

News from Shishu Mandir



Vol I, January 2014 to March 2014

Greetings,

The year 2014 is a precious year for the Shishu Family. The starting itself was special and joyful. Just follow us through January till March.

Shishu Nrithyothsava

Shishu Nrithyothsava, an inter-school dance festival, in which six schools participated, was held at our school as a first step towards the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of our Mama. The four forms of dance categories were Folk, Western, Bharathnatyam and Contemporary. Shastry School stood first and won a cash prize of Rs. 15,000. Shishu Mandir secured the second position winning a cash prize of Rs. 10,000 and St. Antony's School bagged the third prize winning Rs. 5,000. As we had organized the event, we sponsored it completely.

Platinum Jubilee Celebration

On Founder's Day the Shishu Family gave a heart-warming welcome to Mama with drums and unicycle presentations. Greetings and birthday wishes were followed by cutting the cake and singing the birthday song. After that a small booklet containing all the seven songs

that the children and the teachers had composed since 2003 for Mama's birthdays, was released by **Mr. Seshagiri**. Then we had the annual sports meet at Samuel Public School which all children expected with great zeal.

Cultural Programme

At M. M. Function Hall where the programme was to be held, a warm welcome was given to Mama and the 2400 guests. As a first highlight Mama released the **Dr. Hella Mundhra's Platinum Jubilee Higher Education Fund** of Rs. 75 lakhs. The interest derived from this fund would be utilised for the higher education of all future children of Shishu Mandir. Community College and Shishu children from different classes showed their talents by giving high quality performances which were enthusiastically applauded. Mama also unveiled the foundation stones of the Multi-purpose Hall and Child Care Centre.

Cycling Project



Ms. Susanne Klier from Henkel, Germany, had raised funds for a cycle project in which she personally taught the children cycling and traffic rules. After three months they had to undergo a theory and practical test. Those who passed were rewarded with a brand new cycle, a head gear and a hand pump, and the others were given a T-shirt with a cycle picture. The new cyclists are of course cycling to school and even for parking a special cycle stand was provided.

Staff Picnic

The school and the community college staff went for an outing to **the Pyramid Valley** and **Muthathi Falls**. Free from the

usual pressures of their tasks they had a day full of laughter and fun and enjoyed it to the maximum.

Teachers' Training



Mr. Vishwanathan and Mr. Satish from UST Company conducted a one-day session for 25 teachers on 'How to Make Learning Fun'. It was based on a neuro-linguistic programme, which describes the fundamental dynamics between the mind and language and how their interplay affects our body and behaviour. The training was a big help to make ourselves better teachers and learners.

Lego Competition



The Lego competition, in which 14 schools from all over India participated, was held at Chennai. Our school won **the first prize for the best Robotic Design** which was based on **Nature's Fury and Flood**. We had to give a demo of our robotic model and later stand three rounds of interviews by seven judges to explain the science behind it. Thanks to **Mr. Sanjay** and **Mr. Rajkumar**, who have robotics as their hobby and who took keen interest in training us, we reached this high prize.

Adobe Youth Voices

31 Shishu students attended a programme of Adobe Youth Voices, a foundation for empowering **young people's creative skills** in media use. Under the guidance of our trainer, Mr. Ericks, they had shot films on their lives and dreams. A selection of 20 such films from different schools were screened, among them ours on **Gender Inequality** which earned a lot of applause. On April 28th we will come to know the judgment. We hope and hope ...



Visit of CSR

A few employees from CSR, a company for audio and visual products, visited our school to acquaint themselves with a charitable organisation. They played a basketball match with our students and we in turn presented a short cultural programme for them. Their CEO, **Mr. Joep Van Beurden**, donated many articles for the kitchen and furniture for several classrooms and assured us of sponsoring the topper of the class 10 for PUC.



Adoption

4 babies were newly admitted for adoption. Meanwhile two babies could be placed in pre-adoptive foster care with families in Bangalore. But since the procedure is laborious and tedious, 8 children are still waiting for their adoptive parents.

