

## Vanakkam Dear Friends

I hope that health and happiness fills your days of this new year as it does ours. As you will see in this newsletter there has been a wealth of people, ideas and activities contributing to the educational progress of our

students. For more than a snapshot of the learning that has taken place go to the Aikiyam website and enjoy the many voices of our students, teachers and volunteers.

*Shankar, Aikiyam School Principal*

## Holiday Program

Aikiyam students and teachers celebrated the start of our December-January Holiday Season with an all school program on December 24<sup>th</sup>. Principal, Shankar, opened the program with a welcome to guests and students. Arul, grade 8 student, was our Santa Claus Master of Ceremonies. He introduced each item on the program in English. Facing the audience took courage but in the end he was proud to play this role.

The program consisted of dances, songs, and plays organized by our teachers and performed by students in grades Kg to 8<sup>th</sup>. Usha, our dance teacher, taught some of our 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls traditional welcoming dances.

Mala, Special Needs and Vocal teacher, prepared a group of students aged 7 through 13 to sing folk songs from Africa and Russia and an English song of peace to celebrate the diversity of our holidays.

Upper Kg/First grade presented the English story; *Are You My Mother?* in drama with costumes made by the children.

Fourth graders under the direction of USA volunteer

Meghan and Mala presented a short version of *Alice in Wonderland*. These students read and studied the story with Meghan who then adapted it based on the children's work of choosing a character, making costumes for their character, making the set and memorizing their lines.

Sathiya, our English and drama teacher, worked with the 7<sup>th</sup> graders to present *The Ashes That Made The Trees Bloom*. The 7<sup>th</sup> graders were so enthusiastic about this Japanese Folk Tale from their C B S E curriculum that Sathiya turned it into a drama. The children made their costumes and the set using

their own ideas and materials.

Our program came to a grande finale with Liselotte, a music therapist from Belgium, her musician friends and Mala, performing songs in English which Liselotte and the children had written. Everyone watched as the children danced like raindrops splashing down. Then a hat juggler performed while the children sang.

Shankar treated the children to holiday sweets at the end of our program.



*Holiday Program Performers*

### MISSION STATEMENT OF AIKIYAM SCHOOL (NCBS)

Aikiyam School strives to nurture and prepare Tamil village children for life in our rapidly changing world, while maintaining contact with their Tamil language and cultural heritage, through the principles of Integral Education established by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Founder of Auroville, and the English medium CBSE curriculum.

## Grade 4 Food Project

In the 4th grade we have been studying different aspects of food, such as how to make our favourite foods, how food is grown, what vitamins and minerals are in different foods, and foods from different cultures and parts of India. Here is what the 4th grade has learned about food in their own words:



*Volunteer Meghan with Murugan's grade 4*

"We go to the library and get some books about food. We learned that we need to eat more vegetables. We learned about food words and cooking words. We found the vitamins in food. We visit Anapurna Farms and Botanical gardens. We are seeing many rice plants in the Anapurna Gardens. In the Botanical Gardens we saw desert plants, compost, and vegetable gardens. We see the seed bank at the Botanical Gardens. We take care of the herb garden at Aikiyam School. We learned about the plants and how to grow the plants. We wrote how to make parotas, sambar and pongal. We also shared food from our houses."

*By The 4th standard*

## Volunteer Work Makes A Difference

This school year 12 volunteers joined the Aikiyam staff for 3 or 6 months to work with our students. They came from Germany, England, South Africa and the USA. Some took on the role of assistant to a teacher. Others who have teaching experience gave ideas and coaching to individual teachers or facilitated workshops for all the teachers. In speaking with them to find out about their experience here they agreed that: Being with these happy children was the highlight of their experience. Learning about the daily lives of



*KG Volunteer Dominick*

village children was an eye-opener. They appreciated the warmth and openness of teachers and support staff. Working here taught them the importance of being flexible. The fact that volunteers are taken seriously and treated with respect made their work rewarding.

In speaking with the KG teachers, Usha, Praveena and Manju, we discovered that the experience of working with volunteers has made a lasting impact on them. Usha, our senior KG teacher, said this is the first time she has had a volunteer. She was worried that the children would be afraid of the western strangers. But all of the volunteers were kind and friendly with the children. She thinks of Lisa M. as an angel who has brought her many gifts this year in terms of ideas and activities for working with the children. All of the KG teachers appreciate Dominick for initiating the Free Play session which they continue to develop without him. They are also proud of the way that their students listen and learn from the volunteers.

Michael who worked with grade 3 wrote: "The children's energy is boundless; I feel like a juggler on a unicycle pushed to my physical limit just trying to keep up with them. I go home each day with the echoes of "Michael! Michael! Michael!" ringing in my ears."



Dominick writes: "During my time in the Kindergarten ... I recognized that each nationality has its own advantages and weaknesses. I hope the different nationalities working together at the school will create a surrounding for the children where they can grow to their full potential."

Meghan wrote: "Coming from teaching in New York City, a completely different culture, I found immediately that the children were so open to me, to new ideas and enthusiastic about learning! The (grade 4) children along with (teacher) Murugan have made me feel that their classroom is my home."

Lisa M. with KG wrote: "The work with the children is fun, especially because of the openness and the interest of the teachers for new ideas. They welcomed me very warmly and made it easy for me to get into the Indian lifestyle."



All of the teachers and volunteers agree that on the whole the interaction among them has been cooperative and enriching for them on the professional as well as personal level.

