

### Vanakkam to you all,

It is a summer break here but as you all know our school is not totally shut-down. It is a new type of energy and working attitude during summer on campus. Admitting new children, painting classrooms, buying books, doing small repairs keeps the crew busy in this hot season. We teachers reflect and are happy about our work and classroom projects from the 2011-2012 academic year. At the same time our 8th grade graduating class has just returned from their trip to the north and Nainital Camp (organized by the Delhi Ashram). Their parents are busy finding a place for their further studies (most of them will go to New Era Secondary School (NESS) at the Last School campus in Auroville). Some of our 7th grade children are already in Kodai Nature Camp (organized by Auroville) and the others will go in small groups with other Auroville school children in the coming weeks. I hope you will enjoy reading our newsletter which gives you a glimpse at some of our projects this year and includes sharing from our volunteers. Aum....



We have changed the name of the Special Needs program at Aikiyam to Supportive Learning, which more accurately describes what we aspire towards. "Supportive Learning" puts the focus on the action rather than the person. The purpose of the Supportive Learning program is to provide instructional expertise and activities which will enable children to learn effectively, with activities tailored for their particular strengths and weaknesses. It is joyful learning with a focus and for a purpose. Aspects of the Supportive Learning program may be found in any classroom at Aikiyam and in special activities, such as field trips and certain designated classrooms as well. Tia uses Art Therapy as a Supportive Learning tool for both "mainstream" students in the "regular" classroom and students with learning, social, emotional and behavioural challenges in what has been referred to as the "Special Needs" classroom. This year Tia worked with three groups of students in need of Supportive Learning. They were 1st, 2nd and 3rd standard students who were experiencing difficulty in mathematics and literacy skills, specifically English language skills; spoken, read and written.

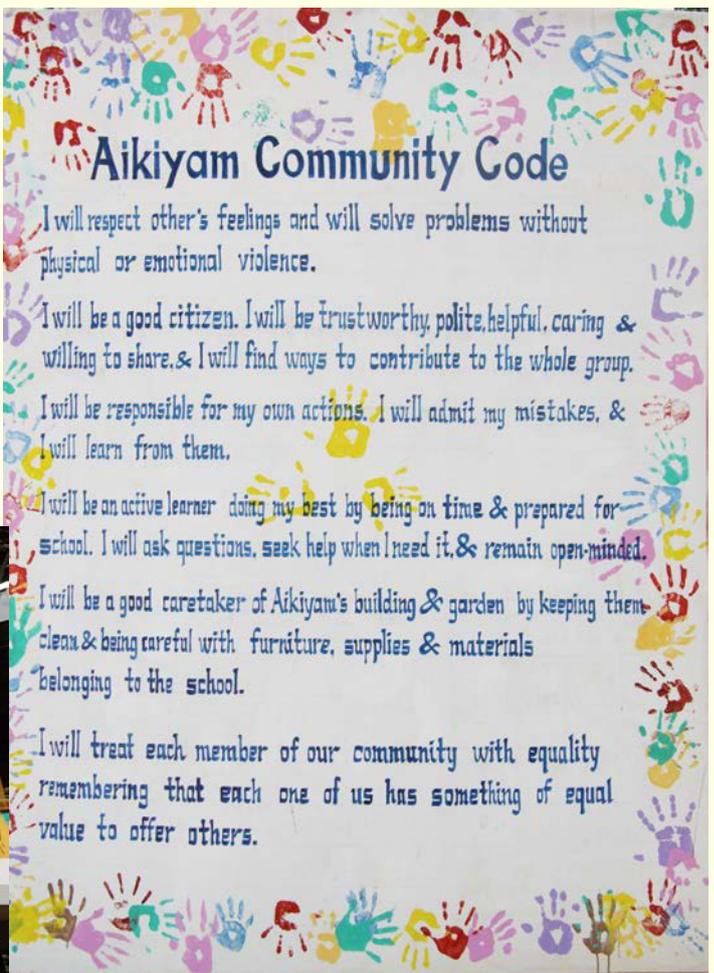




C. Ragav signing her name

### Peace flags, Appreciation Tree, and Community Code projects at Aikiyam School (by volunteer Deborah Howland Murray)

Building peaceful selves for a peaceful Aikiyam community was the focus of my third 2-month project at the school, realized with much help from the regular Art teachers Ramalingam and Tia. We read many books and played lots of games whose messages helped us understand how to make good choices for positive interaction. Look around the campus and you will see the strong visual reminders we created of the non-violent, helpful people we, as teachers, staff and students, aspire to become. From the top of the dining hall, students' and teachers' peace flags painted in our "Peace of Art" room, send our prayers for peace into the world. Our Appreciation Tree, gracing two outer walls of the kitchen area, is blooming leaves on which are written the names of students being recognized for some very positive acts. And, a new Community Code, the product of several teacher workshops, is painted on a central wall to reinforce expected behaviour for the entire community. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, we have begun working hard to "become the change we want to see in the world."



## Volunteering at Aikiyam: a closer look

### Bryn from the United States

"How amazing and motivating it is to see a community empowering its future leaders from within. I was really impressed to learn how many teachers at Aikiyam School actually attended there as students. I just finished a 2 month volunteer-teaching and mid-way through I realized the students' need for more reading, FUN reading; not required or assigned. So I set-up "Reading Buddies". I worked with a small group of students each morning before school just reading, getting used to books, and developing vocabulary. We played games and talked about how silly some words sound! Upon leaving, I saw HUGE improvements and the program was even expanded. Thank you Aikiyam School, for sharing your light with me and allowing me to learn along side you!"



instinct was to discard the script and get them to improvise the situations and this proved the most successful in providing spontaneous performances. All I can say about our cast is that they rose to the challenge magnificently. I can honestly say that I learned as much from them as they (hopefully) learned from me."

