



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We present to you a double edition of BM Connect, covering the happenings from July to December 2023. We regret the delay in the release of this long due newsletter due to some circumstances outside our control.

However, it has been great to flash back to the many events and fun activities that were peppered throughout the second half of the last calendar year. The usual 'special occasions', including Schools & MNC Annual Days, and Education Day and Founder's Day were celebrated during this period. We also had many new initiatives, including the launch of Bala Mandir blogs and a 'crowd funding' – for the first time in the history of the institution. These are covered in this newsletter, and we hope you will enjoy learning more about these interesting new ways of reaching out to people.

The children of Bala Mandir's different units had various outings, festival celebrations, and other activities to look forward to and participate in during this quarter, and these are covered in this newsletter as well.

As we release this, we are already looking forward to the next edition of BM Connect, which will cover the wonderful celebration of the 75th year of Bala Mandir. Do watch out for that! In the meantime, we hope you enjoy reading this issue. Do share your feedback with us at the email ID below.

Archana Natarajan, Editor
archana@balamandir.org

CONTENTS

From the Editor's Desk	1
MNC Annual Day	1
News Bits	2 & 3
Festivals & Celebrations	4 & 5
Vidyalaya Annual Day	6
SMHS Annual Day	6
MNC National Conference	7
MNC Samyam	7
Education Day	8
Founder's Day	8
Bala Mandir Family Get Together	9
Crowd Funding	10
Children's Corner	11 & 12
Bala Mandir Blogs	13
Michaung's Cyclone Impact	13
Outings	14
Madhuvan Inauguration	15
BMRF Mega Event	15
Kinship Care Camps	16
Long Service Awards	16

MNC ANNUAL DAY

The 34th Annual Day of the MNC unit of Bala Mandir was celebrated on 12th December 2023. The Chief Guest for the event was Mr V Sriram, columnist, writer and historian. Due to the rains and flooding at the time, the annual day celebration was scaled down to a prayer meet at the centre. The staff sang devotional songs and presented a dance.

Mrs Jaya Krishnaswamy, Patron of Bala Mandir, who turned 90 the previous day, was presented with a book – a compilation of thoughts, memories and good wishes from her associates. Mr V Sriram presented the book to her.

Mr V Sriram was appreciative of the 3 decades of journey of MNC. Mrs Jaya thanked everyone for the book and for all the cooperation and love she had received since the inception of MNC in 1989.



Editorial Board: Leela Natarajan Rukmini Amirapu Sudha Lakshmi Rao Ramesh N Vijayanthi D
Akila S Sushmitha Chandrasekhar Sangeetha Mani Archana Natarajan

NEWS BITS FROM AROUND BALA MANDIR

→ The play area near the Creche was filled with mud, which was difficult to play on. Member in Charge of Early Childhood, Ms Punitha Ramalingam, had wished to put in artificial turf in this area to ensure the children are protected. Following her unfortunate demise in May 2023, her daughters Ms Shivamala Miller and Ms Premamala Ramalingam took forward her wish. Through their support and involvement, the play area now has artificial turf, which the children enjoy playing on.



← Similar to 2022, Deloitte held a session for the children from Standard V to VIII as part of their Impact Day CSR initiative. This year they covered public speaking and making presentations. The children made individual presentations introducing themselves as part of this, which was a great learning experience for them.



→ The Rajasthan Youth Association donated 11 computers to the computer lab in SMHS, as well as library tables and chairs.



↑ The students from Vidyalaya attended two workshops on 'Writing a Book Review' in November, held in the British Council as a part of a Reading challenge program.



← A pioneering sustainability initiative was undertaken in five villages who are part of the Gummidipondi project, supported by Michelin Tyres. This was successfully empowered the local communities to take the ECCD initiatives forward in their own villages, through the creation of Village ECCD Committees (VEC).



→ On 23rd October 2023, the 100th birth anniversary of late Ms Vedam K (Vedamma), former Honorary General Secretary was observed. Vedamma's daughter, Ms Lakshmi Gopal, Member of Bala Mandir, graced the occasion, and she and a few others from Bala Mandir shared their memories with Vedamma.



↑ A new lift was installed in the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. This was inaugurated by long-time Member of Bala Mandir, Dr P J N Reddy.



