BALA MANDIR

bm connect

Quarterly Newsletter of Bala Mandir

BALA MANDIR 75 Every Child Matters 1949 - 2024

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Memorial Oration Honouring Air Vice-Marshal V Krishnaswamy and Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy

Balu Sir Summer Camp @ Bala Mandir

Congratulations to Dr P J N Reddy on his 48 years of dedicated service to Bala Mandir

Remembering Pramillamma- a Life of Service to Bala Mandir

Hakuna Matata !

A decade of SAMVAAD - the journey

What's new ??

A flurry of activities during Summer

Turn the pages to know about all the above, and more !

Welcome to our scorching Summer Edition!

The unrelenting heat has its moments too. The golden mango-laden carts, the welcome sips of elaneer, and the cooling nungu that slips down our parched throats are singular signs of summer. It is also freedom from routine, the rigour of academics and the compelling need to adhere to a timetable. For the children of Bala Mandir, it's the time to dive into other activities like the Balu Sir camp, with ten days of fun-filled happenings.

The other events held were the Air Vice-Marshal Krishnaswamy and Jaya Krishnaswamy Memorial Oration, celebrating a decade of Samvaad, an enjoyable annual outing for the staff, acknowledging and honouring the service of 50 years rendered by Dr Reddy in the medical profession, and remembering fondly Ms Pramilla Shanmugam who had been an integral part of Bala Mandir for over 40 years. All the units continued with the critical duties they perform, albeit in a toned-down manner, due to the summer break.

The BM Connect brings with it a new look and new features too! You can directly access the BM website and the blogs through the newsletter.

Happy reading!

Till next time.

Rukmini Amirapu

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First Memorial Oration of Air Vice-Marshal V Krishnaswamy and Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy

The Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (BMMNC) held its first Memorial Oration, honouring the enduring legacy of its founders, Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy and Air Vice-Marshal V Krishnaswamy, VSM.

The first memorial oration was delivered by Dr. Prithika Chary, renowned neurologist and neurosurgeon, who drew from decades of experience in neurodevelopment to speak on Neurodevelopmental Challenges in Children with Intellectual Disability & Empowering Families through Early Intervention. She emphasised the urgent need to address late diagnoses, which affected more than half of children with mild to moderate intellectual disability in India—often not identified until ages 5 to 9.

Dr K Vijayraghavan

Dr. Chary called for inclusive, community-driven strategies, including wider screening by frontline workers, early training for healthcare providers, stigma-reduction campaigns, and stronger data systems. Notably, she highlighted the importance of family-centered support, extending beyond parents to include siblings and extended family.

Dr Prithika Chary

The oration was followed by a hands-on workshop, Multi-Sensory Teaching Methods for Parenting Children with Neurodevelopmental Challenges, led by Ms V R P Sheilaja Rao and Ms Afshaan Jabeen from Hyderabad, offering practical insights for caregivers.

The event served as a heartfelt tribute to Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy's lifelong mission to empower families, professionals, and institutions in the disability sector. Her spirit of collaboration and commitment to inclusive education was palpable throughout the day's proceedings.

Ms V R P Sheilaja Rao

Ms Afshan Jabeen

Balu Sir Remembered : Through Stories, Anecdotes, Songs and Dances

Once upon a time (well, that's how most stories start) there was a kind soul, a storyteller whose passion was to regale children with his stories, anecdotes and songs. While writing this piece about about 'Balu Sir' and listening to others speak of him and one is reminded of the late Harindranath Chattopadhyay (an Indian English poet, dramatist, actor, musician and a member of the 1st Lok Sabha from Vijayawada constituency and younger brother of Sarojini Naidu.

'Balu Sir', whose actual name was Vishwanath Gaitonde, was an integral part of Bala Mandir Management for almost six decades and was the driving force behind all initial major milestone construction projects. Vishwanath Gaitonde was a man of many parts. He had the zest of a child and the wisdom of a sage. He played many important roles including that of the first Principal of ITC, Treasurer, Trustee, etc. Above all this, he was the favourite of all the children and related to them in his own special way as their 'Balu sir'.

