

From the Editor's Desk

BM Connect, as the name suggests, intricately knits together the activities of the various units of Bala Mandir to create a harmonious whole that upholds the child-centric ethos of the institution. The past quarter has been a season of sanctity, celebrating the divine feminine energy, sparkling festivities and the joy of giving. The ten days of Navarathri saw the staff and children of Bala Mandir at the height of creativity with four kolus set up at different locations on the campus. Deepavali was a time of love, light and laughter with children wearing new clothes and setting off noiseless fireworks in consideration of the environment. Christmas celebrations were joyful and colourful with the little ones at the crèche dressed up as tiny Santas and angels. Children's Day is of great significance in Bala Mandir and the students participated in events and competitions and were made aware of their rights and safety. As you read on, you will discover the many interesting and informative events that took place, a highlight of the quarter being the Legal Education Seminar held to honour the memory of Mr Govind Swaminadhan, one of the stalwarts of the institution.

As the year rolls to an end, we should take a moment to reflect on our journey – the evolving and the learning, the challenges and the triumphs, the opportunities and the experiences that marked the year gone by. The new year dawns with a promise of renewed purpose, continued resilience, fresh perspectives and a resurgent commitment towards the uplift of the less-fortunate. May the dawn of the new year be a time of reflection and renewal for each member of the Bala Mandir family. Happy New Year 2025! Till next time!

Rukmini Amirapu

minnie@balamandir.org

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Legal Education - Inspiring School Students to Take Law as a Career

Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust conducted its 8th Shri S. Govind Swaminadhan Legal Education Programme in November 2024 at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. This event saw the participation of almost 50 Class 10 & 11 students from various city schools. The Late Sri S Govind Swaminadhan was a Trustee and President of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust. The objective of this programme is to create a positive impact in the minds of the students regarding law and its practice as a profession. The programme had lawyers T Mohan, Aparna Venkatraman, Advaidh Nelakanttan, Sahaana Srivatsan helping to formulate it. Mr Justice N Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court presided over the programme and eminent lawyers from the legal fraternity addressed the high school students.

The Judge said that being a lawyer is not only a vocation, it is a calling to serve the society. Honesty and hard work will pay rich dividends. He spoke about his own experiences as a student, where he veered towards law because of a liking for the subject. N C Vishal, Advocate, Anand & Anand, Suhrith Parthasarathy, Advocate & Journalist, Charulatha Rajaji, Advocate, Lakshmikumaran & Sridharan Attorneys, N S Tanvi and A Yogeshwaran, both independent lawyers and Vinay Aravind, advocate- turned - photographer / writer spoke of their individual law practices, under the umbrella subject of 'Law as a Career'. Later, the students were given an opportunity to interact with each of them to discuss their interests and aptitudes. Justice Anand Venkatesh spent considerable time to participate in each of the group discussions.



Navarathri - Prayers, Poojas and Golu

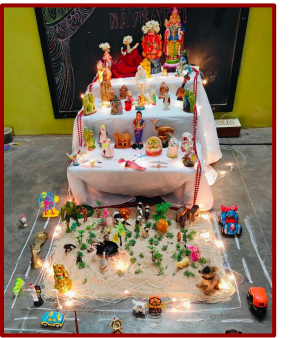
BM Children’s Home, BM Vidyalaya and Sathyamurthi School students and staff celebrated Navarathri with prayers and poojas as well as Golu, where colourful dolls were decked up and displayed.

For Saraswathi Pooja, registers, books and educational materials were kept for blessing. At SMHS, the event featured devotional songs sung by girl students, creating a divine atmosphere. At the Navarathri celebrations spread over 9 days, the children of the Bala Mandir Home recited the Ashtotharam (108 names) of three goddesses: Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga, concluding with a prayer and Aarathi every day.

On Vijayadasami Day, new junior toddlers who were to join the school for the first time, participated in Akshara Abhyas (writing the first alphabet in rice), with the help of senior children. At the Nagercoil Home, the children prepared a Golu display and special prayers and poojas were conducted for nine days.



@ BM Home



Deepavali - Victory of Light over Darkness

Deepavali is a time for some fun, frolic and gaiety. There’s brightness and colour all around and true to its name, the Festival of Lights! Across all units at Bala Mandir, this joy and happiness spreads, lighting up the children's’ faces with smiles. At Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children, it's all about children and their mothers. There was a fancy dress competition where the little ones dressed up as characters aligned to the topic - Deepavali. After the fancy dress competition, the children and mothers lit a lamp and decorated the front yard welcoming the festival of lights to brighten their lives and bring happiness and cheer to all. Sweets and small participation gifts were distributed to all children and the day came to end on a joyful note.



