



# **ACTIVITY REPORT 2011-12**

# PROGRAM SCALE

Program type	Last year (2010-'11)	This year (2011-'12)
Scholarship	100 children	145 children
Learning Centres	3 centres, 150 children	5 centres, 250 children
Students' Clubs	15 clubs, 100 children	20 clubs, 200 children
<b>Total reach</b>	<b>350 children</b>	<b>595 children</b>

# SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

## AIM

- Focuses on students from Std. 8 upwards belonging to poor rural families
- Improves quality of education and equips students to take informed decisions about their education and career

## SERVICES PROVIDED

**Financial support** to complete school education & selected college scholarships

### Ongoing programs through the year

- Skill development programs
- Field trips
- Computer classes

### Special programs

- Legal awareness
- Fire rescue services training

**Other programs** to nurture patriotism, talent in story writing & telling, social skills and environmental awareness among students

### Regular one-time programs

- Health awareness program
- Sports meet
- Independence Day celebration
- Science workshop
- Parents' meet
- Exam preparation workshop
- Excursion
- Mega Cultural program
- Social service camp on Republic Day

# PARENTS' MEET & DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Conducted over 2 days in mid-June for our 7<sup>th</sup> batch of 145 school students & their parents.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Scholarship program goal and the variety of inputs explained
- Parents' co-operation sought in sending their children regularly
- School uniform material, bags, notebooks & stationery & fees distributed
- Parents spoke about the benefits of this program & suggested logistical improvements to ensure better participation from their side.

## CHIEF GUESTS

- Assistant Elementary Education Officer, Nilakottai
- Retd. District Education Officer, Dindigul
- Community Development Officer, Thiyagarajar Mills, Nilakottai



# SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Scholarship students were divided into 4 batches at the beginning of the year based on their age, village and duration of tenure with Aspire Foundation. For each batch, 8 skill development programs, each comprising 4 sessions were held between June 2011 and Jan. 2012.



The sessions provided an opportunity for the children to exhibit & foster skills, as well as to realize their strengths & weaknesses. The life skills focused on were communication, logical reasoning, quantitative ability, comprehension, managerial ability and creativity.

Both individual and group activities were conducted and trained faculty assessed students' performance and gave away prizes as a token of encouragement.



# FIELD TRIPS

## AAVIN DAIRY UNIT & TREKKING AT KEEZHAKUYILKUDI

- At Aavin, children learned the process of milk purification & milk processing into products such as milk powder, butter, cheese and ghee.
- The children also immensely enjoyed trekking at Keezhakuyilkudi Sammanar Padugai, a historic site near Madurai.



## PARLE-G BISCUIT FACTORY, KAPPALUR

- Here, the factory co-ordinator conducted a comprehensive presentation explaining the processes involved in biscuit manufacturing. Children also witnessed these processes in the factory unit.
- The visit was an eye opener for several students on food processing regulations too.



## KODAIKANAL SOLAR OBSERVATORY

- We took our students to visit the Solar Observatory operated by the prestigious Indian Institute of Astrophysics. They were excited to learn about the effects of sunspots on surface temperatures.
- Later, we took them sightseeing to the Kodaikanal lake, Botanical Garden and Silver Cascade Waterfall.



## ANTHYODAYA SANGH, TRICHY

- Our students were enlightened about medicinal plants and their uses during their field trip to Anthyodaya Sangh near Trichy. ANS has an extensive herbarium & nursery and support staff who patiently explain the ayurvedic preparations which can be made from each medicinal plant.



## VAIGAI DAM & RAJSHREE SUGARS

- At Vaigai Dam, our students learned about the origin of the river Vaigai and the areas it irrigates & provides drinking water to. They also learned about the use of hydel plant for power generation.
- At Rajshree Sugars, students understood the process of sugar processing and refinement.