### Sandra from England

"This is my fifth year as a volunteer teacher at Aikiyam School and I have enjoyed my time here very much. I spend my days in the library, where teachers come to me to practise English. This can take the form of conversation, help with projects or lessons, or setting them up with email so they can contact their friends, many of whom are ex-volunteers. During my first lesson with Radha Krishna, the Science teacher, I was asked how to use the word pseudopodia\* - not a common question! Fortunately I love biology so was able to oblige without recourse to a dictionary! This is a wonderful school and the staff have become my friends. I look forward to my return next January."



### Caroline from Germany (Weltwaerts program)

"I am very grateful for my one year experience volunteering at Aikiyam School. I have a whole new understanding of what a school is about, how much work it takes to be well-run, and how important it is to create an atmosphere that makes the school the children's favourite place in the world. Working in the classroom has helped me to understand the Tamil culture better. I observed that the children match the energy of the teacher: if the teacher talks in a calm voice, the students are more likely to be quiet and behave in the same manner; if a loud voice is used, the class will probably respond in shouting. This phenomenon I observed especially in the lower grades. This year has shown me that a teacher is a learner and that I never want to stop learning."



\* for especially curious readers: pseudopod (also pseudopodium) Plural pseudopods, or pseudopodia: a temporary foot-like extension of a one-celled organism, such as an amoeba, used for moving about and for surrounding and taking in food.

### Siri from the United States

"My experience volunteering as a teacher at Aikiyam School was one of tremendous heart-opening and growth. I will always look back upon this time I spent as part of such an exceptional community of learning with tremendous gratitude and affection. I absolutely loved collaborating with the staff (who made me feel welcomed and like a valued member of the team from day one!) and working with the students, who were so open-hearted, full of great ideas, and eager to learn. I learned so much about Tamil culture from my students and fellow teachers and had so much fun each day! I hope to return to spend more time at Aikiyam in the future, and in the mean time think of it often and with great warmth."



### Hazel from England

"In October 2011 I came to the school to work on a Shakespeare project, "The Tempest", with the students and the teacher of standard 6. I was impressed with how well the teacher had prepared the students. They understood the plot of the play and had a good sense of who the characters were. Given that English is a very difficult language I had already created an adapted script. Early on my



### Spartaco from Italy

"I started at Aikiyam in December 2011. I was asked to help the Science teacher liven up lectures for the seventh and eighth grade. The teacher was open to new methods, implemented many of my suggestions, and encouraged me to interact directly with the students. Working with children on a daily basis is not always easy, but the



environment at Aikiyam is positive, inspiring, non-threatening, and conducive to the nurturing of the best human qualities. Looking for avenues for improvement, I would suggest that more use should be made of volunteers, to increase both students' and teachers'

English proficiency. Teachers should be made more aware of how crucial the level of English comprehension is for the students' progress and education."

### **Tina & Alia from The University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA**

Alia shared the following, "My experience as a volunteer at Aikiyam School is one I will remember for my lifetime. I am a graduate student and like myself, the teachers continue to grow and be willing to learn new ways of teaching. I witnessed teachers working cooperatively to cover all the subjects, attending meetings and workshops outside of school hours, and working together to find new ways to meet students' varying needs. I was amazed at the books and

resources available to students and teachers in their school library, in both Tamil and English. I will never forget the children who were so excited to share their school work, their smiles, and their kind and respectful behaviour."



Tina said, "Working with the students and teachers was inspirational, rewarding, and educative. As a practicing teacher in Seattle, Washington, I was thrilled to have an opportunity to include my own class and experience with the Aikiyam students and teachers. Writing a partner story with the 2nd standard children and exchanging pen pal letters with the 6th standard students were some of the rich experiences I feel help build a bridge between the two cultures and my own understanding of culture and schooling in India. I am thankful for the welcoming and encouraging environment which allowed me to ask questions, observe, instruct, and feel a part of the family. I plan to continue communicating with teachers over Skype and to have my class connect with students at Aikiyam in the future."



### **Our Financial Situation**

In this edition we thought we'd take a moment to share with you some financial details from the last year. To put matters in some perspective, we have 225 children aged 3 to 14 years, and our 2011/12 expenditure for running the school was Rs. 3,800,000 (€ 54,850). Around 50.4% of this came from Auroville, 9% came from the Government of India, and 34% (nearly Rs. 1,290,000 or €18,620) came from donations. We had a shortfall of 6.5%, that is Rs. 245,000 (€3,536), which we had to take from our fast dwindling reserves.

We are constantly amazed how the Grace manifests through our friends and well-wishers, and that we continue to have the sincere pleasure of nurturing so many of the local village children. If you have the means to give even a single rupee, dollar or euro in support of our work, we promise to continue in our commitment to the children. Below are the details on how you can donate to Aikiyam School.



### **The Nainital Trip**

One of the standard 8 students, Gokul, shares his experience, "The trip was very nice. When I was in front of Taj Mahal I was so glad of it because I didn't travel that distance before. I mostly loved the forts that were built in ancient times. When I was in Nainital camp, I first had to adjust to the climate. The masters in camp were kind and friendly. We did rock climbing and trekking. Our trekking was 16km, 6km like that. So it was easy for us. We went to the highest peak in that place. We went to towns and the things were very costly and mostly made in China. When we went to Delhi it was so hot like sitting on a stove. We stayed in the Delhi Ashram. We visited the Parliament building, India Gate and Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi samadhis. Then we went for shopping and to the Ashram by metro. Then we returned to Chennai by train. My simple request to future students is to bring only light weight bags, and not so much of money, so not to be lost.



Poovizhi learns rock-climbing

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.

Please indicate clearly that the donation is for Aikiyam School.