



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

When we look back at each quarter for the newsletter, it always feels like a whirlwind of activities have happened across our various units! While the quarter from April to June is usually quieter on the school front, different events are planned for the Home children throughout the summer holidays. These include the annual Balu Sir Summer Camp and the summer outings of the children, covered here.

Just before the schools closed in April, however, there were a few interesting activities that happened, which are also covered in different parts of this newsletter.

In this edition, we have also done a feature on the IT modules we are using across different units of Bala Mandir to track important details about the children of each unit. This initiative, to computerize and automate many functions, has been one of the important ways in which Bala Mandir has developed efficiency over the last few years.

This being the 36th issue of BM Connect means we have now completed 9 years of the newsletter! We continue to invite your views, as always, to help us make our newsletters better. If you also wish to share your thoughts, or even any articles or pictures for any upcoming editions, please do reach out at the mail ID below.

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'MOVING AHEAD' IN MNC

On 20th April – the last day of the academic year 2022-23 – 'Moving Ahead' – the graduation ceremony for children of Upanayan, the Early Intervention Programme of the Bala Mandir Unit for Special Needs Children (MNC) – was celebrated. 'Moving Ahead' is considered to be an important milestone for the children with developmental delays and/or mental retardation. The Chief Guest for the event was Mr S Seetharaman, Chairman, Super Auto Forge P Ltd.

This year 17 children moved on to mainstream / special schools (including MNC's special school, Jivikam). All of them went up on stage in graduation gowns, along with their parents and teachers, and received prizes from the Chief Guest.

A special cultural programme, including a skit, was put up for this occasion



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NEWS BITS FROM AROUND BALA MANDIR

The **Nagercoil Home** had visitors during this quarter from Chennai. Members, Mr P Natarajan and Ms Leela Natarajan visited the Home on 15th April, while retired Superintendent of the Chennai Home, Ms Jayalakshmi V, visited the Home on 28th May. All three visitors spent time with the children and also engaged in a mutual exchange of ideas with the staff.



Kinship Care, which started in July 2021, has been expanding to serve multiple districts of Tamil Nadu and continues to provide support for children who have suffered the loss of a parent / parents. In this quarter, the operations of this unit **expanded to the districts of Vellore, Ranipet and Tirupathur**. Over 115 children were added to the programme, taking the current total to over 700 children. The team of 9 social workers now caters to 9 districts, supporting not just the children, but also the mothers and next of kin in whose care the children have been placed.

PTA meetings for Term III were held for the parents of the students of **Vidyalaya** on 21st April. Third-term answer sheets and rank cards were shown to the parents and discussed. The parents were very participative and appreciative of the efforts of the teachers.



A **health check-up** was carried out for the children of **SMHS** on 25th June. This was carried out with the help of the Chennai Corporation. The children went through all the normal medical check-ups as part of this initiative.



Scouts and Guides sessions, which are held for the **SMHS** children in Standard VI to VIII, were started for this academic year from 18th June.

MNC marks the end of an academic year and the start of the new year with a **community potluck lunch** and a movie for the staff. This happened this year on 3rd June. All the staff shared the tasty food and watched a movie in the assembly hall of MNC.



The Department of Welfare for the Differently Abled of Tamil Nadu is working with the World Bank for financing a project related to early intervention centres. **A team from the World Bank visited MNC** to observe the working of a typical centre.



Starting one week before their re-opening day of 5th June, the staff of **MNC** attended a **refresher course**. The course included classes on subjects like Yoga, PET, OT, Vision and Hearing, Physiotherapy and Montessori methodology. Senior team members also addressed the staff and encouraged them to do their best in this year.



CELEBRATIONS AROUND BALA MANDIR

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



↑ **Tamil New Year's Day** was celebrated in the Chennai Home on 14th April, along with distribution of **Excellence and Exemplary Awards**



↑ **World Environment Day** was celebrated in the Chennai Home on 5th June with drawing and painting by the children



← On 21st June, **International Yoga Day** was celebrated in SMHS. Resource persons from Sky Yoga came and explained the different poses and benefits of yoga in daily life.

The Chennai Home children also performed a demonstration in the Home for this occasion.

BALU SIR STORYTELLING DAY

Balu Sir Storytelling sessions were held on 27th June at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. The resource person for these sessions was Ms Ambujavalli. Each session was one hour long, with Session 1 being for Standard I & II and Session 2 for Standard III to V. The sessions were very interactive, with energising songs to start with, followed by breathing exercises. At the end of the session, the participant children were invited to enact their favourite characters in the stories shared. The children thoroughly enjoyed the sessions!



