



Auroville, April 2012

Dear Friends and Donors,

The end of the year is always a busy time at Deepam. In the beginning of December we had our most beautiful **annual celebration of “Karthigai Deepam”** with more than a thousand little oil-lamps and a bright full moon. Our garden was packed with visitors and our children got a lot of applause for their programme of songs and dance.

For **Christmas** we had a beautiful celebration with games and lots of laughter. Our home-made Santa-Klaus presented a gift to everybody. Finally we enjoyed hot chocolate and our home-made cookies. For our children and most of our team members, being Hindu, celebrating Christmas at Deepam is special, as it is not celebrated in their homes.

This next event was not planned by us. Initially we had planned to go with our children for an outing on the 30th December but in the early morning our area was hit by **a powerful cyclone**, seven years after the tsunami which happened on 26.12.2004. While the tsunami affected mainly the people directly living at the shore, this cyclone caused devastation further inland, blowing off roofs, flattening simple houses and up-rooting hundreds of thousands tall trees and thousands of electrical poles. It left an incredible mess behind. Trees and leaves were piled up everywhere. The first priority was to free the access to houses and main roads and to pump water with the help of generators. It took weeks before the electricity and water supply was restored. Those weeks were filled with the noise of generators and chain-saws. At Deepam we were lucky that the big tiled roof was not damaged. The upstairs windows were blown open and we found an ugly mess of leaves and Christmas decoration inside. The compound wall was broken by fallen trees; another huge tree was lying on the electrical wires and it took days before the outside paths were cleared so that we could have access to our van. Usually we do not take school holidays at Deepam as our children need continuous exercises, the nutritious food, and the health- and social care. This was a forced break - after 10 days we were able to open again for our children. A few of them, who lived under most poor circumstances, had lost their roofs or their houses had collapsed. For these children and their families we provided food. We would like to help three of our children get better housing – this seems to be a challenging task as only one of these families owns land. Also we would like to ensure that their families contribute towards their own houses.

When the heavy storm battered our area we were relieved to know that Dharani, whose father had died of HIV, was living safely in a solid house, built for them with funds from Deepam. See our last letter for more information. The following pictures show Dharani in front of the old and the new house.





In January we celebrated the **20th birthday of our project**, which had started out under trees as a playground for some children with polio and mental disorders in the village of Kuilapalayam. Over the years we have developed into a beautiful school and an outpatient facility for children with special needs from the surrounding villages. For this special occasion we had a small celebration and enjoyed a birthday cake. The ones who remembered the place under the trees shared their memories and we looked at old photographs. We are very grateful to all those who have contributed to the growth of our project through work or donations over the years! Unfortunately, at the same time we celebrated our 20th anniversary, we had to terminate **Karpagam**, our long-term employee who had been with us since the beginning of the project under the trees, due to problems she brought to our workplace. She has been a strong pillar of our project and we are extremely grateful for all the work she has done over these many years.

On the last Sunday in March we had our annual **gathering of the parents** whose children attend our day-care group. All of them have expressed how much their children have progressed since they joined Deepam. Their children help at home with some household chores and show better social behaviour, progress in their educational skills, in their speech development and in their hygiene. Only a few fathers attend our meetings. Several fathers of our children are addicted to alcohol and show little interest in supporting their families which is left to the mothers. At every parents meeting we repeat the following: "Please do not send your children with fever or head-lice, but do send them with a breakfast in their tummy to Deepam school!"

Our children and our team members would like to send you many greetings and best wishes from South India,

Angelika Ehrle & Lawrence Selvi

Kindly keep us informed if your postal or E-Mail address changes!

See our website: <http://www.deepam-auroville.in> for more information

Donations to Deepam can be sent with Swift Code: SBININBB474, A/c State Bank of India, Branch Code: 03160, Auroville International Township Branch, Kuilapalayam, Auroville 605101, India, A/c Holder: AV Unity Fund Foreign, A/c No.: 10237876508, purpose: for DEEPAM

