Vanakkam Aikiyam Friends

What a season! Aikiyam friends can sense the high season excitement during the second term of the school year. I sit to write this note after helping Auroville Marathon runners along with our 8th grade children. What a joy to help 2000 or more runners, who run with their little feet in this International City, with water, electrolytes and small snacks!

Teachers and children welcomed the whole community for our annual science, handicraft and art exhibition and performances in January. We celebrated Pongal and Republic Day. Lower grade children are excited because their Art Therapy teacher returned after a one year absence. Vanaver Caravan team members Livia and Bill are on the campus, and we hear their constant live music, accompanying their choreographic instructions to the children. Class teachers and children keep inviting other children, teachers and parents to show the results of their class room projects. The campus is colourful and busy. We are appreciating our 4 new classrooms and soon another 4 new classrooms will be ready. We are very happy to share these things with you all and I hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter. Please do not hesitate to share your feelings with us. Your words help us to grow. Aum… Shankar

Vocational Training

One of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings is the pleasure we take in making things. Whether it is a cake, a vegetable garden, a stool for the kitchen, a pretty dress, a special tool or even a management plan, we feel satisfaction and fulfillment just from the making of it. Since the beginning when we were still called New Creation, Aikiyam School has been able to offer our students opportunities for making things in art classes, and from the third standard up all students have been able to go to optional classes in carpentry, clay work and tailoring twice a...
week. Some children try them all, while some pursue a special interest. Many of these students have gone on to become carpenters, join pottery works or set up a tailoring business.

In the future we hope to start an optional vocational program for the 7th and 8th standards so that those children, who choose, may balance academic learning with learning the skills of a specific vocation. We would like to extend the present program to include supervised internships in local units and work places in the 8th standard so by the end of the 10th standard the students will be able to move into a paying job where they can be makers for life!

Heidi and Janet spoke with Rajesh, the carpentry teacher, in his comfortably cluttered workshop amongst the benches, tools, bits of wood and works in progress, mostly wooden toys, and boxes.

Rajesh has been teaching carpentry skills to students at Aikiyam for 23 years and maintains a small carpentry business on the side, where he makes furniture and other wood related projects for the schools. Rajesh told us that many of the young carpenters in Edayanchavadi and Kuilapalayam learned their first carpentry skills in his workshop. He introduced us to Selvam, his assistant, who started with a carpentry “option” in the third standard, and after attending another school, has come back first to train and now to work with Rajesh on the furniture making projects.

Rajesh, a certified teacher of carpentry, has a complete and sequential curriculum for woodworking. For the third standard he teaches marking and cutting, and the children make small doll-sized tables and chairs; after that he teaches measuring and exercises to make small wooden toys. By the fifth standard he introduces joining and the making of larger wooden toys with several pieces; in the 6th and 7th standards the students pursue their own creative projects and in the last years the more skilled students learn carving, sanding, striking, screwing and polishing. Most of the work is done with hand tools but he does have drilling and sanding machines for the older students.

Every year the students proudly exhibit their work at the Republic Day Fair, a testimonial to the skills of their teacher.

Meet two former Aikiyam students who are now happily employed:

**Manjula, Aikiyam's assistant sewing and embroidery teacher**

Manjula began studying at Aikiyam in 2005, when she was 12. She had completed standard 5 in a village school, and then spent a year at home because of an illness, which severely affected her hip and her ability to walk. At Aikiyam she had an Individualized Education Program to accommodate several hospitalizations and a rehabilitation program at Deepam School for Disabled Children. To learn more about Manjula go to [www.aikiyamschool.org](http://www.aikiyamschool.org) and click on Newsletter February 2008.

In 2012 she went to Auroville’s Life Education Centre (LEC) (a supportive environment for young women to gain self-awareness and self-esteem while learning a vocational skill). There she learned tailoring and studied for and passed her 10th standard examinations through a correspondence course. She was also part of a women’s empowerment group, which she enjoyed very much. She was there for 2 years.
In 2014 she returned to Aikiyam as a tailoring teacher trainee. For two years she worked under Panneerselvam's supervision, and from 2016 she has her own class. She teaches hand sewing to the 4th and 5th grades, and in 6th grade she allows them to use the machine. As well as sewing, she teaches embroidery, and to children who can do embroidery satisfactorily, she shows them how to make toys. With a twinkle in her eye she says that they have to learn embroidery before she will teach them toy making.

Manjula has studied her 11th and 12th standards by correspondence and is very happy because she just passed her exams.

