



V-Excel Educational Trust

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India

Activity Report 2012-13



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ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT: 2012 - 2013

Significant Events

- V-Excel celebrated its decennial year with a major advocacy event for children with special needs on January 10, 2013. This cultural extravaganza named 'Portraits of India' featured a unique poster exhibition on the world of disabilities, fantastic performances by our children including the Great Indian Parade, food and game stalls, and the sale of Indian craft made by our children and other small cottage-industry owners. Our chief guest for the event was Major General Ian Cardozo (Retd), Chairperson of the Rehabilitation Council of India. Guests of Honour included V-Excel's brand ambassador and renowned Carnatic classical singer, Bombay Jayashri; cricket expert, Kris Srikkanth; Mrs. Aruna Anand, India's chess grandmaster's manager and wife; cine actress Rohini; and Mr. Manohar Devadoss, author of the book 'A Quiet Courage'. We are grateful to all our supporters - YMCA, L & T Construction, Britannia, The Rotary Club of Chennai Port City, The Hindu and our radio partner Radio Mirchi.
- LuvMySib, a forum for siblings of special children was inaugurated in 2012 for the specific purpose of giving siblings of special children a space and a platform to express themselves in a homogenous group. The forum has been extremely successful with frequent meetings, both indoor (with art therapy and other activities) and outdoor (treks and picnics), giving the group the opportunity to share their stories and experiences.
- We have rechristened our Academy for Teacher Training and Excellence as 'Academy for Training and Excellence (ATE)' in the light of the different training programmes conducted by us for varying groups and audiences. The highlight for ATE this year was the official status as an IGNOU Study Centre for two courses in the area of disabilities: one is a Certificate course in Early Childhood Special Education, and the other is a Parents Awareness Training Programme, both under distance education. We see this as a wonderful opportunity for the parents of V-Excel as also for those keen on working closely with very young children.
- Dr. Vasudha Prakash was invited as a speaker for the prestigious TEDx programme. Created in the spirit of TED's mission, "ideas worth spreading", the TEDx programme is designed to give an opportunity to local communities to stimulate dialogue with achievers. In her talk on 'The Journey of an Impulse' she emphasised the importance of

keeping our dreams alive and ensuring that hurdles do not stop us from converting our dreams into a reality. The event was organised by Sri Venkateshwara Engineering College.

- We had the Town Hall meeting on 9th April, a meeting where all the staff and volunteers of V-Excel assemble to share their experiences and views on the year gone by. This year we involved everyone in brainstorming sessions addressing different challenges faced by the organisation. We recognise that we are the agents of the change we want and this can be achieved only by pledging to make a positive difference in ourselves and our environment. It was a very unique sight to see so many heads at work in one place!
- Our Tirunelveli Centre has shifted to a new location, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Kashinathan and Mr. Padmanabhan from Sri Shringeri Sharada Peetham. We would like to sincerely thank Mr. Sivaramakrishnan for graciously and generously allowing us to use his personal premises for two years. This helped us greatly in establishing a base and serving children with disabilities in the region.

Field Trips and More

- In a first ever event for some children, students of Grade 5 and Grade 4 went for an overnight trip to Yelagiri with their teachers. Amidst a lot of fluttering of the heart from parents, the children amazed us all by their independence, their calm adult behaviour in dealing with a new place, new food and all other unpredictable occurrence. It was a very big challenge for the teachers who volunteered to take it on and managed ably.
- Grade 5 went for a photo exhibition on 'Chennai's Heritage of Plants and Trees' in Women's Christian College (WCC). Girls from the Department of Botany in WCC were quite thrilled to see the interest shown by our students in the photographs and later identifying those trees within the WCC premises. Such interactive programmes are not just good for our children to mingle but also give an opportunity for the community to understand our children and their capabilities.
- We celebrated most of the festivals to ensure that children know the diversity of our culture. Festivals such as Pongal, Diwali, Dussehra, Holi, Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Onam, Navratri, Eid, Ramzan and Christmas were celebrated, along with patriotic days like Independence Day and Republic Day.
- To understand the rhythm of life and nature we make sure we celebrate different aspects of nature too, such as Water Day, Animal Week, and more. Sensory experiences such as these where the whole school participates in such free play events that are non-

directed and non-goal oriented, lends itself to a natural, holistic, enjoyable, social and interactive session.

