

Vanakkam Aikiyam Friends

We begin this newsletter with a special appeal, hoping that you will share it with your friends, and/or organizations that you know of, which might be interested.

We had a great beginning this year in our 4 new class rooms and went through an interesting first term. The children in the higher classes did a project at Solitude Farm and now they are creating small gardens in little corners they can find on campus and trying their experiments with plants. This year we are doing a 'whole school class room project' on water. The students are busy



Opening of the new clay workshop. The founder of New Creation Bilingual School, Andre Tardeil is sitting next to Shankar.



the updates as usual and many thanks for your continuous support. Aum...Shankar

with creating small ponds, water cycle models, and visiting water bodies in and around Auroville. We teachers are improving ourselves with more trainings. I hope you enjoy reading

The Present Financial Situation:

The cost of running the school has been increasing regularly year by year. Between 2009 and 2017 the costs have risen by 140%. This increase is mostly due to the high level of inflation in India and the fact that as we get better teachers we need to pay them more. Donations, however, have not increased proportionally. In 2008 donations covered 68% of our expenses, whereas today they cover only 28%. (see table below)

An Appeal to Our Readers and Friends

maintenance of those teachers and staff members, who are members of the Auroville community. The rest, which includes fourteen teachers, and most of our non-teaching staff, are covered by donations and the fees we get from students. Our teachers' pay is very low in comparison to what they might earn in a government school, although a little more than what they would earn in many privately run schools. We have not been able to increase their wages as

	2008-2009	2016-2017	2008-2009	2016-2017	2008-2009	2016-2017
	₹	₹	€	€	US\$	US\$
INCOME						
Auroville's Contribution	1,742,804	3,285,696	23,237	43,809	27,231	51,339
Donations	1,838,516	1,806,502	24,514	24,087	28,727	28,227
Students' Contribution		632,500	-	8,433	-	9,883
Government Grant	110,500	320,350	1,473	4,271	1,727	5,005
Total Income	3,691,820	6,045,048	49,224	80,601	57,685	94,454
EXPENDITURE						
Salaries, Bonuses, Retirement Fund	1,978,806	4,507,826	26,384	60,104	30,919	70,435
Nutrition	259,880	558,196	3,465	7,443	4,061	8,722
All materials inc. classroom, theatre, crafts	85,474	353,838	1,140	4,718	1,336	5,529
Summer Camp and Travel	40,715	135,155	543	1,802	636	2,112
General expenses, repairs, maintenance, misc.	264,086	499,213	3,521	6,656	4,126	7,800
Furniture and Equipment	80,500	378,328	1,073	5,044	1,258	5,911
Total Expenditure	2,709,461	6,432,556	36,126	85,767	42,335	100,509
Income minus Expenditure	982,359	-387,508	13,098	-5,167	15,349	-6,055

As you can see from the table above, 70% of the cost of running the school is for salaries, bonuses, and staff benefits. We have a staff of around thirty teachers, including the school principal, librarian and resource manager. Additionally we have seven cleaning and cooking staff, one maintenance man, one gardener, two secretaries, and one administrator. Auroville covers the

much as we would like, as our expenditure is already exceeding our income.

Need and Request:

To function we need to be able to cover our current expenses, as well as to meet new ones. For the past three years our expenses have exceeded our income, almost entirely depleting the reserve we had built up over previous years when we received more than

we spent. At the same time we would like to increase the wages of those teachers not covered by Auroville. We spend a lot of effort training our teachers how to recognize and develop the strengths of each individual pupil. This is something they do not necessarily learn in the regular teachers' course, which is more oriented to rote learning and passing exams. Therefore, it can be quite a blow when

a teacher, we have been working with for a long time, leaves for a higher paying job in a government school. Yet we cannot blame them. Sometimes they can earn double the salary we offer, or even more.

Any help you can give us to meet these goals would be deeply appreciated. Either regular or single donations would be very welcome.

There are many ways to donate to Auroville, depending

on whether you donate from inside or outside India and whether or not you require income tax exemption. You may also donate online. Go to <https://www.auroville.org/contents/2835> and choose the way that is suitable for you. Regardless of your choice please be sure to write to assg@auroville.org.in with copy to unityfund@auroville.org.in explaining that your donation is for Aikiyam School.