At both Bala Mandir Satyamurthi School and Bala Mandir Vidyalaya, Deepavali was celebrated with lots of gaiety. The students of SMHS delivered insightful speeches on the significance of Deepavali and its cultural and spiritual importance. The teachers stressed on the required safety measures and shared valuable lessons on the true spirit of Deepavali - the victory of light over darkness. The kindergarten children at BMV celebrated Deepavali with a difference, with sand pasting and colouring activities. The children from BM Home, wearing new clothes, as is customary, went in the morning to the nearby Padmavathi Thayar temple and Bala Mandir temple, accompanied by the staff. A special lunch with *vadai* and *payasam* followed. Later in the evening, the children had a wonderful time lighting sparklers. Being environment-friendly, no noisy fireworks were used. For safety reasons, the children were divided into groups and stationed at different locations. The children at Nagercoil Home were treated to new clothes, special delicacies and they celebrated by bursting firecrackers.

It's Children's Day...All The Way !

Ms Adithi Arunkumar from 'Make A Difference' was the Chief Guest at Bala Mandir Satyamurthi School to celebrate Children's Day on November 14. Exciting competitions, eco-friendly fashion created out of waste materials, Mandala Art and Master Chef cooking without fire, were held in the school's Vikalpa Lab. These events encouraged creativity, innovation, and teamwork. The teachers presented an entertaining skit and dedicated songs to the students, adding to the festive atmosphere.

At Bala Mandir Vidyalaya Nursery and Primary School (BMV), students of KG classes were taught to sing/recite rhymes on Jawaharlal Nehru, recite selections from Thirukkural and colouring activity and creating wealth out of waste. Prizes were distributed by Ms Mala from MDA and Ms Aeina Devi and Ms Sneha, members of Inner Wheel Club, Chennai.

Inter-School Competition

BM Vidyalaya organised, for the first time, a Children's Day Inter-School Competition on November 9. About 130 students from schools around T Nagar participated in the event - Dr K N Kesari Nursery & Primary School, Karnataka Sangha, Vidyodaya School, Ramakrishna Mission Boys School, Sarada Vidyalaya School, Vidyaniketan School, Anjuman Primary School, Ramakrishna Mission Matriculation School and Ramakrishna Mission Hr. Sec School (South).

The children of Primary classes exhibited their talents in drawing, handwriting, singing and speech. Spell Bee and Picture Quiz added a different colour to the event as it was greatly enjoyed by the participants. Anjuman Primary School bagged the All-Round Winner's trophy



@ BM Children's Home

The month of November was filled with engaging activities and events to celebrate the spirit of childhood and raise awareness about the importance of child safety.

On the occasion of Children's Day, all the children at BM Children's Home took an oath to uphold the rights and safety of children across the world. It was a moment of reflection and commitment to ensuring the well-being of children everywhere.

To raise awareness about child safety, a series of competitions were conducted from November 14 to 19, as part of the initiative by the Department of Social Welfare and Special Services. The competitions, aimed at engaging children creatively while educating them on important social issues. These activities not only highlighted important life skills but also helped children appreciate their cultural heritage, the significance of education, and the values of diversity and unity.

Children from Class 4 attended the World Children's Day celebration at Taj Coromandel, organised by UNICEF. The theme of the event was 'Listen to the Future'. Speeches were delivered by the Minister and Secretary of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department, along with the Special Secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department. Children from various schools participated in the event, contributing to a meaningful exchange of ideas about child rights and safety.

In Nagercoil, cultural programmes were performed by the staff at the Home to celebrate Children's Day



@ BM Creche

A puppet show was organised by the teachers on the occasion of Children's Day. The teachers narrated a story on animals which the children enjoyed.



Christmas - Merriment and Joy...Carols and Skits

Similar to the festival of Deepavali which is celebrated by people of all faiths, Christmas too transcends all barriers and is celebrated by everyone.

Children across all units of Bala Mandir Home and Schools were involved in various fun-filled activities and events to make Christmas an enjoyable occasion.

At **Vidyalaya**, the KG Section got busy with paper pasting activity and performed a dance to a Christmas song. The Primary class students presented two songs, a dance and a skit on the theme - *Why do we celebrate Christmas?*

For the **Satyamurthi School's** students, volunteers from Ayanavaram Church organised a Christmas-themed puppet show depicting good values, conduct, discipline, and manners. The children also sang Christmas carols along with the volunteers. The programme aimed to instil good values and promote positive behaviour among the students.

