During third term we were invited to a special program on Environmental Education at Auroville’s Botanical Gardens (BG’s). This was the best season as all the vegetations were in full bloom. Khundavi (see picture), one of BG’s environmental trainers, set up a program specially adapted to our children using a combination of games, outings and experiments in both English and Tamil. Each visit started with an ice breaker, followed by small group activities. The children really enjoyed them because there were different things to observe and to do. Two ice breakers which they remembered very well were the cactus gardens full of colorful varieties and different sizes which they had never seen before - and a huge maze with Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF). We learned how both cacti and TDEF need very little watering and make beautiful gardens! During the main activities, we studied food chains, habitats of animals, and their importance of interdependence. We were taught about snakes, one of the children’s favorite subjects – both poisonous and non poisonous – their habitats and why they bite us. We saw pictures and skins and were told of the benefits of snakes as they eat rodents. We were also taught how to measure the height of trees (using a pencil!) and how to obtain different bark designs. Then we did a guessing game to find out how long it takes for different objects to degrade when they are trashed in nature. So, we learned how recycling waste is essential if we want to have clean villages! And we observed how to preserve seeds for many different varieties; we could even choose some seeds to bring back to school. We had a great time and are grateful to BG’s team for sharing their passion with us!

About Special Needs

**Lower Grades (K. to 3rd grade)**:
This program identifies children with learning challenges in an early age, in order to increase their chances to get back into the general curriculum and to increase their integration in society.

**Higher grades (4th to 8th grade)**:
Life skills & vocational training encourages children with learning challenges of mixed ages to become fully autonomous and self confident in different tasks and skills at their own rhythm and level of readiness determined by an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Based on Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s true aim of Integral Education: “The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use (1).” “The aim of education is not to prepare man to succeed in life and society but to increase his perfectibility in its utmost (2).”

(1) Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library
(2) Collected Works of The Mother
“If I was the leader of Aikiyam’s children’s village, which games and activities would I organize?” was the core question of this year’s Special Needs project for higher grade students (5th to 8th). Spread over a period of 2 months, the children designed a plan on the school grounds to organize their chosen activities to which the whole school was to be invited. In addition, they created a puppet show to introduce their village project using hand made puppets out of recycled materials and they each learned some magic tricks to perform. As a culminating activity, they made their own slide show of the project, using special computer software, which they presented to all the students and teachers at the end of the year! says Saskia, the project coordinator (see picture on the left). She adds: “There was an incredible team spirit amongst the children and the teachers. Everybody shared ideas and could express their views during the morning meetings as the project grew. The big difference this year was that the actual performance of the children’s project took one full week which gave us enough space to talk about things which went really well or to improve in other parts where necessary. The idea of the project originated from a brainstorming session between Mala, Jothi, Sathiyavani and Vanitha… all Special Needs teachers at Aikiyam. Recalling last year’s success of the circus project, we found a new way to involve the whole school in fun activities to do and to see. We also wanted the Special Needs children to express, in their own way, their acquired experience from numerous outings to Sadhana Forest and Botanical Gardens. On top of that, we taught them how to make banana rolls, which they distributed to 240 children and their accompanying teachers to reward them for their participation. All the teachers had fun and some of them even participated which was great to see!”

Aikiyam’s Magic Children’s village in full swing!

Not only did they enjoy each day of the project, they also got to perform their activities and magic shows twenty times!”

Saskia

From Left to right: M.Arun, V.J., Ganesh and Manimaran sitting inside the puppet show house. They are ready to present to the Tamil children of 1st and 2nd grade using their self-made puppets of recycled materials. After that they will provide entertainment with water-, obstacle-, animal- and musical games, together with other Special Needs children. Then they will turn themselves into magicians to delight all the children with their magic acts!