Meet Karthikeyan (aka Karthik) Aikiyam's New Social Science Teacher

Recently Karthik joined Aikiyam as the social science teacher for grades five, six and seven. One of his passions is organic farming. It all began in 2006 when he did a year long apprenticeship with Priya Vincent at Buddha Garden. He says this was an amazing year for him, educative on many levels, including farming, self-awareness, and learning to speak English. From 6:00am till 9:00am he worked in the garden with the volunteers. After 9:00 there was the open education program, where volunteers taught a wide variety of subjects, depending on their knowledge. When his apprenticeship was over, Karthik moved to Sadhana Forest for a year, and later worked in Pitchandikulam Forest. After that he moved to College Guest House where he helped to run the guest house, made a vegetable garden and studied nonviolent communication. In 2011 he moved to Solitude farm where, under the guidance of Krishna McKenzie, he deepened his knowledge of indigenous plants and organic farming. At the same time he was pursuing his university education by correspondence, and earning an MSc in Geography.

Then Karthik went to England to attend a mature student program at a Krishnamurthi School for two years. When he came back to India he taught social studies at Pathashaala, a Krishnamurthi School near Chennai.

In November 2016 he returned to Auroville, and has been working closely with Krishna at Solitude Farm. He



Eighth graders enjoy lunch at Solitude Farm. Krishna is standing front, right. Karthik is standing back, right.

wanted to do something in education as well, and found out that Aikiyam needed a social science teacher.

Meanwhile Karthik and Krishna had already talked about an apprenticeship program for local children, so when Karthik came to Aikiyam, and found Shankar was already thinking about a farming project, it was decided that Karthik and Krishna would do a program every Wednesday over a period of four weeks for each of grades five, six, seven and eight.

Aikiyam Students Go to Solitude Farm to Learn About Organic Farming

The day begins with Krishna and the volunteers introducing the children to the farm.



Harvesting at Solitude Farm

Krishna writes the following description of how the day unfolds:

What did you eat for breakfast? Bread, *idlies* (savory cakes usually made with rice and lentils), *upma* (semolina porridge). Where did it come from? Where was it grown? How was it grown? Were chemicals used to grow it? If so,

what chemicals? Who grew the food? How was it transported here? How was it stored? None of the children or adults could give an answer to these questions.

The fact is we have lost our relationship with where our food comes from. The children lay their harvest out on the table: chicken spinach, palm fruit, *modakatan* (balloon vine), *tooduvai* (a tasty weed), kumquat, *kalpuravali* (Indian oregano), banana stem, banana flower, hibiscus flowers, Radha's consciousness flowers (*Clitoria Ternita*), green papaya and more! Ok so which of these crops do we find in a shop? None of them.

For the last 4 weeks the children of Aikiyam School have been coming to Solitude for the morning and having lunch at the Solitude Farm Café. After a brief introduction, they split up into five or six groups of four children with one or two of the Solitude Team and their own teachers. This is headed by the much appreciated Karthik, who was manager of



Solitude for more than a year and is still very much part of the community. We then went through the fields and made a complete harvest of everything we could find. Up to 30 different items were harvested and placed on a table. Next the children identified the crops and were asked what these crops were called, how they were used, and what they were good for.

Then we also explored if they were found in shops. After this session it became clear to the children that many of these crops were part of the very fabric of their culture, such as *tooduvai* or the palm fruit, or the Radha's Consciousness flower, but as agriculture these days has its focus on financial profit rather than nutritional benefit, they could see how these plants are becoming lost to their culture.

Next the groups would start cooking; one group using the wonderful weed *tooduvai* to make *rasam* (South Indian soup), another group making the very traditional *adai*, a sort of fat chappati with ragi (finger millet), onions and drumstick spinach, while yet another group would make a tribal booster juice with Radha's Consciousness flowers, *kalpuravali*, lemon grass, sour sop leaves, hibiscus flowers and *thulsi* (Indian basil). Making the juice is always a fascinating adventure, not only discovering all the plants in the fields but when the blue flowers are boiled and the water turns blue, lemons are then added and the juice turns a beautiful shade of violet. A little sugar is added and everyone enjoys! Another group would make salad with green papaya, guava leaves, rosella leaves, mango leaves, basil, *ponnanganni* spinach, *piper longum* (pepper) and more! Salad is really not a thing that local kids have the cultural habit to eat but by bringing them into the field to harvest and having them claim ownership by peeling, grating, mixing and creating a beautiful dish they also eat it without complaint!

