ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY SUBRAMANIAM SRIRAM

"my heart is with the students whom we have educated and nurtured and who in turn have given the school its name, visibility and purpose"

It was 10 years ago on a rainy day with Swami Dayananda Saraswathi in attendance we formally opened Vidya Vanam. We had at that time, completed 4 small cottages, two of which served as housing for the Director and staff and the other two were our first class rooms. Prior to that, we had used the services of the Chatralaya run by Aim for Seva to start a combined pre-K and 1st grade one room class room for 12 children. The growth of the school since inception in 2007 has been nothing short of stunning. While I can eloquently recite in metrics the growth in the school body, square footage of the class room, the teachers and resource staff who have been part of the school, my heart is with the students whom we have educated and nurtured and who in turn have given the school its name, visibility and purpose.

There are many poignant stories of the students, I reminisce on one, a child who I have followed over the 10 years. Durka Devi from the Vadakallur village was a 5 year old, whose job was to go with her mother to get wood from the forest and cow dung patties for cooking a fire in her kitchen. I did an interview of her in one of the earliest newsletters.

Over the 10 years, I have seen her grow, mature into a confident person, who can stand on her own with any one and at the same time offer the kindest of care to her siblings and friends. It is not only in academic scholarship that she excelled, but she also became a wonderful Bharathnatyam dancer and won a merit scholarship for her artistic talent. She has successfully graduated from her 10th grade exam and is moving on. We will all miss her and the 12 of her class mates as they progress forward.

We now having launched students past the 10 grade, we now have a blue print on how a successful the academic structure can be made to fit the needs of an otherwise underprivileged family and community. We know what works and more importantly why it works and we have challenged in many way the current pedagogy of childhood education. It is with both pride and humility that I offer the 10th annual report for your perusal. As I have said many times, we could not have done it alone and we deeply appreciate all the support.
ABOUT BHUVANA FOUNDATION (INDIA)

The Bhuvana Foundation (India) is dedicated to serving the underprivileged and marginalised sections of society in rural India. The foundation focuses its efforts in the areas of education and vocational training. The foundation is registered under Section 12AA of the Income Tax Act, 1961, vide C.No. 627/07-08 dated 06-12-2007. Donations are exempt under Sec 80g of the Income Tax Act, 1961. Bhuvana Foundation is authorised to receive foreign donations under the FCRA Act, 2010 vide Registration No. 075901291.

Registered office: 2A, 115A, Sivaswamy Salai, Chennai 600 004

ABOUT VIDYA VANAM

Vision: To nurture tribal children to become self-confident, motivated, knowledgeable, and emotionally stable adults who will be the leaders and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Mission: To provide a fear-free learning environment and a specially designed curriculum that integrates today’s educational requirements with the community’s unique needs; To inculcate appreciation and respect for their culture, their knowledge base and their environment.

Objectives:
- To build an integrated personality;
- achieved only when the intellectual, emotional and the physical needs are fulfilled
- To build empathy for the environment, the community and all living creatures
- To ensure that children are free to voice their opinions, think critically and pursue their individual passions
BHUVANA FOUNDATION (INDIA)
BOARD MEMBERS & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

(Clockwise)
Dr. Subramanian Sriram, President (internationally recognised neuroscientist)
Ms. Shanthi Ranganathan, Vice-President (social worker and Founder, T. T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation)
Ms. Prema Rangachary, Secretary (Director of Vidya Vanam)

Advisory Committee:

- Ms. Susheela Raghavan (Chennai-based educational consultant)
- Ms. Bhooma Parthasarathy (Director of the Thirumalai Charity Trust)
- Ms. Vasantha Lakshminarayan (retired school teacher)
- Mr. Jagdish V Doré (leads Sidvim LifeSciences)
- Dr. N. Uma (Chennai-based paediatrician)
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

The school’s remodeled computer lab was opened as soon as school began. The workstations were better designed allowed more kids to work at the same time.

**EXPANDING HORIZONS**

On September 13, 2016, Vidya Vanam opened its branch outside Tamil Nadu at Doddinakoppa Village in Chikmagalur district of Karnataka. This will primarily serve children whose parents work in the coffee estates of that area. On day one, 17 children were enrolled. At a simple opening ceremony, Ms. Prema Rangachary introduced the new teachers to the parents and assembled dignitaries.

