



V-Excel Educational Trust

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India

Activity Report **2011-12**



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ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT: 2011 - 2012

Significant events

- V-Excel made inroads in the international arena. In May 2011, our papers were accepted in two conferences, one in New York, USA and one in Reykjavik, Iceland. Our topic was 'Effectiveness of Curative Education for children with Autism in India'. Dr. Vasudha Prakash, Mrs Gita Bhalla and Mrs Ajita Panshikar jointly presented the V-Excel's journey, the philosophy behind curative education and the different methods used while working with children with Autism. Our approach was appreciated and well-received.
- Mr Matt Aubry, the Director of YAI Network, USA visited V-excel. YAI is a 53 year old, reputed organization working in the field of disabilities. The objective of his visit was to evaluate areas of possible partnerships. He saw our Centres in Chennai and Tirunelveli and discussed the proposed expansion plans in detail. He was extremely impressed and said, "Together, your collaboration, strength of purpose and concern for each other stood out to me".
- Students of Vocational Training Unit (VTU) marched from our Centre to LB Road, Chennai, thereby actively participating in the 'Anna Hazare' support forum for the 'India against Corruption' signature campaign.
- V-Excel co-hosted the week-long IPMT conference for medical doctors, psychologists, therapists, teachers of different grade levels, curative educators and community development professionals, focusing on tenets of anthroposophy.
- This year's World Disability Day made its mark with a silent Walkathon organized by us. Actor Raadhika Sarathkumar flagged off the march. About 500 people walked to pledge their support towards inclusion of persons with disabilities. We thank the special children, parents, teachers, volunteers, the large team from Naval forces, members of the Ladies' Club, the yoga group, many representatives of the public, Trustees and Advisory Board members of V-Excel who participated in this Walk.
- We celebrated our tenth anniversary's Annual Day on 15th March 2012. The Chief Guest was Mr Nakano Masanori, Consul general of Japan in Chennai and Dr. Matthew Belmonte, a Nehru-Fulbright Scholar and an international research expert on Autism, was our Guest of Honour. An Annual Day is typically a musical presentation and a grand culmination of our work with children with various

developmental challenges. For the parents, it is a much awaited event when their children don costumes and, like their peers, perform on a professionally set-up stage.

Field trips and camps:

- A summer camp was organized for 24 remedial students for them to learn to share, care, socialize, and enjoy the experience of a group.
- Two of our counsellors helped VRC conduct the summer camp for special children. The camp included activities like painting, paper mache, flour painting, storytelling, stitching, cooking and drama. All the children really enjoyed themselves thoroughly and had a rich learning experience!
- Mr Balasubramanian, Assistant Engineer, was assigned as a guide during our trip to the Chennai railway Station. Thanks to him, we gained entry into the shunting engine, diesel loco and electric loco, and learned how trains work!
- 14 students of the VTU enjoyed their three day trip to Kumbakonam and the suburban villages of Thippirajapuram and Darasuram; such trips boost them on their journey to independence.
- Thanks to Ability Foundation, some of KLC's older children, with few teachers and parents, were invited to participate in the International Film Festival on Disability. The children were deeply impacted. We also had the opportunity to visit *Kalakshetra* and witness scintillating performances by renowned musicians and dancers.
- BLA children were escorted to the IIT Madras campus. Children enjoyed their tour around the vast area and were enthralled to see the deer and stags running in the 'wild'.
- The KLC children, accompanied by teachers, visited the Indian Naval Ship in the Dockyard, INS Airavat. We sincerely thank the Indian Navy their interest and for giving our children a unique experience. The visit was a test in endurance and social skills, and we are really happy to share that the children displayed extreme equanimity throughout this trip.
- Eight children from VRC and their three siblings were taken on a field trip to Anna Centenary Library at Kotturpuram.

Staff training:

- Two experts on Waldorf Education and Eurhythmy - Ms Aban Bana & Ms Dilnawaz

Bana - conducted an excellent workshop for first-timers and those who were on advanced level. Dilnawaz patiently guided the newcomers through some of Rudolf Steiner's concepts and Aban took the experienced ones to new heights.

- Two of our psychologists attended an Art and Drama workshop which was conducted by an Israeli therapist, Dr. Nira Kaplansky, and arranged by Krita Experiential.
- Parimal, our Unit Head, attended a foundation course on Anthroposophical Biography in Bangalore, conducted by AMS India and facilitated by the German Anthroposophist Mr Karl Heinz.
- A Two day workshop for teachers, trainees and parents on "Embossed Printing on Cloth", was conducted by Chitti.
- Sanjiv Bhalla, a Falun Dafa practitioner, trained parents and teachers in the process of purifying both mind and body.
- The work shop on Autism for parents and teachers from Vocational Unit, was conducted by Dr. Matthew Belmonte, an expert researcher and speaker on Autism.

Partners and donors

- Our Trust-associate, ESVI Sarada Foundation, volunteered to step in and help with the construction of two halls to accommodate the three different VTU activities.
- Britannia Industries stepped forward this term too and organized for biscuits for nearly 4,500 children with special needs for our Villipuram project. A million thanks to Britannia for their support.
- We thank Naidu Hall and Sugun for giving us dress material, shirting and trouser material for the disadvantaged children on occasion of Deepavali. They have also given 25 saris and shirts for some volunteers.
- After our medical camps in all the nine blocks of Villipuram, we undertook distribution of different medical aids and appliances to the children identified with physical impairments. The aids included orthopaedic appliances such as callipers and knee splints as well as other items like tricycles, wheelchairs, walkers, spectacles, hearing aids. We would like sincerely like to thank Godrej Industries and Rotract Club for extending their support in this endeavour.