TECHNOLOGY AT WORK IN BALA MANDIR – DHRUVA

‘**DhruVa**’ is the name given to a custom-built software used to track information about Bala Mandir children. This software has been developed and supported on an ongoing basis by a team of IT professionals from Saint-Gobain (SG) headed by Mr E N Senthilrajan. Started in 2019 in a small way to replace an existing software which was being used earlier in the Children’s Home, DhruVa has grown over the years not only in terms of scope of the coverage of different aspects of child development, but also has taken the form of multiple versions to support the various units.

DhruVa H is the original version which is used in Home, **DhruVa S** is the version used in the Primary and High Schools, while **DhruVa K** is used in Kinship Care. In the Kinship Care programme, DhruVa has become a core part of the operation, since without this tool, the team would not be able to track the various aspects of support extended to the approximately 700 children who are currently in this programme. Since the software resides in the cloud the users can access and update information from anywhere and even using just their mobiles.

The SG team work on weekends and during their spare time to meet the critical needs of the Bala Mandir units to support all three versions of DhruVa. Any issues are highlighted by the Bala Mandir team and resolved by them.

DhruVa H has been in use for the past four years and is now being used to track all aspects of the development of the Home children including health, behaviour etc. It also has provision for making an Individual Child Plan (ICP), which is an essential requirement as per the Juvenile Justice Act, and enables review of exceptions by the management. The scope of this is now being expanded to cover vaccination schedule and growth chart for babies and toddlers.

DhruVa S development was launched during the pandemic period and is yet to stabilise and put to regular use. It has provisions for day-to-day management of time-table and for tracking of academic results. However, these features are yet to be fully explored by the School team. The goal is to make full use of the software during this academic year.

DhruVa K is the most recent version which was started just over one year back, and this system has evolved quickly due to the strong need felt by the users. All aspects of the Kinship project are covered by the software and new features are getting added every quarter as the Kinship programme explores new ways to support the children.

The three modules share a common feature for making **child profile for the donors** which is managed by the central sponsorships team of Bala Mandir. The unit teams provide inputs, which are enhanced by the sponsorships team.

During the June 2023 physical meeting of the Kinship Care team, the team working on DhruVa – **Mr Arun Prasath V, Mr Gobinath R, Mr Renganathan A** and **Mr Senthilrajan EN** – came down from Palakkad and Erode to attend the meeting. At this time, they also met other stakeholders from the various units using DhruVa. The meetings helped the SG team understand the key role played by the software in making a difference to the lives of many needy families.



The BM Connect team asked Mr Senthilrajan to share his and his team members’ thoughts about working with Bala Mandir on the DhruVa project. Here is what he had to say:

“It is a great pleasure to be associated with Bala Mandir and working on this project. We started this project in a small way but when we progressed, we saw the real transformation and change in the way of working of Bala Mandir people.

The team felt this project is very close to their hearts because the application developed is used for a very good cause and helping the needy people. When we had the physical meeting with the Kinship Care team, it gave us the opportunity to understand the end user requirements and their enthusiasm to use this system. The end users’ involvement and cooperation in quick adoption of the changes in the system is the driving force for the team to develop and deliver.

Thanks for the opportunity to be part of this journey!”



What a wonderful example of a team of young skilled IT professionals, making a difference to society by leveraging their knowledge and expertise during their spare time!

SUMMER HOLIDAYS TRIP FOR THE CHENNAI HOME

During the summer holidays, 19 children from the Bala Mandir Chennai Home went on a trip to Krishnagiri and Yelagiri between 19th and 22nd May, suitably chaperoned by the Home staff. They stayed in 'Namma Veedu', a Home set up by Children of Krishnagiri and managed by ARCOD, two NGOs with whom Bala Mandir has growing as well as historical links. The visit was coordinated by Ms Arthi, social worker in the Kinship Care programme, who helped arrange outings for the children.

On the first day of the visit, the children were taken for boating, visited the park, and saw the Krishnagiri dam. On the next day, the children enjoyed visiting farms to see cultivation. They also visited the house-cum-office of Ms Nalini Keshavraj from ARCOD, which is constructed to be completely eco-friendly. On the third day, the children travelled by train from Royakottai to Yeshwanthpur near Bengaluru to see the ISCKON temple there. On the final day of the trip, the children and chaperones visited Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur, and met Rev. Fr. Andrews, HOD, Department of Social Work, who explained the importance of education and demonstrated the ecofriendly projects done by the students. The children then enjoyed visiting Yelagiri Hills where they had lunch, and visited Cloud Forest Entertainment Park, where they saw various birds and rabbits, and went to the House of Horrors. Having thoroughly enjoyed this holiday, the children (reluctantly!) made their way back to Bala Mandir.