**ARTS & SPORTS**

Actor Kalieswari Srinivasan held a theatre and language workshop for Ganga and Nilgiris groups (Std. VI and VII). Coimbatore-based theatre person Dharani Dharan picked up the baton and continued to work with the children. This year-long engagement will culminate in a presentation during the school’s 10th year anniversary on July 29.

Sinam Singh Basu and his troupe held a lec-dem on Manipuri dance, organised by SPIC MACAY. He also invited the children to join him and his team and taught them a few simple steps.

India’s Independence Day, August 15, is also Vidya Vanam’s Sports Day. As usual, the students put up a stellar show. Our chief guest this year was international silambam champion Aishwarya Manivannan.

‘Voices’, a coffee table book with articles, poems, stories and illustrations done by the senior students, was released on Project Day.
IN FOCUS: PROJECT DAY | DECEMBER 5, 2017

Theme: Arts


Topic: How art permeates our lives and is not confined to specific areas

Well-known performance story-teller Vayu Naidu interacted with students and teachers for over a week, observed the classes and finished with a story telling performance, in which she also explained what storytelling was all about and why it was important. She also spoke at length to Nitha Pulloni and Pavin Kumar R of Vindha group (Std. IX) and this interview was published in the Coimbatore edition of The Hindu MetroPlus.

Dharani Dharan worked with Vidya Vanam’s dance teacher Nagavalli Rajesh to create a dance-drama on the evolution of arts in human civilisation. Over 70 children were trained, and performed on Project Day.

Whether it was physics, chemistry, history, geography, Tamil or English, exhibits (including models, paintings, games and charts) showed how the arts were a part of all subjects.
HEALTH CAPSULES

The village health department visited the school to give students of Std. I and V the DPT vaccination and a booster TT shot to students of Std. X.

Doctors from the Shanthi Ashram visited the school to give the children the Hepatitis B and MMR vaccine to those children who had not been vaccinated earlier. Dr. Uma from Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, conducted a general health checkup, which included height, weight, nutritional status, and basic dental, ENT and skin check up for the students, teachers and non-teaching staff.

A team from Aravind Eye Hospital conducted an eye camp for students, teachers and non-teaching staff. Spectacles were supplied to those who required it, free of cost.

VISITORS

When vidwan T.M. Krishna won the 2016 Ramon Magsaysay Award, the senior children sent him an email requesting him to interact with them during his next visit to Coimbatore. He accepted and visited the school on September 9. They treated him to a display of tribal drums and then shot various questions at him about his love for hiking, his social activism, his music and much more.

Mango Education, an after-school science initiative by Obuli Chandran and Arumugam Sankaran, conducted an all-night astronomy night. Subaash K of Himalaya (Std. X) group wrote about this experience and the article was published in the Coimbatore edition of The Hindu MetroPlus.

A group of parents and teachers from the Vidyodaya School, Cudalur visited the school to learn the Montessori methodology implemented in kindergarten.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Vidyam’s very first batch of children from class X cleared the first leg of the EdExcel IGCSE exams and also the Tamil Nadu State Board Std. X public exams as private candidates.

Vidyam’s students came home with a clutch of prizes at a series of competitions conducted by the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History.

- Keerthana of Aravalli (Std VIII) | First prize, Tamil poetry | Category: Juniors
- Karthika of Hima (Std X) | Second prize, Tamil poetry | Category: Seniors
- Manav of Hima (Std X) | Third prize, bird watching
- Manav and Abhiijeeet of Vindhya (Std IX) | First prize, quiz
- Prashanth of Vindhya (Std IX) | Third prize, Tamil elocution
- Prakash of Nilgiris (Std VII) | Second prize, drawing

The teachers were not far behind. Ms. Preethi Mahalingam, the chemistry teacher, won a prize for Tamil essay writing.
FACULTY AND STAFF

Vidyā Vanam’s staff, both teaching and non-teaching, is given medical insurance through the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

The employee contribution is 1.75 per cent of his/her salary while the management contributes 4.75%.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Vidyā Vanam has full-time teachers for arts and crafts and physical education and part-time consultants for special educational needs assessment, dance, vocal and instrumental music. Pre-KG and primary teachers, classroom assistants are recruited locally so they are familiar with the tribal dialect. Middle and High School faculty are recruited from across India. The full-time faculty has the following levels of certification: UG & B.Ed, ECEd, BA, MA & B.Ed, PG & B.Ed, D. Ted; and MBA.