- We also had a very special day this year called Amruth Day! Amruth is an important member of the 'keeper of sacred hearts' class which is what Grade 5 students call themselves and spread messages of unconditional love in all their writings. The teachers and children followed a dress code and menu that Amruth outlined. It was a unique and fun celebration.

Music, Art & Culture

- Our students were invited by the Svanubhava Trust for their dance and theatre programme held in Kalakshetra (a cultural hub in Chennai) this year. They all enjoyed the *Bhagavata Mela* programme and *Kathakali Bommalattam*. Such events are significant for the children not only from the cultural learning point of view but by being in the midst of strangers and communicating effectively to improve their socialisation skills.
- Interestingly, five of our students from the Vocational Training Unit in Shastri Nagar attended a Basket Ball game, organised for the Guinness Book of World Records. All of them were thrilled to receive participation certificates!
- V-Excel's Hobby Club that was launched last year has been quite active this year. The highlight this year was teaching students to handle cameras, to enhance creativity and to develop a passion for this hobby. Our children were quite busy walking the streets of Chennai with their cameras, and those images were used in the creation of the 2013 annual calendar.
- Some of our students visited the Lalit Kala Academy for a demonstration of art and craft items by artisans who had come from all over India. They tried their hands on a few craft items and thoroughly enjoyed the experience!
- Ms. Abinaya, a senior student of Bombay Jayashree, came every Thursday for conducting music sessions with the students of VTU. She sings simple Bhajans which the students sing after her; she then sings kritis for the students who enjoy her singing.

Partners and Donors

- Britannia Industries Limited came forth once again this year and sponsored biscuits for

our special children in Villipuram district. We cater to about 4,000 children there across various programmes – working with inclusive government and municipal schools, running Resource Rooms and Day Care Centres. We sincerely thank Britannia for their generous support.

- Thanks to Mr. Ramesh and Ms. Radhika of Checkpoint, a database application system has been developed, where all details and stakeholder information across the V-Excel centers will be consolidated. This application will make online data updation easy and will definitely take us a step ahead in effective data maintenance and communication practices.
- Mr. Hariharan, one of our Advisors, sponsored two music concerts this year. One was held in Shastri Hall, Mylapore featuring vocalist Vidhya Raghavan, while another was held within the school premises in Mandaveli with vocalist Dr. Sundar. The children enjoyed it thoroughly, and not just kept their patience to sit quietly for about one hour, but even tapped to the beat of his bhajans!

New Projects and Initiatives

- Our newest satellite centre was opened in Erode, thanks to Mrs. Deepa, the mother of one of our students at our Early Intervention Unit. We would like to thank Bally Cares, a social initiative of Bally Technologies, for stepping forth to sponsor all the equipment. The center shall offer Early Intervention and Remedial services to children with developmental delays and special learning needs.
- For the first time in V-Excel, a formal evaluation system has been initiated. And we have chosen the Early Intervention Programme for the purpose as it is a programme that is being implemented across different cities. The project is funded by Sametric Research and involves an extensive analysis of the impact of our programme on the lives of children with developmental delays and disabilities. Assessing the effectiveness of our systems and procedures is also an important part of this work. The project aims to gauge success of our EI programme and make recommendations for enhancing its sustainability and how best to replicate it.
- A very unique 360° feedback was witnessed this year when our children also did their review of the year with one of our play therapists! They wrote what they enjoyed the most and what was their favourite activity in the play sessions. It was really heart-warming to see their positive responses!

Staff Training

- One of our psychologists completed a six-week course in Art Therapy in Australia and has been applying that beautifully in groups and for individuals.
- The counselling department conducted in-service training for the teachers. These in-service programs are aimed at de-stressing the teachers and facilitating their emotional expression to prevent burnout.
- At the request of Mrs. Sundari, our Managing Trustee, we conducted an in-service training for our support staff, who participated with great enthusiasm. They were given orientation on – What is Disability, Types of Disabilities, Activities for Daily Living (ADLs), Attitude of the caregivers, and Problems faced while working with special children. It gave them a sense of pride that they were given formal training and subsequently received participation certificates by our Director.
- Ten staff members attended the annual training program, the IPMT Conference, held in Chennai this year. This week-long residential programme attracts teachers, special educators, therapists, doctors, counsellors, and other professionals from across the country. The conference, over the years, has progressively helped build a culture of working with a deeper sense of understanding of human beings and their development.
- The V-Excel Alumni Association (VAA) members were invited for a get-together on the 1st September 2012. The participants had a lot of fun together. We would like to thank all the alumni members who came for the event and made it a special day.

