



## V-Excel Educational Trust

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## ***Activity Report*** ***2009-10***



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## **V-EXCEL EDUCATIONAL TRUST**

### **ANNUAL REPORT: YEAR 2009-10**

As V-Excel completes seven years and we enter into our eighth year, we see it as the year of metamorphosis. Metamorphosis spells change and our metamorphosis reflects in the energy around the children and the energy in each one of us, which with its various dimensions, has amalgamated and gone deeper, causing V-Excel to grow. What we realize today is the organization which worked for children with disabilities has now transformed into a movement where each person, child or adult, has undergone change making it a community of people moving towards a higher plane.

We have used our varied experience and learning to educate children, parents, teachers, adolescents, executives, and patients by way of counseling, therapy, remediation, workshops on parenting, child development, relationship management and the like. We have emphasized on continuing in-service programs for enriching the teachers and sharpening their teaching skills. We conducted a mega conference in association with another organization Vidyanjali, on Child Development and Art Therapy, inviting outside audience, and hosted a successful Carnival where products made by our children were on display and sale. We welcomed overseas volunteers who became one with us and involved themselves fully in our work. Psychology students from different colleges have volunteered and worked on diverse projects for the children and the school.

Our Director received a Mother Teresa Award on behalf of South Asian-American community at Los Angeles this year; we are happy that our endeavour has been acknowledged at an international forum. We have also been lucky to have supportive partners in our cause – Indian Overseas Bank (donated a van for our special children), ASHA for Education (sponsored underprivileged children), Sharada Peetham (standing by us when we needed it most), MSSC Trust (helped out with operational expenses), Britannia Industries (providing our rural children with biscuits every term), Rotary Clubs (stepping in when we have small funding needs), and the many individuals who volunteered to promote our cause directly or indirectly.

Philosophically, the special child remains at the center of all our work. We have embraced some principles of curative education and are more sensitive to the early developmental years of the child. Use of natural material and simple aids is promoted. We recognize the critical role of the parent in child's progress and have initiated parent counseling for all. Also, acknowledging that children with autism shy away from social interaction and have communication issues, we have been integrating group work and many activities that facilitate their social development. We have been working on the lag areas consciously and are experiencing a greater degree of inclusion in mainstream society. All our service units are geared towards the common goal of a better tomorrow for these children. A brief review (presented below) of each of the units speaks for itself.

#### **Academy for Teacher Training (ATE)**

This resource development program is extremely crucial as it works on creating teachers equipped to effectively work with children having mental challenges. To date we have trained over 150 special educators. We have been running the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) recognized Diploma in Special Education in Autism, besides a certificate course on Learning Disabilities. All our students of the last batch got distinction. We are ensuring that the new batch of trainees get an integrated exposure to the prescribed RCI curriculum and to the V-Excel specific philosophy. For the forthcoming year, we are considering courses on Parenting, child development, relationship management etc. and also working with schools for equipping teachers in classrooms.

## Early Intervention Unit (EI)

This year, our EI unit was accountable for nearly 75 special needs children in the age group of 0-7 years. It makes us proud to share that our model of work and approach towards child development earned us a National Lifebuoy Award, especially since it is a scalable and replicable model. Our focus is on community development. As these young children are with us for about an hour a day, we see that the rest of the time too, their development plan is in sync with our work. Hence we proactively trained parents such that they can take charge of their child at home and also share this knowledge with other caregivers. All the programs are time-bound and inclusion is our goal. For this, we give sensory integration therapy, occupational therapy, remedial training to children who come from different parts of the state and country. We also had some children from abroad who were in India for a few months and required developmental intervention. Some children required pre-school training or readiness skills. For every child in our care, we did comprehensive screening and assessment, focused on their functional independence, had frequent parent meetings to ensure progress of the children.

## Kaleidoscope Learning Center (KLC)

This year, curriculum for whole school suited to the rhythm of the child. This necessitated more movement, more fine motor activities, more freedom for expression, and more art. Opportunities were given to discover nature as they realize that "the universe is full of magical things patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper". The education methods we followed are Waldorf-inspired. (Waldorf schools are based on principles of anthroposophy propagated by the famous philosopher and educationist Rudolf Steiner). We witnessed a number of improvement areas. This encompassed physical fitness and coordination, speech and communication, attention and 'being present', imitation skills and engagement of 'will'. We hope to work at a deeper level with the diet and rhythm of the child in the months to come. This year, we began Parent Education meetings every month with an aim to orient parents about the scientific basis of the child's condition, familiarize them with the work being done by the school for their children, provide them with emotional support and equip them to effectively deal with their child's issues and behavior. We are thus working hand-in-hand with the parents and with our multi-disciplinary team to ensure every child's holistic growth.

