

### Vanakkam Aikiyam School friends,

Our hearts and minds are filled with news and messages that we want to share with you during the beginning of this new year, 2011. We, the Aikiyam School children, staff and the support group members once again wish you all a wonderful year. Since this is the beginning of the third term the children, teachers and volunteers are so ... busy with their lessons, classroom micro-projects, field-visits, preparing for their project presentations and a variety of art and vocational classes as well as body percussion. We teachers are happy that our teachers' resource advisors, Heidi and Françoise are back in Auroville so we can discuss our teaching challenges and questions with them and enjoy the added benefit of their weekend workshops. The school campus is full of fresh energy with many wonderful volunteers who have chosen Aikiyam children to be the ultimate beneficiaries of their talent and skill, goodwill and bright smiles. The younger children have lots of singing and story-reading sessions with our English speaking volunteers. Aikiyam classes are bursting with happy energy. And already our crèche teacher Usha has finished the admission process for all the children who we will welcome in the next school year. We are grateful to reach each of you through this newsletter and hope you will enjoy reading it. Shankar, Aikiyam School Principal.



### January Workshops for Teachers and Volunteers

In January all the Aikiyam teachers attended two Saturday workshops to exchange ideas for informal, formative evaluation, and to create guidelines for volunteers and teachers working with volunteers.

Now that Aikiyam is following the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum, the single standardized exam given once a year, which determines a student's achievement and grade level, is no longer required. These make or break, one-size-fits-all exams make no allowance for individual, economic, racial or cultural differences and may change the course of a child's life on the basis of a few hours of writing once a year. In place of the national, summative

exam we are now able to assess a student's progress with a varied series of informal, formative assessments such as short but more frequent tests for spelling, etc.; portfolios with samples of student's work; and/or teacher's observations and continuous documentation. Performances, presentations and exhibitions in which students demonstrate what they have learned are also useful forms of formative assessment, enabling us to measure a student's abilities and interests in many different ways to form a composite picture of the whole child.

For the second half of each workshop we addressed ways to make the volunteer experience more effective for both teachers and the volunteers themselves. Aikiyam is very fortunate to have a continuous stream of volunteers from abroad. Some come for a full year, some for a few months. They enrich the school with their fresh energy and new ideas and they expose the children to many different languages and cultures. In the workshop teachers and volunteers separately brainstormed lists for the rewards and problems of volunteering and from these lists together created three sets of guidelines for teachers when working with volunteers, for volunteers when in the school, and for the school to welcome and monitor the activities of the volunteers.

The workshop was very productive but not always serious. We played some games good for children, shared some songs and experiences, and left with some new strategies.



In this context we wish to thank and honour our teachers, most of whom saw these very same graduates enter the school as 3-year old toddlers and helped them to feel at ease, gently guiding them and gradually, with colourful play-way methods, coaxing them into the more structured world of learning, discipline and growth. The fact that the teachers have continued developing themselves, and keep progressing with the help of yearly visits from Heidi Watts and students from Antioch and other places, is commendable and we are grateful to them.



Teachers and Volunteers workshop

### Ramayana Play

The Ramayana play is a new effort of the Aikiyam School teachers during the third term in which they explore collaborative teaching in a bilingual classroom and experience its impact on thematic projects. The idea came from one of our teacher resource advisors, Heidi Watts, during one of our weekly INSET (In Service Education Training) meetings. Our 8th grade English teacher Sathya and Heidi proposed we do a project on Ramayana and they requested all the teachers to brainstorm about how they could contribute to the project. For example, our Tamil and Social Science teachers thought that they could tell the story in Tamil and ask the students to enact one of the scenes of the epic.

Students discussed and selected a scene that is suitable for a play and worked on the dialogue in

their mother tongue Tamil. They are presently translating their dialogue into English with the help of the teachers and practicing the play regularly. We also discovered among us one volunteer who is good at making masks with waste newspapers; this has been included in the play process. The students are getting ready to enact the play for the whole school at the end of this project. It is an interesting project which brought together dialogue writing in Tamil, translating the dialogue into English, asking children to bring all characteristics and emotions of the characters in their speech and action and asking them to design their own masks with the help of other classmates. Yes, working with your colleagues and students helps us to enrich classroom activities as a result teaching will become more fun and not simply work.

### Children's Medical Check



As friends of Aikiyam School are aware, we have been organizing health and dental check-ups with available free medical facilities in Auroville for years. In November 2010 we approached the local Pondicherry Institute of Medical Science (PIMS) for the students' annual general health check-up. We were pleased when a crew of six pediatricians as well as six nurses and medical assistants camped out on our campus for two half-days to review the health conditions of our

students. PIMS provided free medicine (for example, de-worming tablets) to some children and asked others to visit PIMS facilities along with their parents for further medical lab tests. The parents of the younger children showed great enthusiasm and were grateful to meet the doctors and get answers to their questions about their children.



### 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.

## Our Volunteers

Aikiyam School is bustling with volunteers from across the globe. We asked them to say a few words about their experience.



### Lena from Germany

My name is Lena and I am a twenty year old German volunteer at Aikiyam School. I arrived in September 2010 and am staying in Auroville for one year. I am working in a 1st standard classroom where I support the teacher Navarathinam

in English and Math classes. The work with the children is great and I enjoy my time here a lot.