As part of the cultural and learning centre initiatives, the Balu Sir Summer Camp is organised in Bala Mandir every year during the months of April / May for 12 working days, in memory of a remarkable man, who volunteered his free time for the children of Bala Mandir when he was in service and full time after retirement, till his demise in July 2013. He spread love and a caring concern for the batches of children he met year after year. Many old alumni of the home fondly recall his delightful and imaginative songs and stories, and the joy he brought into their lives. The camp is appropriately named, in his memory, as the Balu Sir Summer Camp.

This year, the Camp was inaugurated on April 28 and ended on May 10. During the opening ceremony, songs rewritten in Tamil by 'Balu Sir' for the children were sung in his memory, and stories shared. This is the 11th year of the summer camp and it was conducted in two sections - Senior (classes 1 - 5) and Junior (LKG, UKG, Toddlers). It was attended by both Bala Mandir Home children and Bala Mandir Schools day-scholars, including a few children from Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children. Activities like craft and dance were taught to the junior children, while activities like art & drawing, craft, dance and theatre (mime) were taught to the senior children.

Resource persons from outside Bala Mandir who have been contributing their time and expertise all these years for dance and theatre activities, were Dance 1 - Santhosh and Team ; Dance 2 - Kathak - Devaniya Dance School ; Dance 3 - Ghanavi and Team ; Theatre (Mime) - CreaShakthi Praveen & team. The art, craft and drawing activities were handled in-house by our teachers, staff and senior girls.

Refreshments and lunch were served to all the children, including day-scholars, for the duration of the camp - sponsored by YRG Care. At the Valedictory function on May 10, Mr A Joseph Xavier, Member, Child Welfare Committee, Chennai South Zone was the Chief Guest.

Children singing the Camp Song along with Ms Mary - the lyricist and composer

Invocation dance on Lord Ganesha by junior children for 'Bomma Bomma Tha'

Junior children performing for a song composed by Balu Sir - 'Vaarum Mayilin Azhagai Paarum'

Mime performance by senior children - the theme being- In a classroom where bullying and teasing persists – three specially-abled children teach the other children a valuable lesson, through a drawing competition. The lessons learnt are about honesty, kindness, and the power of self-respect, and that kindness always triumphs over cruelty

Senior girls performing for 'Kathak' the traditional deancfe form of UP

Senior girls and boys tapping their feet for 'Dholna' - a Rajasthani folk number

A foot-tapping end to the cultural show - a traditional tribal dance performance

An array of display - of art and craft work learnt by the children in the duration of the camp..

The Team Summer Camp posing with the CG

A Decade of SAMVAAD - From Reflection to Transformation

What began in 2015 as a Study Circle has, over the past decade, grown into Samvaad—a meaningful space for dialogue, learning, and collective reflection across all units of Bala Mandir

In its early years, from 2015 to 2020, the Study Circle functioned as a weekly forum where staff from across Bala Mandir's many units—social workers, administrators, coordinators, teachers, and others—came together to engage in thought-provoking discussions. These sessions were facilitated by committed individuals such as Ashok Aiyar, Lakshmi Gopal, Maya Gaitonde, and other members of the Bala Mandir team.

The topics explored were wide-ranging. They included introspective themes like 'Principles for Peace of Mind', literary explorations like Anton Chekov's 'People's Mind', and internal reflections such as the Bala Mandir Code of Conduct and how staff perceived it. Philosophies of inspiring personalities like Mother Teresa and Mahakavi Bharatiyar were studied with great interest. Practical systems such as the Japanese-origin 5-S procedures—aimed at ensuring cleanliness and organisation in the workplace—were thoughtfully examined.

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted regular life, Study Circle quickly adapted by moving into the online space. Monthly physical meetings were replaced with digital sessions, and bilingual activity sheets were distributed either by email or in hard copy, depending on the accessibility of the staff. These sessions continued, exploring themes such as health and hygiene during the coronavirus outbreak, remembering Kamarajar and Manjumma, the importance of legal awareness, and the significance of festivals and holidays re-imagined as opportunities for harmony, happiness, and reflection.

By 2020, it was evident that this evolving initiative needed a more defined identity and purpose. The Study Circle was thus reimagined and relaunched as Samvaad—a platform designed to strengthen Bala Mandir's management practices and understanding by bringing in voices from the broader NGO sector.

