



## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to the eighth edition of BM Connect. With this our newsletter has completed two years of covering little tidbits of news, small slices of history, and some glimpses into the future of Bala Mandir.

It has been an eventful two years, and Bala Mandir has witnessed many changes, that continue to be rooted in the values, goals and traditions of Bala Mandir; and continue to preserve its ethos and its rich heritage, while taking the institution into the future. It has been a pleasure to capture these changes as part of this newsletter. It has also been an incredible experience to look back into the past, explore the institutio as it was, and to revisit old memories with some of the older members, whose involvement has lessened, but not their commitment to Bala Mandir. But the biggest inspiration is capturing the joy of the children, their aptitude in various avenues, and their cheerful smiles when they accomplish something – these are what inspire the workers and volunteers at Bala Mandir every day too.

Now, as the newsletter completes two years, we invite contributions from our members, our volunteers, our employees, and even our donors. Do write in at the mail ID below and tell us about your experiences with or at Bala Mandir.

As always, we hope you enjoy reading this newsletter!

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## ANNIVERSARY DAY AT NAGERCOIL

Anniversary Day was celebrated at the Nagercoil home, with keen participation from the children and staff alike. Mrs. Uma Maheshwari, D.S.W.O, Kanyakumari District, presided over the function. Mr. Venkat Raman, D.C.P.O, Kanyakumari District, was the chief guest. Mr. Abdul Hakeem (Chairperson, Child Welfare Committee, Kanyakumari District) and Mr. Thavasi Muthu (Head Master in Govt. S.S.S. Vallankumaran Vilai) also gave speeches on the occasion. The speeches by the dignitaries gave the children motivation to improve themselves through various means.

The children performed a well-coordinated cultural programme, with two children performing a special dance. Sports day prizes were given away as part of the programme. The children and staff enjoyed the day.



# NEWS BYTES: APRIL TO JUNE 2016

## ***10<sup>th</sup> Standard Examinations***

Three boys and six girls appeared for the 10<sup>th</sup> standard examinations. While all the other children passed, one girl could not clear her examination due to ill health and has reappeared for it. Three girls and one boy have been rehabilitated with their families, while the remaining three girls and two boys continue to remain in Bala Mandir. Bala Mandir will continue to support their studies.

## ***Update from VTC: AC Mechanic Course***

The AC Mechanic course, launched in the end of last year, has seen the completion of three successful batches, and the fourth batch was started on June 15. The trainees in the previous batches have had good job placements. The third batch completed their on-the-job one month training on June 30 and began employment shortly after that.

## ***Study Circle sessions for the Quarter***

In the month of April, Mr. Ashok Aiyer covered the overview of Bala Mandir for all the staff members as a refresher session. In May, the study circle sessions were not held. In June, Mrs. Lakshmi Gopal took up the topic of holistic Development of personality based on SPRUC domains: Sense of Self, Physical, Relationship, Understanding and Communication (used in BMRF training programmes).

## ***IT Classes for Bala Mandir Staff and Students***

Bala Mandir has created a new computer course, with modules designed to make the curriculum more practical and specific based on workplace needs, including an introduction to computers, MS Office, basic software etc. The classes are held in the computer lab in the Vocational Training Centre, and both staff and students from the school and VTC undergo these programmes.

## ***Revamp of the T.T. Vasu Hall***

The T.T. Vasu Hall in the Office Block has been completely revamped. The Hall is used primarily for meetings and a projector and screen were added to the room. The chairs and tables in the room were also refurbished to give the room a more professional feel. Photographs of the revamped hall are given here.



*Above: A view of the T.T. Vasu Hall in its new look*

*Left: A recent special meeting in progress in the T.T. Vasu Hall*

## RAMA NAVAMI CELEBRATIONS

In mid April, Rama Navami is celebrated, by enacting the entire story of the Ramayana with the main roles being taken by the children of Standard VIII and participation from all the high school children in the Home. The drama highlights the value of obedience and devotion, care and respect among siblings, and repercussions of wrongdoing. The costumes and props of the children (shown here) highlight the creativity of the children and staff in using 'donation clothes'.



## WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Since its inception, Bala Mandir has been working closely with the government and government agencies for advocacy related to children and child development. The institution has shared its best practices, responsibilities, challenges, and successes with all those who work for the upliftment and better life of children, especially those in dire circumstances

A group of newly appointed District Child Protection Officers (DCPOs) visited Bala Mandir recently. A day-long session was conducted for them, with an orientation about Bala Mandir's activities, and the key role of the Juvenile Justice Act in all the decisions that Bala Mandir takes. The Coordinator for the Children's Programme, Ms. Chitra Krishnan, held this session with the assistance of the team of social workers. The session was highly appreciated.



## NARRATIVE THERAPY SESSION

A two day narrative therapy session was conducted on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May by Dr. Aruna Balachandra. There were 12 participants: ten matrons and two interns. The objective of this particular activity was to help participants determine their own skills, strengths and what they want to achieve – for themselves and for the organisation. The exercises were tailored to give the participants a chance to introspect about their strengths, ambitions, dreams, and support systems, and a discussion followed about how to tackle challenges and obstacles, and about the importance of working together. The feedback from participants was excellent, and captured the difference in their thinking processes after the session.

# SPECIAL VOLUNTEER ORGANISATION ACTIVITY

As covered in other newsletters, Bala Mandir works closely with a number of volunteer organisations, including the Madras Youth Choir (MYC). In the month of May, MYC organised a five-day summer camp for children aiming at their personality development through Indian Choral Music. The camp was held in the premises of Shraddha, a non-profit organisation for children situated close to Bala Mandir. The themes taken up were self-confidence and team-spirit and songs were chosen accordingly. Interesting activities were planned to go hand in hand with the music sessions. 10 Bala Mandir children participated in the programme

On Day 1, the children learnt a song on traditional games: “Amma poranda veetule ammaanai aaduvom”. They were taught a few traditional indoor games like Pallaankuzhi and Ammaanai, which are part of the culture and traditions of Tamil Nadu. It was a different experience for the children, who had a very nice time playing these games.

Day 2 saw the children learn a Hindi song with an English rap in between – called “Chooenge hum aasmaan – yes we can”. The kids were taught some technical terms like prelude, melody, interlude, fading out, etc. while learning the song. A member of the Choir also showed a short video clip to stimulate positive thinking and confidence in self. The children were then asked to talk about what they wanted to become in life. One of the Bala Mandir girls touched everyone’s heart by expressing a desire to help the poor and needy like Mother Teresa.

On Day 3 the children were taught a lively Goan folk song, and were asked to draw pictures relating to the song.

The Bharatiyar song Achamillai was taken up on Day 4. The children also played a game emphasising team spirit, and were themselves in high spirits through the day. There was an enthralling story-telling session held too, which motivated the children to be fearless and handle any situation boldly.

On the final day, Day 5, all the four songs taught were revised and the children presented them as a choir to the small audience gathered. Their art work were on display adorning the walls of 'Shraddha'. Dr. Vijaykumar, a Paediatrician, gave a motivational talk, inspiring them to acquire new skills and stressed the importance of being good at heart. The children loved the role play activity taking turns to use the doctor's kit to play the role of a doctor while the doctor himself sportively played 'patient'. All the participating children then received certificates.

For the children from Bala Mandir it was a great opportunity to interact with children from all walks of life and backgrounds, enjoy learning new games and participate in activities.



