

# Shikshayatan ( A unit of Anugriha Charitable Trust)

## Highlights of 2003 - 2004

Two teachers' training courses and six parents' workshops were conducted during the year and it is really wonderful to feel that more and more small schools are becoming a reality. We strongly believe that several small and efficient schools are really the solution to the burgeoning student population. (Just as we believe that one large dam will really solve less, than 1000 small lakes and reservoirs; no one will then have the right to take away another's joy of fulfillment!)

Jnana Vahanam – a library and laboratory on wheels – was welcomed by 14 primary schools around our village within a month. (Jnana Vahanam means a vehicle of Knowledge.) The bus makes weekly tours of schools. Jnana Vahanam is a 24-seater Swaraj Mazda donated by Kalpataru Trust, through Mr. M.K.Hamied of CIPLA, Mumbai. The bus has its interiors refitted with two horizontal cupboards, overhead racks and two seats – one for the driver [as yet that's Raghavan] and one for the navigator [generally Aruna]. While school authorities encourage us by inviting us frequently and our school teachers pour their heart when they visit the schools, Raghavan raises most cheers as he deftly spins the bus around in the small village roads. Generally, the arrival of the bus is treated like a mela (fair).

Computers, CDs, sometimes even the TV travels and the children get a chance to sit at the computer with a chance for some hands-on, work-out math problems and play some interactive games. The TV. is used to show films – we have some interesting CDs on Africa, Armstrong landing on the moon and wildlife. Some magic with chemicals; the peering through kaleidoscope, microscope

Jnana vahanam has also been on two field trips with our own children. One was to a nursery garden about 10kms from here. The children learnt how a nursery is set up, a green house, special sun shades for the more delicate blooms, the plants that are most commonly bought, the names of both chemical fertilisers and learnt how organic fertilisers can be made in large

quantities; names of pesticides, diseases common to plants especially fruits. They then learnt to classify the plants there, as belonging to the equatorial / monsoon types.

The second trip was not so much a 'field' trip as a 'water' trip. With good rains in Karnataka and the squabbles between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu becoming less intense, the government allowed some water from the Mettur dam. So there is some flowing water in the river nearby. The entire primary section packed itself into the bus immediately after lunch. The children had a romp. Entreaties to get back to the bus fell on deaf ears until Raghavan [who didn't get even his toes wet] walked to the bank and stood there. Miraculously the bus filled itself and we got back on time to hear the school bell go off in the evening.

Around 200 teachers of the Balwadis of the district visited our school and underwent a day's eye opener of our methods.

Our school was selected as a field visit by the Block Development Officers. The teachers were given a demo with our nursery and the kindergarten children. The demo included the physical education and Accelerated Learning Programme (a term we coined and which has now been accepted by other NGOs) along with Language Learning Programme and Math. The teachers were very impressed and subsequently we made many trips to the local governing bodies to help implement the method in the balwadis. Each balwadi has as many as 25-40 children between the ages of 2 and 5. The balwadis have one teacher and one helper. After the workshop with us they have taken individual initiative to create some teaching aids. We saw their effort on a public platform with the District Collector as the Chief Guest. We were impressed. *We are looking for sponsors for further implementation and to help provide some basic teaching material.* We believe that between this programme and Jnana Vahanam we should make an impact in the district. The time has come.

### **We had some interesting visitors this year:**

#### **Robert Van Harten**

A friend from Mother's Service Society "Very bright, very happy children." He has some interesting photos of our children on his web site [www.wierook.nl](http://www.wierook.nl) under the caption 'projekten'.

“You are doing a fantastic job. Words fail to express our joy on seeing your fabulous school and we are completely impressed and overwhelmed by your efforts. It has been an inspiring and wonderful experience.” – [Mallika, MET’S Rishikul Vidyalaya, Bandra Mumbai.](#)

“It was a wonderful experience to visit the school set in beautiful natural surroundings. Children have no separation from Nature and they thrive in the environment, physically, mentally and academically. All of you are great preceptors and the children who attend the school are truly fortunate. Keep up the good work, God Bless. – [Chitra Lakshman](#), Living Values Educational Programme, Founder-Director, Jack and Jill Pre school and Child Care, Davis, California

## Report for the year 2003 - 2004

[May 2003](#) – This month saw us at Nagarkoil at Pioneer School. The teachers of the school were trained for three hectic days and we had a keen and encouraging time with the founders of the school who are NRUS citizens!

[July 2003](#) – 28 children from Primrose School, Pondi rumbled in for a weekend to see Aruna’s house and village. Everybody welcomed them – including the rains. The school rooms were converted to dormitories and the children had fun. Here are some mixed comments:

“Candice praised the food; generally she is so troublesome about food”.

“Roshan has not stopped talking about the school”.

“Priyanka wants you to live in Pondi then she can come to your house more often”.

“Vishaal didn’t like the trip at all. There were too many insects and it was very quiet and dark.”

We enjoyed having them; it was the best weekend ever. The children were accompanied by the Principal –Jarena Begum and Academic Director – Leslie Jacobs.

