VIDYA VANAM SCHOOL

Annual Report

2013-2014

www.vidyavanam.org
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We are on track to graduate our first batch of students through the 10th grade by March of 2017. We have kept our focus on our mission to serve the underprivileged groups. Forty percent of our children are from the tribal villages, fifty percent from backward communities, and the remaining from other underprivileged communities.

We are adding close to 25 children a year and we will reach an estimated school size of 330 by year 2016, the same year our first group will graduated out of 10th grade.

Also, to keep in line with our mission that education needs to dovetail with opportunity of employment, we graduated the first group of women certified in early childhood development program. This will be the first of many vocational tracks which will be established in the next few years.

We have and continue to face challenges. These include maintaining a reliable revenue stream to keep the operation of the school smooth and without breaks. We are forever appreciative of the efforts of so many friends and well-wishers to keep our mission alive and well.

The following pages will outline the many accolades the school has received and I am deeply indebted to all who made this happen.

Subramaniam Sriram, President of Bhuvana Foundation
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President, Bhuvana Foundation India and US

Dr. S. Sriram is an internationally recognized neuroscientist currently holding the William Weaver Chair in Experimental Neurology at Vanderbilt Medical Center, Nashville, TN, USA. He has recognized the needs of the underprivileged in India and has dedicated his time and resources to the formation and development of Vidya Vanam.

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Prema Rangachary - Director of Vidya Vanam and the Secretary of the Bhuvana Foundation.

Ms. Rangachary was trained in Oxford UK to teach English to children whose mother tongue is not English. She has long promoted the need to advance novel changes in the curriculum and to foster education especially in regions where resources are limited. As director of the school, she has engineered innovative programs by which art can enhance the understanding of language and the sciences.

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Trustees

Susheela Ragahavan  Jagdish Dore  Vasantha Laxminarayan  Shanthi Ranganathan

Dr. N. Uma  Bhooma Parthasarathy  Mridulatha Dore
Vision of Vidya Vanam

Vidya Vanam is a non-residential school for rural children from tribal and underprivileged families. The school is located about 45km northeast of Coimbatore, in Anaikatti, at the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The school serves children from 28 surrounding villages. It is our endeavor to help children of illiterate or uneducated parents to become self-confident, motivated, knowledgeable, and emotionally stable adults.

Vidya Vanam provides children with the tools for self-learning while simultaneously recognizing the rich cultural traditions of their villages and the world in which they live. They are encouraged to imagine a world outside of the classroom walls and their rural environment. Vidya Vanam strives to educate with respect for a broad cultural identity and instills pride in the children for their roots as well as their accomplishments. Teachers learn how to educate using methods of Montessori, language immersion, arts/creative expression, and project-based activities all centered around the child. Instruction begins for pre-schoolers and our vision is to provide pre-college and vocational tracks through 10 Standard.
Scope of Services

All students receive a mid-day nutritious meal and snack each day

The current scope of services at Vidya Vanam includes:

- Academic instruction from Pre-K to 7th Standard
- Special Needs Assessment
- Nutritional Support
- Transportation
- Vocational Training
- Extracurricular activities, physical education, and field trips
- Community Service
- Referrals for Alcohol and Mental Health Services
- Staff Development and Enrichment
- Annual school newsletter available on website
- Accredited by the National Institute for Open Schools (NIOS)
- Core curriculum competency tests for Middle School
- Remedial support for students from Vidya Vanam and the adjacent Government school on Saturday mornings
- Annual medical check-ups for all students
Facilities
Vidya Vanam consists of a campus with the following features:

- Administrative block
- Dining/ Multipurpose hall, kitchen complex
- 13 Classrooms, including art, AV room, science lab, Montessori, and computer lab
- Library containing 3,000+ books
- Magazine and newspaper subscriptions
- 15 Bathroom facilities and drinking water provided
- Security room and fenced campus
- Faculty/Guest quarters for 18
- Biogas generator
- Campus-wide wi-fi
- Solar power (entirely self-supporting)
- Water harvesting/groundwater recharging
- Sports grounds and kindergarten play area
- Two school buses

155 students are transported daily on Vidya Vanam buses.
The school is located a short walk from the town of Anaikatti (circled in red), within the Elephant Corridor, on the Thuvaipathy Road. The campus is 1.65 acres on a gentle slope. The students are drawn from about 50 villages within the green circle.
All Teachers and Administrative Staff pictured along with Chief Guest, Mr. Gopinath, and S. Sriram, President, taken on Annual Day in February 2014.

