

November 2014

Dear friends and donors,



Deepam is a hive of activity, at the same time therapeutical and educational sessions are being given and different techniques of handicrafts are being taught. Two sets of **big wooden building blocks**, about 1800 pieces of different shapes with excellent finishing are piled up on the shelves in the purple room. Our children are happily using them to build stunning creations. The youth who made these blocks during this last year - with the help of a carpenter - are really proud of themselves.

**Kryolan**, a German business with a branch near Chennai in India, **donated a jig-saw** for wood working and even offered the transport from Germany by aeroplane. This pedaling-saw is of superior quality. It is especially designed for differently-abled persons and is operated with the feet. Similar to the old type of stitching machines it is adjustable in height and speed and is very easy to use. Our children are extremely proud when they sit at this machine to cut shapes out of plywood. Colourfully painted animals, Christmas stars and angels, puzzles, and pieces for mobiles decorate our place.

**Hannah and Malina**, our new volunteers arrived in September, as part of a German government supported program. They had a good introduction from **Mareike**, who had extended her voluntary year by 3 months. Our lovely and committed volunteers have helped to improve different handicrafts-techniques and are contributing a lot with their creative ideas. It is amazing to see the beautiful detailed stitching work and bead weaving which is now being done. The volunteers have been especially helpful in teaching our children how to use the new saw. They have also taken the initiative in introducing more of our children to the computer and training them, for example how to edit photographs which they had taken before at Deepam.

In May **Navena**, a sweet baby girl, was born to our team couple Kayal and Kalaimani. Kayal had been working with us until one week before delivery. She had extended her maternal leave by three months and has rejoined work in November. Luckily their home is not far away and we will support Kayal to be able to continue breast-feeding her daughter.

This time we have asked all our team members to write something for this letter.

**Selvi**: It is almost two years since I have been giving awareness classes to our adolescent girls and the young women at Deepam. With the help of books and other material I explain to them how the human body works, why it is important to eat a healthy diet and how the reproductive organs of the female body function. The young ladies now maintain their own menstrual calendar and some realized that their periods were irregular and so we arranged to see the gynecologist for treatment. Also we made a field trip to visit a local womens-club where eco-friendly sanitary pads are produced which have been introduced at Deepam. In the beginning I experienced difficulties since there is a strong taboo in our culture of talking openly about such topics. For the girls it also took a while before they opened up but now they trust me so much and share all their personal feelings and worries. Many of them live in disadvantaged families and at home they receive little understanding or attention. In these classes we have a lot of fun together and the girls make sure that they never miss it. Myself I feel deeply satisfied in sharing these moments with them.

**Palani**: I took up giving a weekly class for the growing number of adolescent boys and young men. They are confused by the changes in their bodies that come with the onset of puberty and it is important to talk with them about their own physical growth and the behavioral changes. We learn



about the organs of the body and how the body functions. These boys enjoy their time together with me and are very motivated. We also do a drama group which I am facilitating. Role-play is a good medium for them to express themselves and to get a message across. Some of our themes are health related such as awareness about diseases carried by flies and mosquitoes or why cutting nails or brushing teeth is important. Another important topic is how to keep our environment clean. We are in the process of preparing a play where for example, a visiting uncle scolds his family for defecating in the open instead of using the toilet, or a father just wants to light a huge pile of waste mixed with plastic bags, tires and batteries when a neighbor stops him and explains how dangerous the fumes are for the health of his family.

Our team-members **Joyce, Babu, Gopal and Kalaimani** have expressed their satisfaction with the handicrafts and vocational training skills being taught at Deepam. The quality of the stitching classes, the wood-work and candle-making which is being done have improved a lot. They add that:

- **Chandru**, a 6 year old boy with Down-Syndrome, who has been coming with his mother for several years now to Deepam for therapy sessions, is now **attending our day-care program**. Chandru is quite speedy and naughty and has to be watched continuously throughout the day. He still needs a lot of guidance to fit into the schedule at Deepam and not disturb the others in the group. Also he requires more training to be able to eat nicely and to go to the toilet on his own. Our team is sometimes puzzled by Chandru's habit of passing urine or stool in his pants when he does not like something. We are on the way to teach him other ways of expression.
- Once a week there is a classical Indian vocal singing class led by a lovely Indian lady called **Bhuvana**. This year our special children and youth participated for the first time in the **Auroville Singing Festival** and received a lot of praise and recognition for their effort and courage. The local newspaper THE HINDU called the performance of our children the highlight of the evening.
- With the help of **paediatric doctor Peter Prashant**, who supports our work without reservation, another annual **medical camp** was held at Deepam and all our children and youth had a health check-up. Several of them, accompanied by a family member, have been admitted for special investigations and follow-ups at PIMS hospital. This year for the first time ever the dedicated doctors of the **Aravind Eye hospital** conducted an eye camp at Deepam. Several of our children and team members are now to be seen wearing glasses.
- Some others benefit from the **homoeopathic treatments** offered by **Sigrid Lindemann**. She records thoroughly the medical history and offers the follow-up for her patients. Several of them show remarkable reactions and improvement, especially in their emotional state and behaviour.

Our children have started to prepare their singing and dance performance for our annual Deepam Festival of Light. Over a thousand little earthen oil-lamps will be lit in our garden. Word has spread of our Deepam Festival celebrations and we expect several hundred visitors and many of the local children from the nearby village for the occasion. Traditionally this celebration is on a full-moon day and this year it will fall on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. At Deepam we have been celebrating this beautiful event since 2003. Miraculously, though it is held in the middle of the monsoon season, it has never rained on the evening of the event, though it is a challenge each year to prepare the oil-lamps and flower decorations as sometimes it has rained heavily the day before or even in the morning.

Our special children and team-members would like to thank you for your continuous support and we send you warm wishes for Christmas and the New Year,  
*Angelika Ehrle and Lawrence Selvi*