New projects and initiatives

- V-Excel's Satellite Centres at Nashik and Tirunelveli, offering Remedial and Early Childhood services for children with special needs, were inaugurated. With the awareness about these centres increasing steadily, enrolments and referrals have increased too!
- At the KLC, for the first time, the children performed an impromptu play - by the children, of the children and for the children! It was conceptualized entirely by Vishal and he had all his classmates acting out the parts and developing the story line. This play has been around for the season and has been performed for various audiences.
- The Certificate course in Specific Learning Disabilities (LD) was inaugurated.
- The V-Excel Hobby Club was launched on 28th January 2012, its first activity being a Photography class. A few IT Executives volunteered to teach our children to take photos using a digital camera. Open to all special schools, we began with 10 students who were asked to take ten pictures of the scenery they liked. They have really done a good job and the pictures are posted on our Facebook.

The taste of success

- VTU reopened on the 6th of June, with the most exciting news of our first job placement! Ashwin, one of our trainees, has been successfully placed as a Data Entry Operator. Usha, his Job Coach and Head of VTU, is personally monitoring his work behaviour as well emotional aspects on a continuous basis.
- At the BLA, one of our older students, Burhan, got placed in Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre in Class X. Efforts from our school and the teachers made this possible.
- Across all the nine blocks of Villipuram, we conducted disability awareness camps. The modus operandi of reaching the public included street plays, procession, etc. More than 500 persons participated in each camp.
- The BLA children participated in the Sports Meet conducted by the Inner Wheel Rotary Club of Chennai. BLA children participated in all the events and bagged maximum number of prizes.
- At the Crafts mela in L&T, the ARUNIM authorities (a marketing forum of The National Trust that supports products made by people with special needs) were impressed and offered one of our beneficiaries a job of marketing personnel for ARUNIM.

Prestigious Awards & Achievements of staff

- An Award of Recognition was conferred on Mrs. Usha Rajagopal, our Head of Vocational Training Unit. Anna University has launched its Girls' Forum - *Aakriti* - and identified women from the social sector who have done commendable work and made a difference to society.
- One of our consulting psychologists received a fellowship from the British Psychological Association for neuropsychological research work. She was in UK for two months for the same.
- Dr. Vasudha was invited to a meeting at Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), attended by stalwarts from the sector, who discussed various issues concerning the disability sector. The objective of the meeting was to work on policy matters and create a book, edited by experts in the respective field, for various disability areas.
- This year our Unit Head Parimal presented a paper on 'The Effect of Play Therapy on children with Autism' in an international conference conducted in Delhi by IARP. The paper generated a lot of curiosity and triggered many interactions, giving us a platform to showcase our work.

Impacting Corporates

- Dr. Vasudha Prakash conducted a workshop in Cognizant Technologies and a presentation to the Jacob Kuruvilla Initiatives group. We also had RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India) inspection and visit during this month.
- Along with our Vocational Training Unit, we conducted an awareness camp at Cognizant Technologies in Chennai. This was a part of our 10th Anniversary Celebrations. The response to our counselling stall was overwhelming and many showed interest in the products made by children.

Community Impact

- Dr. Vasudha was invited on All India Radio for an awareness program. She spoke of the importance of being observant with regards to a child's development

milestones, and that early identification and appropriate intervention were critical factors that significantly benefitted children with development lags or disabilities. The program was relayed in the local language.

- As a part of our continuing Parent Education Program, a reading workshop for 23 parents, and sessions on rhythm and setting boundaries was conducted for a group of 12 parents.
- In our rural outreach, as a part of the Government's *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* project, there was a National training program on Autism for special educators. Mrs Gita Bhalla, Principal of our special school, conducted a workshop that was attended by many teachers across various institutions. It was extremely well-received and appreciated by the participants.
- Our Special Educators have been faithfully carrying out school and home visits across all the 680 villages of the ten selected blocks of Villipuram district.
- As a part of the Kuruvilla Jacob Initiative in furthering resource development in the education sector, a Principals' Meet was organized on the 21st of September 2011. Dr. Vasudha Prakash spoke about the challenges facing schools, Principals as well as children today and the acute need for sustained training inputs to the teachers who shape the life of our future generation. The talk was highly appreciated and many of them came forth and expressed their interest in taking this issue forward.
- In Stella Maris we undertook a workshop for the second year students of post-graduation on Stress Management. It was conducted for all their branches. The response very positive and we got an opportunity to understand the college-level issues through these programs.
- In Loyola College, we delivered a talk in the women's wing of the college. It was for the second year post-graduate students. The conference was on legal awareness and women empowerment. Keeping in mind that these young girls are stepping out into the world and will have to shoulder many responsibilities, we took up the topic 'Mindful Relationships' that will ensure stress-free healthy associations for their future. The students as well as the others involved appreciated our session very much.
- We have many new enrolments for individual and marital counseling at the Counseling Unit. The referrals are coming from the corporate sector and also from some homeopathic doctors. Our reach is slowly widening and encompassing the general population outside the school.