## TNAU & G.D. NAIDU MUSEUM, COIMBATORE

- Students visited the Department of Floriculture & Landscaping at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore. They saw several species of flora at the Botanical Garden.
- At the G. D. Naidu Museum, they saw fossil remains, age-old tools, old coins & decorative artifacts.
- They also went trekking on Maruthamalai where they saw medicinal plants and visited the temple.





# REGULAR ONE-TIME PROGRAMS



**HEALTH AWARENESS PROGRAM** - A doctor from the Government Hospital, Nilakottai and a counselor from Damien Hospital spoke about common ailments – symptoms & prevention. Adolescent health counseling was also given for girls.



**SPORTS MEET** - Our annual sports meet witnessed enthusiastic participation from 74 students who had qualified for various events in the preliminary round. Girls and boys took active part in kabadi, football and the 200-metre sprint. Following this, two teams of boys played a cricket match, while the girls were busy playing kho-kho and skipping. All the competitors who came first and second in any event won prizes and for team events, every team member got a prize.



**INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION** - Over 175 students from scholarship & village learning centres got together on Aug. 15<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Independence Day at Sengatampatti village. The event commenced with hoisting the tricolour flag & had a range of sports & cultural programs.



# SCIENCE WORKSHOP



Similar to last year, our science workshop had zealous participation from 105 scholarship students. Our vibrant resource person, Mr. Ramamoorthy (M.Sc. Science) demonstrated experiments offering explanation about simple daily life phenomena.



Students also tried their hand at some experiments. They engaged in lively dialogues with the resource person, who challenged them to think about the scientific principles behind each phenomenon. The students also took notes & asked doubts.



# PARENTS' MEET

- 136 students and their parents participated in the second parents' meeting held just before Deepavali.
- Parents were briefed about their children's participation in Aspire Foundation's programs and their academic progress. Parents whose children had been irregular were exhorted to co-operate in sending them regularly.
- Following this, **shirt & pant materials for boys and readymade salwar kameez sets for girls** were distributed so that the students could celebrate Deepavali merrily.



# EXAM PREPARATION WORKSHOP

- 29 students participated in the exam preparation workshop for Std. 10.
- The resource persons were a team of 5 experienced teachers of science, math, English and Tamil from Government Higher Secondary Schools.
- Each resource person gave valuable hints and tips on the art of selecting and answering questions which would help students score marks well. They also provided reference material and students got a lot of doubts clarified.



# 2-DAY EXCURSION

74 scholarship students accompanied by 8 staff participated in this year's 2-day excursion to Kerala on New Year's Eve.

- Our initial stop was Kutralam Waterfall in Tenkasi, where students enjoyed their shower.
- Other interesting venues were Thottippalam, one of the longest bridges in India, Thirparappu Falls, Padmanabhaswamy Temple, Kovalam Beach & the zoo in Trivandrum.
- Our final stop was at Kanyakumari Beach where we also saw the Thiruvalluvar Statue & temple.

Our students were excited at the opportunity to spend New Year's Eve on this memorable excursion with their friends.



# MEGA CULTURAL PROGRAM

250 students from all our programs congregated to celebrate Pongal in Nilakottai! Highlights below:



- **Pongal making contest** - 11 teams made Sakkara Pongal, the traditional way, battling over the smoke emitted from firewood.
- For the first time, an all-boys team enrolled in the contest & took up Pongal preparation as a challenge 😊
- Chief Guest, Ms. Revathy, Lecturer at PVP College tasted each team's Pongal and declared the winning team.
- The students then sat down to relish the Pongal and shared it with their peers. The sharing of food & experiences lent a spirit of friendliness & festivity.

The other main programs were **rangoli contest, uri aditthal (pot breaking) and a cultural program.**

- Boys & girls participated with zest in drawing kolams and breaking pots, breaking gender stereotypes!
- The cultural program which lasted half a day was a melee of dance, drama and oration.
- Prizes for various contests were handed over to the winners.