Director-1
Administrative Support-3
Pre-K Faculty- 2
Primary Grade (K-4)Faculty- 8
Middle Grade (5-7) Faculty-10
Housekeeping-5
Cooks-2
Drivers-2
Security-2
Maintenance-1
Full-time Volunteers- 2

The 18 full-time faculty have the following levels of certification:
UGBed- 7, ECed-6,BA-1, MABed-1,PGBed-3
Vidya Vanam has part-time consultants for special educational needs assessment, dance, vocal and instrumental music, and theater. Pre-K teachers and classroom aids are recruited locally so they are familiar with the tribal dialect. Primary and Middle School faculty are recruited from a wider area, often representing other countries and far reaching parts of the Indian continent.

**School Day**
The school opens Monday-Friday at 9:00 am with morning assembly. All students and faculty have lunch and a snack before departing at 4:00 pm. Students arrive and leave on foot, bicycle, or by Vidya Vanam bus. Pre-K students have Montessori classroom instruction, hygiene and use of toilet facilities, Tamil, English, and project-based learning. Students in Pre-K leave school at 2:00 pm after lunch and a nap. Kindergarten and Primary School students continue bilingual instruction.
Curriculum

The curriculum is developmentally appropriate and specifically designed to be relevant to the child’s life and environment. Teacher-directed and child-directed activities utilize learning tools tailored to the student’s interests and level of achievement. These tools are thematic or generic, flexible, continuously updated worksheets, journals, etc. Eighteen to twenty children work in multi-age groupings. The children work individually, in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class. These groupings are based on interest, learning style, need for skill instruction, or reinforcement. These various groupings promote independent work, cooperative learning opportunities, participatory activities for large projects, and discussions. Videos and lectures; hands on use of computers and tablets; Montessori classroom techniques, learning activities, and tools; and art and craft projects are all integrated into the academic program. The curriculum actively recognizes and nourishes the tribal cultures and diverse student backgrounds as songs, stories, and traditions are woven into the school activities.

Middle School students study math, social studies, science, Tamil, Hindi, health awareness, art/craft, and physical education through interactive classroom work, computer and iPad use, projects, and extracurricular activities. There are Saturday morning remedial classes for students needing a little more support academically.
In addition, the school is equipped with computers and iPads, docu-cameras, and AV equipment for educational needs. The installation of solar panels has allowed for an uninterrupted power supply.
Extracurricular activities during the past year included Bharatnatyam dance, choral and instrumental instruction, farming/gardening, charka, and theater. Field trips to the Nilgiri Biosphere, Salim Ali Center (SACON), Yercaud, Sirthuli, and Mahabalipuram were made.
Choral concerts and dance performances were given in Chennai and Coimbatore.
Highlights of Academic Year 2013-2014

Each year, three school-wide events are held. The public and parents of students are invited to attend. These events include Independence/Sports Day (First Term), Project Day (Second Term), and Annual Day (Third Term). Keynote speakers are invited to speak to the students at these school-wide events.

Independence/Sports Day in August 2013
Vidyut Sivaramakrishnan, Tamil Nadu cricketer
Students sang Neerarum Kadaludutha, the National Anthem, and other songs, performed aerobics and yoga, sprints, shot put, long jump, hurdles, and races for fun. There was a drumming show. Parents and faculty joined in the fun.
Dance Workshop in May 2013

During the two week intensive dance workshop conducted by Karuna Sagari, twenty students from Vidya Vanam and others from Coimbatore learned music, dance theory and practice. The Dance Workshop was supplemented by a pottery workshop, garland making, temple architecture studies, and Tae Kwon Do. A trip to Perur Temple in Coimbatore and walks in the hills in the evenings, along with viewing a performance by their teacher, Karuna, were highlights.
Sunil Kumar and Sajan Sindhu, TV and movie animators, worked with students to produce an animated movie, based on a student story. The movie is called, “Nature Makes Friends” and can be viewed at: http://youtube.be/3ccAVNNA-WA.

Sunil Kumar and Sajan Sindhu working with the children to make movies and introduce the use of computers.

Dr. Bhanumathi from the Pavai Center for Puppetry in Chennai conducted a puppetry workshop for Primary and Middle School students. The puppets were used to tell stories, which is a strategy found helpful in overcoming fear of speaking new languages, in this case English.
Mohammed Saleem from the Kids for Tiger Project sponsored by Sanctuary Asia magazine spoke to the children about the extinction of tigers and tiger conservation in India.

Mohan Despande and Anjali Mhasme from Pune conducted workshops with Middle School students on a wide range of topics including health, hygiene, personal growth, anger management, and gender discrimination.

