



ACTIVITY REPORT 2020-21

V-Excel Educational Trust

(A UNIT OF SRINGERI SRI SHARADA PEETHAM CHARITABLE TRUST)
10/23 Tiruvengadam Street, R.A. Puram, Chennai 600 028

Contents

V-Excel Activity Report 2020-21	2
Success Stories.....	2
Recognition.....	3
Community Impact.....	4
Significant Events	5
Other Events.....	7
Celebrations.....	7
Vocational Services	8
Collaborations	9
Awards & Accolades.....	10

V-Excel Activity Report 2020-21

The disruption created worldwide by the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone. Compulsory lockdowns, interspersed with relaxation of movement, highlighted a year of uncertainty, school closures and parental concerns. Cognizant of the issues faced by children with special needs and their parents, V-Excel took a proactive stance in providing online support. When lockdowns were relaxed, emergency rehabilitation and therapy services resumed with sanitization and hygiene protocols strictly adhered to. V-Excel was in constant touch with the special community and provided them counselling whenever needed. It has been a year of struggle for all, but V-Excel's programs and services were a source of reassurance for parents and children.

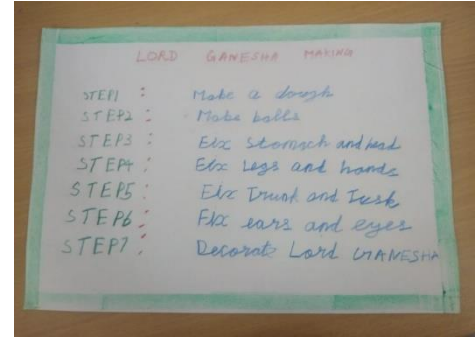
Success Stories

V-Excel works with children and young adults with cognitive and developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual challenges, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD/ADD), Behavioural and Emotional Disorders, and Learning Disabilities such as Dyslexia.

Every success is achieved by overcoming challenges, backed by perseverant efforts from teachers, trainers, counsellors and administrators. These are some of the year's success stories:

- Trainee Balambiga Rajan, from the Youth Empowerment Services unit, was placed in Aakash Fertility Clinic, Chennai, as a Front Office Assistant in December 2020. She will be assisting the Front Office Manager in filing, data entry, attending phone calls and passing messages to various departments in the hospital. Before joining, she was counselled on personal grooming, personal hygiene and safety, and social skills. Regular follow-ups and hand-holding are provided to Balambiga until she settles down in her job.
- Rekha Vijayakumar, a student in V-Excel's special school since 2010, faced many challenges, including fidgetiness, impulsivity, and lack of attention to a task. Recently, to everyone's surprise, she sat for a considerable time and painstakingly copied as well as painted the detailed picture of a Goddess that her teacher had sent her.
- V-Excel's programs are aimed towards preparing children for life. Everyday skills such as cooking, cleaning, eating in a restaurant, doing small chores constitute practical skill training. Mrs. Vasanthi Sivaraman, or Vasanthi Aunty, as she is popularly known, sent a written recipe for tomato soup to Niharikaa, a student in V-Excel's special school. She diligently followed the recipe and instructions and served the soup to her family. Her mother proudly shared the video. In the process, Niharikaa revised her reading skills and followed the written word. It is hoped that this effort from her culminates into a small recipe book for herself and that she can actually use to make simple meals for her family.

- Lord Ganesha is considered to be a harbinger of something auspicious and good, the remover of obstacles and a catalyst for many educationally relevant exercises. In Kaleidoscope Learning Center, Adithya, a student of the senior school made a Ganesha which was balanced in proportions, fine in the intricacies, and quite exact in the imitation of the teacher's work. This was all done under video tutelage from his teacher. Adithya's handwritten note describes the steps he used.
- The senior-most trainee Vaidhyanathan (Vaithy), from the Vocational Training Unit in Adyar, Chennai, joined V-Excel in March 2016. He was 53 then, and had certain OCD issues. Gradually, with a consistent and holistic program he settled down, and started learning all the activities at the unit. In April 2019, he graduated to be employed at the Sreyes Farm sales outlet at the same premises. Now Vaithy is 58 years old and the family, after discussing with him, decided to move him to a senior citizens' facility at Sriperumbudur.






Recognition

V-Excel was once again awarded the "Champion Level - GuideStar India Platinum" award. This is a professional endorsement of the organization's commitment to constantly maintain financial transparency. GuideStar India launched the GuideStar India NGO Transparency Awards to recognize organizations that practice and voluntarily demonstrate their transparency and accountability in the public domain. GuideStar believes that there is a need to have awards to illuminate the transparency level of civil society organizations to inspire greater trust in their work and garner support for their cause.

