

News from Shishu Mandir



Vol II, April 2014 to June 2014

Greetings,

Our second newsletter of 2014 starts with the summer holidays. So have a good time and enjoy the carefree atmosphere of the children.

Exuberating Holiday Activity

At school the time was quite different. The classrooms were closed for regular classes, but holiday activities exuberated all over the place. The children had a huge variety of choices, beginning with chess, Chinese Checkers or any other table game, via carom, badminton, volley ball, basketball to Karagattam Dance, unicycling and juggling. These two sports



were brought to us by Mr. David Foi from the US, and indeed it was a delight to see the children meandering on their unicycles around obstacles and bouncing a ball side by side. 60 children learnt the art of unicycling which invaded every free hour at school. Ultimately Mr. Foi donated us all the 13 unicycles

which he had brought from abroad. Sure, they hardly stand still.



SSLC – only First Classes

Going to the other end of the ladder we had the great joy of seeing all our 10 SSLC candidates finishing with a First Class, including one with Distinction, and 5 girls finishing their Bachelor Degrees successfully. It was the first time we reached such a good result. All 10 First Classers have started their PUC studies and 4 of the 5 degree holders have found employment. To think that hardly anyone of them would have finished the SSLC without the great educational help which they received over 12 years, we are extremely happy. 2 more children finished their education by passing their diploma in commercial

training and also found employment. With such results our ultimate aims get fulfilled.

Reconstruction of the Child Care Centre

Now we are looking forward to the reconstruction of the Child Care Centre in the same place, but in two storeys to provide early childhood grooming to approximately 80 children. The foundation stone has been laid and the building is about to be started. We hope to get all the funds during the next few months to finish the building by January 2015.

A New Vehicle

KPMG, which conducted a thorough checking on us, considered our van not fit for transporting people. Consequently - they donated us a new one. Here is the 'proof'!



Fathers' Day with a Change

Not ending here even the fathers were given importance during this time. Father's Day usually means another opportunity of enjoying a carefree time and getting drunk. This year the children of class 10 used the occasion by honouring their fathers in a special way. They expressed to their fathers in touching words how much they meant to them in spite of the daily scenes of alcohol based quarrels and aggressions. It was indeed a moment which did not leave anybody untouched.

World Environment Day

Other big events were the World Environment Day where we planted many saplings and remembered the importance of keeping this planet alive. Also the meeting with high school students from USA was a memorable event for our students as they were given the possibility to shoot a film on a topic which was evolved entirely on their own. It boosted their self-confidence considerably. The project was supported by Adobe.

Siblings' Support

This year we also reached out to the other members of our school children's families. First of all the siblings got an opportunity to gain basic English and computer knowledge at our school. For a full month they came every day to practise these two skills which mean so much in their chance for a better position in society. Two school teachers took the challenge to teach these youngsters with very different backgrounds that we called 'Spoken English' and 'Basic Computers'.



Mothers' Empowerment

But not only the siblings were given this opportunity, also their mothers were offered English classes in the hope that they will be able to participate better in discussions and decisions concerning their families and also have a better position in society.

World Compassion Day



Another big event was the World Compassion Day which was celebrated at our school with 500 outside students and 100 adults from different NGOs. The presentations of course centred on compassion for any human being or animal, by way of videos and personal sharing.

Service Camps by the CC Students

The students of the Community College were also very active. Apart from their classes they attended a service camp in different localities. The Fitter and Electrical students took up repairs like home appliances and house wiring as well as plumbing and welding. The Automobile students could practise their skill in adjusting brakes and clutches, changing the engine oil and checking the speedo-metre. Altogether they had a good experience with the public.

Home

For the Home it was, however, everything else than carefree, as we had to manage the big task of caring for seven babies, two siblings of whom the 5-year-old boy was hyperactive and extremely aggressive, and two special needs children. It was indeed at a breaking

point for all the staff members who could not have managed without the help of the children. Such situations are not fully avoidable, as it is not in our hands when a child is offered for admission. In that moment we have a strong tendency of overstraining our staff, as we believe that we do the best for our children. This time, however, it was more than bearable.