← Refresher training programmes were conducted for the field staff who are working on the Gummidipondi project on early parenting. This included a training on craft work as well.

An Early Parenting Broadcasting Group was created on WhatsApp for 98 mothers of Kinship Care with infants and young children. Audio messages are sent in this group on topics such as brain development, physical development etc.

NEWS BITS FROM AROUND BALA MANDIR (CONTINUED)

→ Students from SMHS participated in Boeing's Family Event, Harmony. The children performed a skit and dances during the event. Boeing is a CSR partner of SMHS, and has been supporting various initiatives, including the Vikalpa Lab.



↑ As part of their CSR initiative, a team from Virtusa visited SMHS and distributed bags with a few notebooks and stationery items, and water bottles.



↑ **Storytelling Day** was celebrated in July 2023, as is done every year, with the students of Vidyalaya listening to stories by Ms Ambujavalli.



← Competitions were held for the students of SMHS from 7th November to 11th November, leading up to the celebration of Children's Day on 14th November 2023. The teachers put up a special performance on the day.



↑ The Under-14 SMHS Girls Throw Ball team was the Runner-up in the matches held in MCC School on 28th August.

→ Four students of Standard IX were taken to watch a live cricket one day international on 23rd October 2023 between India and Afghanistan in M A Chidambaram Stadium, Chepauk, as a part of Police Club initiative.



← The Rotary Club of Besant Nagar continued to support the children with physical disabilities who are part of the Bala Mandir MNC unit. Along with the splints and gaiters that they sponsor, they also provided 10 CP chairs, which are very useful for children with cerebral palsy.



↑ Free cycles were given to the students in Standard XII, by the government.

→ On 14th August 2023, for the occasion of Independence Day, four children participated in the fancy dress and drawing competitions conducted by the Madras Dyslexia Association and won prizes.



Karan from the Chennai Home, who is studying in Sankara School, participated in his school sports competitions, and won second prize in long jump.



↑ A vaccination camp was held in SMHS on 22nd December 2023, as an initiative by the government to give MMR-vaccination to all the students in school.

FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS

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



↑ Independence Day celebrations in the Chennai and Nagercoil Homes



↑ Independence Day celebrations in SMHS (left) and MNC (centre and right)



↑ Varalakshmi Viratham in Chennai Home

↑ Onam celebrations in SMHS

↑ Onam celebrations in Nagercoil



Krishna Janmashtami celebrations in various units of Bala Mandir:

↑ Left and centre: Chennai Home

↑ Right: Nagercoil Home

← Left: Creche

→ Right: Vidyalaya



FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS (CONTINUED)

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



↑ **Vinayaka Chaturthi** celebrations in the Chennai and Nagercoil Homes



↑ Drawing competition for **Chaturthi** in Vidyalaya



↑ **Gandhi Jayanthi** in the Nagercoil Home



↑ **Kolu** for **Navaratri** in the Chennai Home



↑ Music performance for **Navaratri**



↑ **Saraswati Pooja** in the Nagercoil Home



↑ **Kolu** for **Navaratri** in the Creche

→ **Diwali** in the Chennai Home included a talk by Karan (Standard X) about the importance of a noiseless celebration. The children enjoyed with sparklers and simple fireworks, avoiding bombs and noisy crackers.



↑ **Diwali** celebration in Vidyalaya



↑ Celebrations in Nagercoil: **Karthigai** (left), **Children's Day** (centre) and **Veer Bal Diwas** (right)



↑ **Christmas** celebrations in various units (L to R): Chennai Home, Nagercoil Home, MNC and Creche

VIDYALAYA ANNUAL DAY

Vidyalaya Annual Day was celebrated on 26th August 2023. The theme for the event was **‘Values: Pathway to Success’**. Dr Revathi Parameswaran, Principal, P S Senior Secondary School was the Chief Guest for this event. The children presented a dance, a song and dramas in Tamil & English. ‘Best Teacher’ awards were given out as well.



SMHS ANNUAL DAY

Satyamurthi Higher Secondary School Annual Day was celebrated on 19th August 2023. Dr G J Manohar, Headmaster & Correspondent of MCC Higher Secondary School was the Chief Guest. The children of SMHS presented a cultural programme on the day, including a dance, a skit, a mime and a song. Awards were given to the best students.