GuideStar India Platinum (Champion Level) is a Seal issued after thorough due diligence of an organisation for legal and financial compliances and a certification that the organisation is transparent and holds itself accountable to not just its stakeholders but also to the general public. It is a review based on facts presented by the NGO and verified against documents issued by regulatory authorities, statutory auditors, past donors and key visitors or memberships / accreditations with philanthropic intermediaries. It is additionally based on the organisation making detailed disclosures in the GuideStar India template for disclosures in the public domain based on Credibility Alliance norms.

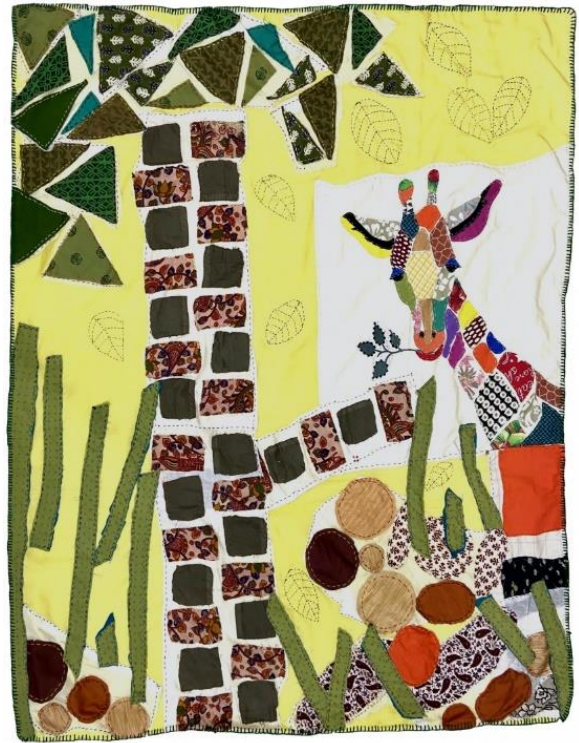


Community Impact

- In light of the various issues surrounding COVID-19, V-Excel's counselling services were available via calls on WhatsApp and Skype during this lockdown period, at a minimal cost. The service was opened up for everyone and anyone who needed psychological support.
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- In May 2020, V-Excel, Nashik, distributed the homeopathic medicine, *Arsenicum Album 30*, recommended by the Central Government's Ayush Mantralaya, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to all the staff, students and their families as a COVID prevention measure.
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- To help professionals, teachers and parents tide over the prevailing COVID-19 crisis, and to use this time optimally for creating awareness and training, V-Excel initiated a series of webinars. Professionals offered these webinars on a variety of topics at a nominal cost to various target audiences. This included diverse topics such as Sensory Integration, Teaching social skills and emotional resilience in Autism, Building Bridges for children with Learning Disabilities, Understanding Teen Anxiety, Play and Learn for Primary Schools, and Connecting through Music and Movement.
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Significant Events

- *Autism 'crafts', and beautifully does so.* Three exquisite quilts were designed and created by students with special needs and their teachers from V-Excel Educational Trust. The quilts are exhibited at the recent India International Quilt Festival (IIQF).



When the hands are used as instruments in creating something, the spirit reveals itself through these creations. Every little stitch made with precision turns a simple motor activity into a skill. For children with special needs bringing in art and beauty transforms this skill into a virtue. They feel

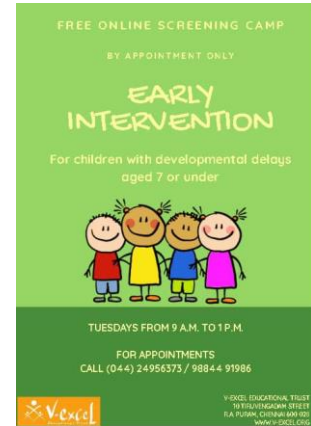
anchored despite their inner and outer turbulence.

The uniqueness of this community quilting project was that it came alive at a time when social distancing was at its peak. Yet, it brought together students, families, and teachers together making it a completely inclusive activity. The individual pieces crafted by the children were designed and put together by another set of teachers and students to make three masterpieces. It is the first time that IIQF has entries by special students.

For V-Excel Educational Trust it has been a moment of jubilation to find that a philanthropist has purchased one of these entitled 'Waters in a Still Storm' in the exhibition. The two other quilts 'Surprise in Savannah' and 'Diamond Within' have also reached their discerning, rightful owners.



V-Excel conducted free Early Intervention camps for infants, toddlers and young children (under 7 years of age) with developmental delays. This initiative was undertaken keeping in mind the need for awareness arising from the increasing incidence of children with autism, attention disorders, and other special needs. Evidence has shown how early identification and intervention ensure better outcomes for children later in life. The Early Intervention program in V-Excel is supported by a CSR grant from Hexaware Technologies



Every service unit of V-Excel created a video presenting 'The Lockdown Story' that talked about the activities that the students and teachers were engaged in during the lockdown. These videos can be seen on - <https://www.youtube.com/c/VExcelEducationalTrust/videos>.