From April 2021 onwards, Samvaad took on a new depth by turning its attention to Bala Mandir's own rich history. Topics focused on building a collective understanding of the institution's journey—featuring stories, images, and anecdotes about the founders, trustees, early executive committee members, and the architectural evolution of the campus.

The legacy of Kamarajar and Manjumma was revisited as a source of continued inspiration. Sessions also explored narratives around significant donors—both Indian and international—and units such as the Medical Centre, socio-economic services, and Bala Mandir's schools and vocational centres.

Experts from diverse fields were invited to share insights that touched on various aspects of human development, education, inclusion, and self-awareness. Sessions were held to explore the differences in right and left brain functioning, the concept of multiple intelligences, and Zero Rejection in inclusive education. Other memorable discussions featured topics such as Sevadharma as Swadharma and the challenges of privilege and exclusion within school systems. With hybrid sessions becoming the norm, participation expanded to include members, directors, heads of units, coordinators, and social workers, enabling broader ownership of the learning process.

In recent years, from 2022 to 2025, Samvaad has sustained its momentum with thought-provoking themes rooted in both institutional ethos and personal development. Staff members engaged in discussions around Bala Mandir's Vision, Mission and Code of Conduct, as well as foundational values such as peace of mind and behavioural thinking. Topics like the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH), Samakalan (the path to integration), and the balancing of personal and professional priorities further enriched the conversations. The more recent sessions explored themes like effective workplace communication, the concept of the 'One-degree habit', the joy of giving, and finding what truly matters in life.

Through all its phases, Samvaad has remained a space of evolving dialogue. Since 2024, the entire organisation and facilitation of Samvaad have been ably taken over by Ashok Aiyar and Bharath Natarajan, ensuring that its purpose stays strong and its vision continues to grow.

Remembering Ms Pramilla Shanmugam

A Life of Service at Bala Mandir

In 1974, Ms Manjubhashini, the Founder of Bala Mandir, invited a young widow, Ms Pramilla Shanmugam, to join the institution. Having just lost her husband, Pramilla was navigating a difficult time in her life. That moment of invitation marked the beginning of an extraordinary bond—one that would last over five decades and leave a profound impact on Bala Mandir.

Affectionately known as "**Pramillamma**", she found purpose in the care of children and in managing the everyday workings of the home. Assigned to manage the Infant and Toddlers (I&T) section, she soon became the heartbeat of the I&T Block, then known as the Hospital Block (because of the constant visits the kids had to make to the hospital).

Dr. P.J.N. Reddy, Bala Mandir's in-house doctor since 1977, recalls, *"When I joined Bala Mandir, Pramillamma was already there, heading the Hospital Block. She would always interact with me, showing deep concern for the children. She listened to staff members' problems, brought items from home, and tried to help however she could. She even became part of my personal life—attending my wedding, my daughter's naming ceremony, and her Arangetram."* Even after her retirement in 2003, she remained an active and caring presence—supporting marriage functions, mentoring staff, and managing endowments through her Trust to support the higher education and vocational training of Bala Mandir children.

Discipline with Deep Compassion

While known for her strict standards, she led with empathy and understanding. Staff often approached her for support—not just for professional guidance, but for personal struggles too. ***Chitra Krishnan, Director of Bala Mandir's ECCD Projects, reflects***, *"When I joined in 1997 and expressed a wish to work with infants, she kindly accepted me. Though she had some initial doubts about joining Bala Mandir, after the loss of her husband, she gradually became fully committed to its mission. She had high expectations around hygiene and presentation—no fancy clothes or flowers—but she also helped people generously . Her love for dogs was unshakeable — her home was filled with dog-themed wall hangings. She even took children and staff to dog shows, turning them into fun, proud moments for everyone".*

A Witness to Growth and Change

In the early years, resources were meagre—basic clothing and food were hard to come by. After Ms Manjubhashini's passing, there was a phase of uncertainty, but gradually, Bala Mandir grew in strength and capacity. Despite limited resources, she remained a source of strength and continuity. She supervised room allocations, appointed matrons, ensured discipline, and maintained high standards of cleanliness. ***Sasikala, a staff member of the I&T Block since 1989, remembers,*** *"Pramillamma insisted we present ourselves well—clean sarees, hair in a bun, no flowers, nails trimmed. She believed our appearance mattered when working with children. She maintained strict hygiene standards and recognised good work. She once gave me Rs. 20 as a reward—it meant a lot back then. She often bought essentials for the children herself and arrived in her car to deliver them. People stayed at Bala Mandir despite modest pay, because of the respect she commanded."*