EDUCATION DAY

The Annual Education Day celebration was held on 15th July 2023, on the birthday of Bala Mandir's Founder and first President, Karmaveerar Kamarajar. Justice Prabha Sridevan (Retd.), Trustee of Bala Mandir, was the Chief Guest for the day. The children performed a villuppaattu on the life of Kamarajar, and also performed a Tamil tableau on the connection of Kamarajar with Bala Mandir.



FOUNDER'S DAY

Founder's Day was celebrated on 22nd September 2023. The Chief Guest for the day was Dr Radhakrishnan, Commissioner, Greater Chennai Corporation. The children performed a villuppaattu on Bala Mandir founder Manjumma's life, and reminiscences about her were shared by those who had been associated with her. Since Manjumma loved music very much, a music programme has become a part of the celebration to honour her memory. This year the programme was by Ms Sudha Lakshmi Rao, who entertained the attendees.

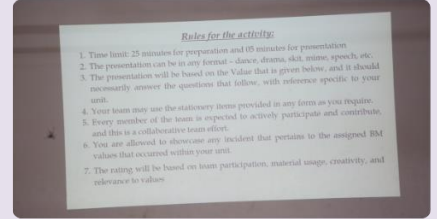


BALA MANDIR FAMILY GET TOGETHER

The Annual Bala Mandir Family Get Together – where Members and staff across all units come together – was held on 23rd September 2023, as a continuation of the Founder's Day celebrations.

The staff were divided into 9 teams, and these teams chose a Bala Mandir value, which they were then asked to depict through presentation, skit, mime or any other creative medium. The talents of the staff were showcased during this event. The teams thoroughly enjoyed meeting up, sharing ideas and getting to know each other better, which was the main aim of this event.

The team of Mr S Krishnan, Ms Rukmini Amirapu and Ms Sudha Lakshmi Rao were the judges for the event, and they shared their thoughts at the end of the programme.



CROWD FUNDING

Hon. Treasurer, **Mr P Natarajan**, shares details about the crowdfunding activity held in October 2023

The Kinship Care project was at a critical stage in October 2023 and a decision had to be made on whether to expand beyond the 9 districts around Chennai. This decision was dependent on the comfort of long-term funding. The options of crowdfunding was strongly recommended by some well wishers. However, there was a concern that this approach may not be aligned to Bala Mandir's normal low-profile methods. Also, there was a cost associated with raising funds by this method. After much discussion and debate, it was decided to go ahead.

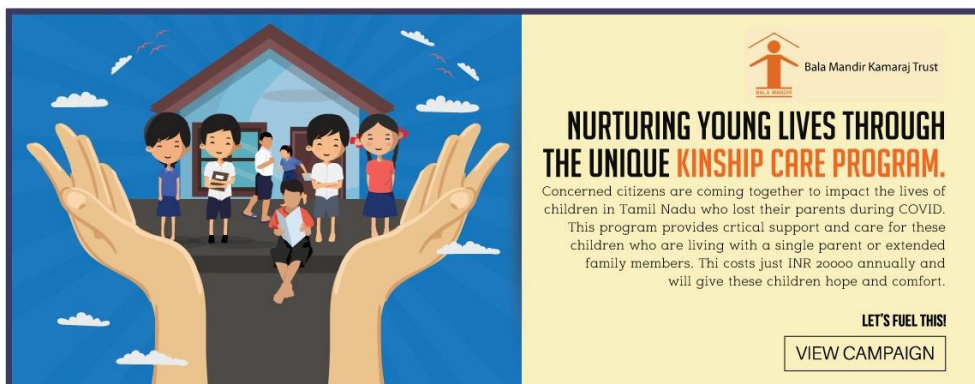
Crowdfunding is a method of raising capital through the collective effort of several individuals by soliciting contributions from a large number of people, who contribute purely with the desire to support the cause, the person, or the project. One of the significant advantages of crowdfunding is that it not only provides a source of capital but also serves to validate ideas and build a community around a project or cause. These additional benefits made the case for crowd funding more compelling even though unlike the normal crowd funding projects, this cause was an ongoing one.

Bala Mandir decided to work with an established crowdfunding platform – Fuel a Dream, a company based in Bangalore. This company guided Bala Mandir to follow its well-structured process which was based on many years of experience in similar fund-raising projects. The key success factor turned out to be the choice of volunteers who owned this exercise and took individual fundraising targets and promoted 'their own crowdfunding campaign' with friends and family, who could then contribute to Bala Mandir and this programme.