Vidyā Vanam also has part-time volunteers who come from India and abroad for short spells and help in various ways.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Vidyā Vanam won an award for the Best Contribution to Environmental Conservation and Awareness from the Nature Conservation Society of Coimbatore.
A JOURNEY FROM 2007 TO 2017...

Vidya Vanam’s first batch of Std X students did the school proud with a stellar show in both the EdExcel IGCSE exams. They took their Science and Math papers in January 2017, and immediately plunged into preparing for the Tamil Nadu State Board Std X exams. A short break and they began preparing for the EdExcel English, Tamil and Information & Communication Technology papers, which they took in June 2017. Now studying in other institutions -- with five of them in science groups, two in commerce and one doing a diploma in automobile engineering -- the children continue to stay in touch with Vidya Vanam through regular visits and phone calls.

"For every teacher, the first batch taught will always have a special corner in the montage of teaching memories."

A teacher writes:

For every teacher, the first batch taught will always have a special corner in the montage of teaching memories. Couple this with being the first batch in the entire school, and it is a little hard to compete. When I stepped in to the classroom straight from being a student myself, it was this set of kids who made a teacher out of me. For the next twelve months, we climbed this seemingly mammoth mountain of IGCSE English together. For every person who would ask me whether “these children can really do international exams”, I gave them one more essay. For every questioning look and unsure glance, they got one more worksheet. We barreled through it -- teacher and students -- through class hours and then some, starting our sessions as early as 7.00 am and going on till the dinner gong went off at 8:30 pm.

They wrote, I corrected, we discussed, and started over. Rinse. Wash. Repeat. Just between January and April 2017, each student in that batch wrote me roughly 400 essays. That computes to over a lakh of words each. They grew from a page with more red ink than blue to not giving me any reason to withhold marks. They grew to debate euthanasia, beauty pageants, and everything in between.

When results come in later this month, they will be merely a detail to this larger journey, a journey that was about discovering a language, persevering to master it, and never letting the size of the mountain weigh them down. It was a journey that taught me arguably more than it taught them.

- Yashasvini Rajeshwar teaches English at Vidya Vanam
PROFILE OF THE CHILDREN

Anaikatti being on the border of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Vidya Vanam has children coming from both states. The villages on the Tamil Nadu side are Anaikatti, Vadakalur, Thekkalur, KK Nagar, Armatkadu, Kallikadu, Thuvaipathy, Jambukandi, Kutupilikadu, Aalamaramedu, Kondanur, Pudur, Kandivali, Pannapalle, Moongilpallam, Doomanur, Sembukarai, Mangarai, Veerapandi, Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Singuli, Pattisalai, Kalany Pudur, and Aalangadi.

On the Kerala side, the villages are Anaikatti, Mandiamman Koil, Dasanur, Lakshamveedu, Vattalakki, Mattathukadu, Kallmukayur, Kottathora, Sandhakadai, Gulikadavu, Agali, Boothiavali, Memuthumpali, Kizhmutumpali, Seerakadavu, Ranganathapuram, Chavadiyur, Pudur, Aalamaran, Pattimelam, Vadakotthathorai.

*Illustrated by one of the students for Voices, the coffee table book released on Project Day.
TESTIMONIALS

“Two hours of fun, learning and understanding spent wonderfully with the alert, open and young minds interacting through stories and activities.”
- Ms. Sridevi Subramaniam of Koodam, after conducting a storytelling workshop for Middle School.

“Refreshingly different atmosphere which is free from the oppressive fear and submissiveness found in other schools.”
- Ms. Kavita Krishnan, the well-known activist after interacting with the teachers and children.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORT

Members Present: T.M.Srikanth, Prema Surendran, Uma Maheshwari, Kannan, and Bindu

It was resolved to encourage parents to actively participate and help Vidya Vanam teachers to ensure smooth flow of school events like Annual Day and Sports day. The committee was also apprised of the requirements for the IGCSE exams and the arrangements and compliance to conduct them. The necessity for special attention for slow learners and the need to tackle this was also discussed. It was suggested that the school look at introducing vocational training programmes for such children.
EXPENSES 2016-2017

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Vidya Vanam is grateful to these corporates and foundations, without whom we would not have been able to reach out to the community.

BGS Trust
Parathasarathi Samatva Trust
Sidvin Foundation

Bhuvana Foundation (USA)
S.S. International
TT Logistics

CKD Charity Trust
Shree Sarita Jain Foundation
T.T.K. Healthcare Ltd