The efforts and initiatives by the teachers drew a lot of appreciation, particularly from the parents, as they witnessed the individual attention their child received.

Masks became the new addition to everyone's attire during this year. Vocational students and teachers stitched hygienic cotton masks for sale and distribution.



Throughout the pandemic, and spearheaded by a staff member, Mrs. Usha Suresh, weekly music concerts under the e-Tarang banner were streamed live on YouTube and Facebook. Several musicians and singers give their precious time for these online concerts

The duration of online classes gradually increased and were modified to include various aspects of life skills and practical skills. The programs delivered were customised, wherever required. Music played an important role in holding the children and their parents together. Products were made with the involvement of class teachers and vocational teachers.

- International Day of Persons with Disability was celebrated on the 3rd of December. A pledge was taken to support inclusion of individuals with special needs in the mainstream. A video of the same was taken and posted on the social media to encourage more individuals to join the cause and to create awareness among the general public.
- For Christmas, the special school Program Coordinator, Neha Bharadwaj, put together a movie on Jesus Christ where teachers and students played their roles with deep understanding and authenticity and helped to soak the Christmas spirit. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrojUxcj3Co>

Other Events

- In May 2020, RJ Girish of Big FM 92.7 invited our Vocational Coordinator Ms. Gayathri Suryanarayan as a guest on radio to talk about V-Excel, its work and the extra mile that V-Excel went to see that the trainees did not lose out on development opportunities during the lockdown.



- On 1st October 2020, a *puja*, led by our Founder Dr. Vasudha Prakash and Managing Trustee Dr. Prakash Natarajan, was organised and performed for the well-being of all. The same was viewed by many of our trainees, parents, staff and well-wishers through live video sharing.

Chanting



- The year 2021 started on positive note with an excursion to "Guindy Park" in January. It was a wonderful feeling to be in an outdoor open space together after a long spell.

Celebrations

- ESVI Sarada Foundation celebrated Founder's Day on July 22, 2020 at the Adyar center in Chennai. Mr. and Mrs. Rajagopal spoke about the life and journey of the Founder, the Late Mr. S. Viswanathan. Ms. Saraswathy Sarathy, one of family Trust members, was present via Zoom along with the teachers from Vocational Training Unit.
- The 73rd Independence Day was celebrated with an evening of patriotic songs, threaded around the theme of India, Indians, brotherhood and freedom. All satellite centres of V -Excel were represented and parents and children joined in making it a spectacular event.



- A Christmas carol concert was held on 15th December with parents, children, friends, neighbours and staff from V-Excel. Candles were lit and children and teachers sang their favourite carols in a spirit of joy and brotherhood. The highlight this Christmas, was the decision to thank and appreciate the custodial staff for their role in caring for children with special needs. The teachers cooked a meal for the *Akkas* and *Annas*, sang for them, and gave them gifts.
- Pongal Celebrations were held at the Sreyes Farm on 15th and 16th January, 2021. Upon reaching the farm, the trainees chopped vegetables, helped in setting up the tents, bathing and decorating the cows. Post-lunch, traditional celebrations included folk dances, games and distribution of the sweet rice, *pongol*.



Vocational Services

- With an 80 kg. tomato yield from Sreyes Farm, a short vocational project of preparing sauce from it was initiated. All the trainees were involved in this project for three full days. The finished products were distributed to the trainees first, and then to all the teachers, staff and the balance were sold at the Sreyes Farm outlet on our premises.
- The success with the quilting project spurred a foray into different projects where the children could use these stitches. What emerged was an entire range of home decor products like table linen, *dohars*, curtains, and many simple creative products for children.
- Collaborations between teachers and students who worked with textiles old and new - Machine stitching, simple running stitches, blanket stitches, quilting were explored. Simple crafts made from wood, coconut shells, jute, paper, were transformed into useful and aesthetic articles to be used at home and offices and for gifting.



- The annual Summer Bazaar was slated to be held in the foyer of Sharada, the main school premises, on the 17th April. Much to everyone's dismay, COVID again reared its ugly head and the bazaar was held online. <https://crafts2021.wixsite.com/bazaar>
- The year also focused on improving existing products and increasing the product range across all the vocation streams.
 - Arts & Crafts – now includes useful crafts from coconut shells. These products are eco-friendly and hand-made.
 - Soap making – After the initial training that happened in the month of January 2021, a lot of trials and fine tuning were done. Four variants of soaps are now produced - Orange Zest, Neem, Honey and *Nalangu Maavu*.
 - Printing and Documentation - Digital printing on T-shirts are being done
 - Baking - Different varieties of cookies are being made in the bakery at the Youth Empowerment Services, Mylapore.



