



V-Excel Educational Trust

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Activity Report **2007-08**





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V-Excel Educational Trust

Annual Report: 2007-08

We live in a world where many say, "Give up," But Hope whispers to us, "Try it one more time." And we earnestly do. Believe me, each one of us at V-Excel breathe this philosophy, day in and day out, and have very rarely been disappointed. It hasn't always been easy, but we have had the good fortune to have had a very committed and dedicated team as well as the support, blessings, and well-wishes of hundreds of our friends in the community, both here and overseas. Their continuing belief in our vision infuses us with renewed energies to achieve higher and to consistently provide the best services and resources for the population that we cater to.

I must also make a special mention of our parents who have undeterred faith that we will work with their children, as they would, with love and care. Thank you all for this trust and positive approach that allows us to bring about the best in your children. It has been six years now since we began as a fledgling institution and I am happy and proud at how far we have come in this short span of time. It also gives us an immense sense of satisfaction that we now offer the entire gamut of specialized services that parents would require for their children, saving them the trouble of running pillar to post and balancing the schedules of various therapies, educational and rehabilitative inputs from professionals.

This year I'm particularly happy that we have started new services like Counseling and Assessment, Early Intervention, and Vocational programs. Our center in Shastri Nagar, which we jointly run with ESVI Sarada Foundation, is fully functional and provides training in sensory integration, early intervention, vocational services, counseling, assessments, workshops for teachers, parents and children, and home management for parents. We cannot express enough to ESVI Sarada Foundation how valuable their offer of using the premises has been in terms of extending the really much needed services for the special children.

With this expansion came the need to bring on more professionals on board and we are excited to have done so. Our quest is to hire, and retain, the best and our staff is held to the stringent standards of excellence. Our teacher-training program offered at the Academy of Teacher Excellence has been recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) in New Delhi and, in addition, has received a major boost in support by our friends from i-flex Solutions.

Our other flagship centers continue to provide high standards of services. Our frequent interactions with parents bring out much-valued feedback about our programs. We have also been fortunate to have several dedicated volunteers who have provided us with expertise in many areas of administration and education.

Kaleidoscope Learning Center

Our teachers have been ensuring a spurt of activities so that children get as many opportunities to participate, use their abilities, while gaining immense joy and a sense of achievement.

Music, Art, Gross Motor and Yoga sessions are being conducted. Students from the Fine Arts Dept. of Stella Maris College for Women worked closely with our teachers and children to liven up our school and teach the students creative art ideas. Clay modeling was taught to our teachers and students by Margaret Buch. The highlight has been dance classes which are being held by the renowned Shiamak Davar Dance group every Tuesday and Thursday. Children really love these activities.

This year we extended the school hours upto 3.p.m starting June '07 for children with higher sitting tolerance. In the afternoon classes, children are taught independence in daily living skills (mainly eating and cleaning their utensils), followed by a highly structured language enrichment program. Some of our students from the Pre-Vocational Program have moved on to the more "Formal Real World" program in our Vocational Rehabilitation Centre at Shastri Nagar. Sex Education sessions were taken by the Counselors where both - the parents and children – participated. According to us, this is a very critical area of training which is essential for all special children.

The "Kitchen Craft" programme was inaugurated in October where each class has a hands-on working time in our kitchen lab and manages the Friday "Tuck Shop"! Diwali, Navratri, Christmas, Pongal - all brought in a festive mood for all to swing. These have been wonderful learning experiences for our children in terms of compliance, camaraderie and confidence, reflecting on their enhanced independence and social skills. The year has whizzed past busy designing detailed IEPs, implementing them rigorously and monitoring progress of the children on every aspect of their development.

V-Excel Remedial Center

We merged our Adyar Center with the Mandaveli unit in April '07 and consolidated our activities. We have autism-specific morning group for whom we emphasize on independence and an adolescents class where the focus is to learn together as a group. Life skills and independence are among their main goals. We work with the children on various fronts and have addressed object identification and generalization, social skills, waiting tolerance, turn taking skills, management of time and money, taking responsibility for younger and weaker children and compliance to authority in varied settings. Communication in children with ASD has taken on a new dimension with the children beginning to express their inner fears, as well as preferences, thoughts and ideas through non verbal means and body language. They are also becoming adept at understanding non verbal cues by the teachers.

IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) for the children are drawn up in detail. Teachers outline goals, coordinating with other departments, to make the goals more realistic and for guiding them to plan their programs for children. We try to use day-to-day instances to teach the students overcome their own emotional and behavioural barriers, build sensitivity towards others, appreciate core values, develop better listening skills, work harmoniously with others, take differences between people in their stride, and exhibit appropriate social conduct. In terms of hard skills, apart from academic training, students have been given a lot of exposure and taught various practical skills. A stage performance was held in October at the Music Academy, in which many of our students danced to the Lemon Tree song by Fools Garden. The program was a huge crowd-puller and the audience gave a standing ovation to our students' performance.

Although we primarily work on an individual basis with children, we have attempted to offer a group benefit to many children coming in for remedial intervention. We see this as an important part of the training, especially when they get together for festivals and other celebrations. We have introduced a few field and outdoor activities for the children to benefit from experiential learning and we see this bearing fruit.

Academy of Teacher Excellence

The previous academic year concluded in 13th April 2007 where 11 students graduated with our Diploma in Special Education. We held the Convocation in August 2007 to felicitate the graduating students. This year, we are very happy to share with you, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) has granted recognition to our institution to conduct the one year Diploma Course in Special Education on Autism Spectrum Disorder. This prestigious recognition has boosted our spirits and encouraged us to further our impetus in the area of teacher training. We have conducted many workshops and training programs keeping human resource development as our core objective. We also plan to conduct few short-term courses on Specific Learning Disabilities and Mental Retardation.

Classes for the new batch of students in the RCI-recognized Diploma in Special Education started in July with an exceptional batch of enthusiastic students who come from diverse backgrounds. Courses taught include Child Development & Psychology, Nature and Needs of Autism, Curriculum and Teaching, Family and Community Issues and Practical Observations. Apart from tests, a number of case studies, assignments and hands-on-experience offer holistic training to the special educators. A field visit to few significant institutions in Bangalore was organized for two days during the month of Lectures on Task Analysis and Making Lesson Plans were organized to help them understand importance of micro-planning and effectively deploying various teaching strategies to meet training objectives for the special child.

At this forum, I would like to appeal to people here who have the wherewithal to take on a more active role in scientific teaching by taking up a formal course. I would also like to appreciate the daunting task of a special educator and all salute those in our midst today. Can we have a standing ovation for them please?

Bridges Learning Academy

We revamped the BLA curriculum and have focused only on children with specific learning disabilities. Several innovative techniques have been introduced to facilitate learning and to make it an enjoyable experience. A conscious effort has been made to give individual attention to each child, that has helped ensure that all children make steady and measurable progress. Three of our children from the last batch moved on to the Vocational Training unit in Shastri Nagar.

Our students are being exposed to a variety of activities which include play therapy and art therapy. They are also attending keyboard and mridingam classes. Another feature this year has been the introduction of spoken English classes which are expected to go a long way in enhancing the confidence level of the children. Group singing sessions and occupational therapy is benefiting the children. It is very heartening to note that most of the students are showing positive outcomes on the academic front.

Several activities have been conducted this year. This includes preparation for the Tamil action song telecast on Doordarshan on Children's Day, watching movies which were educational and enjoyable, celebrating festivals, having parties, etc. We have recently started Brain gym exercises for the children from January 2008 which will help them in enhancing their memory and concentration, resulting in a better their academic performance.

V-Excel Center of Research and Rehabilitation

This Center in Shastri Nagar, offered by ESVI Sarada Foundation, was formally inaugurated by the Social Welfare Minister, Ms. Poongodai Aladi Aruna. Various crucial services for children with special needs have been introduced there and today the center regularly serves over 50 children.

