

Pudiyador Times

Issue 2, Mar 2010



A Field Trip of Dreams!

A gracefully aged TATA 60-seater bus, chugs to a stop, near the Pudiyaador center... Thirty-six kids, screaming and beaming, attired in their Pongal clothes, jump in... Two tense staff members and one volunteer try to establish peace and calm, in vain... A multitude of spicy smells emanate from lunch packs and odd snacks... Thirty-six 'barf' lemons to match each excited little face, appear from nowhere... One overwhelmed driver's complaint is barely heard over the noise of the engine... Twenty-one smiling parents wave goodbye, from the street side... This is the scene at the start of one fun-packed field trip Sunday at Pudiyaador!

Hope the second issue of Pudiyaador Times finds you in the best of health and cheer! We are very happy to bring you more news about the children of Pudiyaador and their families in our quarterly newsletter.

The focus of the second issue will be one of Pudiyaador's most exciting activities: field trips! For 2010, Pudiyaador's ground team made field trips a priority among all the children's activities. During this year's first planning meeting, we decided that we will strive to organize field trips for all the kids at least once a month. In addition to being a fun event, field trips providing an outlet for team work, leadership and development of social skills. Also, such experiences serve to expand children's learning through active hands-on activities and increase knowledge and understanding of any subject by adding realism to the topic of interest, for example astronomy or biology. In the first three months of 2010, Pudiyaador children's field trip



experiences included book festivals, the zoo, planetarium and a science project conducted on the beach!

Also, in this issue, you will meet the wonder-women tandem of coordinators at Pudiyaador, relish our Pongal harvest festival, and hear about the making of a Pudiyaador community. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed making it! We sincerely appreciate your efforts in supporting Pudiyaador and would be glad to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Manickam Narayanan
Co-founder



Creative corner

Children of the Ramapuram center went crazy this quarter, painting the town red (and blue and yellow...). Look for more murals with the paintbrush icon in the following pages!



Achievers at home

The children at Pudiyaador recently celebrated the 100th International Women's Day on March 8th. They read lots of interesting books and articles about women achievers and decorated their centers with posters and collages. In keeping with that spirit, we pay our own little tribute to women achievers much closer home. In this article, we feature two prolific women who help manage and run the Pudiyaador Ramapuram center.



Ruby Fatima, 28, began volunteering two years ago since her daughter started going to Pudiyaador. She holds an advanced degree in English literature and is a favorite amongst the little ones. Ruby has been actively involved with us in developing learning kits to help children improve their reading and writing skills in Tamil and English. However, her most significant contribution is helping the parents of the Pudiyaador children align themselves closely with the ideologies of Pudiyaador. Being a parent herself, her empathy with the other parents has been instrumental in enhancing the reach of the center in the children's lives. Most children who drop

"I now have a sense of independence and courage that I never had before."

out from school (or Pudiyaador) tend to have trouble at home – financial or otherwise. Ruby deals with this fundamental issue by visiting the children's homes regularly and engaging the parents directly in ensuring that the children's attendance remains unaffected by issues at home. Her success in these efforts can be seen at the parent-teachers meet at the center where parents find an avenue to vent their concerns, thus rightly keeping the children out of domestic woes.

Ruby enjoys all kinds of music and has recently started attending Veena lessons with her daughter at Pudiyaador. She says that working at Pudiyaador has given her a sense of independence and courage that she never had before. She is also improving her management skills and computer expertise while learning the ropes of being a Pudiyaador facilitator.



Ruby teaching younger children using AID kits

Achievers at home

Radha Kumaradoss, 40, has been with Pudiyador Ramapuram for over five years now. Since she has recently been getting a lot of help from Ruby with the regular operational activities of the center, she has started managing some special projects at Pudiyador. Her last project was the introduction of the age-old form of story telling to enhance the parental involvement with children. Although this might seem obvious to parents from privileged families, the concept is very novel for parents who hardly have time to sleep. She explains, "Our children love books and eagerly listen to volunteers who tell stories. But, not many of them take a book home because their parents don't have the time and/or ability to help with reading. We felt that this could strain the parent's ties to their child. The comfort and pleasure that children derive from listening to enchanting tales shouldn't be lost. Hence, we have introduced oral story telling as a tool to initiate parent-child conversations." Radha meets with the parents (mothers, mostly) when they catch a break and teaches them some simple techniques for good story telling, which the parents find enjoyable. The parents now narrate stories to the kids daily before bedtime while they complete their household chores. She hopes that this activity will

"The comfort and pleasure that children derive from listening to enchanting tales shouldn't be lost."



Radha using JodoGyan techniques to solve math problems

improve the quantity and quality of interaction between parents and kids.