Shishu Enclave

The land, which Shishu Mandir purchased eight years ago for the benefit of some children and staff members, was ultimately transferred to its new owners. All beneficiaries made a trip to their land and erected a name board with the name '**Shishu Enclave**'. Altogether 20 sites were allotted to our past students and aunties who could purchase the land at an exceptionally low price thanks to Shishu Mandir's advance payment. Still they required eight years for the full payment. Our past students were lucky, as they got the land due to an extra donation from their sponsor parents in Germany.



Admission for Community College

January is the month of admissions for the Community College. **Mrs. Neeraja and Mr. Lazar** conducted the interviews for the newcomers who chose their trade according to their interest. In the first two weeks we introduced them to all our trades to give them an idea of the different branches. Then we started regular classes. As usual the applications for Computer classes were the highest followed by Automobile training. Altogether we received 87 applications from whom we selected 55 students.

"There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure."

The Story of Davy Schneider



When we hear of a child being adopted we assume a poignant story of despair, of a mother forced to abandon her child, messed up and tattered with broken emotions, parting ways with her newborn child. We think of a child dealing with feelings of abandonment, searching for a home where someone cares about his or her existence and left to wonder where he or she came from. We ponder over the selfless adopting parents who love unconditionally and raise a child not born out of their own womb, but that of an unknown one and wonder what brings such an outpour of unconditional love and complete acceptance to a stranger from another land. The story of Davy Schneider is that of adoption, but not of despair or heartbreak. Instead it is of gratitude, happiness and acceptance. In 1982, Davy was brought to Shishu Mandir as a newborn and soon adopted by his German parents, the Schneiders.

They embraced him as their own. Davy only knew Germany and didn't feel the connection to India at all. For all practical purposes he is German except for his appearance. He talks nonchalantly about his younger brother, who is the only birth child of the Schneiders as a blue-eyed, white young man, and simply his kid brother. His parents did not try to force Davy to study the Indian culture, nor did they hide his background. Davy never felt the need to find out about his natural parents. He had heard that his natural mother was a young 16-year-old who took the decision not to "throw him away", and he feels grateful that she gave him up for adoption.

"I always felt there was a part of me that I cannot explain. Even though I tell everyone that I am from Cologne, Germany, no one really understands that because of my external appearance," explains Davy. Davy knew nothing about India and its people, but in his late 20s he wanted to know more about the particular side of him that was Indian. He contacted "Mama" (Hella) and expressed his desire to learn more about himself and traveled to India with her. With no expectations or foreseen outcome, Davy stepped out of the airport and was received by a van full of Shishu kids. In an instant he felt he was home. He sat among them as one. He had never felt in his entire life that he was incomplete, but being with the children he felt replete. Suddenly his life had changed. He felt a sense of purpose and the meaning of his being. A piece of puzzle, which was his external self, was now clear.

2009 was supposed to be just a visit, purely out of curiosity and ended in a way of life, chartered beyond his imagination. Today Davy is 32 years old. Although the smell, the crowd, the dirt and the chaos of India are clearly visible to him, it does not deter him at all. He is home. He has no plans of moving to India, but in the last five years he managed to visit once or twice a year. He takes back with him a report of how Shishu operates, the work done in creating opportunities for underprivileged kids to the extent it becomes their home, and he is fascinated at the sheer gratitude the kids have of their existence. He is amazed that they have very little, but thrive in it with immense happiness and peace.

Davy is struck by how loving and incredibly caring the Shishu staff is. Their support toward the Shishu children can be likened to that of loving parents, which explains why the children feel like they are home. Anand Sir is one of the strongest contributors to Shishu, who works tirelessly, always smiles and is a great problem solver. He believes this organization's most hardworking person and the reason for the children's and staff's wellbeing is Hella Ma'am. This is her life's calling and dedication, says Davy, clearly moved by her energy.

Davy is an educated professional with a Degree in Osteopathy. He is young, confident and extremely privileged with a great network of friends. Davy has contributed significantly by bringing in a lot of donors for Shishu. He also brings large groups of people to come to see how Shishu operates. A decision taken by a 16-year-old girl is now a driving force of Shishu Mandir in Germany, standing in full support of children who could possibly have the same privilege as him. Davy works to provide the kids a chance of that opportunity, he is so grateful he could have. This could only be possible in an environment such as Shishu Mandir.

