



V-Excel Educational Trust

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India

Activity Report **2014-15**



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V-Excel Educational Trust

Annual Activity Report: 2014 - 2015

Significant Events

Welcome Maldives : An email from a school in the Maldives set off our first workshop for teachers abroad. Seven teachers from a Special Education unit started 5 years ago in one of the biggest schools in Maldives, arrived for a 5 day workshop in Chennai. Since their universities did not offer any special training in Special Education, there was an acute lack of awareness and a dearth of professionally trained special educators. A google search led them to our website and the work we do and they went away happy with the knowledge they had gained from our workshop.

Paper presentation : Mrs. Lalitha Sridhar, the Coordinator of our Early Intervention programme, presented a paper on "Meeting the Needs of Young Girls with Development Delays (birth to seven) - Findings from an Outcome Evaluation" at the International Conference on Women, Child and Social Welfare (ICWCS-2014), Indian Institute of Sciences, Bengaluru on November 17th, 2014.

Green Peppers : Green Peppers organized a special get-together for our children in June. Our interns were recently commissioned to cut vegetables for this off-premise catering company, and they were so impressed with the perfection in the work of our trainees, that they honoured each of them with personalized plaques!

KLC Graduation : In June this year, it was a big day for KLC as 11 of their children graduated to the Youth Empowerment Services (YES) Centre in Mylapore, our vocational and life-skills training unit! The graduation ceremony held at our Mandaveli campus was deeply magical, beautiful and heart-warming, with an unmistakable touch of grace and nobility.

Trips and treks! A long overdue trip scheduled as part of the curriculum in the last academic year was finally undertaken to Pondicherry. It was celebrated in a two-nights-three-days trip to Pondicherry by students of Grade 6 and junior prevocational.

Our children from Grade 5 went for an overnight trip to Yercaud. This time it was two nights and three days. The children and teachers had a wonderful time in the hills trekking, boating and enjoying a bonfire. Children were independent and teachers reported no sleep and food issues.

Blue Blue Sky unplugged: On July 14th, 17 children and 6 teachers from KLC and YES, part of the Blue Blue Sky Choir, went to Jaigopal Garodia Government Girls Higher Secondary School to sing at their assembly. It was a beautiful experience not just to perform for them, but also to have them join in our songs.

Sacred Beginnings: An auspicious two-day puja was conducted in July at Sharada, our brand new centre, to mark our journey into the next phase of our future growth and development of serving individuals with special needs. October 3rd, Vijayadasami day, marked the move into the new premises with a flurry of packing, unpacking, settling and resettling with great enthusiasm and anticipation. December saw the formal inauguration of the school building by Padmashree Dr.V. Gowrishankar of the Sringeri Sarada Peetam. Mr.A.Krishnamurthy, Chairman of the Amalgamation Group was the Guest of Honor for this significant event.

Tarang : The Bangalore debut for Tarang was more than we hoped it would be and was thoroughly enjoyed by the children. A big thank you to Jagriti Theatre for graciously agreeing to host our first concert!

Recognition : V-Excel was chosen by the State Commission for the Welfare of the Differently Abled - Tamil Nadu to conduct a one-day training program on "Early Identification of Children with Autism". This was held on Sept. 13 and had nearly 60 participants, most of whom were special educators from various special schools, parents and also students of M.Sc. (Counselling and Psychotherapy), of Tamil Nadu Open University. Another similar program conducted this year had nearly 50 participants.

Pathway Award: Pathway, a well-known NGO of Chennai, celebrated December 3rd (World Disability Day) in a unique manner. They honored intellectually challenged young adults for achieving independence in skill training, individual as well as group work. The Pathway Award for Independence in Skill Achievement (Individual Category) was awarded to intern Ibrahim for Block Printing. Award of recognition of achievement and skill development in group work was given to our group who stitch various types of bags; Vaishali for material cutting, Gautami for stitching and Yogeswari for embellishing embroidery on jute bags.

Chennai Wipro Marathon : The Marathon was held on Sunday, December 7 and many of our children and trainees participated with infectious enthusiasm. Our children made us realize that every individual is born with some talent and what they lack in strength, is made up in will power.

Sports: On Jan. 11, our trainees took part in various sports events at the Unified Sports Meet 2015 organized by Special Olympics Bharat/Tamil Nadu. We won 15 gold medals and 11 silver medals. Thanks to Jason and the staff for all the effort.

Placement : Chandramouli Ramanathan, our trainee, was hired as a Front Office Assistant in Square Network Solutions, Chennai. A truly proud moment for us!