Santa Claus visited **BM MNC** and there was merriment in the air. Teachers sang Christmas carols and a small chapter from the Bible was read, after which the children staged a tableau on the birth of Jesus. There was music and dance and gifts galore. The spirit of the season was visible in the fun the children and parents were having.

The **BM Children's Home** at Chennai and Nagercoil were equally enthusiastic in celebrating Christmas. At the latter Centre, the children made a crib to self-learn the story and significance of Christmas and decorated the tree with lights, ornaments and stars. Children of both Homes performed a drama about the birth of Jesus, danced and sang carols. Special food was arranged for them.

Our special thanks to Ms Miranda Corti, a long-time friend of Bala Mandir for her loving sponsorship of the Christmas celebrations every year for the Children's Home, Chennai.



@ BM Vidyalaya

@ BM SMHS



@ BM MNC

@ Nagercoil Home



@ Chennai Home

News from BM Home

Remembering Sri Kamaraj and Gandhiji

October 2nd, birth anniversary of Gandhiji, is also the death anniversary of Sri Kamaraj. Children from Bala Mandir Home visited Kamarajar Illam, offered flowers and sang bhajans to mark the inspiration behind the founding of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust. Later on the same day, volunteers from the NGO, Alert, visited Bala Mandir to celebrate their 18th anniversary. They interacted with the children, conducted various activities, and gave a speech about Gandhiji's life. A student of Class 9 drew a picture of Gandhiji with the help of teacher Abitha.

The next day, children from Classes 1 to 5 were taken on a field trip to Guindy Park, along with the staff of BM Home. It was a fun-filled, educational journey for them.

At the Nagercoil Home, social activist Krishna Veni was the Chief Guest and she delivered a wonderful speech on Gandhiji for the benefit of the children.

Visit by CWC

On November 26, a special inspection was conducted by the CWC and the Police Department. The staff visited Bala Mandir to verify the manual documents and inspect our residence.



Honouring All Religions

On November 23, the birthday of Satya Sai Baba, BM Children's Home celebrated the Sarvadharm Festival, a beautiful occasion to honour all religions. The Primary children performed a dance on *Nalla Thamarai*, depicting the values of Truth, Dharma, Love, and Non-violence. The high school children also performed a dance celebrating the concept that all religions are one, followed by bhajans that resonated with the message of unity and peace.

Mahakavi Subramania Bharathiyar's birthday was celebrated on November 30, when the members from Heartfulness Meditation conducted speech, dance, poetry and essay writing competitions for the children of the Nagercoil Home.

The birthday of Shri Guru Gobind Singh on December 26, was observed as Veer Bal Diwas at the Nagercoil Home as requested by the District Child Protection Unit. Essay writing, storytelling, poetry reciting and drawing competitions were conducted for the children.





@BM Vidyalaya

Wealth out of Waste

Sixteen students of Bala Mandir Vidyalaya from Class 2 to 5 participated in the *Wealth out of Waste* competition held at Wonder Diamond Shop, G N Chetty Road, on December 7, 2024. This event provided them with a valuable opportunity to enhance their self-confidence and communication skills in a real-world setting.

By taking part in the competition, the students were able to showcase their creativity, and practice public speaking while presenting their projects. This experience also promoted teamwork, collaboration and practical skills, contributing to their overall personal growth. Students received participation certificates and a gift kit.

Child Safety

An activity for students of classes 3 to 5 was conducted by 'Safe Schools' team on child safety on December 6.

Just for Kicks

BM Whales A and BM Whales B teams, played 3 league football matches each and won all the three on December 10, 2024 at Kotturpuram Govt ground, Chennai. Rohith, Manikandan, Jeeva, Mahesh, Roshini and Samyuktha were declared as players of the match.

Joy of Giving

'Joy of Giving' week was celebrated from December 9 to 20. Class teachers addressed the students on the theme - **Joy of Giving**. Parents were informed that this initiative is to instill the value of kindness and empathy in children. The items collected were given to Ms Lovena, Ex- KaRe staff to be distributed to the families of migrant workers.

Community Engagement

An awareness and community engagement programme was conducted in Vidyalaya in association with Bhumi Foundation on December 21. Parents from the community attended and participated in the games.



News from BM Schools...

