

News from Shishu Mandir



Vol VII, July to September 2014

Welcome to another newsletter from Shishu Mandir. It's our pleasure to take you along our way of success and disappointment. This time we are happy to introduce you to a number of new programmes.

Expansion of our Library



We were the lucky recipients of 2000 books from a British school in Germany which was closed down. The books were related to History, Science, Art and Craft. Moreover there were dictionaries, magazines, globes and atlases. 250 books we gave to our Community College. Above all, the students were delighted to have an abundance of story books which replenished our sizeable stock of 22,000 books. Along with those books, we got hundreds of note books and a lot of puzzles.

Digi-Learning

Electronic books - so far an unknown term for our children - entered our school, thanks to Mrs. Payoshni from Pratham Publishers. Children who have a natural inclination towards computer use were exposed to read English and Kannada books on their 'beloved toy' and even enjoyed it! So far we offered this programme to grade 2 to 4.

August 15th with Mount Litera Zee School

Every year again August 15th is a special highlight. This year we had guests from the Mount Litera Zee School, whose principal came to see our school bringing 200 students along. Together with our students they enjoyed a small cultural programme. The guests surprised us with note books and even a cash donation for sports training. As

the flag was hoisted and the national anthem sung, it was indeed - Freedom in the Air.

Self-Defence Classes

Again we were lucky to meet a person who offered a special service to us. It was a visitor, Mr. Marco Panayi, from Luft-hansa, who came to see us during his short stop-over. His hobby was to train people in self-defence, a skill which we welcomed with open arms, especially in these days of deteriorating safety for women in India. On the International Women's Day he conducted a



training for 20 women from the surrounding villages. Mr. Panayi so much enjoyed our women's eagerness that he promised to come back to us twice a year.

Technical Skills for Migrant Workers

TE Connectivity requested our Community College to provide courses of Fitter, Electrical, Basic Computer, Life Skills and Spoken English for their temporary employees. The company was eager to improve the employability of these employees in case they could not be taken over by them. It was a programme of three months in which 30 employees of TE and 25 students from Shishu Mandir had classes, and although it was always held on Sundays we observed 95% attendance.

Improving Employability

We had noticed that our college students lacked certain basic skills of presenting themselves, when they apply for jobs. Their gestures, facial expression, choice of words, intonation and overall behaviour lacked maturity. In this situation we were highly pleased when a team of IT professionals from **Creating Future** offered a 3-day workshop in which 17 of our college students took part. Even after this a follow-up of online mentoring and monthly workshops was provided. It was indeed an urgently needed programme for our students.

Training in Public Speaking

Even our school students got a chance to learn Public Speaking. This time the training was

offered by **Toast Masters** which organised it mainly on Sundays. But also during the week the students got help online in preparing their topic. During the main sessions they were taught about body language, eye contact, gestures, methods of writing a speech, and after each student's presentation a feedback was given. Out of our 18 participating students 5 won a prize, namely Bindu K., Murali R., Mary Basilica I., Lakshmi M. and Ashwini M. This was indeed a great day for Shishu Mandir!



Tally and Office Administration

40 youngsters of the surrounding villages made use of our courses of Tally and Office Administration which we held for the third time. Additionally on Saturdays we conducted group activities like tower building, singing, or party games, all for developing their interpersonal relationships. For 10 days the youngsters also had an internship in different supermarkets. To our joy 13 of them could be placed in jobs.

Sports

Sport has become the driving force in our Shishu children. With the introduction of football we now practise three sports, namely basketball,

volley ball and football and even won many prizes up to district level. 5 of our girls have gone for a divisional level football match, which is just one step away from state level. For the first time our junior boys and girls and also our senior boys won the district level basketball match. It may be slightly overconfident, but we have a feeling that we are creating a state level impact in sports.

Awareness Training for Mothers of Prep A Children

A 3-day training was conducted for the mothers of our newly admitted children to orientate them towards their role and responsibility in shaping their children's future.

A professional resource person conducted the training. She made them aware of the prevailing discrimination of women in society and the need of empowering children with self-esteem and an inner balance in a predominantly patriarchal society. Great emphasis was put on equality of the genders and the need to open the taboo topic of sexual misuse. The workshop turned out to be a blessing for the women, also in respect of collectivizing their common problems. It is to be repeated once a year.

Spreading Ecological Ideas

From the beginning Shishu Mandir was following ecological ideas. The children were taught about the use of paper, water, electricity or also the overload of disinfectants in water and

many aspects of their daily life. Now **Target** widened their horizon by showing them a power point presentation on waste management and the disastrous impacts of CO₂ accumulation on nature.



On **Plantation Day** the children planted many saplings and cleaned the surroundings of the plants. It was a joy to see the students' involvement and eagerness to invest their energy in the care of plants.

Medical Support

Soukya Foundation, an organisation of homoeopathic doctors, provides homeopathic medicines free of cost. Recently they introduced a special check-up for respiratory problems and started the treatment on 50 asthma patients, who were assured to be cured within a year.



