

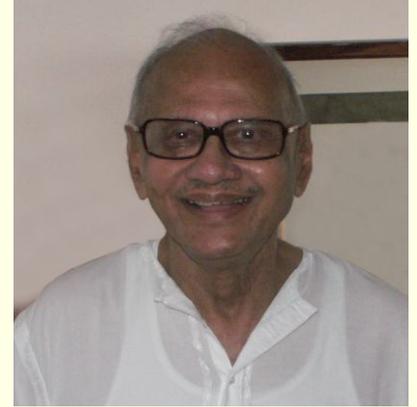
Vanakkam friends,



Sudhir

I am happy to greet you all again through this newsletter. I hope this edition finds you all with good health and energy. Aikiyam is fully energized with several new short- and long-term volunteers and our many classroom projects. The support group is happy to have one more Aurovilian friend and Udavi School teacher, Sudhir who has joined them in their work. We miss our friend, and benefactor, Vasanthlal Bhai (read more on the back page). We are planning to start construction of a building with 4 classrooms at the beginning of 2013 to replace 2 classrooms, which are in a bad state of repair. This is possible because of the generous support of friends like you. This is a big blessing for us.

The children also enjoy Aikiyam's programme that starts at 8:30 a.m. and finishes with sports at 5:00 p.m.. Yes, we modified our time schedule. Parents are happy about our programme and appreciate our work. The childrens' beaming smiles are a testimony to our progress. Please accept our sincere gratitude for being with us. Aum...



A smiling Vasanthlal Bhai



Joyful challenge - a sharing:

Hema, a young girl, joined Aikiyam School three years ago as a crèche student. After a while our crèche teachers found that Hema was different from other kids, and she could not speak any words. Concerned about her behaviour, we asked for help from Deepam (an Auroville school for differently abled village children, managed by Angelika). On the basis of Angelika's suggestion, Hema was taken to Chennai to see a specialist.

The doctors in Chennai found that Hema has severe hearing loss and could be helped with hearing aids.

Immediately the Deepam team took Hema as their student and gave her the needed hearing aid and speech therapy for three years. This year, she has come back to Aikiyam with the basic ability to articulate sounds, and she rejoined her old class. She comes to Aikiyam Monday through Friday in the morning for half a day and continues her study at Deepam in the afternoons. She is very happy to be back in the classroom. The class teacher says that, 'Hema's academic skills and social behaviour are starting to resemble that of her peers'. She also says that Hema's relationship with her classmates is increasing her social initiations. She started to write Tamil and English alphabets. She reads simple books with Sarah, a Aurovilian volunteer, and spends time with the Supportive Learning teachers.

Hema's parents are happy and say, ' We had no idea what to do with our daughter and where to send her for her studies. We hope that Aikiyam can give her basic education with some work training like tailoring'.

One of the beautiful things about Hema's story is that it may be the first time Aikiyam has been able to work with the specialists at Deepam so that a child could get the specialized help needed, and then had the opportunity to integrate the child back into the regular classroom. We continue to try our best to help Hema and we always enjoy her laughter.





Aruna

Kalai

Vijaya

Usha

A talk with the kindergarten teachers about the playground

The kindergarten playground has been enjoyed by the children for a little over one year now. We decided to talk to the kindergarten teachers Aruna, Kalai, Usha and Vijaya. This was their enthusiastic response:

What is your overall impression?

The children love to be in the playground. They really use it in a different way; they're all over the place.

Can you describe any changes in the way the children behave in the kindergarten playground now, compared to when it was new, one year ago?

A year ago they didn't share the swing; they're using more of the equipment, and overall area. We had noticed they didn't use the painted tunnel. Now they use its holes as foot-holds, and climb. They make up stories, really using their imagination, and play hide-and-seek. In the splash pools they would cry last year; now they like it and ask for soap to wash; they help each other. The tire ladder is now used as a 'transport' vehicle. Some days it is a bus; others it's a train. There is a conductor, and passengers who pay the fare with leaves. There was no attraction to the story-telling platform last year; now they want to have activities outside on the platform. Being outside, in the playground, stimulates their imagination.

In what ways do the children seem to test their physical limits in the playground? Do you observe that they climb higher, go further across the vertical ladder, balance longer on the wood beams, push/challenge themselves to do more, etc.?)

Some of them last year would not go to the top of the big bars. Now they go all the way up, and even jump down into the sand. They are very brave. Now they walk the wooden balance beams from the top to the bottom; before they would only start at the bottom, and go half-way. And they do it without our assistance now.

Can you describe improvements in the children's motor skills, and confidence, which you attribute to their

regular access to the playground over this last year? Do you see a change in the children's overall learning process and class behaviour since we have such a playground in the school?

Because of the playground, their confidence in everything is improved. Their fine motor skills are enhanced by playing with the various sized pebbles. They have more sensory experience, playing with and walking upon sand, wood, rocks, and grass. In the classroom we see a definite improvement in the way they hold their pencils and crayons. The way they handle materials in general, and how they hold themselves (due to practice with balance) is better. Children from all three classes, creche, lower-kindergarten, and upper-kindergarten interact more because they play together. The older children help the younger ones. In the classroom they're more focused, once they had time to be in the playground. If they're restless, sometimes we'll take them out for a few minutes, and when we return their behaviour is noticeably better. In class some children will not share; they will not speak up. But out in the playground, the same children will be open and talk to us. We noticed they like to sing while on the big fire swing; they've learned the songs better because they practice while they play.

