

## Lea Gathen, Germany

Lea Gathen (25) was a volunteer for the Weltwaerts Programme 2009/2010 and returned to reconnect with Auroville and Aikiyam during the winter of 2016. During the months of January and February she conducted a project in the school called Wasteless Aikiyam. She writes:

*Have you noticed the schools' segregation barrels -freshly painted with clear writing and creative painting? Have you seen the lush green spots, lurking through the field in front of New Creation, which were heavily littered only four weeks ago?*

These changes in the schools' environment derive from students' activities during "Wasteless Aikiyam" a small project scheme, which I conducted during the months of January and February this year with 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. In my work I was supported by various and numerous wonderful people including Kaya from Wasteless Auroville, Alex from Eco-Service, Guillaume and Gillian from Kuilapalayam Clean-Up and Creative Arts Teacher Helgard from Kalabhumi.

I am going to tell you a little bit about what we did. When I started classes just after Pongal we would first focus on Upcycling: 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders turned matchboxes into colorful pieces of art by covering them with waste clothes; 8<sup>th</sup> graders did something similar with books and 7<sup>th</sup> graders created garlands with stars made from waste chocolate wrappers. After Republic's Day followed classes on different waste materials and categories. We asked ourselves "What is the stuff that we don't want to deal with?" And landed with answers such as "Plastic, Paper, Organic Matter, Metal and Glass"

February came and with it the "Maha Kuilapalayam Clean-Up" which was organized by Balamurugan, Gillian and Guillaume. So we took up the subject of littering, discussing causes and consequences on colorful posters. On 5<sup>th</sup> we then cleaned the area in front of the school, collecting a total of 10 bags of waste, which were taken to Eco-Service after. Only two days after fifty students, Shankar, Nava and I joined forces for the clean-up of the village. I was stunned watching students being seemingly more motivated than everybody else and trying to segregate on the way.

After Clean-Up I tried to get 5<sup>th</sup> graders to investigate on the current situation of solid waste management on school Campus by means of interviews. But getting tasks clear proved to be more difficult than I expected initially. Meanwhile 7<sup>th</sup> grade started to redesign the schools barrels for segregation of waste and finally painted them with materials generously provided by Helgard from Kalabhumi. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade then joined me for a field-trip to Eco-Service, Auroville's unit for waste collection and segregation near Kottakarai. At Eco-Service students received a full tour by Palani and participated in two hands-on exercises on segregating waste in twenty categories as well as to figure out prices for waste materials by means of scaling and weighing

Rounding up the program teachers, students and I will watch Srini's short film "Maatram" in Tamil and laugh out loud about the way actors portray common problems with waste in local villages. Finally Neranjan from Eco-Pro will give a small training to the Ammas on Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup>.

With the issue of waste remaining present everyday on the streets of Kuilapalayam, I hope students keep solutions ready at mind, heart and hand to turn the school and their village once more into a greener, healthier place for humans, dogs, cows and crows.