Accolades : The highlight of the year has been the presentation of a paper in an International Women's Conference at Indian institute of Science on the effectiveness and impact of the early intervention programme in children between 0-7. The study was conducted in association with Rutgers University. The paper also focused an emotional and physical well-being of the mother of special children. The forum consisted of pediatrician, gynecologist and other medical practitioners. The feedback given by them was that it was an eye opener session and the medical fraternity would join hands with NGOs to support such programme.

Annual Day : The "Garden Of Light" was staged on the 19th March as part of the annual day program. An environmental fairy tale, this year saw more than hundred students with their teachers light up the stage and the hearts of the audience. Even the authentic, aesthetic props were all made by the older special children at V-Excel. It tells you the amazing tale of what magic is created when faith and abilities get artistic expression.

From our departments

The production unit at YES has become fully equipped to process bag orders! They received a special order from overseas for 50 jute block-printed bags in July.

A laundry unit has been started in YES where trainees learn to sort clothes and wash them in the washing machine. They learn to operate the washing machine and the dryer. Further, they are taught to fold and iron the clothes.

The group play therapy sessions at KLC have resulted in fantastic development seen in the way children play. The other significant development of these sessions is the fact that many of the children have now started to communicate with the counsellors and teachers through the typewriter.

V-Excel participated in an Exhibition and Sale of exclusive products made by Artisans with Disabilities which took place in the L&T's Manapakkam campus in January 2015.. L&T hosted the **Arunim** sale and we were among the 10 NGOs which participated in it. Our interns who were at the stall demonstrated their work. The precision in work and neat finish of our products were very much appreciated. It also gave an opportunity for our interns to experience how their products were received and also in the handling of money following a sale.

We were represented at the India Inclusion Summit in Bangalore by Mrs. Ajita Panshikar and Ms. Sangeeta Goel. The event was a huge success and the organizers had done a phenomenal job in defining and showcasing what they meant and felt by "INCLUSION".

Satellite Centres : In **Solapur**, the new center was inaugurated with a wonderful show and an enthusiastic audience. The **Nashik** special school and therapy centre is growing from strength to strength, with 33 children in the school and 37 children attending therapies at the centre. Parents have actually begun to

move to Nashik from other smaller towns in and around the area to be able to enrol their children at our centre. An inclusive school in **Erode** approached V-Excel to train their teachers on handling children with developmental needs, and we have just conducted an orientation programme in the school. The **Erode** centre has shifted to new premises.

Partners and Donors

KLC had visitors from the Berklee College of Music – Ellie Foster, Taty and Toto. They participated in music time with the children, engaging them in some music making of their own. They were impressed to see the varied uses of music in the curriculum and we hope to see some useful collaboration with them in the near future.

Asha for Education, Seattle Chapter, USA, has been a great source of support for V-Excel over the years and it was indeed a special moment for us to have Anupama Ramabhadran, an associate of Asha for Education, come for a site visit to our Chennai centre in July.

Micheal Kokinos our own special Santa from Australia visited the school on Nov.17th and the children and teachers sang and danced with him for a joyous hour and a half. It buoyed the sagging spirits of the children and teachers alike.

Brindavani, New Jersey, hosted the Second Annual Youth Carnatic Music Festival in January 2015, and the proceeds were donated to V-Excel. Thank you to the entire Brindavani team!

Copper Chimney hosted a lunch for our students in March this year and the hospitality and warmth shown by the staff was heartwarming.

Staff Training

July saw the start of Eurythmy exercise for our KLC teachers. Two sessions were conducted for our teachers -the first session was about 'make and repair', while the second had teachers learning to make different items using rolled paper.

A training program on "Puppetry" was arranged for teachers to introduce them to techniques in which this ancient art form of India could be used in classroom teaching.

The international 'Train the Trainers' conference on Anthroposophical Psychotherapy that was held at Emerson College, UK, was the perfect opportunity for our Counselling Coordinator Mrs. Parimal Pandit to further hone her expertise in psychotherapy. "It was an eye-opening experience to see what the other countries are doing in terms of psychotherapy. Many representatives came from various countries, such as Argentina, Spain, Brazil, Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Chile, Italy and Israel!" says Parimal.

Mrs. Parimal Pandit, the head of the Counselling and Assessment Unit received her International Anthroposophic Psychotherapy Certification this November in the International Postgraduate Medical Training in Mumbai after completing the academic requirements of the International Federation of Anthroposophic Psychotherapy (Dornach, Switzerland). It was moment of pride as there are only two other Indian psychologists who are similarly certified.

Community Impact

The fifth in our 'A Class Apart' series, under the Kuruvilla Jacob Initiative was conducted for the first time outside Chennai at the Lakshmi Matriculation High School in Madurai. It was a three-day workshop on sensitising teachers and teaching them how to recognise disabilities in their classrooms. The workshop was attended by 36 teachers, including principals and academic coordinators.