The other important factor was the definition of the project for which the donations would be raised. The Kinship Care project was an appealing project and supporting children in need is always an emotionally satisfying act for anyone. On the top of these the widespread goodwill of Bala Mandir ensured that the project had many inherent positives. For the 50 volunteers the initial target of Rs. 50 lakhs turned out to be not so challenging and they managed to raise double the amount over two weeks. The success of the project not only enabled the expansion of the Kinship Care project to 5 new districts in the Coimbatore region but also gave Bala Mandir the confidence to re-run this campaign every year.

It was a new experience for almost all the volunteers who had never asked anyone for donations and support. Each of them came out of their comfort zone for this project and had some new learning experience. Volunteers were based all over the country and one of them even operated from USA while on a trip there. This exercise was restricted to Indian citizens and hence his target donors were all in India.

After the successful completion of the campaign, a get together of the volunteers was organised at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre to thank the volunteers and share the experience. A large proportion of the Chennai based volunteers attended the get together despite a threat of impending storm.



A blog by one of the volunteers, posted in the Bala Mandir website, captures some of the learnings from the crowd funding project (click to read): <https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2024/02/13/fundraising/>

Bala Mandir looks forward to doing crowdfunding as an annual fundraiser for the Kinship Care project.

MNC NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The National Workshop organized by MNC on 17th and 18th November 2023 was the 17th in the series of National Workshops on Early Intervention in Intellectual Disability and Associated Conditions, with focus both on medical and early intervention training aspects. The theme of the Workshop this year was ‘Early Intervention with Parental Involvement – A Continuous Learning Experience.’

In the deliberations of sessions at the Workshop, MNC presented a sharing of experiences by experts who, with their immense repertoire of expertise in the areas of multiple aspects of development, provided hands on experience for all the delegates, and, in particular, to all service providers.

The central theme – early intervention with parental involvement – was discussed elaborately with the sub themes of:

- Early intervention and its importance
- Early intervention and support system
- Early intervention as the foundation for inclusion and
- Early intervention life skills for employability

The chief guest at the inaugural function was Mr N Kumar, President, Bala Mandir. The chief guest at the Valedictory function was Mr K Kamal Kishore, IAS Director, Department of the Welfare of Differently Abled Persons, Chennai.

About 126 delegates from various special schools, government departments, and NGOs participated. The recommendations arising from the deliberations were submitted to Mr Kamal Kishore for review and action.



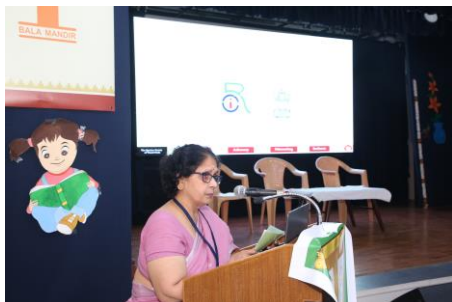
Mr N Kumar inaugurating the 17th National Workshop



Keynote address delivered by Mrs Maya Gaitonde



Dr Rema Chandaramohan, Director ICH, Chennai talking on Early Detection and Intervention



Mrs L V Jayasree, Director SPASTN giving her presentation



Mrs Priya Rajkumar of Maithree giving her presentation on Post EI



Mr K Kamal Kishore, IAS, giving the certificate of participation to a delegate

MNC SAMYAM

The annual Samyam event of MNC, which brings together past and present students, and new entrants, was held on 22nd July 2023. The Chief Guest for the event was Mrs B Senthamilselvi, Founder Principal of Kumaran Special School in Ennore – mother of two children who are alumni of MNC. The children and parents put on a cultural show. A panel discussion was held among parents on the challenges they face.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

→ **Flowers Day** was celebrated in the Creche in November. The children performed to rhymes based on flowers.



↑ In August, **mass chanting of the Bhagavad Geetha** was done by the children for world peace, in commemoration of the Mahasamadhi of Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda.

← Volunteers conducted **classes for the children in the Chennai Home** during the Dusshera holidays, including on arts and crafts, storytelling, math and spelling, and active listening.