### Theresa from Germany

My name is Theresa and I'm here for a university internship from November 2010 to March 2011. As a student of Social Works in Germany I'm helping in the 2nd standard and also in the special needs classroom. The Aikiyam School is a great place what makes me happy to be here. I really enjoy the lessons based on the individual belongings of the children and all the friendly and helpful persons.



### Leticia from Spain

It was a nice surprise when Aikiyam School contacted me to work with them in the class for special needs, and I'm more than happy to come here every morning to work with Sathyavani. Everyday is a new experience and I learn a lot from

both, the teacher and the kids. Besides, Aikiyam has found the point where West and East meet in something that is neither one nor the other. A funny combination of different people, cultures, clothes, colours, languages...and it's a real pleasure to be part of it.

### Mirjam from Germany

Hi, I'm Mirjam from the German "Weltwärts" program. I'm volunteering in 3rd standard for one year. I really enjoy working with the children in this wonderful school. I think Aikiyam is a great opportunity for them and I'm happy to be part of it for one year.



### Stijn from Belgium

I enjoyed working together with the English teacher Sathiya, the children of the 5th and the 6th standards, and listening to students read in the library. Their kindness made me feel welcome, their energy and fun-loving attitude

reminded me of my own childhood. Thank you for giving me this rejuvenating experience!

### Tia from the United States

I could not be more delighted with my Art Experience at Aikiyam School. I have been warmly welcomed from the beginning by everyone, teachers and students alike. My background as an Art Therapist enables me to both facilitate personal self expression and the "teaching" of Art within a process which grows and expands as the relationship with the one creating matures. I have the pleasure of working with Ramalingam with both the younger and older "special needs" students on a group level and I am working with several children individually.



### An interview with Special Needs teacher Jothi

Jothi has been teaching to the special needs children for 7 years at Aikiyam School. During this time she has researched a wide variety of teaching materials and found available resources lacking. In response to this, she has developed some of her own teaching resources to reach the children in a way that meets their needs.

Q: *Have you found teaching materials for your students?*

A: Some yes, but they need to be simplified.

Q: *Can you give an example of how they need to be simplified?*

A: Let's say a student has difficulty with a sentence or a word. In the lesson I will use a similar but simpler word. You see, in Tamil there is "pure Tamil" and "common Tamil". Much of the written material is in pure Tamil and this is difficult for the children to understand so I translate it into common Tamil so they can more easily relate to the message, or story being told. It is important to reach the children where they are. This is one way of achieving this.

Q: *The materials that you need, what are their different qualities?*

A: The materials should be more interactive. For example I use games, puzzles, building blocks and CDs as the medium of music and song is very effective.

Q: *You've created object-oriented lessons. What is this?*

A: I've created a series of laminated word cards. The children use them in games (which can be a problem-solving exercise) and in learning language. One fun and interesting way we use the laminated word cards is to give to each student one (card/word) and then have them make a sentence. They get much more involved with the language in this way. We're doing this in both English and Tamil.



Q: How do the children respond to these teaching methods and materials?

A: When they're learning Tamil they're much more concentrated and ask questions. When we're using games and puzzles I sometimes put them into small groups and when they've figured out the problem they explain to their classmates how they solved it, and everyone puts the problem and solution into writing. They sense their achievements and I believe this builds their confidence and self-esteem.

Q: What other methods are effective in reaching your students?

A: We use dance, drama and performance.

Q: What more would you like to see developed for the special needs children at Aikiyam School?

A: I would like to give more individualized attention to each child. Now we have about 30 students. I would like to have smaller classrooms which correspond more with the childrens' capacities and abilities. This would enhance each child's learning experience.



## Tugay Başar, Body Percussion and Aikiyam School



*From the top!*

Tugay, musician and ethnomusicologist, has given his name, which in Turkish means "1000-strong army", new meaning. Active in the creation of an informal international network of some 1,000 creative people who freely offer their gifts to enrich communities small and large around the world, he has assembled a lively body of peaceful, creative power.

In 2009 Rajan invited Tugay, who was visiting Auroville from Istanbul, to a few

morning Assemblies to teach Aikiyam School students a popular musical discipline called Body Percussion.

Tugay: "When I first saw the children, sitting cross-legged, neat and eager, all looking up at me, I was instantly put in mind of little birds, hungry . . . hungry for life, hungry to learn. Then they focused so readily and happily to learn the rudiments of Body Percussion. The clear connection we established between us fascinated, and continues to fascinate, me."

The initial reception to those first hand-clapping, thigh-patting, foot-stomping Body Percussion sessions among students was astonishing; lines of excited and energized little ones danced away, smiling, bodies swaying, to their classrooms.

Tugay: "After 3 years, every day at Aikiyam School has been as fresh and delightful for me as the first. I feel privileged to be part of such a wonderful experiment in whole education and development that I can see for myself is producing some wonderful results."

Through Tugay we are learning how to win, with grace and calm, through subtle awareness to ourselves and others, the attention and concentration of children and young people. Our children can focus, they can speak in a whisper and they can roar like lions . . . all with the sheer enjoyment of the moment shining in their faces.

Tugay: "Controlled, well-coordinated basic movements are a key to creativity, healthy self-esteem, spontaneity and learning, because as we make rhythms together with our bodies, freely and with joy, we feel and discover the power of unity, oneness, or to use a term that I believe is well known here in India, 'aikiyam'."

Tugay has dedicated a good part of his Auroville visits to helping release the beats, chants and rhythms, the music our students all have within them.

Thank you, teşekkür ederim, Tugay

(From the top! is a Tugayan catchphrase, combined with a gesture)



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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.