Doctors, especially paediatricians from the nearby MVJ

Hospital, visited the school or Home once a week to take care of the medical problems of the children. A dental check-up was done by Vaidehi Dental College which comes to our school regularly, and - last not least - an eye camp was carried out by Vasan Eye Care Hospital for all our children. This time also spectacles were sponsored, thanks to Lion's Club Bangalore.

Special Maths Teachings

This summer we were lucky to have another training programme with Bettina Zauner, a teacher for Special Education from Germany, who has been our main guide in all matters of pedagogy from day one of our school. Again she presented a workshop on Maths, this time



on the method of introducing the number concept. It is based on visual aids and follows a strict sequence of logical steps easily understandable by children. Though our teachers were new to this way of teaching, which was not an easy task for them, they understood its advantages and took big efforts to follow this method - always open to novel ideas. We plan to bring out a work book of these Maths materials which should be almost self-explanatory.

Congratulations!

We take great pride in announcing the names of our students who finished their education.

We congratulate

- Varalakshmi S.,
- Aksa M.,
- Kavitha V.,
- Asha N. for their **B.Com.**

- Caroline D. and
- Cynthia Rani D.

For qualifying and entering a **college of engineering.**

- Divya N. for her **MBA**



A big thanks

to the volunteers of

- KPMG
- Target
- Cisco
- Dell
- Aloft
- Decathlon
- Mphasis
- AIG
- DHL
- Mercedes Benz

for their services.

Kalpana – our Iron Girl!



Kalpana looks every inch the Shishu child I have grown to recognise neatly dressed, pleasant, confident and with a story that surprises, inspires and touches.

“I am 25 years old,” she says, “and doing my Masters in Psychology.”

But that's not where her story begins. It goes back to growing up in a tiny one-room home with her mother and sister, unsupported by an alcoholic father who also had another family, a life that began with naught.

Kalpana is probably among the rare few whose mother was keen to see her educated. She took it upon herself to support her daughters by working as a housemaid in the Gulf. Fortunately for Kalpana, living in Ulsoor meant that news of a free school for poor children – Shishu Mandir – reached them soon. And so Kalpana came to join the Shishu family when she was around 7 years old.

“I liked playing with the toys, the classes... my teachers were so nice and there was always enough to eat...” Shishu was more than just a safe place. Here she explored various interests and found her love for sports. And sure enough, Hella and Anand and the other teachers encouraged her to pursue it. Basketball camps during holidays, football games, athletics, swimming... Kalpana enjoyed them all.

Kalpana lost her father when she was in the 7th. Her mother chose to return to the Gulf to work. Kalpana and her, although living near their aunt, learnt to fend for themselves. Reminiscing, she doesn't express sorrow for a difficult life; Shishu Mandir seems to have more than compensated for it.

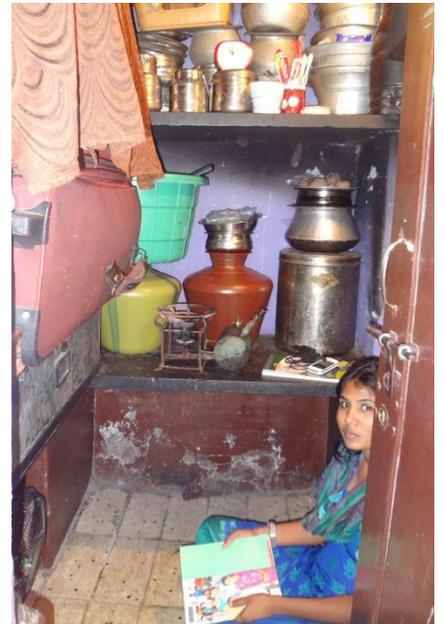
With 68% in her SSLC, Kalpana pursued the Arts at St Anne's College, following the PUC with a BA and now an MA in Psychology. All of this has been possible with Shishu supporting financially and emotionally.

Kalpana's mother left Bangalore safe in the knowledge that Hella, Anand Sir and Shishu Mandir would be her daughters' guardians. And they have kept their promise. Every Saturday Kalpana is in Shishu, with other past students. They catch up over lunch, a game or two of basketball and meeting the social workers. Kalpana's boyfriend, Gautham, a former Shishu schoolmate is also supportive of her choices. She attributes this to him being a Shishu child. “He has learnt good values here,” she says. Her teachers' advice has been that she should complete her studies and work for at least one year before getting married. It's advice she has decided to follow.

In two years time, Kalpana will graduate with a Masters in Psychology. She looks forward to it. “I want to start working, I want to teach in a school, I want to work as a counsellor, I want to bring my mother back to India, I want to provide for my mother and sister, and for Gautham and his family. I want to give back to Shishu...”

“Your mother must be so proud of you,” I say. “And I am so proud of my mother,” she responds. As a parting note, I ask, “Do you like reading?” “I love the story of Cinderella,” she replies, grinning.

Perhaps she finds parallels with her own story, and sees in Hella her very own fairy godmother.



Kalpana's story was written by Aravinda Anantharaman.