→ The students of SMHS enjoyed celebrating **Air Force Day** in October.



↑ The **children of the Infants and Toddlers Block** had various activities conducted for them in the Dusshera holidays, including drawing, colouring and craft work.

← Student volunteers from Loyola College Interact club conducted a **team building event** for students of SMHS



← Activities were conducted in the Vikalpa Lab in SMHS to celebrate **International STEM Day** in November.



→ The students of SMHS were encouraged to use the **telescope in the Vikalpa Lab** on Edwin Hubble's birthday.



← The Vidyalaya students (both boys and girls) enjoyed **Just for Kicks** football classes.



→ **Yoga Day** was celebrated in Vidyalaya with yoga demonstrations.



CHILDREN'S CORNER (CONTINUED)

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

→ The children in the Chennai Home are divided into three clubs. During the period from July to December, each of the three clubs conducted **fun activities and meetings**.



← Ms Swarna Rani, Inspector, ACTU, Nagercoil, spoke to the girls in the Nagercoil Home about the **POCSO Act**.

→ A quiz was conducted as part of the **Learning Links Program** in SMHS.



→ 12 students of SMHS participated in a state level **drawing competition** conducted by Decathlon in July.



→ **Red Day** was celebrated in Vidyalaya, with the children learning about different red coloured items.



← Students of SMHS watched, as **Chandrayaan 3**, the third in a series of lunar exploration missions by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) landed on the moon near the lunar south pole. This special event sparked a lot of interest in space missions and rockets among the children.



← Rotary Club held **Interact Club** activities in SMHS, to help the children develop public speaking skills.

→ The **Road Safety Patrol** of SMHS restarted under the guidance of the E3 Teynampet police.



→ **Value Education classes** were conducted on various topics, such as cleanliness and waste management.



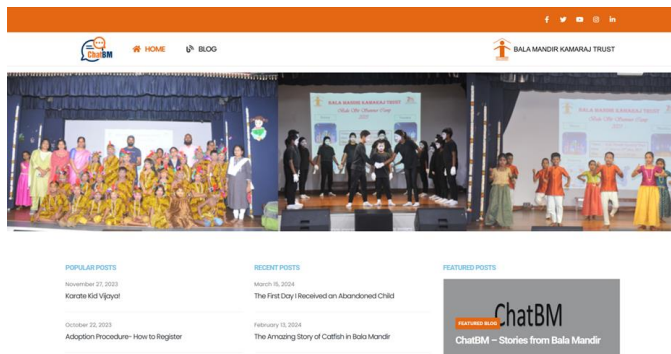
← Students from SMHS participated in the **national level drawing competition** conducted by Kalabharti Art Development Institute.

The Bala Mandir website now provides the possibility of hosting “Blogs” – called **ChatBM**. The blogs are open to all to write and express thoughts, feelings and experiences on any topic which is relevant and linked in some way to the Bala Mandir’s activities. Each blog should ideally be no more than 200-300 words. Rules for blogging have been defined and a Bala Mandir’s Member – Ms Rukmini Amirapu – helps to whet and post the blogs on the website, with the support of Ms Sushmitha C. Readers are encouraged to write blogs and send them to minnie@balamandir.org.

So far, many blogs have been published on various topics and the numbers are expected to increase when more people get to know about the blogs and start sharing. There is also provision to comment on the blogs and take forward the discussion on the topic. Do check out some interesting blogs related to – Stories written by Kinship Care social workers, Adoption processes, Poem on Manjumma, Diwali donors, Flooding of Bala Mandir, Cricket, Crowd founding and many more.

Blogs can be accessed at:

<https://blog.balamandir.org/online/>



MICHAUNG CYCLONE’S IMPACT

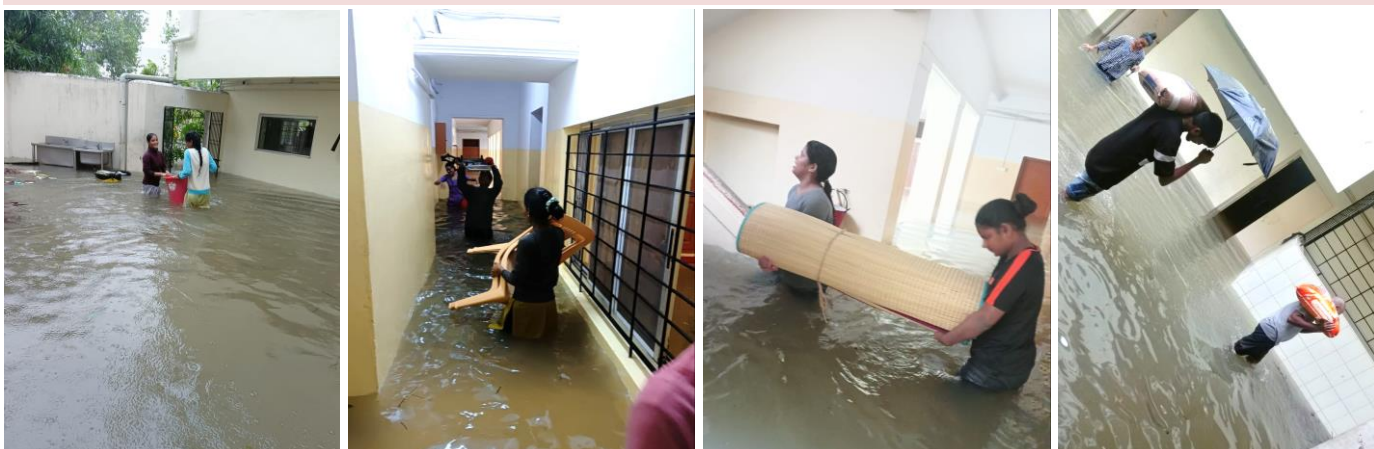
On 4th December 2023, Chennai experienced one more of the mega cyclone events that the city has come to expect every year. Michaung cyclone brought the entire city to a standstill with heavy rains and water logging across the different places. Being one of the low-lying areas, the Bala Mandir main campus was totally flooded, with water rising so high that it entered the Main Office building, which is one of the higher points in the campus. The ground floor of all the buildings were under water, leading to some loss of material which was lying there.

The Bala Mandir emergency response processes got triggered automatically and all children were shifted to the first floor and arrangements were made for their well-being. Since the Kitchen was flooded with water, food was cooked by the staff and social workers in the respective sections, for which supplies were brought from the main kitchen. Preparation was made for a long haul in terms of diesel storage for DG operation to ensure electricity supply, and other emergency measures. However, the recovery process was surprisingly fast. Once the rain stopped the water level outside started receding as the water started flowing out through the newly revamped storm water drains. This enabled the pumps installed in the premises to come into effect and start pumping water out. Though this took 24 hours, Bala Mandir relatively recovered faster than many other parts of the city.

The cyclone did create a lot of havoc and losses and the biggest of these was the loss of two big trees, one of them probably 100 years old. A blog written in the Bala Mandir web site under the section on “Nature and Sustainability” compares the 2023 flooding with the peak flooding we had in 2015. It makes an interesting reading, as also another blog in the same section on the story of catfish which were found in Bala Mandir. For the children these fishes inside Bala Mandir will remain a talking point about the floods!

Given here is the link where you can find these blogs (click to read):

<https://blog.balamandir.org/online/category/blog/nature-and-sustainability/>



OUTINGS

Over the six months, the children from various units went for many outings to different interesting places. Let's take a look at some of these outings!



↑ Children from SMHS Standard XI and XII visited Pondicherry in July 2023



↑ Children from the Chennai Home visited the aquarium



← and →
Children from
Standard V to X in
SMHS visited the
Vandalur Zoo in the
month of July 2023



↑ Children from the Nagercoil Home went to the circus in August 2023, and enjoyed themselves very much!



↑ Children from the Chennai Home visited the temple and homes of Members during Navaratri



← As part of the
Christmas
holiday
programme, the
children from
the Home in
Chennai went to
various places
for outings,
including the
Egmore
museum,
gurdwara,
planetarium and
religious places
of different
faiths



INAUGURATION OF MADHUVAN

As part of the JIVIKAM in MNC, the children from age 6 upwards with intellectual disability are being trained with a practical hands-on individualized programme towards occupation in their adult years. One of the occupations selected is gardening. Towards this, 'Madhuvan' was conceptualised – a teacher-parent-child group where they get together to 'create' an herbal nursery. Ms Shoba Menon and the team from Nizhal (resource partners for 'Madhuvan') worked with MNC to draw up the plan and provided hand-holding and support for implementation.