Strict yet Warm

Her firm approach earned her the affectionate nickname "**Military**" from the Hospital Block staff. ***Bhojarajan, a carpenter-turned-driver*** at Bala Mandir, shares, *"While other units got regular tea, it was Pramillamma who ensured HB staff received theirs specially. Her love for dogs knew no bounds—she had furniture custom-made for them to eat, sleep, and sit in comfort."* ***Kalpakam Narayanan, the beloved Kathai Teacher of Bala Mandir, fondly recalls:*** *"There was a girl named Prabha who was of very short physical stature. She would run to Pramilla every time she saw her. It was touching how Pramilla cared for her—right till her end. She sat often in the Hospital Block, chatting with caregivers. I still remember how stern she became when the children had scabies—she would raise her voice if hygiene was compromised. Cleanliness mattered deeply to her."*

A Lasting Legacy of Care

Between 1981 and 1984, Pramilla ma guided the ICMR project, under which each caregiver was responsible for five children. ***R. Lakshmi from the Administration department (with BMRRC),*** who worked under her during that period, says, *"She would visit weekly to monitor each child's progress. She guided us with care but was a strict disciplinarian. We were expected to wear high-neck blouses, neatly draped sarees, and keep our hair tied in a bun. No flowers allowed.. even after I became a supervisor in 1990, she continued to mentor me. Her presence shaped my sense of responsibility. Her passing leaves a deep void."*

The Heart of Bala Mandir - Bala Mandir will always remember her as one of its finest..

Ms Pramilla Shanmugam was more than an administrator—she was a nurturing presence, a steady guide, and a quiet force behind Bala Mandir's transformation. Her strict but loving leadership inspired loyalty, integrity, and excellence. Though she is no longer physically present, her influence continues—in the disciplined routines, the care for children, and the grateful hearts of those she mentored. Her legacy is one of service, strength, and unwavering commitment.

A Glimpse into the Bala Mandir Homes @ Chennai

A Day of Victory - Anusha from Class 11 won silver medals and sports cups in athletics and throwball. She was also declared as the Individual Champion. It was a matter of great pride for the Bala Mandir Home.

Sri Rama Navami Celebrations - The sacred festival of Rama Navami was observed with great devotion. The children performed Astotharam and sang soulful bhajans, creating a spiritual ambience. The pooja concluded with a serene aarthi, offered by the children themselves.

Recognition from Sathya Sai Seva Organisation - A proud moment for the children from Bala Mandir Home as they received a token of appreciation from the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Nungambakkam Samithi, for their participation in the State-level Essay Writing Competition. Their involvement reflects the value Bala Mandir places on literacy and expression.

Gardening Time - The Vidyalaya children from the Home actively participated in gardening activities, guided by the dedicated staff. With great enthusiasm, the children helped plant, water, and nurture the green spaces on campus, learning valuable lessons about nature, responsibility, and teamwork.

An Outing - A much-awaited outing from May 25 and 27, was organised for the Home children, who visited temples, parks, and the Vandalur Zoo. The trip was full of joy, discovery, and shared laughter. Accompanied by staff members and social workers, the children had a memorable and fun-filled time, making this outing a highlight of their summer.

After-Care Pooja and Transition - A special pooja was performed to mark the transition of children who had turned 18 years, to After-Care Centre. These young adults were moved into the newly-constructed tuition centre quarters, a nurturing space where they can continue their educational journey with support and guidance.

Temporary Fostering Get-Together - A heartwarming get-together was organised for all temporary foster parents involved in the pilot fostering project. The foster families shared emotional and uplifting feedback about the bonds they formed with the children. The project successfully created a family-like environment, allowing children to experience meaningful emotional connections. Social workers conducted home visits, obtained police verifications, and worked closely with government officials to ensure compliance and safety. Their efforts contributed significantly to the project's success and positive outcomes.