**November 2003** – The trip to Coimbatore was the highlight of this month. A separate report on the trip had been earlier sent to all our donors as it was a special event. Anita of IIT Chennai sponsored half the costs of the trip and Raghavan and I put up the other half. Twenty five children had a romp on the trip..

**December 2003** – It was marriage-time for Aruna's student, Shiva Athreya from Bhavan's Gandhi Vidyaashram, Kodai Kanal. He decided to celebrate his wedding differently. Cash / cheque bestowed on them was happily converted into donation for our school and another in U.P. That was an unexpected and very touching gesture. The school had a special prayer meeting on his wedding day; we not only prayed that Shiva and Richa live long and prosper but also that when their time comes they'd be able to do something as handsome. We hope to build a kitchen and dining area with the proceeds

**February 2004** – We finally received a letter from the Tamil Nadu Education Board admitting that they have 'recognised' the school as a 'Primary School'. There was a lot of rejoicing in the village; we were not unhappy but it should make little difference to the day-to-day activities of the school. We are now keeping our fingers crossed and hoping that there will be no undue interference from the local education authorities. It will certainly ease the process of getting our children admitted to other schools without much ado. We had to give several lines of undertaking including one that we would never in the life time of the school seek any government assistance. There was even a clause to sign that at any time the government may decide to take over the school without any compensation to the school. We simply signed on the dotted line and prayed that there would be no untoward incident. We felt very much the way the Indian contingent may have felt at the WTO. We had been resisting this scenario for nine long years but seeing the plight of the parents when they had to seek admissions at the secondary level made us wonder at our resistance and we succumbed. The village looks upon this as a major victory for us.

**March 2004** – Children have already started preparing for the annual day scheduled for the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2004. The theme for the annual day was 'India in an interesting world of languages' So there were songs galore: French nursery rhymes by the KG. and the first standard, English numbers

by almost all the classes and an Israeli number by Niru and Ramya. The idea was that the first standard would sing and the KG would dance to the songs. But the KG sang so well, two days before the annual day we had to fix a new song for the first – they had such long faces against the KG. Then there were songs in Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam, Goanese, Sanskrit and of course, three in Tamil. There were translations of songs into Tamil so that the parents would understand them. The Hindi songs were everybody's favourites. Everyone sang and the few we thought wouldn't sing, sang as they danced.

The heart warming incident was our 5 yr old Vishnupriya – an autistic child - who happily went on stage with almost every young group and sang like a lark. The whole village was astounded. After every song she would stand and clap along with the audience.

Having no real music teacher, the children acted as coaches – Ramya, Niru and Tanvi. Ramya choreographed the dances and Tanvi and she danced every step to show the children how. It inspired Ramya enough to decide that she'd like to learn and perform dance seriously. She is now back in Mumbai getting ready to join a major dance and music school. We also learnt that our children sing group songs truly well.

We also have now an art and yoga master. And within two months of joining the school had a small art exhibition. There were line drawings and simple paint work – but truly gorgeous. They are now being converted into greeting cards. Wait until Diwali / New Year for yours.

The yoga classes were good too –with the children learning to breathe and be still. The children performed a sequence of asanas on the annual day.

**April 2004** – Utsav and Sushila Kapadia of Mumbai, who had visited us in January 2004 had asked whether there was any one large cost they could fund. We thought of a games area – a covered court. A 2000 sqft. asbestos-topped ( supported on steel channels) court was completed in record time (15 days) so that the annual day function could be held there. Since the court always resembles a festivity with the children playing, the court has been named Utsav. We thought it appropriate in all ways. The annual day was in fact staged there.

We advertised for fresh admissions. The previous year due to constraints on space and trained teachers we had restrained from taking on children for the year 2003-04. Having completed the new school buildings we put up three small adverts at the two local temples and at the local tea-shop (a small hand-written placard indicating that admissions were on). We explained in the advert that we would take on 15 children. To be on the safe side (or so we thought) we xeroxed 25 copies of the admission application. We wound up distributing 72 applications and after much defenses – quite like the Indian hockey team - took on 30 children. The waiting list was longer. Our criterion was simple the more needy the child the higher up the scale of selection! And of course, the girls were given preference.

**June 7<sup>th</sup>** - school recommenced after a summer break. The children looked happy to be back – and so did the teachers.

Do visit our site: [www.absolsoftec.com](http://www.absolsoftec.com). A very simple start without graphics except for some specific photos. Slowly we shall build this site into something parents would enjoy visiting frequently.

In all, it has been a rewarding year. And we have you to thank for it. But for your continued and interested support none of this would have been possible.

We thank you.

### **Our supporters this year**

Mother's Service Society  
Kalpataru Trust  
Mr. MK Hamied  
Sushila Narayanaswamy  
Absolsoftec Pvt. Ltd.  
Utsav and Sushila Kapadia  
Shiva and Richa Athreya  
WestWind Association  
Kirat and Shree Patel  
Pashupati and Sangita Advani

Jaya and Radhakrishnan  
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Sirisha and Dommetti  
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