



V-Excel Educational Trust

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Activity Report **2010-11**



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V-Excel Educational Trust

Activity Report : 2010-11

It has been an eventful year for V-Excel! The long list of various activities we undertook will vouch for this. Each event, each celebration, each field trip or an outing was a step further in our children's social, communication, motor, cognitive, behavioural, psychological, and/or emotional development. The best part of it all was that it was coupled with fun!

We continue to focus on raising awareness in society and our Director, Dr. Vasudha Prakash, personally was on national and regional channels (Jaya TV, Podhigai and Radio) to speak on various disability-related topics. She addressed specific issues faced by parents of children with special needs and learning challenges, eliciting cooperation from the society for inclusion of children with special needs.

We organized rallies in villages for generating widespread awareness among school children, teachers, self-help groups, heads of institutions and the general public using dramas, street plays, speeches, photo exhibitions, processions, puppet shows, handbills and posters. Even with our corporate clients, our consistent work has helped in creating awareness of mental health issues. We have been getting referrals from their relatives and friends for such cases.

We have expanded our activities in towns where there is dearth of special services. Towards this end, we conducted training programs for teachers, counselors and parents in Nashik (Maharashtra) and Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) and will be setting up Satellite Centers there. We are seeking support from the community for taking care of all the requirements.

Awards

- V-Excel Educational Trust was awarded the Service Excellence Rolling Trophy by Baha'I Community for its 'Outstanding Contribution to the Society'.
- Dr. Vasudha Prakash was conferred the Women Achiever's Award as a 'Woman of Excellence' for her exemplary work in the field of education, and disabilities in particular.

Many Successes

- We have been working in a concerted fashion with children having learning disabilities such as dyslexia on a time bound program. 6 out of our 10 children this year could go back to their schools far more confident and a lot happier!

- Similarly our Early Intervention Unit has mainstreamed 36 young children with sensory integration issues into regular kindergarten and pre-primary schools.
- Vocational Unit executed a sizeable external screen printing order - 200 letterheads, 800 visiting cards were printed by the trainees. We are really proud of their work!
- One of our students has started interning at 'Bookz and more' (a library). This is an achievement as it is a step towards inclusion and independence.
- Introducing play therapy, art therapy, movement therapy, drama and sports has significantly helped the children become cohesive, together, expressive and creative.
- We have seen success of our toilet training program; parents have thanked us for the convenience this development offers them in their day-to-day lives.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) project officials inspected the Resource Rooms and Day Care Centers run by us and congratulated our team for tirelessly working at the grassroots level and mainstreaming over 50 children in the 4-14 age group.
- Our parent counseling sessions have been extremely effective in helping them cope with their difficulties in life, and in turn, helped in improving their relationship with their children. Children looked better adjusted after the parent counseling.
- Our Vocational group children made desk calendars on the theme 'Happiness Quotient', with brush strokes and Warli designs on each monthly sheet. Everything has been done by our children, right from designs to screen printing!

New Projects and Initiatives

- Music Programs - As a part of the SushrAvya series, a music initiative of V-Excel and Sumanasa Trust, we invited many maestros to our Center, including renowned Carnatic vocalists, Smt. Bombay Jayashri, Shri T.M. Krishna, Ms. S. Sowmya, Trichur Brothers, besides many others who gave melodious concerts at our school. Our sincere gratitude to Mr. Hariharan, a keen well-wisher of V-Excel for supporting us.
- A 'Child Study' concept was introduced wherein all thoughts and energies of the multi-disciplinary team were focused on the child in a non-judgmental, non-opinionated way. The positivity created helps in the child's progress.
- Group Parent Activity was held on 6th October 2010 with an objective of teaching mothers to make dolls using fabric and socks. There was a spirit of bonhomie as over 40 mothers learnt the art in a stress-relieving, meaningful and productive manner.
- Learning Disabilities was conducted as a theory plus practical course for eight weekends. The trainees were equipped with fundamentals of the condition as well as various hands-on intervention strategies.