@ Nagercoil

There were regular visits by Government officials - The District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Protection Officer (PO), and Health Inspector verified the Home documents and inspected the campus. The District Level Inspection Committee also completed their inspection. The *Nimir* team members from the Kanyakumari Police Department visited the Home and conducted an awareness session for the children.

The Revenue Inspector conducted an inspection for the renewal of the Ration Bulk Permit. The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) team inspected the Home and verified the registers. The *Ungalai Thedi Ungal Ooril* (UTUO) team carried out an inspection and verified the records.

Awareness on POCSO Act

Visit of the CWC Team and the Revenue Inspector

Ungalai Thedi Ungal Ooril

Hakuna Matata - The Kinship Care Summer Camp

As part of an annual tradition, Kinship Care organises yearly meet-ups with beneficiaries across various locations. These gatherings typically serve as safe spaces for parents to share their experiences, express their grief, and acknowledge the support received from Kinship Care that has helped them rebuild their lives.

However, this summer, it was decided to take a different approach. Instead of a traditional meet-up focused on sharing stories and emotional healing, the aim was to create a day filled with joy and carefree moments. The goal was to craft a memory that children and parents alike would cherish forever. The theme for the summer camp was ***'HAKUNA MATATA – No Worries, Take It Easy'***- a day to leave behind sorrow and look ahead with hope and happiness.

To bring this vision to life, Kinship Care partnered with Fun Fair Games, Chennai, to organise a fun-filled day packed with structured entertainment and interactive games for the children. The event featured a wide variety of engaging activities such as Balloon Shooting, Wall Ball Maze, Archery, Dart Games, Bowling Pin, Mini Golf, Buzz Wire, Bouncing Castle, a Magic Show, and even a Human-Sized Snakes & Ladders board. For many of the children, it was their first time experiencing such games, and their excitement was palpable. They waited patiently for their turns and played with kindness and enthusiasm. The games played by the parents during the summer camp were filled with joy and enthusiasm. Many participated wholeheartedly, expressing that it felt like they had returned to their childhood. They shared that it had been a long time since they had laughed and played so freely. Several mothers mentioned that the day served as a much-needed stress buster. As single mothers juggling responsibilities both at work and at home, they often feel overwhelmed and exhausted. This day provided them with a refreshing break, recharging their spirits and bringing a renewed sense of energy and joy. The highlight of the afternoon was the screening of *The Lion King*.

In addition to entertainment, the intention was to leave the parents with a renewed sense of strength and confidence. A discussion session on best practices was facilitated by Bala Mandir counsellor, Ms Sujatha and Coordinator, Ms Vijayalakshmi. The conversation focussed on the challenges faced by single mothers, including balancing work and family life and dealing with societal pressures. Many mothers shared personal stories and strategies that offered inspiration and practical guidance to others. The session fostered a deep sense of empathy, solidarity, and collective strength—developing a strong 'we' feeling among the participants.

Storytelling Workshop

Storytelling is a powerful emotional practice that is the art of conveying narratives through engaging words and expressions. A good storyteller will be able to create a visual imagination in the eye of the audience. In order to help the children become efficient storytellers and also to cultivate an interest in storytelling, a 5-day storytelling workshop was organised in 2 batches. The famous story teller, Ms Srividya Veeraraghavan guided the children to bring out their best. 70 children from various locations participated in this workshop and unleashed their storytelling talents. The session also turned out to be a platform for the children to exhibit their active narratives and enchanting acting skills!

Juniors Storytelling Session

A fun-filled way, a two-day story telling session was organised for children in Class 1 and 2 with the help of Ms Gayathri Anbalagan. She used various techniques that kept the children glued to the story and wanting for more. She also did not just stop with the stories, but used them to emphasize various moral values.

Magic Square Session

Maths phobia is very common in school-going children. Maths is a subject that is often feared by children. In most cases, they just need the right teacher and the right method. One way to make Maths interesting is through Magic Square puzzles. To make the children fall in love with Maths and numbers, a session was organised with Mr Mahesh Narasinga Rao where he shared his unique ways of solving magic square puzzles and ignited the 'Maths fire' in nearly 50 children. He did not just stop with that. He spent the last 2 days explaining various science concepts and experiments. The children enjoyed the fruitful session.