Radha is also actively involved with the local *Magalir Sangam* (Ladies' Association) where she speaks to the members about the importance of a well-rounded education. Such interactions have also lead to many more close collaboration and volunteer associations with Pudiyador from the community. Radha is now pursuing her bachelor's degree in social work and believes that she is a completely different person – a better parent and a much better human being today due to Pudiyador.



Featured activity: Book Fair

Towards Another World....- A report by Dr. Latha Kumari

Children don't read to find their identity, to free themselves from guilt, to quench the thirst for rebellion or to get rid of alienation. They have no use for psychology.... They still believe in God, the family, angels, devils, witches, goblins, logic, clarity, punctuation, and other such obsolete stuff.... When a book is boring, they yawn openly. They don't expect their writer to redeem humanity, but leave to adults such childish illusions.

~Isaac Bashevis Singer

The Chennai Book Fair, the country's largest, is organized by the Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India (BAPASI). It typically lasts for about 10 days during the New Year-Pongal season.

On January 2nd, I accompanied 32 little stalwarts of Pudiyador and their three mentors, on their first outing of the year to the annual Chennai book fair. Each child was in his/her best attire, holding a basket with a box of food and a water bottle. Armed with the famous lemon in their hands lest they throw up on their way, they climbed into the two vans that ferried them to the fair.

We reached the book fair in an hour and broke into smaller groups. Each child was given a budget of Rs 50 (~ \$1) that they could spend on the book(s) of their choice. The children were free to move around and choose books for themselves. However, we requested that they explore the stalls and make a note of the books they liked before purchase so that we could avoid duplication. It was wonderful to see our senior children use their experience from previous visits to help their younger friends navigate the stalls.

The groups reconvened after two hours, to buy the books that the children had shortlisted. One of the most heartwarming moments was when the children decided to pool in the money left over from their individual purchases to buy books for their non-Pudiyador friends in the community at large! On our way back from the book fair, we stopped for a quick post-lunch visit at the Snake and Children's Parks. They visited as many snake, animal and bird enclosures as they could fit in and afterwards thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the play area. We finally said good bye to the setting sun and moved homewards to begin the journey of reading and fun.



Dr. Latha Kumari, a lecturer of English, is one of the earliest volunteers at Pudiyador. She enjoys spending time with the children and engaging them in various activities that enrich their lives.



The children proudly displayed some of the books they bought for all of us to see.



Featured event: Pongal celebrations

Pongal -O- Pongal! - A report by our COO



Decorating the earth with bright colors

At Pudiador, *Pongal* celebrations are an occasion to bring the entire community together. "Pongal", alluding to the bounty of the harvest season of the Tamil month of Thai (Jan-Feb), is a four day-long festival celebrated all over in Tamil Nadu, India. This year, the children managed our two-day *Pongal* festivities from conceptualization to execution. The first day of the festival is known as *Bhogi* when people ring out the old and bring in the new. On *Bhogi* all of our children helped with spring cleaning the Pudiador centers and their homes. One group visited the market to help purchase supplies for the next day's celebrations - the day of Thai Pongal. They bought rice, milk, pulses, jaggery, cashew, dried grapes, karkandu, sugar canes, and earthen pots. Another group decorated the earthen Pongal pots and the surroundings with beautiful flowers and patterns.



Don't they know? A watched pot never boils :) Children eagerly await the "pongal" moment after which all the goodies will be theirs to enjoy and share.

Thai Pongal, the most auspicious day of the festival, was celebrated in each of our centers with great fanfare. All the children were dressed in their colourful bests. A fire was lit in a specially prepared and decorated fireplace and milk was boiled in a beautiful earthen pot.

The *pongal* dish was cooked and offered to the shining sun and mother nature as a token of our gratitude for the plentiful harvest, along with prayers for abundance and prosperity. The *pongal* was then shared among everyone including parents and guests. The younger children chronicled the day and expressed themselves through many colorful drawings and paintings of the festivities. It was a wonderful celebration of togetherness, reflection and thanks.



Translation from the wall :)

Sweet New Year
and
Pongal good wishes.



Pudiador...



Impact story



Exactly five years ago, on Mar 31 2005, Pudiyaor established contact with the Urappakkam community. The thatched roof hut seen in the background was their "community center".



In less than a year, Pudiyaor began constructing a new community center five times larger than the previous one. It was designed to comfortably host activities of all the children of the community at once.



The new building is a spacious haven that children retire to in the evenings and weekends. They enjoy well-lit study spaces, cool air (thanks to Keane employees for false ceiling), and protection from the elements.

Some things just cannot be captured in numbers. Like the impact that our donors make on Pudiyaor communities. And the impact of Pudiyaor itself. In this page, we feature transformations that are visible over time, but are hard to quantify. The development of a strong sense of belonging, ownership, freedom, and peace of mind is such a transformation experienced by the Pudiyaor Urappakkam community.