Davy's story was written by Sima Mehta

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

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'!



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

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.

Story written by Aravinda Anantharaman

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.

News from Shishu Mandir



Vol VIII, October to December 2014

Welcome to Shishu Mandir! We are pleased to take you along to our latest developments and programmes during the quarter of October to December 2014.

Let us start with a general activity which was inaugurated by the **Prime Minister, Mr. Modi, 'Swachch Bharat'**. Our children wholeheartedly accepted the challenge and toiled hard, sweating it out, whatever it demanded. Not only the ever present waste around the compound wall disappeared, also the garden and the store rooms attained a fully new look. What a feeling of achievement they had after the toil!

The National Library Week



There was another all India event which we celebrated at our school. **Drop Everything and Read** – D.E.A.R. – was the call of the hour which children and staff followed enthusiastically. Of course the reading activity did not end with the children, even their parents were invited to read (out) a Kannada story. As usual, our mentor in library matters, Hippocampus, was extremely pleased with our efforts and success on the way of improving the reading habits of our children.

Heart Camp

A significant help was rendered to 177 children between 0 and 10 years of age by way of a heart camp. They had been diagnosed with a heart problem earlier in their lives and were now screened by specialists from Chennai for any type of heart disease. Much as their anxiety had been on their way coming, they could all return with a free mind, as the investigations had not detected any heart disease. It was a big relief for the worrying parents and their families! Thanks to



TE Connectivity and Aishwarya Trust, which bore all expenses for the sophisticated investigations.

Eye Camp



Another medical help was provided through Shishu Mandir, this time benefitting the villagers around the school. About 200 came to get their eye sight tested and, sure enough, 108 required spectacles. We made sure that the spectacles were issued so-to-say on the spot, thanks to UST Company and the Lions Club of Bangalore. For three patients a

cataract operation was advised which would also be done free of cost.

Science Training by Agastya International Foundation

Science is not a popular subject with most of the children. Althamore Shishu Mandir struggles to attract the students' interest to Science. KPMG, which shares our zeal to make students shine in Science subjects, offered a 3-day residential camp at Kuppam, AP, to improve the children's interest in Science. 6 girls were the lucky ones to be exposed to a high-level Science scenario with many experiments and models.

Employability Training

This training was very practical. Under the leadership of Mr. Jimmy from Volvo Company volunteers from companies like Northern Trust, Cap Gemini, SAP etc. engaged themselves in sensitizing the students for the best manner of going through an interview, how to compose their resumes, and last not at all least, how to show good communication skills and - very important - the best of their English. No doubt, our students get an all round training.

Children's Day

No day in the entire round of the year reveals so specifically the bond between our teachers and students. On this day the teachers display all their talents and creativity and above all their love and dedication to the children by making it a big event.



They perform a self written skit which itself puts the children into reels of laughter, but not sufficient with that they cook and bake and sing and dance and make the



children feel totally at home. Children's Day in fact is one proof of Shishu Mandir's claim to be a big Family.

International Giving Day

December is not only note-worthy for the big Christmas festival, but also for the International Giving Day, which Target India made into a special event for 30 of our children. They offered an inter-institutional competition in quizzes, dancing and Rangoli creations. It was an excellent opportunity for our children to compete with the employees of Target as well as with other NGOs, and inevitably they also won a few prizes. Our children have an extraordinary talent to dance and to create wonderful Rangoli compositions.

CCTV Cameras in the School and Home

The appalling happenings in a few reputed schools in Bangalore, where small girls were sexually assaulted by their own teachers, have led to stringent measures by the government which imposed on all schools and institutions to install CCTV cameras in all classrooms. We had no other choice than follow suit and fixed 16 such cameras so far. But it pains deeply to think that we cannot trust anybody anymore, be it a child, a teacher or an outsider. Big Brother is watching you! Where have we reached? The cameras are not the

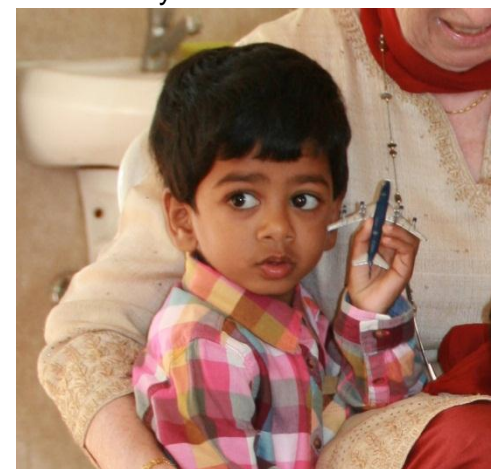
only imposition, there are dozens of rules and regulations, which are highly restrictive and even demanding big investments in respect of changes/ additions in the buildings. As usual the demands exceed all realistic options so that we are left with no other choice than envisaging penalties.