# REPUBLIC DAY WITH A DIFFERENCE



- This year, we decided to celebrate Republic Day in a manner memorable to our students and the residents of Nottakaranpatti, one of our most backward villages in terms of education and hygiene. This village is home to several first generation learners.
- Our team of students conducted a **social service camp** – they cleaned the village streets of debris and dry & kitchen waste. They conducted a host of cultural programs for the villagers including dance, drama stressing the importance of education and hygiene & sanitation. The villagers turned up in large numbers and enjoyed these programs immensely.
- Mr. Perumal, the local village leader praised the students for their sense of social service and thanked them for their efforts.



# SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Below are the **new programs introduced this year** to build confidence among our students.

**LEGAL AWARENESS PROGRAM** - A group of 152 scholarship & VLC students learned about their rights & responsibilities, the Indian Constitution and got an insight into the history of Indian law from Ms. Anuradha, Judicial Magistrate & her team of lawyers. This team encouraged our students to form children's parliaments, frame rules and exercise decision making within their prescribed structures.



**FIRE SAFETY AWARENESS PROGRAM** - Our students got a unique opportunity to learn the importance of fire safety from this program which we conducted in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Fire Service Department. Mr. Arumugam, Station Officer and other staff demonstrated the usage of fire extinguishers and other fire safety equipment for rescue operations. They also taught the students to administer first aid to victims of burn injuries. Our students found this program relevant and useful and they participated in the demonstrations and mock drills eagerly.



# VILLAGE LEARNING CENTRES (VLCs)

Year	2008-'09	2009-'10	2010-'11	2011-'12
No. of VLCs	2	3	3	5
No. of children	120	150	150	250

- Aspire Foundation started VLCs in 2008-'09. On commencement, the focus of VLCs was on after-school academic support for students in primary & middle school.
- However, today, after 4 years, the VLC has a multi-faceted character. In addition to providing academic support, VLCs encourage children to exercise their rights & responsibilities and exhort them to be socially and environmentally sensitive citizens. We have a separate curriculum for VLCs, which involves the use of research, discussion, hands-on projects and advocacy.
- Our 5 VLCs catering to 250 students (largely in middle school) are in Thummalapatti, Sengattampatti, N.Pudupatti, Chinnamanaickenkottai and Nottakaranpatti villages.



# SALIENT FEATURES OF A VLC

- Situated either in a building contributed by the village community or in common village space (such as school/temple premises)
- Runs for 2.5 to 3 hours, 6 days a week after school, catering to students between Std. 5 and Std. 9
- A trained faculty monitors children's enrolment & attendance. Also facilitates participation by all children in the VLC's multi-pronged activities.
- Daily 1 hour is spent on schoolwork and assignments. The remaining time is spent on discussions, sport, cultural activities, projects, committee meetings, campaigns and other programs.



# EVERY VLC HAS A CHILDREN'S CLUB

This year, a lot of groundwork, including training, has been done to ensure that every VLC has a children's club (Siruvar Manram).

Interested children in each VLC **campaigned for the posts of President, Secretary & Treasurer** of the Children's Club.

All children in the VLC **voted using the ballot system to elect their office bearers.**

The Children's Clubs have been **meeting once a week** to plan & implement village-based projects related to education, health & environment issues.

The Clubs **collect weekly subscription** from members. In the last year, some of the expenses met using this subscription are:

- To buy a light bulb to replace the broken bulb at a VLC.
- To buy brooms and dustpans to use in village street cleaning work.
- To pay the bus fare of a few members who visited another VLC's children's club



**Sengattampatti VLC children's club acquired a piece of panchayat land near their VLC to start a nursery by submitting a petition to the panchayat president!**



# ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

This year, every VLC has set up an Environment Protection Committee. The work of this Committee is to plan & execute activities/projects to preserve the environment and also to sensitize adults and children on the need for environmental preservation.

Some of the interesting & useful activities done by the EPCs this year are:

## Daily measurement of rainfall



Training was given to all VLCs on rain water measurement. The staff & children made their own instruments and ever since, students in all VLCs have been measuring daily rainfall. Using this, they plan to make a report on annual rainfall, which is available to the villagers.