@ BM Satyamurthi School

Promoting Tamil Literature

Promoting Tamil language, literature and culture was the focus at the inaugural Tamil Ilakkiya Mandram programme, held in October at SMHS. Students enthusiastically participated in various competitions, including debates, poetry recitation, Thirukural recitation and Bharathiyar songs, demonstrating their passion for Tamil language and literature.

Love for Football

The students of Class 6 at SMHS participated in the 'Just for Kicks' football tournament held at Nehru Park on October 29. The team displayed exceptional skills, winning their first match with an impressive score of 4-0. Although they put up a strong fight, the team unfortunately couldn't secure the top spot in the finals. They may not have taken home the championship title, but the students demonstrated remarkable teamwork, sportsmanship and enthusiasm, throughout the tournament.

An English Language Festival

The Satyamurthi English Fest, held on November 8, marked a significant milestone as the inaugural event of the school's English Club. The programme witnessed vibrant participation from the students, who showcased their linguistic skills and creativity through various competitions. Renowned social entrepreneur and cofounder of Sukha Foundation, Ms. Sanjana, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, inspiring students with her presence. Students enthusiastically engaged in competitions such as poem recitation, handwriting, tongue twister, reading marathon, and several others, demonstrating their enthusiasm for English language and literature. The event provided a platform for students to hone their communication skills, build confidence, and foster a love for English.

Integrating Samacheer Curriculum

The Rotary Club of Madras, in collaboration with TATA Class Edge, has generously sponsored an education set-up with preloaded contents to SMHS. This innovative platform integrates the Samacheer curriculum with engaging multimedia resources, including videos, interactive quizzes, worksheets and fun activities. Teachers have found this tool to be an invaluable asset in delivering subject content with ease, while students eagerly anticipate and thoroughly enjoy these interactive sessions.

Developing Financial Literacy

SMHS students had the opportunity to interact with the professionals from Deloitte India, who conducted an Impact Day programme to improve Financial Literacy, a vital life skill that's essential for making informed decisions about money management.

This year's programme was well planned, with a workbook created by the Programme Coordinator, Deepa Senthilrajan, Manager | Technology & Transformation - EAD: Engineering, Deloitte South Asia LLP, Chennai. Each student received a comprehensive kit containing the workbook, a book on money handling suitable for their grade level, and stationery. This interactive approach helped students understand complex financial concepts in a relatable and engaging way. Thirty-eight volunteers, including senior staff members of Deloitte, participated in the programme.



Bala Mandir Kinship Care - Where Every Child Matters

Kinship Care events are organised in every district to serve as a platform for the beneficiaries to meet the Management and get to know more about Bala Mandir and its programmes. During this year, the events coincided with the 75th year celebrations of Bala Mandir, making these more important.

The Vellore Kinship Care event was held on October 20, 2024, with 103 children from 55 families. Government officials from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) addressed the parents, discussing relevant government schemes, child safety, and the importance of education. The parents shared their experiences and asked questions. The Class 10 children were engaged in a discussion of their future plans and career aspirations. Many parents expressed their gratitude and shared positive experiences. Fun games and a variety of art and craft activities were organised for the children, who enthusiastically participated in all the events.



The Tiruppur and Coimbatore district event was held in Coimbatore on November 17, with around 250 parents and children participating. Since the parents have been with the Kinship Care programme for less than a year, it was a wonderful opportunity for most of them to understand the various features of the programme and the policies. The meet also helped the single mothers gain some comfort from the fact that there were many more like them and the programme features helped build confidence about the support they can expect in future for their children’s education and other needs.

The Chief Guest, Dr Bhuvaneshwari, Paediatrician from Shivanjali Hospital, addressed the gathering on the importance of ‘Nutrition and Diet’ especially for children. The children enjoyed participating in the games organised by the social workers and enjoyed a wholesome lunch after the event. There was an optional one-to-one session for some of the parents who needed counselling.