Within two months, the community children started attending Pudiyaor programs inside this hut. However, the roof leaked, the walls were crumbling, and the space was practically unusable on hot or rainy days.



Thanks to the generous gift of Mr. V. S. Nagarajan, a Lion's Club member of a neighboring locality, the building was successfully constructed and inaugurated in Sep 2006. The children promptly took ownership of the decorations :)



This is a great space for holding group activities & classes. The women folk use this building to hold community meetings and learn and practice yoga. On special days, the entire community gathers to watch their children perform!

First Quarter Highlights



The New Year began with a dash of color with the conclusion of the Winter Mini-Camp, where the focus was on crafts-making and free-form painting, and the first 3 months of 2010 were peppered with fun-filled experiences for our kids. The timeline above highlights some of the activities that our children participated in.

Amidst the seemingly chaotic yet exciting proceedings, there was a method to the madness! Pudiyaador's broad objectives for this year are being met steadily...

- Collaboration and partnering between Pudiyaador communities: The arts & crafts teacher at Pudiyaador Vannandurai (PV) center taught his students to make exquisite mementos using gunny bags. To ensure that all our kids benefit from such knowledge, a select group of PV children shared their knowledge with the other two communities. Now all our kids have learned to weave miracles with gunny bags!
- Community involvement in Pudiyaador administration: A high-school senior, five high-school juniors, one high-school sophomore and three college freshmen together provide administrative support to our staff at the Pudiyaador centers. We hope that these rising stars of Pudiyaador will be trendsetters of change in their respective communities.
- Field Visits: Enough said, already :)

How can you help?

As you were getting acquainted with the various Pudiyaador activities and our progress this quarter, have you been wondering what *you* can do to help? If so, you are at the right spot and we are very excited to have you on board. You can get more involved with Pudiyaador and our activities in a variety of ways by volunteering your time or by donating money and resources.



If you live in or are visiting the Chennai-area, we would love it if you can volunteer your time with our children. You can help them with their school work, coordinate and/or participate in a field trip or hold one or more sports, art, cultural or individual development sessions. Your interactions can be regular daily, weekly or monthly events (like providing academic help, teaching them spoken English or taking them on field trips) or you can schedule stand-alone events depending on your availability. Our volunteers typically come up with fantastic ideas to enrich the children's lives through fun and educational activities. You are also more than welcome if you would like to interact with the parents and share your knowledge and/or experiences with them.



If you are unable to make a time commitment and instead you are looking for other avenues to be engaged with Pudiyaador's efforts, we welcome your donations. You can make a one-time donation or pledge a fixed amount every month. We are set up on [Paypal](#) and we also accept all other forms of donation - cash, cheque, cashier's cheque, etc. Pudiyaador is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations made to us are tax-exempt.



One way to easily multiply your monetary contributions to Pudiyaador -or any other charitable organization that you support, for that matter- is to contact your HR department to see if your place of employment sponsors a corporate matching grants program. If your company has such a program, all you would have to do is, fill out the appropriate form and forward it on to us along with your contribution. We will then fill out our details and other requested information and send the form back to your HR. This is a simple, yet effective way to augment and even double your donations and we thank you for looking into it.

If you are looking for a list of specific needs that you would like to help with, we are planning to:

Increase our collection of educational kits.

We are looking for new or used educational aids that would foster the imagination of our children—anything from abacus to microscopes, word games to complex science kits.

Extend regular medical services to all our centers.

We need medical professionals to volunteer their time, services and supplies to our children. We can use your help whether you are able to make a regular or single time or resource commitment.

Revamp our computers that are over 8 years old and are riddled with hardware issues. Please think of us if you are looking to replace your older laptops or have the resources to donate new ones.

Enable our children to hone their musical abilities.

There is a need for two *Veenas* and two *Sitars* to help with our music classes and for the kids to practice and perform on.

Expand our Audio/Video library.

We are always on the lookout for good audio/video materials for example, National Geographic/Discovery/History Channel features on DVD/Video CD to supplement the children's educational and extra-curricular needs.

If you are able to help out in any of the ways detailed above, please contact our Chief Operating Officer, Mr. J. Sethumadhavan, at janasethu@yahoo.com or at +91.99413.57646. At Pudiyaador, we are completely driven and sustained by our volunteers and donors. Without your commitment of time, money and other resources, our activities, our goals and even our organization, will be but a dream. We sincerely thank you for all your support and generosity.

We would love your feedback!

Our newsletter team would love to hear from you—after all, you are the reason our team exists! Please let us know what we can do to make this newsletter more informative and enjoyable. Or just drop in a line to say hello :)

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