- Creative classes, apart from functional academics for teacher trainees, practical lessons were taken on gardening, photography, candle-making and tennis for working with children having Autism. This valuable addition to the course was appreciated.
- Book Reading - An interesting series of Book Reading Sessions was started this year for promoting emotional well-being and self-growth among the teacher trainees. The first book selected was 'Understanding Emotional IQ' by Dr.Jyotsna Codaty.
- Group Remedial, has been introduced in Early Intervention Unit for young special children and the program has been yielding good results. The remediation is done after grouping children requiring common programs for gross and fine motor skills.
- Parent Training has become an integral part of all our Early Intervention programs to ensure consistency of approach at our Center and at home. A sensory diet, prescribing developmental activities to improve the child's condition, is thus taught to the parents.
- Boosting confidence of children is one of the core objectives of our Bridges Learning Academy. The children were encouraged to put up a skit called 'Jungle Pathshala' where props and animal masks were made by the children. The skit was performed beautifully.
- Summer camp was organized for remedial students for them to learn to share, care, socialize, and enjoy the experience of a group. Children enjoyed the integration of learning with art activities, nature walk and games, which helped enhance receptivity.
- 'SAMARTH', a new initiative to sell VTU products, has been launched. We have started off with baking as an activity and the trainees are being oriented to the baking process. They are really enjoying the process seeing the 'ovenfresh' results of their work!
- Photography Workshop was a fun lesson conducted for VTU trainees. Most of our trainees learnt to click pictures using a digital camera! She has been also been a movement therapist for our students, making them become more expressive.
- Dance Therapy was an instant hit with our vocational group trainees. It is beautiful to behold the way barriers are broken in a non-threatening and enjoyable way.
- Benefits for the disadvantaged - Two initiatives with immense benefits for children with special needs were actively pursued-(a) Kalainar Kappidu Thittam Government Insurance Scheme and (b) National Id Card for persons with disabilities. Under the former scheme, children are covered for an insurance value of Rs. 100,000/-. The latter offers medical and travel concessions/benefits to card holders.
- Counseling for everyone, including 'akkas' (helpers) of the school, was a novel idea. The aim was to give them a platform for expression so that they are not mentally disturbed with their domestic problems and learn ways of coping effectively. This helped settle them in their minds and take care of our children more compassionately.

Partners and Donors

- With active involvement and backing of Shringeri Sharada Peetham for this project, we hope to further extend our reach to many more children in smaller towns.
- We are extremely thankful to Oracle India for providing us funds for purchase of a 25-seater school van for our special children.
- Britannia Industries Limited has come forward to help us, once again, with 4500 packs of biscuits for all our children under the rural program. They have been consistently supporting us for nearly three years now. Thank you, team Britannia!
- Hindustan Unilever Ltd and Wabag Ltd. organized a collection drive for 'good' old clothes and donated these for our SSA project in Villipuram district of Tamil Nadu.
- We are thankful to management of EA mall, Escape Cinema and Sangeetha Restaurant who gave our children not just lunch and movie, but excellent support and assistance.
- Sports events marked the World Disability Day for over 4000 special children in Villipuram under our care. A million thanks to Mr. Amiya Chowdhury and his team from ITC Stationery Division for sponsoring notebooks and pens for all.
- We are very grateful to Mr. Rajesh Chhachhoria, MPA Financial Services, who donated the money needed for purchase of spectacles for 200 children under the rural project.
- Johnson & Johnson team executives were splashed with excitement watching our children on this 'Water Day'! They were really touched and impressed with the event.
- The Rotary Club of Madras sponsored kitchen equipment. They also entertained our children with renditions of some melodious songs and karaoke singing.

Professional Staff Development

- Two senior management members attended a two-day workshop on the Role of Stakeholders in Implementing UNCRPD organized by NIEPMD.
- An intense in-service program was conducted on the three-fold nature of human beings - thinking, feeling and willing - and how crucial it is for all the three to be in sync and how focusing on each of the folds affects children with special needs in different ways.
- Eleven of our staff members from teaching and counseling streams attended the week-long IPMT conference in Bangalore. It was an intensely educative and reflective time with anthroposophical concepts and its applications in the fields of teaching and healing.
- A workshop on Eurythmy, conducted by Aban and Dinawaz Bana from Bombay, saw active participation of 18 teachers. The week was exhilarating with the right mix of knowledge and practical class room skills; each teacher's mind was ignited!