Are there pieces of playground equipment you would like to be added?

It would be great to have the slide that was originally planned. They could use 2 more swings, and a small seesaw.





Children love to swing!

The story behind the playground, by Stacy Gluckman

Aikiyam playground was envisioned under its majestic banyan trees where the spontaneous play of the children has enlightened many hearts. However not all ages could grip the roots and swing like Mowgli in the jungle and the 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 year-olds certainly needed a creative option for climbing and swinging and splashing, digging, and singing. We were sadly aware of the limited apparatus and the keen interest most children have to explore movement in space. So with the help of the support group, staff, a village playground manual, and a creative architect the vision was born.

We hoped to keep modalities cost effective as well as maintain the natural elements of the banyan tree and village life. Village children are able to play with any material so this principle was taken into the playground planning. Balance beams and stepping stones were made from wood stumps (fantastic for balance, gross motor coordination and confidence), horizontal and vertical swings from tires (for vestibular function and flow), a creative climbing wall (gross motor coordination and planning) from donated ferrocement triangles, ladders from banyan roots and bamboo, a performance platform area (for outdoor classes), splash pools (specifically for water-play for the

kindergarten), sensory gardens (where different textures are separate like pebbles, soft sand, and rocks, specifically for the creche children) and sitting areas (for personal time). This is to name a few of the modalities that were implemented.

Once completed the playground was introduced to the teachers and then the learners. Teachers explored creative ways of using the space for learning outcomes (e.g. during the monsoon the water would travel through the carefully planned pebble-beds creating a small river - ah ha - an opportunity to learn about the rivers of India. Carefully hidden objects like Krishna were placed around the banyan tree to be discovered - ah ha - a game for visual memory).

Teachers were encouraged to take ownership for the maintenance of the grounds and for its continued improvement. Learners were encouraged to also be involved in this process. Phase two of the playground hopes to bring a small slide, a labyrinth, a tree house with bridge and ramp, and extra swings.



School, by A. Vaidheki, 8th standard



A school is a place where children get educated and gain knowledge. I'm going to write about a particular school called Aikiyam. The word "aikiyam" means being in friendship with groups, to help others. According to everyone we can say that Aikiyam is a peaceful place.

Now let us see which are the things that make Aikiyam School a peaceful way and a good path.

Teachers are the main persons who make a school into a peaceful place by the way the teachers relate with all the children. They teach the hard lesson in a way that makes it easy to understand, they allow us to ask questions if we don't understand that part. Also, the main thing is they are friendly with us and share our happiness and sadness. Not only this, some teachers in Aikiyam School help for poor people in our school which makes them have fewer problems.

In Aikiyam School there are many types of classes besides the academic studies. They are computer, carpentry, tailoring, embroidery, dancing, singing, and drawing. Mostly this kind of classes help the student to learn some activities. Also this kind of classes help the student for their future work. Mostly this kind of classes help the children to learn many types of work and how to concentrate.

Here the green wealth means the types of plants and trees in Aikiyam. These kinds of trees make our campus beautiful with the help of the gardener, workers and students. These kinds of things also make the school look peaceful. Also we planted some medicinal plants with the help of our gardener which help our studies .

Students also make a school peaceful by the way the students here help other students to learn things in as many ways as they can.

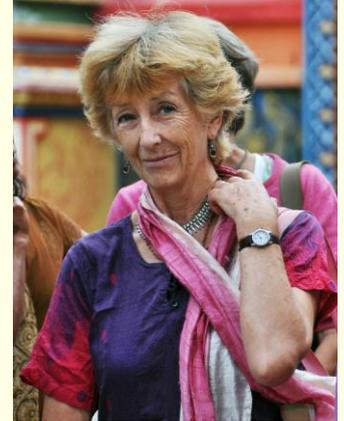
These are the ways that Aikiyam School helps every student to get educated and knowledgeable.



You can send your donation via the Auroville International Centre in your country, or send a cheque made payable to 'Auroville Unity Fund', Town Hall, Auroville, 605101 Tamil Nadu, INDIA indicating clearly that the donation is for Aikiyam School, or you can send it electronically by going to auroville.com/donations/ and following the instructions.

Farewell Dianna

The Support Group sadly lost one of its members in June. Dianna had been unwell for several months, and when she went to the UK in March 2012, she learned that she had motor neurone disease, also known as ALS. Dianna joined the Support Group in 2007 and represented New Creation Community where she lived with her husband Norman. Dianna loved to write so she quickly started a pen pal project with the children helping them to compose letters to students in a school in Australia. After some time she took a two year leave from the Support Group to write a book called "The Journeying Years". This project included interviewing a broad range of Aurovilians on what brought them to Auroville. Dianna loved life. She was very fond of the Tamil people and wrote about her fascination with customs in the neighbouring villages in Auroville Today. We will miss her, as well as her unique perspective.



Remembering Vasanthlal Bhai



In the midst of sharing all our challenges, improvements and various achievements the Support Group was shocked to hear that one of our best friends, Mr. Vasanthlal Bhai unexpectedly passed away in Mumbai in August. People who are closely connected with Aikiyam know Vasanthlal Bhai and his ever present smile. He, and his wife Kokila Bhen, adored our children and regularly collected funds for our school nutrition program. Aikiyam staff and children meditated for Vasanthlal Bhai and pray that Kokila will have the strength to continue her work. Kokila Bhen continues to fund-raise for Aikiyam's nutrition programme and to visit the school regularly with good food and snacks for all the children.