EXPRESS YOUR TALENT

A showcase event 'Express Your Talent' was held on 1st April in the Vikalpa Lab, for the SMHS students of Standard VI to VIII. The children created and demonstrated projects, such as automatic dustbins, paper circuits, etc. These interesting projects were appreciated by the attendees.



AHAGURU SHOWCASE EVENT

A showcase event was held by AhaGuru for the children of Vidyalaya. This was held on 1st April for the Bala Mandir Home children and the KaRe unit, and on 2nd April for the day scholars. Through the event the primary school children were able to exhibit their talents and skills in various activities. Parents were invited for the event, and were very happy to see their children participate in various activities – and some of them joined in for the activities as well!



KINSHIP CARE SUMMER CAMPS

This year saw the social workers of Kinship Care organize day long summer camps for the first time since the inception of the programme. The intent was to engage with the children during summer vacation, create a memorable day of outing and fun, improve children's self-esteem and self-confidence with opportunities to perform and to help form a community of mothers in the region. Social workers Saranya, Arul, Siva, Magendiran and Pradeep organized summer camps to engage with children and parents. In Chennai Saranya conducted a virtual camp for 20 children every day for a week and took the children on a creative trail to build and create a cartoon story. Siva organized a camp in Bala Mandir premises, where 34 children from Chengalpet and Kancheepuram, along with 26 adults, visited Bala Mandir for a day of fun activities. The Tiruvallur summer camp was well organized by Pradeep and Magendiran in the IRCDS office, in which 59 children with 33 parents and 4 guardians participated.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

To help the children understand and appreciate colours, '**Green Day**' was celebrated in the Creche, with all the children and teachers dressing up in green to mark the day. Activities such as this are part of the curriculum for the Creche.



Sports Day and Graduation Day were celebrated in the Creche in April. Sports Day was celebrated with Montessori related activities, which the children greatly enjoyed. Graduation Day was celebrated for the children moving to LKG, and they received hand-made medals and certificates in the presence of their parents.



As part of their CSR initiative, **Boeing** conducted a **science workshop** for students from Standard V to VIII on 29th April. Topics covered included photosynthesis, basic physics principles and nutrition. The workshop was made very interactive, and the children were also encouraged to showcase their talents at the end of the event.

Inter-school competitions were conducted by KESARI Higher Secondary School on 3rd April. 15 students from Standard V participated in this. From among them, 6 students won prizes in various competitions, such as village folk songs, drawing and Tamil speech.



The children of the Chennai Home enjoyed many **activities throughout the holiday break**. Some of these were conducted with the support of volunteers from Happy Reading and U&I, as well as individual volunteers like Ms Prasanna Ramesh and Ms Hema Sridharan.



On 26th June, the high school children along with the Inspector and staff of E3 Teynampet Police station attended a **Drug Awareness programme** held at Forum Hall, Vadapalani. Students from Loyola college presented an awareness program through street theatre and Parai Attam and Oyilattam.



BALU SIR SUMMER CAMP

The annual Balu Sir Summer Camp was held between 1st and 13th May, in memory of late Mr V Y Gaitonde, fondly known to the Bala Mandir children as Balu Sir. The event included his spirit of creativity and spreading joy, through classes for the senior and junior children in Art, Craft, Theatre, Mime and Dance. For the first time ever, the Summer Camp also had representation from MNC and Kinship Care, with three children from each of these units participating.

The Camp began on a sombre note, since a Member of Bala Mandir, Ms Punitha Ramalingam, had passed away in the early hours of 1st May. In lieu of the traditional inauguration ceremony that is held, the children sang bhajans in the memory of Ms Punitha.

Over the next twelve days, the children went through sessions handled by young professionals, who coached the children to help them bring out the best in themselves.

The Camp ended with a valedictory function on 13th May. The participating children showcased what they had learnt – through performances of dance, mime and a skit. Their art work was also displayed across the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. The parents, teachers, volunteers and other attendees of the event enjoyed the performances very much, and appreciated the children and resource persons for their efforts.

The Chief Guests for this event were Ms Sarada Jagan and Mr M S Jagan, long-time donors, who are now partnering with Bala Mandir for a volunteer-driven reading programme called Happy Reading. Both Chief Guests had a lively interaction with the children and asked them to make use of all opportunities provided to them.

Certificates were given to all the children who attended the Camp. Mementos were also presented to the resource persons as a token of appreciation from Bala Mandir.



Artwork display



Dance by the junior children



Group dance performance



Mime on 'Living in Harmony'



Semi classical dance by the senior girls



Skit to show how teamwork can help face obstacles



Tribal dance by the junior girls



Mr M S Jagan addresses the children



Ms Sarada Jagan shares her thoughts

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