children could face issues because of flowers. I also used to buy uniforms in different colours for the different rooms in the Hospital Block (where babies and toddlers are housed). The staff had nicknamed me 'Military' for my insistence on discipline! Every time there was any issue, I never used to shout at them. Instead, I used to call them and give them a long sermon. They would hear me out and then respond to me. I appreciated that very much. They were very good to me, and took care to work well – they were keen to do more. I used to give all of them leave and permission to go watch movies. Meenakshi Amma, who looked after the Main Block used to scold me for the amount of leeway I gave them! But I did have a soft corner for them – Lakshmi, Vasanta, Shanta, Usha, Geetha – many of them are still in touch with me. They are the backbone of Bala Mandir and have given the best years of their lives for the service of children in Bala Mandir.

Any other thoughts that come to mind?

I have seen so many incidents over my period at Bala Mandir. I had only seen one side of life before that – my life was about parties and clubs. I got to see a very different side of life. I shouldn't be saying this, but I feel that all the talk about "motherly passion" is bunkum. I saw mothers who abandoned their children – some even caused them bodily harm, for the most selfish reasons. I used to get upset, but I also learnt that sometimes you cannot judge till you walk in someone else's shoes. We looked after those children well, and ensured they had the best possible care in every way possible – which was most important.

We thank Pramilla Amma for the time she took out to speak to us!

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