The Lucky Ones

April is also the time to select the new students for our school, the most difficult task we have to face, as all applicants, who count about 150 and more, are needy and would need support. Then how to reject 130 of them? Only through a very elaborate selection process in which the families are visited several times, even by two Society members, the 20 lucky children are selected. Criteria like education of the parents, status of the mother as single, husband being a drunkard, number of dependents and health reasons play a vital role. Still we sometimes have to hear criticism from fathers like 'Do I have to start drinking to make my child eligible for you?' We have no answer for this reproach. With the new admissions our school strength has reached 2006.

Swimming Lessons back again!

The April holidays also brought swimming lessons back to our children. For the first time we chose a paid course, as we do not see any other possibility for getting access to a swimming pool. 20 children learnt the basics of swimming which will be of great value in their lives



The Story of Varalakshmi



Varalakshmi's story is one of yet another childhood that has been saved. Having lost her father when she was three, Varalakshmi, her mother and baby sister continued to live with relatives. When circumstances became uncomfortable, Varalakshmi's mother chose to move out with her two young daughters and started working in a garment factory. Life could have easily been very different with both Varalakshmi and her sister likely to start working, as soon as they could. School was almost an indulgence and certainly a distant dream. A friend and neighbour, Shantamma, spoke about the place, where she worked, a Children's Home and School called Shishu Mandir. Why not send Varalakshmi there, she suggested. And so it was that at the age of 6, Varalakshmi joined the school at Shishu Mandir.

"When it was time for vaccination, we would run. But Mama would hold us and talk to us, and the injection would never hurt," says Varalakshmi, of one of her most treasured memories of Shishu. Her school years allowed her to enjoy her childhood, in the company of friends and under the care of teachers who, she says, were "the best". School meant not just studies, but

so much more; there were songs and dance, there was swimming and basketball, there was outdoor trips and picnics. And the one thing that Varalakshmi still misses in her family – an excellent lunch served everyday. It was a life she would never have known otherwise.

With the help of Shishu Mandir, Varalakshmi's younger sister was admitted into an English-medium private school. And Varalakshmi continued on in Shishu, always in the top 3 ranks in her class. In the SSLC exam, she scored 74% and enrolled for PUC in Commerce at St. Ann's College, Millers Road. She followed that with B.Com. at St. Ann's College.

Life after Shishu Mandir was different. From a class of 10 students, she was now in a class of 100 students. Everything was different, but Shishu was still a part of her life. Rajkumar, the social worker, was at the college often, with Shishu Mandir being the students' guardian. He was there at PTA meetings and to discuss marks and attendance and any problems the Shishu children had. Further, Shishu Mandir began organising a Saturday programme for its former students. Volunteers from IBM gave lessons in Maths and Accountancy, the social workers were available for a chat, lunch was always offered and a game of basketball was an inevitable end to a relaxed day in the company of old friends. Varalakshmi, like several other Shishu children, realised how strong the bonds with Shishu were and the unshakeable commitment it offered her. Study holidays were always spent at Shishu Mandir, when all meals were provided and most importantly, an environment conducive to studying. It went a long way in ensuring that she could do well in her exams.

When a chronic health problem persisted, Nancy, one of the Shishu social workers, took her for check-ups and tests. A surgery was recommended and with Shishu footing the bill, Varalakshmi underwent a surgery in 2013. "Anand Sir spoke to me before the surgery and also Nancy ma'am called. 'We are with you'," she said. "I know I can call them at any time and they will respond."

Varalakshmi graduated in May 2014 and in July began to work for a real estate developer. She is the first and only graduate in her family. Her first salary will be Rs. 10,000 which will go a long way in supporting her mother and sister.

"Does your mother insist that you marry," I ask, the inevitable question. "She used to and then I made Anand Sir talk to her. Now she doesn't trouble me. I want to work. I have always wanted to have a job and earn well and I have only just begun."

Varalakshmi's sister couldn't complete her PUC and has now enrolled at the Shishu Mandir Community College. "I want to make her study more," says Varalakshmi, now a breadwinner and head of her family. "In my family, girls are married off after the 10th standard. I am also trying to help my cousin move here and study, but her parents are not allowing her to."

Clearly, she has realised what life can be and how education can enable a better life. It's one more childhood saved and one more adulthood that has the most valuable of all gifts – hope.