## Science Field Trip



On November 3<sup>rd</sup> Aikiyam Science teacher, Radhakrishnan, took our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to the Kamaraj Agricultural Research Center in Pudduchery. There a researcher demonstrated the asexual scientific techniques for growing plant tissue. Students learned that the callus tissue or undivided mass of cells from a banana plant could be placed in a test tube where nutrients could be applied. Within 7 days the researchers collect the grown test tube tissue and place it in a second culture medium where growth hormones are applied. 20 days later the result is a seedling banana plant in a test tube. The seedling is then transplanted into a soil bag and kept in a greenhouse for up to 2 weeks.

Students went into the greenhouse where the scientist taught students about how the greenhouse gases effect the environment. Upon entering the greenhouse the warmth from the soil and the moisture on the glass roof made it easy to understand the concepts of plant transpiration and global warming.

The children brought 10 banana trees from the researcher's greenhouse back to school where they planted them in the garden. As a result we can now see how asexual reproduction of plant tissue culture creates a viable banana tree. This lesson is an important part of the CBSE grade 8 science curriculum as the textbook covers both sexual and asexual plant and human reproduction. Fortunately students were able to see the research work being done to increase food production in India through asexual plant reproduction at the Kamaraj Center.

## Special Needs Team Improves Services

In November 2007 under the guidance of the support group Stacy, a newcomer from South Africa and an occupational therapist, recruited Saskia, a newcomer from Belgium, and Sathiyavani, our special needs teacher since 2007 to address the educational issues of learners with special needs and educate teachers and care givers around the myths this usually carries. The student needs include physical and learning disabilities, psychological, social and academic difficulties. The team has now blossomed into 4 teachers and 3 teacher trainers, with various backgrounds, now managing more than 50 learners daily.

For these learners- remaining in their usual classes

while receiving 1:1 and small group classes has been the magic ingredient for their emerging potential. These classes focus on their emerging levels of understanding and integration by creating programmes that facilitate this natural but structured emergence. Some of the tools that are used include: Individualised Education Plans, Awareness Through the Body techniques, developmental guidelines, vocational training, life skills training and specialized therapy.

After a successful programme implementation over the past 2 years we are most excited to move to our new room- a spacious 50 square meters- of potential movement, outreach training, group and individual work space. We are most grateful to the donors and coordinators of this most successful project which is certainly leading Aikiyam School into the next level of growth.



*The Special Needs Team  
Sathyavani, Jhoti, Mala, Stacy, Saskia, Perumal.*

With the continued support of our community and extended friends and supporters from all over the world we hope to see this room as a resource centre for teacher training , Awareness Through the Body Classes with all our learners, and continued 1:1 and group classes. We are looking forward to our move into the new building and know this will take us to the next level of transformation.

Namaste  
The Special Needs Team

## New staff



*Sathiya (English), Aruna (Tamil), Manju and Praveena (KG)  
Radhakrishnan (Science)*

## Remembering with love



*Jan Lohman at Aikiyam School, 2009*

We were sad to learn that one of the school's good friends and supporters, Mr Jan Lohman from the Netherlands, passed away in November at the age of 81. Jan was a regular visitor to Auroville. In recent years he frequently visited the school attending classes, exhibitions, and performances during his annual visits. He generously helped out when the school had serious financial difficulties. After his passing, his family found in his house in Rotterdam books, toys and pens, which Jan was planning to bring to Aikiyam in January 2010. Sadly he could not bring them himself. We will sorely miss him. Thank you, Jan, we will remember you with love and gratitude!

## Support Us

We continue to be gratified and touched by the number of regular donations which keep flowing in. Some donations come from parents of our students and graduates of NCBS. Most come from our many friends around the world. Because of your many donations following our appeal for help with running costs two years ago, the school has been running well. As you can see from the table below 2008-2009 was a record year partly because of a one-time donation from a person who is now deceased. This year we appear to be slipping back, as to date we have received only €12,504, although this is not a final figure as there are still two months to go in this financial year.

This year, our expenses are exceeding our income and we are using up our reserves quite quickly. So we appeal to you to keep giving as generously as you can. We need to raise a further Rs 800 (€13 or \$18) per month per child to supplement the money that we receive from Auroville.

Year	Donations		Auroville Funding
2006-07	Rs 445,243	€ 7,022	We usually receive between Rs 1,500,000 € 23,656 and
2007-08	909,009	14,335	2,000,000 31,541
2008-09	1,838,518	28,994	per year for teachers' salaries and maintenances, and basic nutrition.
Apr09-Jan 10	792,853	12,504	

While our regular budget is very tight, we have been blessed with the means to upgrade our buildings. Thanks to three donors who have given seed money, our construction budget continues to be very generously funded by the German Government through Weltwaerts and AVI Germany. Our new building for the library, science lab, grade 8 classroom and special needs room is almost finished. We are about to embark upon a major renovation to our UFO classrooms during the summer holidays.

With love, gratitude and a further appeal,

The Aikiyam Students, Staff, and the Support Group; Principal Shankar, Franca, Françoise, Janet, Suriyagandhi, and Dr. Heidi Watts of Antioch New England Graduate School, USA, Martin Littlewood of Auroville International UK, Satyakam Karim and Devasmita Patnaik of Auroville International France, all long time friends and supporters of the school, attend our meetings when present in Auroville.



*150 Aikiyam students and staff work on Litter Free Auroville day January 29, 2010*

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