Selvam, carpenter working with teacher Rajesh

Twenty four year old Selvam began his schooling at Aikiyam’s Lower Kindergarten in 1998. He left in 2005 after completing standard 5 because Isaiambalam School was closer to his village, Alankuppam. He remembers enjoying English class, carpentry class and the outings. He stopped school altogether after standard 7 and became a village worker doing a variety of jobs, including working with his uncle, who was a carpenter. One day he met his old teacher Rajesh, and asked if he could come to his workshop for further training. Rajesh agreed and Selvam spent two years in training. For the past year and a half he has been working as a full carpenter, helping Rajesh fulfill his many orders, which includes making whatever is needed by Aikiyam and Udavi Schools. On the day we visited the workshop he was sanding a very nice chair, which he had made.

English Improves at Aikiyam with Fantastic Phonics and Get Set Go

For the last 2 years Marion has been working intensively with our lower school (Kindergarten to standard 3) teachers to improve their English so they can use English better in the classroom and deliver English based programs.

She started with a program called Fantastic Phonics (to learn more go to www.aikiyamschool.org and click on June 2015 newsletter), a core phonics reading scheme intended to ensure that when students reach higher grades they will have a firm basis for further development. The next phase of the program was to introduce an English as a Second Language scheme to run alongside Fantastic Phonics.

In July 2016, Marion knew the teachers and their students were ready for the next phase so she introduced a program called “Get Set Go” to the teachers of standards 1, 2, and 3. The teachers, Manju (Standard 1), Mala (Standard 2), and Thamizhelvi (Standard 3) are delighted with both of the programs, saying that they make learning fun, and the children become happy and energetic, and learn much better than with previous English programs.

They say that Get Set Go involves the children a lot and uses a lot of activities, giving many chances to speak and
There are interesting songs, which the children love to sing. They listen to recordings by native English speakers, so they learn the correct pronunciation and how to use common abbreviations like “what’s your name” instead of “what is your name”.

Manju says that even in the first grade the children can write simple sentences. If she shows an object they can write and speak more than 5 simple sentences about it, and they make fewer mistakes than before. There are many interesting characters in the stories. There is Bix the robot and Echo the parrot. The children listen to the audio and mimic the funny voice of the parrot. They are very playful sometimes, such as when making the sound of the parrot coming into the room, or when they act and speak like a robot.

Teacher Manju

Thamizhselvi says the teachers’ book is very helpful because it gives the steps to follow in sequence, and shows which games go with the lesson. The children learn faster through games. The book makes it much easier for teachers because they don’t have to go and search the internet for activities as they did before.

Teacher Thamizhselvi

Manju is 12 years old and a student in the sixth grade. She enjoys all of her classes, especially Tamil, English and Hindi. Her father does not work, so each day her mother goes to Muthialpet and sells flowers on the East Coast Road from 10:00AM until 9:00PM. Revathi joins her there each afternoon after sports. After finishing her homework she helps her mother to sell flowers. When she grows up she would like to be a doctor, and treat people who have no money. One day Shankar saw her while he was driving to Pondy, and took this picture with his mobile phone.

Revathi helps her mother to sell flowers

Mala adds that the children like the classes so much that they are teaching English to their parents when they go home.

The teachers attribute the success of both programs to Marion. “She is a great support for us. She is always available for clearing up doubts about the lesson and about English. She is regular with our classes and we can phone her when we have a question. She is good and friendly and very approachable. She loves Aikiyam because we teachers are so eager to learn and practice. She can see results when the students speak to her in English. Even children who get no support from their parents learn to speak in English. During snack time the children will go and sit next to volunteers and other English speakers and start a conversation. They can speak for more than 15 minutes.

Now we do the class ourselves. Marion comes to observe once a month. In the beginning she observed us more. Some English words are difficult for us to pronounce. Marion couldn’t understand us when we said “horse”, and taught us how to say it correctly, but it’s not an easy word for us.” This was followed by lots of laughter as each of them tried to improve their pronunciation of “horse”.

“We have Headway, an English Second language class for adults, with Marion once a week. About 15 teachers come, mostly from kindergarten to 3rd standard. We love these classes and won’t miss them, and because they’re weekly we don’t forget.”

Teacher Mala

This month we saw Auroville photographer Sven on the campus many times taking pictures of the students, while they studied and went about their various activities. He kept coming back because he enjoys the joyful and stimulating atmosphere on the campus.

Most of the pictures in this newsletter were taken by Sven.

You can send your donation via the Auroville International Centre in your country, or send a cheque made payable to ‘Auroville Unity Fund’, Town Hall, Auroville, 605101 Tamil Nadu, INDIA indicating clearly that the donation is for Aikiyam School, or you can send it electronically by going to http://www.auroville.com/donations/ and following the instructions.

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