The harvesting, cooking and eating is most obviously the way in which we are going to give value again to foods that have been eclipsed by carrots, potatoes, broccoli and cauliflowers, all plants that don't grow here. The nutritional value of the plants that the children discovered also have a

huge medicinal value, and the idea that Ayurveda doesn't come in a little jar for Rs150, and that traditional medicine is actually part of our diet, was also communicated in a practical and experiential way.

As well as all the adventures through the fields, harvesting and cooking together, we also harvested foxtail millet, planted palm fruits, documented with posters in Tamil and English the booster juice, did field preparation and planted spinach.

One of the most important aspects of the work we are doing at Solitude is to show that social change, vis à vis our relationship to where our food comes from, can happen only through community and celebration. At the heart of change is joy! So one day we did what we do best and got out the electric guitar, barrels for drums and performed and recorded a song together with them. Feeling the joy after singing, playing and dancing together is something so special, not at all quantitative but most definitely at the heart of deep learning!

Working with the local Tamil children was nothing less than a joy for me. The local children's vitality and joy and the fact they are from this land is so very important and I hope our work with them, which includes my learning as much as theirs, will go on.

A relationship with Mother Nature can be the only basis for a healthy world.



Preparing lunch at Solitude Farm



Preparing lunch at Solitude Farm



Trip to Solitude Farm by Ishaan, Grade 7

On August 30th we made a trip to Solitude Farm. We were the second group to visit Solitude Farm from our school. We started at 9:00am from our school and reached there at 9:15am.

These are the activities we did in Solitude Farm:

- * Cutting millets
- * Collecting leaves, flowers and fruit
- * Making tea
- * Making charts in Tamil and English about the ingredients and the method of making special tea from the



Ishaan

leaves and flowers we collected.

We were split into five groups - 2 groups for cutting millets and 3 groups for collecting leaves, fruit and flowers. There were 6 guides; my group guide was our new social science teacher, Mr. Karthikeyan. He took us around the farm and showed us different leaves and flowers. He also gave us the names of them, and asked us to collect the leaves and flowers we needed for the tea. At 11:00 am we returned to

the kitchen, which was our meeting point. And then we had tasty snacks.

Krishna, a lover of nature and the founder of this farm, wanted a person to help him bring delicious drumstick leaves for our lunch; so I went with him. On our way to the drumstick trees, by mistake I stepped on a beautiful baby plant. Krishna poured some water on the plant and made it straight again, and then he said, "you have stepped on this plant by mistake, but do you know what all this plant can give you after 2 or 3 years?" He then said, "it can give you food, shade, medicines etc." One thing which really touched my heart, and which I am still trying to apply it to my life, is that "one should always celebrate everything you get in your life and everything that god and nature has provided for you!" These words of him have really touched my heart. I feel so happy that I had a chance to visit Solitude Farm and this wonderful person.

First Term Break and Trip to Ooty by Harini, Grade 6



Harini

I am so excited about our trip to Ooty. This is my last day in school for this term. We have our first term break and I am going to enjoy my holidays in Ooty.

September 27th night we are leaving from school to Ooty. Our science teacher is taking us on this trip. There are five other teachers, who are coming with us.

These are the places that we would visit – tea factory, candle museum, Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, flower garden, and Black Thunder, which is an amusement park. Just like me all of my friends are excited and looking forward to the trip.

I am especially looking forward to visiting the tea factory and tea plantation because we will have a chance to pluck tea leaves by ourselves.

Volunteers

Recently Aikiyam said goodbye to two volunteers who had been at the school from August 2016 till August 2017 as part of the Weltwaerts program.

Sophie Naurez assisted in crèche, upper kindergarten, 2nd and 3rd grades. She also helped with teaching science in the 7th grade, and spent some time in art and clay classes. She found the work to be very diversified, interesting and a lot of fun, and she says it helped her to grow a lot.

Nele Schute assisted in the lower kindergarten and grade one. She worked a lot with children who had special needs and needed extra support to keep up with the class, helping them with English, science and social science. She also helped in art class, in the library, and with swimming classes. She says tolerance, respect, flexibility and understanding are the most important qualities she developed while working at Aikiyam



Sophie



Nele

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