KINSHIP CARE SUMMER CAMP – 2025
HAKUNA MATATA
CULTURAL
Thank you so much for sponsoring this Summer camp! This day created truly wonderful and unforgettable memories for both parents and children. The parents were able to leave their sorrows behind and, for a while, relive the joy

Summer Activities at the Bala Mandir Vidyalaya and Satyamurthi School

Graduation Day for UKG and Class 5 students of Vidyalaya was held in April at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre. Ms Jasmine Michael, Principal, Anjuman Primary School was the Chief Guest. Students and teachers of UKG brought on stage the daily routine they have at school, which impressed the audience. Rohit of Class 4, presented the Graduation Day address

A training session on ***Jolly Phonics*** was conducted by Ms Hemalatha for the teachers of both Vidyalaya and Satyamurthi Schools. The sessions were very useful and helped the teachers gain valuable insights into phonics and the importance of sounds in early learning and spelling rules. Also, a ***training session for Tamil subject teachers*** of both Schools was conducted by Ms Kanagalakshmi in May. The training provided valuable guidance and strategies to enhance Tamil language teaching

The ***Boeing Sukanya STEM Lab Summer Camp*** held in May at Satyamurthi School, was a 7-day immersive experience that introduced 22 students to mobile app development using MIT App Inventor. Through hands-on projects, students learned design and coding fundamentals, creating interactive apps that utilised sensors, voice features, and game design. The camp culminated in students building personalised apps, showcasing their newfound skills in coding, technology, and presentation. The event successfully sparked interest in STEM fields, empowering students to create useful and entertaining applications

World Day against Child Labour was observed on June 12, with a special assembly at Vidyalaya. Students of Class 2 A, presented a skit highlighting the theme. Ms Santhi, Primary School teacher, briefed the children about Child Labour and the need to work against it

Balu Sir Storytelling was celebrated in June. Ms Ambujavalli, renowned storyteller, entertained the children of Primary School in Vidyalaya by narrating stories in a very interesting and expressive way.

A ***Drawing & Colouring Competition*** was held in June to mark the upcoming Education Day in July, for students of Classes 1 and 2 on the topic 'Famous Schemes of Kamarajar'. A drawing competition on the same theme was held on June 25, for students of Classes 3 to 5. A quiz competition on the life and achievements of Kamarajar and a few facts about Tamil Nadu was held for Classes 4 and 5

On ***International Yoga Day*** in June, the students showcased their yoga skills along with Mr Saravanan from Sky Yoga Centre. The event featured a yoga display by the students, highlighting the importance and benefits of this ancient practice. Padmashree, a Class 9 student in Satyamurthi School, delivered a speech about International Yoga Day, raising awareness about its significance and promoting the adoption of yoga in daily life. At Vidyalaya, the children performed yoga asanas under the guidance of Malarvizhi who briefed them on the importance of yoga to maintain physical and mental fitness.

Glimpses into the activities @ BM Schools

A Summer of New Beginnings @ BM MNC

On the last day of the academic year 2024-2025 ending on April 12, 2025, BM MNC celebrated the graduation ceremony of those who are Moving Ahead - which is, facilitating children with developmental delays/intellectual disability, to move on to school education, in special and mainstream schools, on completion of the Early Intervention Programme, Upanayan at MNC. Over the past 17 years, about 255 children have been successfully enrolled in the mainstream schools / Special Schools, since Moving Ahead was initiated. This year BM MNC celebrated the 17th Moving Ahead - 13 children from EIC and 1 student from Jivikam will be moving to other mainstream schools / special schools / Jivikam Skill Development Unit and to Vocational Training.

Alumni parents spoke about their experiences in reaching this far. Ms Chandra Balaraman, mother of student Sai Krithvik said she owes a lot to MNC. Mr Murugesan, an alumni of the 90s pursuing an arts degree in college said that it was in MNC he learnt that disability can be managed. Ms Poonam Natarajan, the Chief Guest, Founder Director of Vidya Sagar, appreciated the teachers and the management for doing such a noble service to the disability sector and promised to help in whatever way was possible by her. She said that Vidya Sagar would render the needed help for children in Jivikam for vocational training. She said BM MNC could promote the art of weaving among the children which is currently in trend, and easy to teach. In fact, a student from Jivikam, Aakash is joining the Vidya Sagar Weaving Unit in Thakar Baba Vidyalaya in T Nagar.