The Early Intervention unit became fully functional from April 2007. The objective has been to provide timely intervention to young children and restrict the extent of issues that they would otherwise encounter. Professional inputs to the young parents is being well-received. Many infants and children with developmental delay are now availing of the state-of-the-art sensory integration facilities and neuro-developmental therapy.

A lot of meetings and brainstorming sessions are happening to formulate vocational and pre-vocational programs for young adults with disabilities. Activities at the Vocational Unit are progressing very well and children are gradually picking up the necessary hard skills and soft skills program which will eventually help them develop their job skills and enhance employability over the longer term.

Recently, a field trip to a plastic carry-bag factory was organized for the students and they really enjoyed the experience. Students are also being exposed to various new activities like computer, terracotta clay work and block printing on gift-wrap paper to develop their skills. Students of Fine Arts from Stella Maris College taught the children make productive material through art. Students are being taught screen printing, block printing, creative art, paper products, kitchen linked activities etc. to build their fine motor skills and other skills required to equip them for the outside world.

Counseling and Assessment Unit

The Group Therapies and Play Therapies have now become an established routine for children across all our Units. Depending on the goals, group therapies focus on different areas. For KLC and VRC, we work on development of appropriate emotional expressions and recognition of expression while appropriate social behavior and etiquette are discussed through stories for BLA children. It gives us immense satisfaction to see children really enjoying these classes and activities. Many a time they come forth and proactively discuss their issues and seek guidance.

The goal of certain groups is to facilitate group interaction, anger management and developing sense of personal belongings. Specific strategies are used for handling of such issues which include social stories, stories using puppets and objects to deal with appropriate expression of emotions and songs to deal with emotions and appropriate behavior

Some of the children have shown a marked improvement, strengthening our belief in Play Therapy as an effective method for children with limited communication abilities. We have had two very pertinent workshops – one for the children regarding safety and teaching children about safe and unsafe touch. Second one was a sex education workshop for training mothers of the girl children to teach their daughters about puberty management.

Apart from individual counseling, the Department is planning a course on Specific Behavior Modification for teachers, professionals and parents.

V-Excel Outreach Program:

You must be aware that we are involved in the government project Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The SSA team has been extremely active and conducting awareness and medical camps, besides providing special education and home programs. We are very grateful to Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital and R.K.Eye Hospital for planning and conducting the eye check camp for all the children. In all, the camp was very successful with about 1300 children getting the benefit of the check-ups in the awareness camp.

Mrs. B. Sundari, our Managing Trustee and I, visited the district with Mr. Hariharan - Vice-President, Infrastructure, i-flex solutions, to distribute notebook diaries and stationery to the children at Villipuram. The bright inquisitive eyes, beaming faces, beautiful smiles, and enthusiasm of the children were a real sight to see and enjoy!! Field trips were planned for 1000 special children from the villages, a task that called for great degree of planning and perfect execution.

The SSA wing of the Union Government gives financial help to buy the aids. Nevertheless, in order to reach out to all the children we seek support from individuals and companies to fund the cost of medical aids that need to be distributed, including hearing aids, spectacles, crutches, wheelchairs,

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Some of the programs that we held include all-institution Sports Day where many of your children participated in different events, Dental Check-up Camp, Independence Day, an Art Exhibition, supported by Yes Bank and the artist Mr. Raajendran, external programs where our children had to interact and perform before a large group of strangers and did it superbly, without any fear.

As an organization, we have invested a substantial amount of time and resources in Professional Manpower Development. A number of workshops and in-service programs for the teachers have been undertaken which will help widen their horizons while working with your children. "Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another" - said Walter Elliott in his book '*The Spiritual Life*'. We are all working towards a common goal which calls for immense love, patience, and care. I would like each one of you to step in with us in taking ownership of this development movement we have begun and hope to have your positive involvement.

We recognize that there is much left to be done and that we've only just begun. We are confident we will get there. With the blessings and the good wishes of so many of you, how can we not?