*The children play traditional Tamil games*



*The children learning the songs*



*Watching a video*



*The children drawing*



*With the doctor*



*Performing the songs*

# TAMIL NEW YEAR'S DAY

Tamil New Year's Day, which marks the beginning of the annual Tamil calendar was celebrated in mid-April. For Bala Mandir, Tamil New Year's Day is always a little more special. It is the day of the prize distribution for the club activities held in the Home. As covered in Newsletter 4 (August 2015), boys and girls in the Home are divided vertically from Standard II to Standard X into three groups (A, B and C respectively), called Alamaram (BanyanTree), Mottum Malarum (Buds and Blossoms), and Inaintha Kaigal (Joined Hands). The groups are given points based on academics, extra-curricular activities, sports, and the workbook each group maintains for arts and crafts. As a new addition this year, participation in school activities and also winning prizes gained points for the group

While for many years, Group A (Alamaram) has been the winner of the inter-club activities, this year saw a new group walk away with the winner's prize – Group C (Inaintha Kaigal). Their overall performance in all categories was very good, and their efforts were appreciated. Group A (Alamaram) came in second, and Group B (Mottum Malarum) came in third. The first place winners enjoyed a visit to the temple, a movie, a meal at a hotel and a beach trip. The second placed group went for a movie and had a meal at a hotel. The group placed third had a hotel meal and a trip to the beach.

In addition to the prize distribution celebration, the Tamil New Year's Day celebration saw the presentation of a song and a drama by the students in Standard X, the script of which was written by them. The children of Standard V presented a dance.



Scenes from the play scripted and performed by the Standard X children



Distribution of prizes to the children in the Home by Mrs. Leela Natarajan, Hon. Joint Secretary

# YOGA DAY IN THE SCHOOLS

World Yoga Day is celebrated every year on June 21, 2016. This year the children in Bala Mandir Primary School and Satyamurthi High School also , by performing some yoga exercises. The enthusiasm of both the students and teachers was high. Yoga is given a lot of importance in Bala Mandir, and a session was also held for the teachers on June 28, 2016 by Mrs. Kalavathi Sekhar (Director, Sky Yoga).



## PARENT-TEACHER MEETING

At the start of every academic year, a parent-teacher meeting is held at Bala Mandir Primary School (BMPS) and Satyamurthi High School (SMHS), with the Honorary General Secretary (HGS) addressing the gathering, to connect with the community from which the children in the schools come. The meeting emphasises the importance of academics, and the all-important role of the parents to ensure a good education for the children.

Every year there is something special for the parents and this year the parents enjoyed visiting the newly refurbished classrooms in the first floor and interacting with the teachers. They enjoyed seeing the Special Education Room, Science Lab, Library and audio-visual room and craft room – the tiled flooring, new airy windows and well painted walls. They were very thrilled with the enhanced infrastructure that is being provided by Bala Mandir for their children. During the meeting they witnessed three demonstration classes to understand the educational values being imparted to their children – Spoken English, Yoga and Activity Based Learning (ABL). There were lots of questions and appreciation for the new initiatives taken by Bala Mandir.



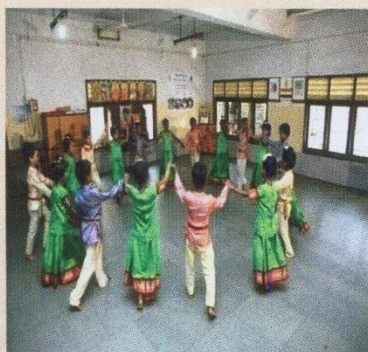
# BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP

The third annual Balu Sir Summer Camp was held at two levels between May 2 and May 14, 2016. 83 children from Standard III to Standard VIII participated in the camp, with 30 of them from the neighbouring areas.

The children had two groups – one for dance and drawing, and one for theatre and craft. The experience was showcased in a Valedictory Programme on May 14. There was one skit, one pantomime, three dances – Ganesh Vandana, Garba and Bhangra and an exhibition of Drawings and Crafts done by the children. The Chief Guest was Mr. Venkat Natrajan, Past President & Trustee – Rotary Club of Madras, Ashok Nagar. A sumptuous lunch was provided by Sri Krishna Sweets to the children every day after the sessions were over.