In Madhuvan, small patches were created for the children to make it easy for them to water, weed and maintain the plants. Herbal and medicinal plants like tulsi, as well as some vegetables, were planted.

The inauguration of Madhuvan was held on 8th September 2023, and the Chief Guest who performed the inauguration was Dr K Balabaskar of NIEPMD. He stressed the need for the parents to be patient and consistent in their efforts to appreciate the progress made by the children over time.

The garden is taking shape, and the children are getting acquainted with the tasks for maintaining it.



BMRRC MEGA EVENT

The Bala Mandir Research & Resource Centre (BMRRC, earlier Bala Mandir Research Foundation) conducted a 'Mega Event' in Gummidipondi. The event was planned with support from Michelin Tyres, which provides CSR support for the ECCD parenting project in Gummidipondi. For this event, Michelin sponsored the transport for villagers from their respective villages to the event, as well as refreshments for the participants.

The main aim of the mega event was to create awareness among all the people participating, on the 'Importance of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)' through a street play and to reinforce the same among those participants who were aware of the same. An external event management organisation supported in preparing and performing the play. Prior to the event, pamphlets were printed and distributed in the villages, highlighting the programme details. The village presidents, local governance, volunteers, ward members, Anganwadi teachers, helpers etc. were also invited to participate in the programme.

Due to bad weather, the programme had to be postponed three times, and was finally held on 19th December 2023. Along with Ms Janani, Assistant Manager, CSR from Michelin Tyres, Ms Rukmini Amirapu (Member in Charge, BMRRC) and Dr Bindu R (Director, BMRRC) participated in the programme. A brief pamphlet on parenting was also launched and distributed as part of this. Participants enjoyed the street play, which went on for 45 minutes, thoroughly. The content of the programme was given to BMRRC in the form of audio recording for future use. Children participated in dancing, fancy dress and singing. These children were encouraged with prizes for their participation. More than 350 people, including AWC parents, grandmothers, AWC teachers, helpers, village presidents, ward members, other visitors, etc., participated in the mega event.



KINSHIP CARE CAMPS

A Medical Camp was organised in Tiruparamkundram on 6th August 2023, in collaboration with RUWSEC – a first in Kinship Care. The camp included assessment of the nutritional status of the children, clinical screening for nutritional deficiency, and screening for common medical conditions, vision, and dental. RUWSEC gave away free supplements and advised parents on the right food to be provided. They also provided detailed reports and follow-ups on each child.

A Camp was held in Tiruvannamalai, where 48 children accompanied by 27 parents participated. Members in charge of Kinship Care addressed the parents, and also spoke to them one-on-one. The social workers engaged the children through the day. It was a good event and elicited positive feedback from the attendees.



LONG SERVICE AWARDS

Long Service Awards were given to those who completed 5, 10 and 15 years of service with Bala Mandir in September 2023 (during Teachers’ Day for Education and MNC units, and during Founder’s Day for the other units). Staff who complete 20+ years with Bala Mandir are usually felicitated during the Anniversary on 10th March; however, this year these staff members were also awarded during the Founder’s Day celebrations, keeping in mind the 75th year functions.

Awardees for 20, 25 and 30 years



Ms Mala BM – 30 years



Ms Usha Rani B – 30 years



Mr Panneerselvam S – 30 years



Ms Geetha V – 25 years



Ms Vasantha K – 25 years



Ms Jeyasree V R – 20 years

Awardees for 5, 10 and 15 years

5 years

- Lizy Pushpalatha S (Education)
- Bharathi S (MNC)
- Sangeetha M (Administration)

10 years

- Latha R (Home)
- Vijayanthi Desikan (MNC)
- Thenmozhi C (MNC)
- Thangathai V (MNC)
- Premila Devi K (MNC)
- Sushmitha C (BMRRC)
- Sulochana R (Administration)

15 years

- Padmavathi M (Home)
- Poonguzhali S (Education)
- Gunasundari A (Education)

Published by: Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust
Phone: +91 44 4867 9207

Address: No. 8, G.N.Chetty Road, T.Nagar, Chennai 600 017
Email: main@balamandir.org **Website:** www.balamandir.org