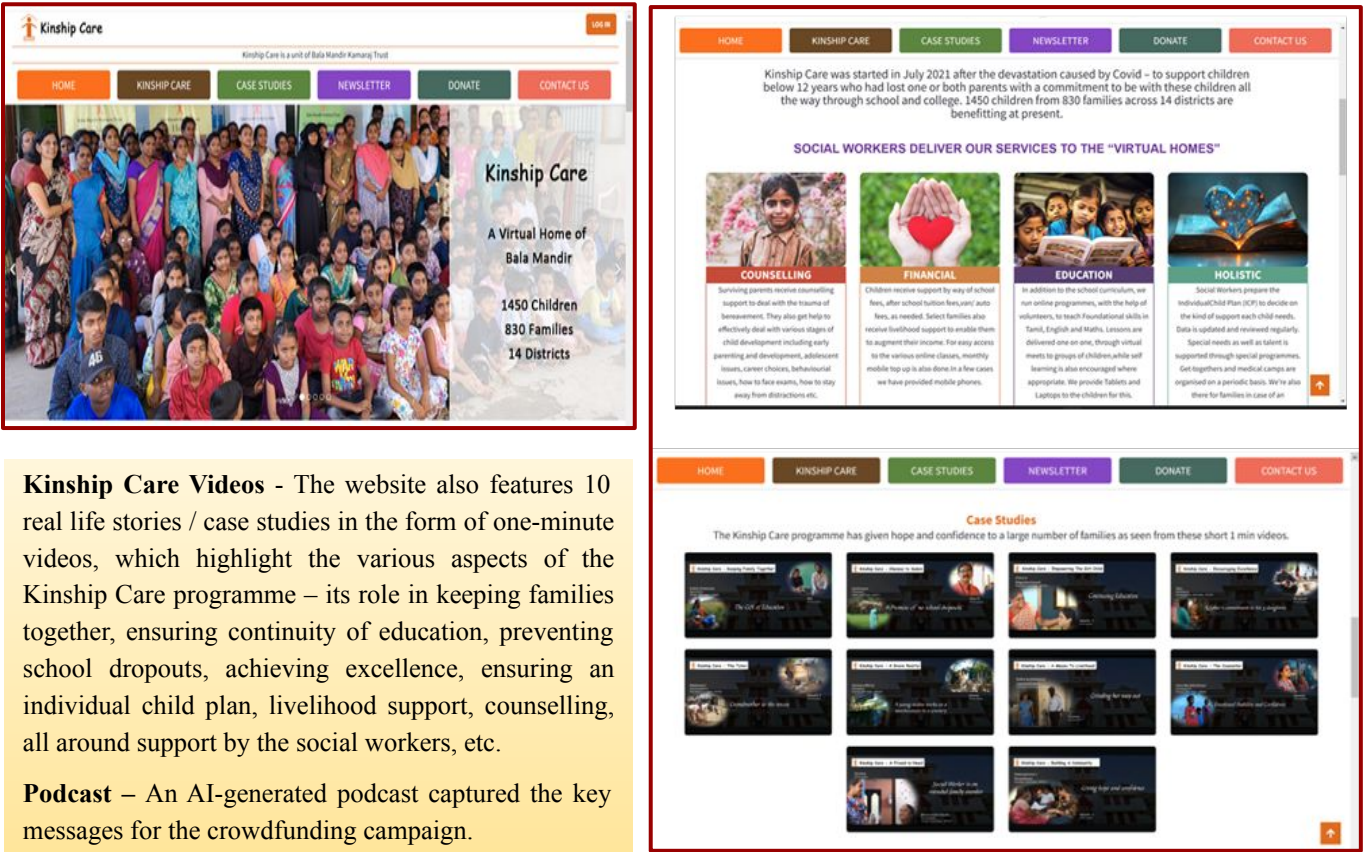
Bala Mandir Kinship Care - Communication Initiatives

Kinship Care strengthened its external communication by improving some of the existing initiatives and taking some new initiatives during this quarter.

Malarum Mottukkal (மலரும் மொட்டுக்கள்), the monthly Tamil newsletter which was started six months ago, was initially published in print, with embedded audio links to help those who cannot read Tamil. From October 2024 onwards, it is available in both print and audio-video versions, which is now on YouTube. This has improved its impact and reach. The newsletter serves as a platform for the Bala Mandir Kinship Care team to directly engage with its beneficiaries. A small team of social workers and the coordinator, form the editorial team.



The Kinship Care website - www.kinshipcare.in was launched during the quarter. It has a unique design and since it does not have separate pages, is very convenient for viewing on mobile devices. This website was developed in time for the 2024 crowdfunding campaign.



Kinship Care Videos - The website also features 10 real life stories / case studies in the form of one-minute videos, which highlight the various aspects of the Kinship Care programme – its role in keeping families together, ensuring continuity of education, preventing school dropouts, achieving excellence, ensuring an individual child plan, livelihood support, counselling, all around support by the social workers, etc.

Podcast – An AI-generated podcast captured the key messages for the crowdfunding campaign.