**Nursery** – The Sengattampatti EPC set up a nursery with 800 tree saplings on the plot obtained from the Panchayat. 75 Children from 5 VLCs participated and got trained on tree plantation. Villagers did voluntary work to clear the plot. The EPC raised these saplings with care.



**Kitchen gardens** – An awareness program was held, following which EPC members exhorted the VLC students to raise kitchen gardens. Motivated students got seeds from the EPCs and have been raising kitchen gardens on small plots near their houses.



# PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS

## Media Awareness Workshop

- 10-day summer workshop for 25 students from Sengattampatti VLC conducted by 2 MSW student interns from the Madras School of Social Work, Chennai
- Objective – To be aware of influence of media on students' daily life and tips to use media for productive purposes
- Aspects covered – Pros and cons of print media, television, cinema, mobile phone, the Internet & radio
- Intensive interactive sessions comprising games, group discussions and presentations
- Participants submitted a report on their learning experience and have undertaken to take this workshop forward to other VLCs next summer.



# PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS continue.

## Seminar

- In summer, a multi-faceted seminar was held in Sengatampatti VLC. The sessions covered were:
- Small home-based enterprises
- Word play – puzzles in English
- General Knowledge – info on various topics
- All about me – a session on getting to know oneself better



## Teaching aids preparation

- A training program was held for 125 VLC students from all VLCs to make concrete teaching/learning materials.
- Children made models related to mathematics (angles, rhombus) and biology (heart)



## Workshop on Nutrition

- The nutrition workshop covered the essential components of a healthy diet.
- Moreover, children's weight & height were measured and they were taught to calculate their body mass index.



# PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS continue.

## Field trips

- Along with the scholarship students, 25 VLC students also went on the field trip to the herbal farm at **Anthyodaya Sangh, Trichy**. Here, they gathered a lot of information on medicinal plants and also learned how to set up and raise a nursery. This visit proved very useful for the Sengattampatti VLC students to set up their own nursery.
- Similarly, over 20 VLC students also went on the field trip to **Vaigai Dam & Rajshree Sugars, Madurai**.

## Workshop on Vermicompost preparation

- 36 VLC students were trained on preparing vermicompost, an excellent nutrient-rich organic fertilizer and soil conditioner using earthworms at Nottakaranpatti. M. Kathiresan Prabu, our trustee was the chief resource person for this program. Following this, some students have been preparing vermicompost themselves at home.



# A MULTI-FACETED CHILDREN'S DAY



This year, Children's Day was even more fun with a variety of events to cater to every child's taste. Students from scholarship, VLCs & clubs participated avidly.

**Sports** – A kho-kho match for girls and kabadi match for boys, judged by a physical educator & director



**Marathon** – Students undertook a 11-km marathon emphasizing children's rights, from Pudupatti to Chinnamanaickenkottai village – some by cycle and others by walk.



**Tree sapling distribution** – A major highlight is that our VLC students sensitized the participants on the need for environmental conservation by **distributing 750 saplings which they raised on their own**, in the Sengattampatti village nursery. In this manner, the children exhorted each student to raise a tree near their home.



**Cultural mela** – The day ended with a cultural mela comprising dance & drama.



We were honoured by **participation from** the following **eminent chief guests** – College professors, school teachers, physical educators, Panchayat Union Counsellors, Ward members & village leader.

# Environmental Protection Camp

- This year, students from our VLCs and students' clubs celebrated Gandhi Jayanthi in an environmentally conscious manner. The VLC students led a group of 145 students to conduct a camp in 3 remote villages, namely, Seethapuram, Thumalapatti and Sengattampatti.
- The highlight of this camp was that the students uprooted hordes of parthenium hysterophorus plants in these villages. This plant species is known to invade farmland, pastures & roadsides, adversely affecting crop production, livestock and human health. By destroying these plants, the students performed a huge service to all the villagers in these 3 villages.



