

Annual Report for the Year 2008-2009

K.G., Jones Rd., Saidapet

We have had a wonderful year at the Saidapet school.

The second academic year, since our entry here, has drawn to a close and we are happy to say that there were no major problems and the functioning went on quite smoothly. Although the corporation teachers do not assist our teachers, they have not created any problems or interfered in our work in any way. One reason is that the headmistress has been strongly supporting our cause. Secondly, they are happy and relieved that we are looking after the children and maintaining the premises too.

Our teachers strongly feel, that having worked with us for more than a year now, the corporation staff has grown to trust us and value our presence, being witness to the tremendous change in the quality of schooling of the children. They have come to understand, that this method is less cumbersome for teachers since every child is independently engaged in some purposeful activity. Order prevails naturally, and need not be forcefully enforced. Tremendous progress has been made and the corporation teachers are awed at the way children have been eagerly working. If our teacher is absent for even one day, they would rather allow the children to work with the materials, which the children demand, rather take a class the traditional way, which is tedious to the teacher and uninteresting to the children.

The math material is fascinating and exhaustive and the corporation teachers have openly appreciated this and the ease and interest with which children learn arithmetic.

Mrs. Sukanya Venkatachalam from the Chennai Wellington Corporate Foundation was instrumental in getting funds to buy materials costing Rs.62,000. Mr. Sudhakar Ram made a donation of materials worth Rs.10,000.

As usual, students from the Centre for Montessori Training, Chennai were sent to our classes for observation,- and the environments at Jones Rd., were unanimously agreed to be the best they had seen.

Our teachers have interviewed parents individually and written down the feedback. Each and every parent mentioned that their child has picked up good habits like personal cleanliness, keeping things back in their respective places, tidying the house, helping at home etc. In fact they have said that the children are also instructing their siblings and others at home to follow these practices. They said that the children spoke some English and were able to tell names of vegetables, fruits etc. in English. They recognized India and were able to tell names of States. Many parents commented that the children told them that they were being taught a lot of arithmetic. One child had told her mother that she wanted to learn 'the bead material' which her friend was doing and was eager to

complete her current level activities to do that. This shows clearly that children are motivated by peers in the class, and there is no pressure to perform or compete.

Our teachers choreographed and prepared costumes for an English and Tamil song for the Annual Day, and the children performed well.

Balwadis, Jones Rd., Saidapet

Of the four centers here, two centers function as Montessori centers and two as play centers. More than half the children are more than three years old, capable of working with challenging materials. Therefore, we have organised the classes in such a way that the older children of all the centers work in the Montessori environments, while the younger ones are kept engaged in the play centers. Even in the play centers many of the children work on mats with preliminary materials and are getting prepared to move on to the Montessori environments.

Since there is a lot of shifting of children between the rooms on a daily basis, all children have been provided with identity cards.

The balwadi centers are on the ground floor and each center had a separate flight of stairs which the children had to engage with difficulty, when shifting between rooms, or using the bathroom, which is located at the far end of the 4 balwadi centers. It is difficult to accompany every child every time he needs to go to the rest room. Smaller children tripped and fell on many occasions and even adults found the frequent climbing up and down stairs cumbersome. On our request the top 3 sets of stairs were joined and altered to make one long stretch of uniform pathway from the first center to the bathroom. A grill with handrails was also fixed for the safety of the children. It is indeed surprising that the corporation not only complied with our request, but also got the work done immediately.

The pathways on the right and behind the balwadi centers were stony and crude and difficult to clean. These areas have been cemented by the corporation and look nicer now and are much easier to maintain.

Rats have been invading and playing havoc in the store room where food grains are stored and the Trust has spent Rs.7000 to safeguard all the 4 store rooms with iron mesh. The water tank has also been safeguarded at the cost of Rs.1000, with a mesh cover so that children cannot climb over or peep in and fall inside by chance.

The huge numbers of children is making it stressful for one teacher to manage the environment alone and the Trust may employ assistant teachers to help in the Montessori centers from June 2009. Furthermore, now that the children have settled down into the mode of working with materials the Trust plans to equip the centers with more educational aids for the coming year.

Recently, Ms. Gopalan met the balwadi Project Officer at her office, and was pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome she received. Moreover, having heard and seen much about our work and assuming that Ramacharan Trust was a large organisation with a lot of funds she requested that we train all the 50 balwadi teachers working in her zone, or atleast sponsor their training! Such is the esteem the Trust has built for itself in these few years.

K.G., V.P. Koil St., Mylapore

The school at Mylapore, where we pioneered the Montessori Project has always been dear to us. However, the time to move out has come. After 4 years of our stay at this school the 2 corporation teachers here have been sufficiently trained in the Montessori Method on the job. Furthermore, both are currently undergoing the Montessori training at the Montessori Center along with several other corporation teachers who are receiving the training, sponsored by the corporation. We expect that the corporation will provide the Montessori materials once the training is over. In view of these factors we plan to withdraw our trained teachers from the environments. It is also decided, that until such time that they receive materials from the government our materials may be left there for the use of the children. One assistant teacher from the Trust may continue her services there for the time being.

The supply of noon meals for the children from the local Sai Baba temple shall continue. The Trust has only to bear the transportation charges which shall be managed with the help of individual sponsors.

Our Teachers

The Trust has been very lucky to get teachers who have been dedicated to the Trust and sincere in their work. Awards were given to recognize the services of some of its older teachers.

On February 1st 2009, all the teachers went on a picnic to Mahabalipuram. The teachers themselves made the arrangements including food and transportation. They also visited the Kalyana Perumal temple, at Thiruvudanthai, the Tiger Caves and enjoyed boating at Muttukadu. None of the Trust members were able to accompany them, but the teachers reportedly had a fabulous time. The atmosphere of friendliness and merriment made the picnic one of the most enjoyable and memorable events for the teachers. The Trust was also very happy to fund this outing as a joyous incentive and to promote the spirit of togetherness and camaraderie.

Apart from planning an outing together the teachers had been planning to get uniform sarees for themselves. Ms. Padmini Gopalan personally took it upon herself to find a sponsor and sanctioned Rs. 500 for each of the 25 teachers (Rs. 500 x 25 teachers = Rs.12,500).

On reminiscing, the academic year 2008-2009 has been a happy and satisfying one for both the Trust and the teachers. Furthermore, the Trust is overjoyed to announce that a benefactor, Mr. Sudhakar Ram has offered to take over the Luz Avenue balwadi for which we needed a new a sponsor. Apart from this on his request we have identified and selected 3 new balwadi centers where work will commence from June 2009.

With expansion more teachers are required. Unable to get trained teachers from the training center the Trust has been training its own teachers since the past one year. Re-fresher classes are also being held so that there is streamlining and errors rectified.

Starting out with 2 teachers and 2 environments in 2005, today Ramacharan Trust is managing a total of 20 environments with a team of 25 teachers. The Trust has gained great respect wherever it has stepped in. The name of Ramacharan Trust has spread and many more balwadis have been requesting us to help them, which we are ready to do if God so wills it.