The Director of Puvidham School accompanied by 15 students and a teacher visited Vidya Vanam for two days to observe and exchange ideas regarding similarities and differences between the two schools. Both schools serve rural populations.

**Project Day in December 2013**

Aruna Roy, eminent social and political activist and pioneer of the Right to Information Act, spoke to students at Project Day about the Indian Constitution. Students performed dance, charka, songs, and debate. There were exhibitions of student research on natural disasters and many other topics.
School Students with Aruna Roy at Project Day
Biodiversity in the Classroom and Outside

Children participate in outdoor activities, which include gardening and specimen collection for their projects. They also go on field trips to the Nilgiris Biosphere where they receive instruction on horticulture. The Nilgiris Biosphere is a non-profit reserve which is dedicated to the preservation of the local flora and fauna of the Nilgiris. The biosphere is a great asset for the science and environmental education of the children of Vidya Vanam.

Students collecting specimens for a study of biodiversity. The presentation was made in a competition held in Chennai in January 2014.

The high point of the year was the presentation on biodiversity by the children in Chennai. This forum was a presentation by 10 schools from Tamil Nadu. As reported by The Hindu on February 4, 2014, the children of Vidya Vanam “stole the show.” Speaking flawless English they said, “We live among trees, birds, and
animals. Our pictures may not be perfect, but they were shot entirely by us.” They named every one of the birds, insects, snakes, and plants they had photographed. “Butterflies migrate to Anaikatti because we don’t use pesticides; golden beetles are used to embellish jewelry”, they stated. To the audience that sat enthralled during their presentation, they made a final offering — a collection of a beehive, sun bird nests, a cobra skin, an unusual tree pods, and kestrel feathers.

![Image of students showing their collection]

The students from left to right showing their collection are, Abhijit, Manav, Pravin, Durga Devi, Archana, Karthika and Subash.
Statistics

The school has 277 students, 53% boys and 47% girls.

Demographic of Student Body

Distribution of Underprivileged groups in the student body 2010-2014
Annual Dropout Rate 2010-2014

Transportation of Students from their villages to Vidya Vanam
Annual costs for education (Indian Rupees)
Words of Wisdom from a Visitor to Vidya Vanam

There have been a number of visitors to Vidya Vanam who have interacted with the staff and students. The most memorable event was the visit of Aruna Roy. Writing in our Guest Book she notes,

“My brief interlude in Coimbatore restored my sanity and helped get a perspective on issues that were overwhelming me. The dialectic between the essentially serene nature of living and the artificial and self-aggrandizing pressures of institutions of governance, remain the 2 poles between which I continue to swing. I want to thank the wonderful children and the teachers, and you, for creating a pool of sanity and an atmosphere of inquiry, in the midst of this chaos.”
Plans for Expansion

1. 2014 Infrastructure expansion of Sports Ground and Vocational Block.

2. Increase in the number of students to the vocation training program in Early Childhood Development and Education leading to Primary Teacher Certification.

3. Develop a vocational program which include additional vocational stream for school drop outs and students who have completed their 10th or 12th grade education.

4. Develop ties with regional industries to support vocational education.
Donations

The Bhuvana Foundation was formed expressly and solely to support the Vidya Vanam School and has 501(c)3 status in the US and India. The Bhuvana Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization, eligible for 50% exemption (80G) and under the Foreign Contributions Regulatory Act.

Please consider making a contribution to cover all the costs for one student for one year: R 18,000 R($300, USD) which includes tuition, transportation, food, uniform, field trips and extracurricular activities.
Contributions may be made online through the website or by personal check or electronic transfer by arrangement:

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Please make checks out to the Bhuvana Foundation. Eligible matching funds through employers are actively sought and in place at the current time for Microsoft, IBM and Novartis.

Donations of cameras, laptops, tablets, art materials, PA system, AV equipment, books, and furniture are needed. If you wish to donate any items or materials, please contact the Director.

We honor the efforts of a number of unique supporters in the past year.

1. Pooja Aiyer, an 11th grade student from Westlake, NY, USA, organized a fund-raising Walk-a-Thon to support Vidya Vanam, as President of the Junior States of America Club.
2. Mr. Jesudas runs marathons every year to raise funds. Last year he raised $1.0L running the Bombay Marathon.
3. Vardhman Jain of Chennai donated the solar units which are now fully operational and support the entire power needs of the school.
4. Pfizer Pharmaceuticals donated 15 laptops and 5 printers.
In the past year, we have gratefully received donations from the following people and organizations, from as little as $5/month up to R12L ($20,000). Vidya Vanam is entirely supported by these generous contributions and operates without any government funds or grants.
Donor List

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