- There have been many in-service programs this year, taking sub-topics from anthroposophy and understanding their importance and significance in the context of our children, its impact on teacher-student relationship, and in the child's development.
- The in-service on Sensory Integration continued. Also, our teachers were back in the saddle for the games session from 2-3 p.m., taking it over again from the ATE students (teacher trainees), who were partially in-charge of it for some time.

Workshops and Seminars Conducted

- Dr. Vasudha was invited by 'Sanmvedana' of Nagpur for a workshop on 'Growth of an autistic child through adolescence and the education to handle the process.'
- She was also invited to give a talk on Hypnotherapy at the Rotary Club of Madras Chennapatna at Hotel Savera. The talk triggered a lot of curiosity and interaction.
- Two of our teachers and our Occupational Therapy Head conducted a two day workshop for the SSA staff. The experience was of a very different nature and truly rewarding.
- Our professionals held three sessions on Child Development for different parent groups in Tirunelveli. They also conducted a teacher meeting and a press conference there.
- Dr. Vasudha was a speaker at The National Convention for Education on the 'Emotional aspect of development' as a vital parameter for healthy, holistic growth of an individual.
- A Train-the-Trainer Workshop was conducted in Tamil for 40 rural special educators as an awareness and education drive for parents of children with special needs giving information on disabilities, myths and superstitions, various government schemes, understanding the child and dealing with social pressures.
- Our professionals conducted many workshops on different subjects such as Parenting, Relationship Management, Counseling etc. for Cognizant, and few other IT companies.
- We also conducted workshops for college students of Ethiraj College on interesting topics such as Significance of Family, Nurturing Relationships, Cooperation and Understanding.
- At Ramachandra Medical College, a team of our professionals and teachers organized a workshop on Communication through Movement.
- A Women's Day special was held at Accenture where we spoke on Reinventing Opportunity with a fresh outlook towards work and life.
- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Chandigarh had invited Dr. Vasudha to address the group on the 'Need to encourage research in Rehabilitation and Special Education'
- Our Counselors addressed the Parents Support Group on 21st March and facilitated a sharing and relaxation session especially for them.

Significant Events and Celebrations

- Stall setup by the Vocational Training Unit in an exhibition by 'ARUNIM'- the marketing wing of the National Trust of India - Our children's wares were highly appreciated by all, including the Central Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment and the State Minister.
- Our children presented a cultural program on 15th August. The costumes, representing our tricolour, were a treat to everyone's eyes! Great leaders were saluted for their valuable contribution to our country's freedom and development.
- Onam celebrations were held in the school where all staff and students made a huge poo-kolam (a traditional rangoli with flowers) under guidance of one of our teachers.
- Initiated by Block Three of the special school, the entire organization converted the place was remodeled into 'Gokuldharm', the place that Krishna was brought up and celebrations of Gokulashtami concluded with the pot breaking by dressed up Krishnas.
- The Sports Day at the YMCA Indoor Stadium saw over 100 special children participate in the interesting animal races and colourful fun drills. The event was a mega success!
- Ramzan was celebrated with two parents conducting the event. They distributed sweets and vadas to all. They also explained the significance of Ramzan to the school children.
- Three students went for an inter-school painting competition by an environmental organization. The goal oriented, focused assignment was a good experience for them.
- We participated in 'Joy of Giving', an event organized by the Down Syndrome Association. It was a valuable exposure to the trainees in social and adaptive skills.
- Golu celebration, the doll-festival a typical feature in South India during Navratri, was held in a festive and joyous atmosphere. The uniqueness was presence of children's siblings who brought in cheer by joining in the celebrations with music and dance.
- Our vocational trainees and teachers participated in an awareness drive 'Badhte Kadam', conducted by SPASTAN on behalf of the National Trust of India. We had set up a stall and students actively participated in various activities and won prizes as well!
- Diwali, the festival of lights, was celebrated with passion. Students made and painted clay diyas (lamps) and burst crackers as a part of celebrating the festival.
- On World Disability Day, V-Excel and Lions Club of Beach City co-hosted a Drawing and Colouring competition, with an overwhelming participation from 240 challenged children across 17 special schools. To mark this day, the Vocational trainees performed a 'Ramp Walk', with young ladies dressed in traditional sarees and boys as different professionals
- Christmas spirit took on a new meaning with all the thoughtfully made gifts this year! Prevocational class made wooden cots for dolls and toys using carpentry, Kindergartners got patchwork quilts, Grade 2 made pillows and Grade 4 made beautiful bags for gifts.