## Introduction to yoga

A trainer from “Brahma Kumaries” Traditional yoga centre, Madurai introduced 90 of our VLC students to a form of meditation called *Raja Yoga* and taught the students to concentrate and meditate.





# STUDENTS' CLUBS

- Students' clubs are forums which provide students the opportunity to express their views, exhibit their talents, enhance their knowledge & skills and interact with students from other villages.
- Importance is given for children to exhibit and foster their inherent talents in art, sport and vocational skills through discussions, debates, workshops, field trips and cultural programs.
- We have students' clubs in 15 villages with a membership of 200 students. These clubs meet regularly once a fortnight.
- Our students' club members have been given special T-shirts to instill in them a feeling of identity.
- On the lines of the VLC Children's Clubs, this October, all 15 students' clubs also conducted elections and elected office bearers.

# SOCIAL SERVICE CAMP

This year, our students' clubs commenced their activities with a social service camp in Thummalapatti village during the summer holidays.

**Seminar on ecosystem** – A popular local resource person, Mr. Satish, enlightened the students on biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems.

**Village streets cleaning** – Our students then took up a massive exercise of clearing the village streets of debris & wild plant growth.

**Environment conservation awareness rally** – Mr. Salim Shet, BDO, Nilakottai Block flagged off & participated in the rally to sensitize the villagers on the need for environment conservation. He commended the students' efforts to preserve their environment. The program ended with plantation of a tree sapling on common village land.



# WORKSHOPS

## Skill Exposure Workshop

- A day-long summer workshop was organized in Thopupatti village during summer. The workshop had a variety of sessions including skill development, making art from waste products and exhibiting it and English vocabulary building.
- 112 students participated and a lot of parents visited out of curiosity. This event was covered by the local newspapers.



## “Do you wash your hands properly?” Workshop

- Based on the training given to VLC students last year, a similar workshop was organized for 100 students’ club members on washing their hands properly.
- The students were enthralled and amused to know that there are 11 steps involved in washing one’s hands thoroughly.

## Candle-making workshop

As part of our continued training on small home-based enterprises, we trained 40 students’ club members on candle-making. The resource person demonstrated the steps clearly and used several moulds to create candles in various shapes & sizes. Students enjoyed the training and wanted to try this at home.



# WORKSHOPS

## Story writing workshop

- On Children's Day, students' club members participated along with our other students. Children were divided into pairs and asked to write and illustrate stories. While some children narrated, others wrote and some illustrated.
- At the end of the day, several colourful story booklets emerged. College lecturers and school teachers judged the best story writers and illustrators.

## Kabadi team formed!!

- An experienced physical educator and director were invited to help us form a good kabadi team. These experts along with our students spent half a day training and playing. At the end, a kabadi team was selected from among our students' club members.



## Self-confidence & cleanliness Workshop

80 students' club members were engaged in a day-long workshop involving 5 different games to improve children's self confidence and encourage them to observe self-hygiene.



## Summer mela



- This summer, one-day melas were conducted in 5 villages, where students' club members from other villages also gathered and participated.
- Totally, **232 students participated** in this program. The villages wore a festive air with children involved in a variety of games, cultural programs and informative displays. Many parents also attended the programs and watched their children participate with zest.



## Tree plantation campaign

- Awareness on the need for every person to plant trees in order to minimize environmental pollution and training on tree plantation was provided to 105 students' club members at Kombukaranpatti village. The students also went on a rally in the village to emphasize this point.
- Finally, students were given seeds to plant vegetable gardens near their houses.



# Science Exhibition

- 110 students' club members from 20 villages participated with zest in the science exhibition held at Pappinaickenpatti village.



Children through the exhibits as the eager young scientists explain their inventions & models.



Some interesting exhibits –  
windmill, glacier,  
robot, ambulance,  
water stream,  
magnetic powered  
car



The top 2 innovative  
inventors receiving  
prizes & certificates