BMRRC - Reaching out to the Rural Community

Mega Events

A mega event was conducted by Bala Mandir Research & Resource Centre (BMRRC) in October for the Early Childhood Care & Development (ECCD) project supported by Michelin Tyres, Gummidipoondi, under their CSR. This is an awareness programme on the importance of ECCD for the rural communities, through a street play. Around 400 people benefitted through this street play. The theme for this was 'The Importance of ECCD' and was conducted in Soolaimeni village. A similar mega event on the same theme was conducted in November in Thervoy village where 280 people benefitted from the street play.

IEC

BMRRC conducted the 2nd Information, Education, Communication (IEC) implementation on Health, Hygiene & Safety in 10 villages. The importance of breastfeeding, vaccinations and monitoring the baby weight was shared with the parents. The safety of the surroundings, dangers of giving small objects to children and the concept of toy safety - that they should be soft, non-toxic and safe to play, was explained. In total, 384 beneficiaries attended the programme.

Training Programme

Ms Sumana conducted a training programme on brain development, child development and curriculum-based activities for the staff of SARDS (Social Activities for Rural Development Society), an NGO in Yerragondapalem, Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh on December 9 and 10. The initiative, in Telugu, was to benefit the children of Chenchu, a tribal community in Yerragondapalem as part of Project Tribal Village.



Innovative Initiatives @ Bala Mandir Creche

Khel Ghar

Kuzhandhai Ulagam - Khel Ghar - குழந்தை உலகம் was inaugurated with the aim of creating a homely atmosphere for toddlers, especially those in the Infant & Toddler Block and offering a space for day scholar parents to connect with their young children (ages 0-6 years) through play. The idea is to use everyday household items to create fun and bonding activities, allowing both parents and children to enjoy quality time together. Khel Ghar is all about fostering joyful experiences that strengthen the parent-child relationship. Additionally, it offers the little ones in the I & T Block unconditional love and the opportunity to experience a home-like environment, further enriching their development and emotional connection.

A New Initiative

An innovative approach was introduced by taking I & T Block Toddler kids on trips to new places within the campus. Initially, the children were taken to the BM main office and the kitchen. They were both happy and surprised to meet new people and experience these unfamiliar spaces. This initiative aims to broaden their understanding of the world around them and help them develop social skills. The toddlers were also shown various trees in the campus, as part of their syllabus. They are going to step into KG in the next academic year, so they were taught to use tables and chairs as in a classroom set-up. A medical check-up was organised for day scholar creche kids.



Activities Galore @ Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre...

Monthly Birthdays - On the last Friday of every month, Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (BM MNC) celebrates the birthdays of children born in that month. This brings immense joy and happiness to not only the children, but also to their mothers who are always accompanying them for the daily classes. On these days, all children, mothers and staff gather in the central prayer hall where the celebrations start with rhythmic songs sung by all to create a festive mood. A chart with the names of the children whose birthday is being celebrated is put up on the board. All children celebrating birthdays that month sit around a small table and cut a cake.



Focus on Fathers - BM MNC ensures that both parents are equally important in the bringing up of their special child. Hence, while the mothers are always accompanying and spending time with their children, once a year, the fathers of all children are invited to spend quality time with everyone at the Centre. Many of the mothers stayed back and sent the children with the fathers. 56 fathers came this year on October 26 and made the meet a grand success. The fathers had a lot of fun running around with their kids. A feedback meet was arranged when it was time to part. Many of them spoke frankly about how they enjoyed the day.

Health Awareness Campaigns - On the occasion of International Prosthetics and Orthotics week in November, Ishwar Institute of Prosthetics and Orthotics, Anna Nagar conducted a series of awareness programmes on Prosthetics & Orthotics (P&O) education. This covered orientation on P&O rehabilitation process and Physical Assessment (lower limb /spine) session of the students as early screening. 32 children were identified as needing gaiters, braces and other support systems for effective intervention.

Similarly, Dr M Kameswaran a Paediatric dentist of Milky Smilez Kidz & Family Dental Centre, Chennai conducted a dental screening for all children in the Centre, with 77 children participating. In this first phase, children were desensitised to eliminate their fear and anxiety. A dental consulting room was recreated fully at the Centre, with dental chair, LED lights, an X-ray machine and other accessories that are found in the dentist consulting room. It was a very novel way to do away with the fears of the children and the desensitisation programme was successful.