- Nine trainees attended and seamlessly merged with over 150 other regular students at a workshop in Kalakshetra on 'Youth for Peace' to perform as part of the theater group. They learnt to make yarn with 'Charkha', sowed 'methi' seeds in pots & painted sarees.
- Many staff members and a few children attended the rally for inclusion of the disabled, in the proposed countrywide Census. Their self-advocacy was very significant.
- Pongal was celebrated in January. Traditionally dressed children watched 'Pongal' being cooked in the mud pot and overflowing from it. This was followed by a school lunch.

Field Trips – Fun and Learn

- For the first time, we had an overnight stay in our Centers for trainees and staff of Vocational Unit. The highlights of evening were exciting games, music, dance, camp fire, stories, a skit, and food together! It was a wonderful and memorable experience for all.
- Students from Prevocational class and grades 3 and 4 went for a day long trekking trip. It was a great revelation to see how well children in the Autism Spectrum were surefooted but children with other disabilities needed some urging and help in undertaking this trip. Also it is beautiful to note that when it comes to the four natural elements (e.g. earth, water), children seamlessly fall in sync with them and no disability is apparent. A big thanks to Janaki for taking the initiative in making this event happen and to the volunteers from IIT-Chennai, who helped with this trip.
- This year we had some amazing field trips – a movie, shopping, eating out at a restaurant, visits to Jain Temple, Gurudwara, Church, Agro Foundation, Milk Factory, Snow World, Vandalur zoo, etc.. Each one gave the students a unique exposure and experience. We also had fun celebrations during Deepavali, Christmas and Pongal. All these helped the trainees to become self-confident, social and communicative.
- An exciting one day trek to Nagallapuram hills was organized with Eco Login for the remedial children on 5th February. Nagallapuram is an extremely pristine and beautiful hill. It was awesome to see children walking towards this 'Heaven on Earth'. The serene greens, cool pools, made our spirits bloom. Children also enjoyed making their own photo frames to keep their trek photo.
- The Teachers Day celebrations at Yelagiri - It was wonderful to see the usually harried faces relax in the gardens of Yelagiri, trek and go for a boat ride. They all came back refreshed to take on the task of training and preparing the children for the Sports Day.
- Few children got tickets for the World Cup Cricket match held between Kenya and New Zealand, and were excited to watch the match. They were lucky to get some goodies from Reebok by wearing their apparels and accessories!

- All trainees and staff visited Periyar Science Museum. Thanks to the management of the Museum, they got a chance to enjoy the 3-D movie and 'Astro-Show' at the planetarium

Volunteers Welcome

- Citibank has an annual Global Volunteer Program and for the past five years, we have been one of their partners. This year, eight employees from Chennai engaged in systematic documentation and coding of our books and other resource material.
- VIA, a German social organization, sends us two volunteers every year. We have earlier had young volunteers and eagerly look forward to the same dedication and commitment from the two new ones as many of their previous counterparts.
- Volunteers of our Vocational Unit, along with our trainees, have undertaken computerization and e-enabling at VTU to streamline all documents and processes.
- We are thankful to our volunteers across different Units for giving us their valuable time.
- As unique volunteers, we had representatives of The Traffic Police Department educating our student group on road traffic rules, safety and 'police as a friend of the community'. The practical exposure was given not just as an observation at busy junctions, but also by manning the traffic on the streets.

The Last Word

A 'Town Hall' meeting, including all staff at different levels, was held where Dr.Vasudha recognised the contribution of each and every V-Excelite in shaping the organization. Every department/service unit had a spokesperson sharing highlights and achievements of their Unit as well as voiced their concerns. The meeting concluded with a eurythmic exercise. It was a very touching moment when the entire group stood in a circle with hands held together, a mark of solidarity.