Jivikam Day

The question usually asked by the parent of a child in the Upanayan Early Intervention Programme is, "What next?" The answer is not easy. It is the dream of every special parent to integrate their children into mainstream school education. Mainstreaming depends on the cognition level of the child and is not possible for all children. The next option is **Special School Education with Vocational Training for Employability**. The bulk of the children, on completion of the Upanayan Early Intervention Programme will become eligible for special school education with vocational training for supervised sheltered employment, in their adult years. Building on Upanayan Early Intervention Programme, MNC started a holistic programme **Jivikam** for such children focussing on the age group of 6 to 18 years. On April 11, which is celebrated as ***Jivikam Day,*** a small display of the items that the children had made was done in the assembly hall for all the staff to see and encourage the children. An array of jewellery, block printed pillow covers, saplings from the garden activity, and colourful doormats from the small custom-designed handlooms, greeting cards, were all brought out and vied for attention of the visitors. Everyone appreciated the handwork of students and Jivikam takes its baby steps steadily towards training in pre-vocational skills.

Other News Bits from Around the Campus..

Students from Singapore Gain Practical Insights into Child-centred Care

We chose Bala Mandir because it offers our students a meaningful opportunity to understand the foundational role of care, shelter and education in enhancing the quality of life for underprivileged children and their families. Bala Mandir's holistic approach to child development including emotional well-being, inclusive education and early intervention for children with special needs aligns closely with our curriculum. Its impactful community outreach initiatives in rural villages provide valuable insights into how resources and support can transform lives - was the collective response from 20 students (plus two teachers) from Singapore who visited Bala Mandir for three days in June 2025.

These were students from Singapore's Institute of Technical Education (ITE) which offers courses: Higher Nitec in Community Care and Social Services, Work-Study Diploma in Rehabilitation Care, Work-Study in Community Care Integration and Management. The students who visited Bala Mandir learnt about Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Nursing and Special Needs Education.

Students gained practical insights into child-centred care, inclusive education, and community support. They learnt how structured services and outreach efforts can positively impact vulnerable children and families. They visited the creche, MNC, Vidyalaya and the Home and interacted with the students and performed age-appropriate activities with them. They also conducted soft skills training for SMHS students at the Cultural Hall. They were briefed on outreach activities and parenting programmes conducted by BMRRC currently, and also the Kinship Care programme virtually.

Dr. Reddy - 48 years of Dedicated Service to Bala Mandir

Dr P J N Reddy's association with Bala Mandir and his dedication to his job as a visiting paediatrician grew to such an extent that we are celebrating his 48th year of being here, for the children in particular, and all of us in general.

On May 3, 2025, we had the privilege of honouring the 78-year-old Dr. P J N Reddy — as he marked 50 remarkable years in the medical profession. He and his wife very graciously hosted a lunch at Bala Mandir. A paediatrician by training, Dr. Reddy has been associated with Bala Mandir since 1977 and has been the backbone of our medical care initiatives for decades. His dedication, compassion, and quiet strength have supported generations of children and staff alike.

Dr. Reddy continues to serve Bala Mandir actively and is a valued Member of the Bala Mandir Executive Committee. We express our heartfelt gratitude for his unwavering commitment and congratulate him on this extraordinary professional milestone!

Refresher Training Sessions by BMRRC

The ECCD Refresher Training for Michelin Field staff held in the BMRRC Training Hall in May 2025, was attended by 11 participants. This session was oriented more towards an interactive training, wherein each participant was given questionnaires (based on LTPC) to answer, and were asked to narrate a story or rhyme to assess their communication skills. Another two-day refresher training session on ECCD, using the tool 'Parenting for the Early Years - B-3' (Red Book) was given to field staff of Ellapuram and the Michelin Projects in June at Gummidipoondi.

At both sessions the staff were given a few flashcards and were asked to explain how they would carry the message from the cards to the parents / caregivers.

