We were invited to Sadhana Forest for 3 days to celebrate the end of the year. The idea was to experience community life and volunteering activities. On day one we were guided around the community to learn about the do’s and don’ts. It was the first time that most of us would use compost toilets and sleep on our own mattress! In the village homes there is usually not enough space so we have to sleep together. That afternoon we made our own water raft with bamboo shoots, coconut rope and used plastic bottles to help it floating. Once in the water, we all fought to get on the raft first... and it broke... What a scenery! In the evening, we chanted under the moon and the stars around a sacred fire. Ana and Tiago, who organized everything for us, made it an unforgettable evening. We sang in different languages, danced around the fire and listened to the beat of the drums till late at night. On day two, we all helped as volunteers: our most favorite activity was cutting vegetables and cooking rice in the kitchen! That afternoon, we practiced circus acts: two human pyramids, hoola hoop and balance acts. In the evening, we performed in front of 120 volunteers. It was wonderful to get cheers from the audience. The last day, we helped Tiago in the forest and some of us did handicraft activities with Ana. All the children had a great time and most of them said they would feel happy to join as a volunteer, when they are a bit older, to help build future forests. Thank you Sadhana Forest for this great X-mas treat!
Vanitha, who joined us this year, has learned how to teach the children a new method based on a book called: “Timetables the fun way - A picture method of learning multiplication facts”. Vanitha explains: “Spread over a period of two months, we spent 5 weeks teaching them each picture related to a specific multiplication. We also taught them key words and finger counting methods. It was fun to see them drawing pictures on the floor and hearing them say the key words. After this initial training, we started playing shop games where the children made play dough items in different colours and shapes. They were encouraged to buy a certain quantity and say the key words which they had just learned. After that session, we brought in three different weighing tools so the children had to multiply the weight of the items by their cost price”. What Vanitha really likes about this method is that children see numbers as living characters in a story which makes the tables alive and meaningful. She thinks that most of the children have greatly benefited from this approach and would really encourage other teachers to try it. She says: “Also, it enhances the use of their right brain as they are associating pictures with stories and numbers.”

Vanitha uses laminated cards of each picture so that children can easily refresh their key words for each of the multiplication tables.

“When children can associate numbers with pictures and tell a story which will lead to remembering the clue, it makes Maths a lot easier!”

Vanitha

Special Math Classes with Vanitha

Vanitha uses laminated cards of each picture so that children can easily refresh their key words for each of the multiplication tables.

Playing the shop game using their own made play dough to create shop items. Every teacher is working with a small group of children to facilitate the learning process.
Write Dance Sessions with Mala

Two years ago, Mala attended a workshop in Auroville held by a trained teacher in Write Dance skills, based on Ragnhild Oussoren’s work, to teach children pre-writing skills using music and movements. Mala, who has been working with special needs children (from 9 to 14 years old) for three years, was very enthusiastic to use this program. “Many children have not properly developed their motor skills.” She explains: “Every music piece is related to a theme. For instance, during the Robot Dance children walk and dance around the room like robots. Then we ask to observe what kind of movements they are making: rounded or straight lines and angles.

After the dance, each child receives a large sheet and some wax crayons. We demonstrate these movements on the blackboard. They are invited to draw symbols and shapes on their sheet with their right and left hand simultaneously whilst the music is playing.” Mala adds: “The music has been carefully selected to captivate their attention so they concentrate on full movements using little effort. The result is that the wrists are developed and left & right brains are stimulated because they work with both hands. Confidence increases as they see how easy it is.” Since then, Mala has trained all the Kindergarten teachers who are now also using it!

On the right is a picture of one special needs boy who is now in 7th grade. Mala says: “It’s always more difficult to teach older boys because they have already developed a pencil grip and so they first need to unlearn their old way of holding their pencil. But the nice thing about this approach is that they don’t have to think about it, they just flow with the music and all the rest follows. There needs to be little correction because they can make mistakes and they get enough time and space to practice the same movements over and over again. After the session, all the children may hang up their art works as they feel really proud of them!”

“It is rewarding to see children being proud of their work and displaying it in the classroom!”

Mala
About Aikiyam Special Needs

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T.N. India

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For long term volunteering, please write an e-mail to Saskia in Special Needs, or to Shankar, our school principal, with your request and details about your training.

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

Soon to come ! Auroville’s Education Portal
with links to our Special Needs Program.

Home grown veggies in front of our class room!

Thanks to Botanical gardens who gave us the seedlings and to Sadhana Forest where we learned how to make circle gardens using cow-dung, soil, leaves and human urine to create the best compost for our veggies. The children have planted tomatoes, red capsicum, brinjal (eggplant), basil and chilly peppers. They have made their own fence and freely take care of their garden during snack time in the mornings.

Written and edited by Saskia, Special Needs Teacher in Aikiyam school.