## Bridges Learning Academy (BLA)

This unit has children with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia in the age group 8-14 years and has had 70% inclusion for the past three years. Not only do we see enhanced academic performance but have witnessed a distinct increase in confidence and self-esteem of the students. The changes are thus seen at a much deeper level than at the evident level of better grades. To achieve this, we ensure exposure and involvement of children in multi-dimensional activities such as cultural programs, festive celebrations, small in-house events, carnival, sports, etc. The concept for this unit is mainstreaming and thus much focused work is done with the children. To ensure that the incidence children with such difficulties getting rejected from school is kept low, we conduct workshops for teachers of regular schools.

## V-Excel Remedial Center (VRC)

The children of VRC are typically children from regular schools who need added remedial support. Each child has different learning challenges and programs are designed based on the concern areas. This year, we revamped our programs to make them more all-rounded by introducing a multi-disciplinary approach to consultation, program planning, and execution. Our emphasis is on development of various skills by looking at the child as a 'whole'. We have incorporated foot massage, eurythmy (type of rhythmic movement that works positively as a therapy) and wet-on-wet painting (an art form using water

colours on wet paper) as an integral part of every child's program. The key purpose has been to improve concentration, perception, motor control, and 'will' development of these children. As a mandate, we decided to have a six-weekly review of every child so that the progress is tightly monitored. This has helped the children immensely.

## **Vocational Training Unit (VTU)**

We cater to various skill areas for the trainees of this service unit. Both hard skills and soft skills (personality development, communication, etc.) are given equal attention. Our students bagged prizes at the government sports program and enjoyed the field trips planned for their development. This year, we taught the students (15 years plus) screen printing, block printing, computer skills, jewelry making, creating pen holders and photo frames, amongst many other things. We tied up with National Trust for their program ARUNIM which helps market products made by special children from different NGOs across the country. A Parent Support Group has been formed and meets on a regular basis to discuss issues of common concern and find practical ways of dealing with them. The idea is to see that they get together as a synergistic group, keeping in mind the long term need of their children to be independent, earning members of the society.

## **Counseling and Assessment Unit (C&A)**

The work of our Counseling unit spans across all our service units, catering to children and their parents. The nature of their work, target beneficiaries, type of counseling or therapy depended on the specific problem areas. For our special school KLC, learning disabilities section BLA and remedial intervention VRC, our counselors provided Play Therapy, Group Therapy, Parent Counseling and Teacher Support. The work was more intense in case of our Vocational trainees and included Adolescent Counseling – Sex and Safety Education, Social Intervention Model, and Parent Support Group. Assessment professionals focused on formal evaluation of the developmental lags, undertaking brief screening or elaborate assessment, as required on a case-to-case basis. This department also caters to general clientele with family matters or children's problems, corporate executives with their stress management issues, relationship complexities, parenting concerns etc. and hospital patients with fear and pre-post treatment anxiety or trauma.

## **Rural Outreach Program**

Our rural program primarily is part of government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) project that caters to about 4000 children with special needs, including physical and mental disabilities. We are extremely happy that V-Excel has been recognized for the best program delivery in the country, second time in a row! We now run not just Resource Rooms in the 10 blocks of Villipuram district of Tamil Nadu, but also have Day Care Centers servicing younger children through therapy and education. We conducted many Health Camps, provided nutritional support, ensured appliance distribution to all those identified through medical camps for wheelchairs, calipers, hearing aids, spectacles, etc. We are grateful to many of our supporters who voluntarily step forward to fill in the gap in government funds and actual required expenditure. For the ensuing months, we are exploring the possibility of extending our services to the disadvantaged children and provide more support to our special educators and therapists.

We strongly feel that "The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means to an education". For us, V-Excel has been an important seat of education and growth—a spiritual experience. We thank the children- who are so special for leading us here so gently and lovingly and we want everyone to be a part of this growth too.

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