Support by international Companies

Though India's unprecedented economical growth led the lower sections of the society into even deeper poverty and despair, the improved economy resulted in a heightened readiness to support NGOs, from the side of the management as well as from the employees. We could count on increased support from companies though every time it meant an immense struggle and effort from our side. This quarter it was Brady Company which gave us a generous support by providing high quality sweaters for all students just in time before the start of the winter season. We are extremely happy and grateful.

Home

After 4 ½ years the search for a family for little **Monish** came to an end. Monish, you may remember, was born with the glass bone disease, an incurable disease which leads to frequent fractures even with a little impact. Although Monish was a handsome and smart little fellow, he could not find his family in India. But destiny rewarded him for all



what he may have missed in 4 ½ years: A couple from Britain living in Luxembourg offered to adopt him knowing very well about his disease and the consequences. We were overwhelmed by the magnanimity of this couple. And the unimaginable happened: Within two hours Monish, shy and sceptical as he always was, sat in his father's lap calling him 'Daddy'. Indeed this scene brought tears to our eyes.

From the State Juvenile Home

At the age of 1 year and 9 months **Sree Raksha** was transferred to us. She could not yet sit, but showed all symptoms of severe hospitalism like beating her head against the ground and pulling her hair. It was pathetic. But within six weeks she had overcome her habit and became active and jolly. Even her weight increased by 2.2 kg and since the beginning of February she is walking freely. It was a miraculous improvement. Hopefully she will find an adoptive family soon in spite of her delayed milestones!



Changes in the Adoption Scene

During the last few years the Indian government ordered strict rules concerning adoptions. Local agencies cannot suggest a couple anymore for adoption, the application has to be made online to the Centre. We did not appreciate this system, but we accepted it, different from other institutions which closed down.

Consequently the number of adoptable children increased considerably, burdening our working capacity beyond limits. 11 babies at a time, when our usual number is below 5, meant an enormous challenge. Meanwhile we have introduced a system of outside foster care by approved families, whenever the number of babies exceeds a certain limit. In this way we can hopefully provide more children the happiness of living in an adopted family and more parents the happiness of experiencing parenthood.

Our Vocational Training Centre...

...has completed seven years, a hard time. Without a reputed name as a training centre it was very difficult to get students, though the training was and is free. Now only we seem to have managed a breakthrough: Our staff members distribute pamphlets in many places of the church and villages around, but then also our former students are our trumpet. For the current course we had more students than we could possibly take.

To direct the students towards job reality, every course provides an internship training of two weeks at a workplace outside of Shishu Mandir. During this quarter it was the Fitters and Electrical students who had their internship. They had to apply whatever they had learnt in their course, which was of course very basic, but they got a feeling of their future job reality.

Service Camps

A similar experience waited for them in a 'service camp', where they did little repairs for the villagers at



Jyothipura, like setting door or win-

dow fittings, repairing electrical wiring, naturally free of charges and with a happy feeling. An elderly lady had been living without electricity for four years. Our boys set the connection right and literally brought light back to her life.

Reaching out to the Fathers

This time we took efforts in also reaching out to the fathers of our students. To give them a feeling of being important, we made them learn small bike repairs. With this we hope to have boosted their self-respect to some extent.



A Turning Point in their Lives

If not for the fathers, for the students we could definitely achieve a great increase in their self-confidence, as almost all found jobs through our contacts. These students all have passed years of loitering around aimlessly and now they will earn their own money. It is indeed a turning point in their lives, which has been achieved in a course of six months of giving them the basics of a skill, life skill sessions and above all respect.