Activities Galore @ Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre

Accessibility to the Disabled

Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust in association with Team Community Services Development 2024-25, Rotary International District 3234 and Doctors Citizens Forum, Indian Medical Association Chennai South organised a function commemorating World Disability Day on December 3, 2024. The event themed ‘Accessibility to the Disabled’ addressed the challenges in the sector and showcased examples of how the students have overcome these challenges and made a mark for themselves.

Parents of students such as Mrs Muthu Periyanyaki Krishnan, mother of Lakshay Kumar, a BM MNC alumnus who was part of the team which set the World record in swimming from Rameswaram to the Marina, Chennai, spoke about the achievements of her son. Sankalp, another alumnus of BM MNC was accompanied by his mother and he shared his experience in the journey of life in academics.

Public awareness was created by a Walkathon at the G N Chetty Road Jeeva Park by the special children of Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre accompanied by the management and staff, and the doctors and Rotarians who attended the meeting.

BM MNC Annual Day

BM MNC completed 35 years of service (on December 12, 2024) to children in the age group from birth to six years, with intellectual disability and associated conditions providing them early intervention. A special day for BM MNC, since it brings to the forefront the last thirty-five years of tireless and dedicated work put in by the Founders, Management team, the staff, and of course the children and the parents.

The Chief Guest was Rtn Vinod Saraogi, Chairman of Meridian Global Ventures Pvt Ltd and Co- Founder of Go Colors, a popular ladies fashion brand and a very active Rotarian. In his address the Chief Guest said that the sheer joy on every parents’ face showed the impact of the sterling work done by the Centre.

The journey of 35 years of BM MNC was brought out in a presentation with a chronological timeline starting with its inauguration in 1989 till 2024. The children gave a cultural presentation on the theme “**Apoorva Katha – the story of MNC**”.



Our 'Kathai Teacher' Tells Her Own Story

She may be 92 years old, but Kalpakam Narayanan stands out for her childlike demeanour, her cheerful disposition, and her absolute eagerness to do something for the children of Bala Mandir. For almost 50 years, Kalpakam, fondly known as *Kathai Teacher* to the children, has been a regular visitor to Bala Mandir, teaching tailoring to the children and telling stories to a captivated audience. During one of her rare (of late) visits to Bala Mandir, our Joint Secretary Leela Natarajan met with Kalpakam who is an Executive Committee Member and wrote this story. *Kalpamma* as she is affectionately addressed by the staff and members, began her volunteering even during her school days – starting with Red Cross and a Harijan hostel for girls. She had her education at Bangalore, where she started her volunteering with Red Cross. Post her marriage, she moved to Bombay where due to family circumstances, she could not continue her volunteering. At the time, she found a lot of peace spinning the *charkha*. Kalpamma's entry into Bala Mandir was providential. Her nephew, studying in Vidya Mandir, insisted that he would not have a birthday party without the four Bala Mandir boys who were studying with him in the same school. Kalpamma offered to pick up and drop back the boys.



She says, "Somehow when I came into the campus, I felt a strange connection – that this was the place I would like to volunteer." She went to Manjumma the very next morning and expressed her desire to work there. She was warmly welcomed with a hug and told that she could take up anything that she wanted to do. She started with helping children in their studies, to overcome fear of examinations, and also told them stories. Her tailoring activity began when she saw several children wearing clothes that needed mending. So Kalpamma started bringing her own sewing kit from her house and started mending clothes to help the caregivers.

She fondly recollects a girl who was prone to severe asthma and so was disinclined to study. She motivated her and started giving her sewing lessons. The girl ultimately became a very good seamstress and bought her own sewing machine. For girls who were not interested in studies, tailoring was a very good option and came under the tutelage of Kalpamma and turned into tailors / seamstresses to earn a living. This is a matter of great satisfaction for her. She used to bicycle to Bala Mandir, and after some time started driving herself in a "rickety car" as she humorously puts it.

"Bala Mandir in those days went through tough times financially, and so Manjumma was very particular that the children understand the value of money. Children these days are better off," says Kalpamma. It was heartbreaking when due to heavy rains, the milk powder which used to come from Denmark got completely spoiled and the entire lot had to be buried in a pit dug for it. The Home children were eager to listen to her stories and she was named *Kathai Teacher*. She says that being uncomfortable with speeches, she narrated the Gajendra Moksham story as a Chief Guest of the old Vidyalaya School. Ms Maya Gaitonde, the Honorary General Secretary of BM was present and immediately told Kalpamma that she should continue to tell stories to the children. This went on as a routine alongside her tailoring work. She also monitored the food quality, coaxed the children to eat well and taught older children to serve food with a smile, and ensured the quality of milk and curds. She remembered with great sadness the children telling her about their personal life and the trauma that they had been through.