- The digitization process, which began before the pandemic, was taken up again with vigour and the trainees were taught all the necessary skills. 48 files from the Early Intervention Unit, were digitized, numbered, scanned, saved and uploaded to the cloud storage.

Collaborations

- A new project with SNEH – PRODUCT HUB, was initiated. In this project, the raw materials are provided by SNEH and V-Excel creates or executes their job order. A MoU was signed with mutual agreement on the quantity and duration with focus on training. The platform is intended to provide continuous training on art and craft, block printing and jute products without worrying about raw materials sourcing and marketing.
- The mobile food truck Tiffin Times resumed its operations in the month of November 2020. This vehicle was restructured to be a training, assembling, and sales platform for our young trainees being prepared for the hospitality industry. After many rounds of meetings and discussions a MoU was signed with M/s. Judie's Group who will be the operating partner for V-Excel.



- Remedial classes at the Anandam Satellite Center, where V-Excel is a technical partner, were forced to be suspended due to the pandemic. As many underprivileged students studying there do not have access to smart phones or computers they are not able to take up online classes. So the teachers have been keeping their good work going by talking to the students over phone, guiding the parents and also sending across worksheets and other study materials to keep the students engaged.



Awards & Accolades

- Ms. Jayanthi Viswanath, Regional Program Director, Nashik Center has been honoured for her dedication and commitment towards building an educated society by HDFC Bank, Nashik Branch on the Teacher's Day 2020.
- Ms. Shanthi Nehru from Vocational Training Unit was selected for the “Life Changer Award” award by Rotary Club of Chennai Royals for her contribution as a Skill Trainer for children with special needs. Mr. V. Yuvaraj of Youth Empowerment Services was also selected for his teaching skills for special children. They were both felicitated at an online event held to commemorate the Teachers Day.
- Trainee S. Ramanathan received a Special Art Award from USO. He, along with three others from Youth Empowerment Services participated in the poster making competition conducted by USO, Delhi. He got a medal, a certificate and a few goodies as gifts.



Awards



- Mrs. Margaret Buch, an incredibly talented craftsperson, has been a committed volunteer at the Vocational Training Unit in Shastri Nagar for years now. She has trained trainees in jute-bag making, bead work, making paper bags, chord jewellery, jute fibre products, and coasters, among several other things. She has set exemplary standards for product quality and is a stalwart of the V-Excel family. On International Women's Day and on this special day, Margaret Ma'am was featured in a special issue of the Adyar Times.

Women deserve to be honoured daily. But once in a year on Women's Day, they are revered the world over. This day is not a reminder for others to celebrate women. It is a day to remind women to feel proud of all that they have given to society and family. A day they let others pamper them; a day to be on the receiving end. At *Adyar Times* we picked enterprising women in our neighbourhood who are worthy of praise - the pearls of society, who in their own fashion enhance the lives of the less fortunate who need unconditional love.

Simple life, Great Joy

By M. Rajini

Margaret Buch is an 84 year young Wonder Girl from Besant Nagar. She is bubbling with energy and love which she shares with needy children in the society. She settled in Besant Nagar in 1970. Her career started as a Primary class teacher at St. Michael's in Gandhi Nagar in 1968 where she worked for 25 years.

She lives with her husband Buch who is 93. Margaret was a National level champion in Hockey and toured in Australia (believe me) in 1956!!!! She had qualified as an artist at the School of Art in Bombay.

She now imparts all



her knowledge in craft, beadwork, worli painting, quilling, terracotta and much more at the Vocational Training school for special kids, at Sastri Nagar. She says she learns a lot from these kids, "They teach you immense patience, and the joy in loving someone unconditionally. They are God's own children."

She also volunteers at ARC Thoraipakkam, an orphanage for HIV affected children who have been abandoned by their family. Margaret says the girls there are aged between 6 years to 20 years and she teaches them bead work. She finds them fast learners and all they want is a little love from society. HIV is not infectious, yet they face social stigma, she adds sadly. Incidentally she travels by auto to this institution to give free lessons.

Margaret also teaches special kids at RASA in Mandaveli.

It is indeed surprising that her services are voluntary and free. After lockdown when these places shut down, she has done heaps of hand work and all for sale. She never handles cash. The money from the sale of her craft work is paid to her as a cheque, favouring any of these organisations. It is amazing that she is not even proud of what she does. She just takes it as a part of life.

There is a life lesson senior citizens need to learn from her. "I have practically zero wants. No fancy food, just rice and dhal and vegetables. I have enough money for my simple living style and my medicines. Why do I need more money, which will only complicate my life? I just want to help others and be useful to society. I only wish more youngsters and retired people take up volunteer community service."

Her handcrafts are on sale. She is a resident of Urur Olcot, Kuppam Road and can be contacted at 044 2491 0208.