This was the first time that children from ages 4 to 7 also participated in the event. This was the age group most special to Mr. Vishy Gaitonde, or 'Balu Sir', in whose memory the camp is conducted every year. There was a variety of art and craft activities, story-telling sessions and a puppet show conducted by various resource persons and a dance choreographed by a professional dancer. The highlight of the camp was a trip to Chetpet Eco Park where the children enjoyed a 3D animated film on underwater life after which they played in the park. During the valedictory function, the tiny tots performed two dances and their art and craft work was also showcased.

Feedback from the children was uniformly positive, and they enjoyed the camp thoroughly! A picture collage of the valedictory function is shown below.



Folk Dance



Mime



Play



Contemporary Dance



Bhangra Dance



Garba Dance



Drawing & Craft



## MEET OUR MEMBER: Ms. R.S. VIJAYA

One of the members to whom Bala Mandir owes an incredible debt of gratitude is Ms. R.S. Vijaya, earlier Hon. Joint Secretary of Bala Mandir. 'Vijayamma', as she is known fondly, belongs to the illustrious family of the Raja of Ramanathapuram. She also belonged to a generation where women were not allowed to go out and work. Despite these odds, with the support of her parents, she went to Queen Mary's College and completed her B.Sc. in Maths. She was always interested in social work and used to go into the slums as part of the Social Work Club and counsel men and women about the role that they needed to play in society.

In the 1960s she was already a disciple of Smt. Manjubhashini, the founder of Bala Mandir. She had been one of the young volunteers at the Avadi Congress during the freedom struggle. She soon joined government and retired as the Deputy Director at the Directorate of Social Welfare.

When she found herself with not much to do after her retirement, she was asked by Manjumma to come and help her at Bala Mandir. She was in charge of the Rajaji Home, and used to help with administration, licenses and government-related activities.

Vijayamma used to take care of many activities in the Children's Programme while she was the Hon. Joint Secretary. All clothes that came for donation were distributed by her diligently age wise. She was also involved in the quality control of the kitchen, provided the menu and used to taste the food before children had it. As a signatory in Bala Mandir, she was very protective of the funds and used to track all expenditure closely. She was also instrumental in connecting up Bala Mandir with the Service Home, due to which Bala Mandir girls receive admission there very easily.

Her strict demeanour with the staff belied a sympathetic and kind soul, who used to help all those in need. She also used to spend a lot of time with the children, talking to them, telling them stories and giving them life lessons.

Even today, at the age of 85, Vijayamma comes to Bala Mandir in the mornings to render whatever services she can. Her passion and commitment to Bala Mandir are inspirational for the next generation of Members.



## HR NEWS — JANUARY TO MARCH 2016

### Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Jeniffer Antonita, Social Worker
- Ms. Dhanalakshmi, Social Worker
- Ms. Gayathri, House Mother
- Ms. Flora, Helper, Children's Programme
- Ms. Aathilakshmi, Helper, Children's Programme
- Ms. Sanila, Helper, Day Care Centre
- Mr. Arulselvan, Social Worker, VTC

### Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mr. Senthilkumar, Hostel Warden, ITC boys
- Mr. Chandrasekhar, Instructor (re-joined)
- Ms. Seena Hariharan, Coordinator, Schools
- Ms. Senthamarai, Maths Teacher, Schools
- Ms. Revathi, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Ms. Archanadevi, Teacher, Vidyalaya

### Transfers and Changes

- Mr. Simonraj – from German Hall to Vocational Training Centre – as Handyman
- Mr. Panneer Selvam – from German Hall to Main Office – as Cashier
- In the Schools, Mrs. Ranjini retired as Headmistress and Mrs. P. Manimegalai, B.T.Assistant, was appointed Headmistress with effect from June 1, 2016 based on seniority and merit

### Performance Appraisal

All levels of appraisal – self, by Coordinator, and by Member in Charge – were completed as per schedule.

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