Kalpamma is full of gratitude for the support she received from her family, especially her husband. She is also happy that she brought in Ms Chitra Krishnan, the senior-most social worker of Bala Mandir, whom she had known since childhood. Her sister, and her nephew and niece, have been regular donors. Time has flown and Kalpamma is not a frequent visitor any more to Bala Mandir, given her advanced age. But she continues her tailoring for the infants at her home. For us in Bala Mandir, the abiding memory would be of Kalpamma gathering all the young ones inside her car and going round the compound, with them squealing in excitement.

People with her kind of dedication and love are hard to come by!

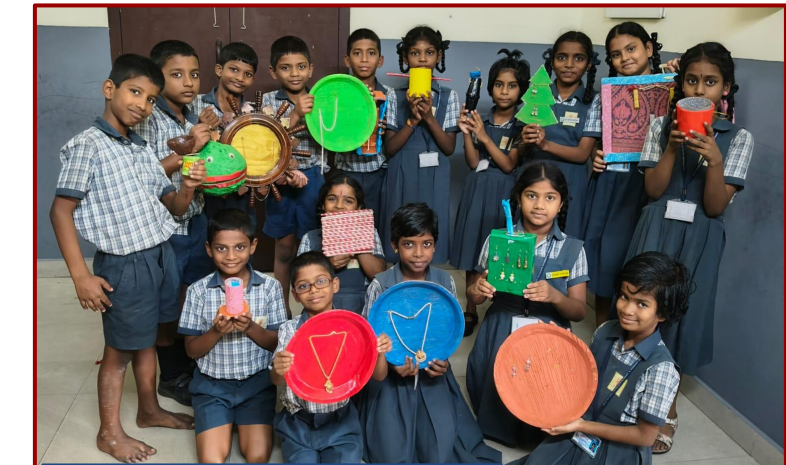
Vignettes from Bala Mandir...



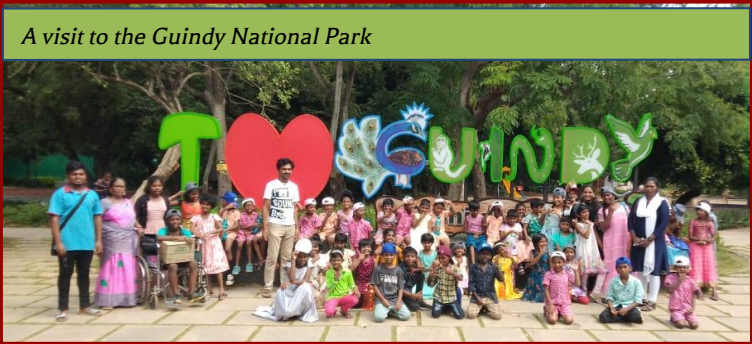
HPV vaccine second dose was administered to children above 14 years of age on Nov 8 and 9



Christmas @ Nagercoil



Team posing with 'Wealth Out of Waste'



A visit to the kitchen by creche children

Vignettes from Bala Mandir...



Snippets from the SARDS training - Curriculum based training on Child Development and Brain Development - Andhra Pradesh

Interacting with Chief Guest & Experts - SGS Legal Education Programme



Other News from around Bala Mandir

Our own Lane!

Bala Mandir shares a road with Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sangh Sabha (Regd.) Madras, which also leads to our Bala Mandir Vidyalaya Nursery & Primary School.

We responded to their idea to name the road jointly. It is now called **Gurudwara Sahib-Bala Mandir Lane** !



HR News

Towards Good Health and Fitness

As part of BM's employee engagement programme, a weekly yoga session for all staff members is conducted every Thursday. Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram has volunteered to conduct these sessions, which promote health and well-being while fostering a healthy balance between work and personal life. Participation is voluntary, but we strongly encourage staff to join and enjoy the physical and mental benefits of Yoga. They can participate in these sessions during their free time to ensure routine work is not disrupted. On an average, around 15 staff members attend these sessions each week.



Ms Manimekalai retires as Head Mistress

After 24 years of tirelessly working towards taking Bala Mandir Satyamurthi School (SMHS) to great heights, Ms Manimekalai, aged 60, has retired as the Headmistress, a position she held from 2017. Prior to this, she was a teacher for 17 years in the same school. A farewell function was held in October attended by all staff and her relatives. Ms Manimekalai treated all the students to lunch on the same day.



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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