Community Impact

- Dr. Vasudha Prakash, along with our Counselling Head Parimal Pandit, conducted a workshop on 'Guilt-free Parenting' at one of the leading IT companies. The feedback very positive and we have been asked to conduct similar workshops in Kolkata and Coimbatore. In fact, in Kolkata, it was conducted for an all-fathers group, with two young unmarried men also attending it to understand what it entails!
- A full day work shop for primary, middle and secondary school teacher of Dhanalakshmi School was conducted by three of our facilitators. It was a very nice experience doing this unique workshop for a 99-year-old school.
- Thirty-five Primary teachers from across 17 schools in Chennai benefited from the workshop undertaken by V-Excel as a part of the Kuruvila Jacob Initiative (KJI). The

workshop was the first of the three-module programme planned for resource development in schools. Dr.Vasudha and Mrs.Gita Bhalla, Principal of KLC, delivered the lectures and conducted the activities.

- A two-day workshop was conducted for rural teachers of Isha Vidya School, Cuddalore, a school for children belonging to economically challenged backgrounds. The focus was on child development and identification of children with various types of learning disabilities.
- We had a wonderful group of six young volunteers from the Psychology Department of Ethiraj College for the summer camp. They conducted various interesting activities both outdoors and indoors. The activities were so creative that the children looked forward to coming for the summer camp.
- We had five interns through AIESEC volunteer network from China, Russia, Hong Kong, and Europe. The students of our centre were engaged in a lot of activities, new games, singing and dancing with the interns. Some of our older children enjoyed learning a new language –Chinese – and diligently practiced some of the symbols taught. For the interns it was an all new experience being with special children and they unanimously felt that they had learnt a lot in the course of their interactions with our children.
- Dr. Milind Sonawane, a Speech Therapist, working as a rehabilitation specialist in a Government Institution at Ireland, visited our Nasik Center for the second time. Fifteen children with speech and language difficulties were referred to him for consultation. He did a systematic profiling of the children referred to him and has given holistic recommendations.
- Students of Madras University visited V-Excel and were given an introductory talk by Dr. Vasudha, followed by a short tour of our school. We hope that, in the years to come, we are able to attract more and more students like these who can fortify their training practices and are able to join us in our environment.
- In our Nasik Centre, we organised a seminar on ‘Behaviour Management of Special Children’. Mrs. Sunita Samant, Clinical Psychologist, was the speaker. About 15 parents attended the seminar and it was well-received.
- Dr. P.S.Lalitha, an Alternative Medical Practitioner, with the knowledge of Reiki, Pranic healing, Crystal Therapy, Magnified healing, Magneto Therapy, Acupuncture (Traditional & Sujok), visited our Shastri Nagar Unit. She shared many interesting experiences with us and spent some time understanding our work. She congratulated us on our commitment and efforts in empowering young adults.
- The counselling department met Dr. Elaine Walker from the US who guided the counsellors on how to organise data for research. She also shared the rubric on which to record the data so that it will be easy to select variables and carry out qualitative and quantitative data.

Achievements

- Ankit Bhootra, a student of Upper Grade 4 was chosen to be trained for a basketball tournament.
- One of our VTU students, who underwent training in external therapy from our specialist, has now learnt the art of foot massage and foot bath. It gives us joy to see how she has become independent and can single-handedly do therapy for the other students.
- VTU received an order for terracotta masks, Warli painting and key bags from Svanubhava Trust. The students were extremely busy executing the order. The finished products were extremely beautiful and were appreciated by one and all! VTU also received an order for 250 thamboolam bags (type of goody bags), and thanks to the success of this order, they received many more for the festive season.
- At our Nashik Centre, a non-verbal four-year old child with autism who came to us a year and a half ago is now able to spell out letters when he sees them anywhere – TV ads, wall calendars, posters and books! A five-year-old child with ADHD who could not attend regular school, has been with us for eight months taking Sensory Integration (SI) and Neuro-Developmental Therapy (NDT). We are really happy that when he attended interviews for admission in two reputed schools, he did very well and was offered admission in both the schools! And finally, a child with autism, participated in a music competition conducted by her school (regular) in March. She sang "Nanna munna raahi" and won the second prize. Kudos to her for standing before a crowd of 100 and singing at the Annual Day function!