The Sibling Forum – LuvMySib – was set up to provide a platform for siblings of children with special needs to share their experiences and unique perspectives that life has enriched them with. After our previous session in January where eight siblings attended, this session had a record 24 siblings attending! We had group games, painting, drawing, group discussion and a trust walk.

ATE's **Mind Share** series of short and long-term courses was started in July for regular school teachers, special education professionals, parents, students, corporate and public sector professionals, and for anyone interested in furthering the cause of education or those looking to build their individuality in any sphere of work and life.

The AIESEC sent a group of volunteers who came to interact and spend time with the students. This was with the aim of exchanging ideas and bringing different cultures together.

'Disha', our parent's forum, had 30 parents participating to share their insights and experiences of the very special world they inhabit. They had regular meetings through the year.

A group session was conducted for parents of the trainees in YES. For many parents, this was a first-time experience. The session progressed from a round of introductions to an art activity and then to a discussion on future meetings for such sessions.

A quilling workshop was organized for mothers of the children in KLC. Almost 15 mothers attended and thoroughly enjoyed it. Many felt that they could do this with their children and asked for regular programs in this activity.

ATE started the 2014 events by first organizing the "Awareness Program on Disability" a 3-months distance mode course. The program currently has an enrolment of 15 and includes parents from EI and KLC and students from another organization *Pudiyador*. All participants have expressed that the content of the program has given them much-needed insight and information on disability and ways to understand

children in a better manner. The training programs and seminars offered by ATE have been making a great impact both at the state and national levels. Our offerings in topics relating to Special Education, ASD, and Early Intervention have been especially sought after.

We participated in a "Job Fair" organized by the Social Work Department of Stella Maris College. We put up a stall at the fair and were represented Mrs. Maria Josephine, who shared details about the ATE training programs and highlighted the need for volunteers. About 42 students have signed up to volunteer with us.

Our counseling desk work with corporates has been increasing and in September we met 20 at the client site and 10 at our center for follow up. Most cases are to do with relationships and family conflict. The general coping resilience seems to be on the ebb and most of our counseling gets focused on making them emotionally strong.

"Vocational Training" was the topic chosen for this month's Continuing Rehabilitation Education (CRE) Program. The ATE Department had already conducted one in February 2014, and this was the second one organized from November 18-22, 2014. We had 20 participants from various parts of the country.

Success Stories

When six-year-old **Tara** (name changed) came to us for a remedial assessment, we were told that she was rebellious, defiant and refusing to conform to any rules set by the parent. On assessment, it was found that she hadn't developed any academic skills though she had been schooled for three years. She was low on motivation, attention span, task completion and lacked boundaries. During interactions with the mother, it was also found that the child was mirroring her mother's behaviour in many ways.

The remedial program gave Tara the freedom to explore but gradually set boundaries with a gentle and firm hand and with a lot of love and care. Her mother also received counselling and there was a marked improvement in her attention span and task completion. Since June of this academic year, Tara has been shifted to an inclusive school and is ready for learning.

Meena is a pretty, bright-eyed girl from the underprivileged section of the society. She was brought to us for an assessment due to attention issues, distraction, learning difficulties and behavioural problems. During our assessment and subsequent remedial sessions we observed that the girl possessed learning skills but her learning was severely deterred by her environment. She was restless and angry and could not pay attention to tasks on hand.

We worked with her on specific goals. Initially our focus was on calming her and boosting her confidence and self-esteem. We could see that even small appreciation and encouragement made a big difference in her attitude. She was sent for group play therapy sessions and also exposed to art activities which had

significant positive impact on her behaviour. Slowly she relaxed, smiled a lot and started enjoying the sessions. She made good progress in reading and writing. We got feedback from her caregivers that her concentration is much better and is showing interest in studies.

A child from a mainstream school came for therapy. He constantly blinked his eyes throughout the day and his mother suspected some impairment in his eyes. This issue had been present for more than a year. He was given 2 sessions of visual-motor integration in the SI room and the blinking was completely stopped. He now cooperates for all activities without blinking and mother felt happy and satisfied.

Karthic is a 14-year old boy brought to us for assessment and remedial help. Upon assessing he was found to have severe lags in learning skills especially in spelling, expressive writing and math skills. He was withdrawn shy and very low on confidence and self-esteem. As we started working with him we could sense his desperation and with encouraging talks and building on his strengths we could build good rapport with him. He showed amazing drawing skills. Every session would end with a drawing time and he enthusiastically engaged in it. And one day he drew a fish desperately trying to get out of a small glass tank. When questioned gently about the choice of the picture, hesitatingly, he said that the fish represents him, longing to get out, just to go out there and play and not be reminded all the time to study and study more. And his eyes filled with tears. The picture brings out clearly the desperation in the eyes of the fish. An eye opener for parents, teachers and society at large on the increasing burden faced by children!