A one-day training session on Art Therapy was imparted to 30 Field Staff at Soolaimeni village in April.

Training sessions were also conducted by Dr. Bindu, Director-BMRRC for the field staff of SWADHAR - a Pune-based NGO partner of Bala Mandir. The sessions conducted in Hindi entailed training on monitoring and evaluation for supervisors, was attended by 21 participants. Training on COR for field staff where basics of SPRUC and understanding, and implementation of COR were taught, was attended by 57 field staff.

Wedding Gift

When one of our Field Staff from Palavakkam Village got married in June, the Inner Wheel Club of Madras sponsored a suitcase full of new sarees and a refrigerator.

Early Intervention Campaign in collaboration with UNICEF

A campaign titled 'Early Intervention – A Step Ahead for Healthy Childhood' in collaboration with UNICEF, was conducted in June covering 102 villages in Gummidipoondi Taluk. A total of 2,400 people from around 1,300 households interacted directly with the field saff. The objectives of the campaign were to ensure inclusive participation by actively engaging all segments of society and raise awareness about the early signs of developmental issues in children. It was intended to promote equal participation and social inclusion by bridging gaps between different communities in semi-urban, rural and remote areas.

An important objective was to educate the parents and caregivers on recognising early indicators of developmental delays in children from birth to six years of age. It helped to emphasise the advantages of timely medical, educational, and therapeutic interventions and inform communities about the services and referral pathways available for early intervention support.
Good awareness was created through pamphlets, display of banners, voice-over announcement of messages using two autos fitted with sound systems.

A Very Active Summer Session @ the Bala Mandir Creche

All the Creche children, including day-scholars, actively participated in the Balu Sir Summer Camp, and were involved in a flurry of enjoyable activities.
Under the activity 'Beyond Classroom Teaching', this quarter the children were taken to see pomegranate tree at the entrance to the Bala Mandir kitchen area. A 'Water Pouring' activity was conducted, to improve their fine motor skills, understand concepts of volume and measurement, and to increase their level of concentration and independence.
As an exciting new initiative, a special classroom set-up has been designed to warmly welcome children moving into LKG.

News from the HR Desk

A Celebration of Team Spirit and Togetherness..

In keeping with the Bala Mandir tradition, the annual staff outings were organised with great enthusiasm this year. The Education and MNC teams had their outing in May, while other units scheduled theirs during June and July. This staggered approach ensured that all teams had an opportunity to relax, connect, and rejuvenate without disrupting day-to-day operations. Most teams opted for resort locations for their outings, providing a perfect blend of leisure and team bonding. The day's activities included engaging beachside games, refreshing swims, and time to unwind by the sea, which were the highlights of the outing. A sumptuous buffet lunch was arranged, and rooms were made available for the staff to freshen up and relax. A heartfelt thanks to the Management for their caring support in organising comfortable transportation and beautiful venues, making sure everyone had a wonderful and memorable time. These really brought out everyone's lively spirit and enjoyment. The outings continue to serve as an excellent opportunity for staff to connect beyond the workplace, strengthening team spirit and reinforcing the organisation's commitment to staff well-being.

The Bala Mandir Blogs are just a click away... Happy Reading !

Just click on the links below to read our blogs published during the quarter

- For the Women Who Fight Quiet Battles Every Day - blog on Kinship Care authored by Ms Sujatha
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/04/23/for-the-women-who-fight-quiet-battles-every-day/

- The Healing Touch - blog on ECCD authored by Ms Krithika
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/04/28/the-healing-touch/

- Childless Couple: A Journey of Pain, Hope, and Adoption - blog on Adoption and Foster Care authored by Ms Jenniffer
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/05/03/childless-couple-a-journey-of-pain-hope-and-adoption/

- Never Ever Give Up - blog on Inclusiveness authored by Ms Krithika
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/05/05/never-ever-give-up/

- Against all Odds - blog on Kinship Care authored by Ms Fermie Priyadarshini
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/06/12/against-all-odds/

- Bringing Home the Warmth: Bala Mandir's First Summer Fostering Pilot - blog on Foster Care authored by Mr P Natarajan
- https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/06/17/bringing-home-the-warmth-bala-mandirs-first-summer-fostering-pilot/