



Harvesting lady's fingers

**Vanakkam friend,**

As I walk around the Aikiyam School campus, with my arms folded comfortably across my chest, I want to share what I observe with you: the campus looks more beautiful this year after the completion of the kitchen renovation. Our children are busy in their classes. Eighth graders are weeding and harvesting lady's fingers (also known as 'okra') in their experimental vegetable garden with their Science teacher. Some are building a wooden frame so that their bean creepers will grow tall. Half of the under-kindergarten children are walking to their Awareness Through the Body (ATB) class and another group is busy stretching their bodies with the new yoga teacher. Our individual help to special needs children has gone through some changes and at present these children get extra attention in subjects where they are weak. The over 100 crèche to 2nd grade children are tireless and never bored in their explorations of the newly opened special playground area. Overall, I am very happy to tell you that our children get a lot of individual care and integrated education. Thank you again for your continuous interest to know about Aikiyam children and their school. Aum, Shankar (Principal)



**The kitchen renovation is complete ...**

It's been a long 5 months. We really had hoped the kitchen renovation could be completed during the summer break but alas, the best laid plans oft go awry. The finishing touches were done over the first term break at the end of September and we were finally back in the freshly plastered and painted kitchen, happily cooking for our children, on Monday 3 October. Just.in.time. The monsoon season starts in a few weeks and we'll be safe and dry in our new dining area. We hope you enjoy the new pictures.



**... and so is the playground!**

We inaugurated the new playground by asking the designer and architect to provide a detailed introduction to all the teachers and staff on the different play areas and pieces of equipment. Now the children happily climb, and swing and build things in the sand. What a joyful noise they make while they're fully engaged in free physical movement.



## A spotlight on Vocational Training at Aikiyam School

Learning life skills has always been an important part of the programme at Aikiyam School and many years ago the European Union funded the construction of the workshops where our tailoring, carpentry and computer classes are given.

The Aikiyam School Vocational Training Belief Statement provides a clear overview: "Aikiyam supports the development of every student's ability in the handicraft and technical fields for possible future employment as trades or crafts people. We believe that when young children develop skills for trades and crafts along with their academic learning they will be equipped to find rewarding work once they complete an 8th, 10th or 12th standard education. To this purpose the school day includes instruction by professionally trained teachers with appropriate equipment for the learning and practice of trades and crafts."

This year during the summer break we talked with our vocational training teachers. There's Rajesh, who has been teaching carpentry with us since 1993. Vijaya and Kalai were all smiles while talking about embroidery. Pannerselvam had a lot to tell us about his tailoring students. And we asked Devanathan how things are going in his clay classes.

Here are some highlights of what we heard:



Kalai

*Question: "Describe what skills the children are learning, and to what level?"*

Tailoring: grades 4 and 5 students learn hand-stitching, button-fixing, and how to make shorts and bags by hand; those in 6th and 7th standard learn more of the same, in addition to how to use a sewing machine; then the

standard 8 students make their own clothes, learn sewing machine maintenance, and are more independent.

Carpentry: all the students do beginner to intermediate toy-making; in theory they learn and use angles, and mathematics; they all have to do free-hand drawing and practical hand-work like measuring, marking, cutting, hammering nails, sanding, and polishing; the intermediate students do machine work, for example

sanding, lathe, zig-zag sawing (to make puzzles), and drilling.

*Question: "Are there other skills you would like to teach?"*

Embroidery: stitching on a sari blouse or skirt; using other materials such as kanji (high quality cotton); use leaf bowls on which to do handiwork; other handiwork (ie 'exposed painting' using a special cloth, paint, and applying an iron to 'expose' the art work)  
Clay/pottery: polishing; would like to do firing again (need a kiln); cutting, finishing detail work like flowers, etc.

*Question: "What do you like best about the work with the children?"*



Rajesh

Embroidery: the children are very happy when they finish something, and this makes us very happy; we like when they ask and want to do more work

Clay/pottery: happy teaching and when the children listen; working well with the children

*Question: "What would you like to change?"*

Tailoring: he would like that the children make tailoring as an art when they get older

Carpentry: would like to offer actual training for young adults; with the skills learned they could get a job as a trained carpenter helper



Devanathan

Each of the teachers responded with a resounding "Yes," when asked, "Would you have time to give a more professional training to our older students who wish to stay in Aikiyam longer to learn your skill as their future job?"



Vijaya

And back to what prompted our inquiry, we dream about possibly offering cycle (manual and electric) repair. That will be our ongoing exploration. If you have any questions or comments, we would love to hear from you.

### We need your help.

Our financial situation is precarious. Each year we need around Rs. 1,500,000/ (€23,585/ or \$33,333/) more than we receive from Auroville to run the school and send our seventh and eighth graders to summer camp. During the last six months we have received Rs. 340,000/, (€5,346/ or \$ 7,555/) which is 45.3% of what we need to keep the school running for a six-month period. We have survived because of a one time bequest of Rs. 500,000/ (€7,861/ or \$11,111/) which we received last year, and which is now almost finished. We are aware that many of you have been affected by the global financial situation, and that you may be no longer able to give as generously as you did before. But perhaps there are other things you can do such as fund-raise on our behalf, or help us increase our donor-base by getting other people interested in Aikiyam. Or you may have other ideas. Please continue to actively participate in Aikiyam in whichever way you can. With love and gratitude from everyone at Aikiyam

## Aikiyam's library: full of new energy!



Since school opened in July, many changes have been taking place on the first floor of our new building, Pragati, both in and directly across from the library. First of all, an updated library software for tracking all of our books, and a simplified colour system for reading levels were introduced. With help from most of the Aikiyam School teachers, it took a full summer break to modify the book colour labels, the reference numbers and to enter approximately 12,000 books into the new library program. Second, Vincent, our librarian, who managed the library on his own for the past 5 years, has been receiving help from Saskia, our Special Needs teacher to coordinate and improve the organization of the class visits and the physical placement of the books on the shelves and in creative places within the library. This small but powerful

change has greatly improved the accessibility of the books to the children: for example, they see the books displayed in a manner that makes them more interesting. More good news is that we are looking forward to additional input from Natascha, who has been working in French school libraries for many years. She already worked with us during her guest period and we were very happy with her many contributions. When she returns as a Newcomer in November, she will join our library team and she already has many ideas of how to introduce interesting and positive changes. And last but not least, starting from 2nd term, Saskia will be receiving classes in the educational games room just opposite the library. This will be part of a new program offered to all grades (1st to 8th) twice a month for 1 hour. Both the teachers and the children are very happy with the library's new energy and express their joy and pleasure when they come to visit.



## The Many Colors of Art Therapy - Tia Pleiman

Throughout history, drawing, painting, sculpture and other forms of art serve as powerful and effective means of communication for all cultures. Art has been used for the communication of ideas, feelings, dreams, aspirations and the expression of a wide range of emotions without having to use words.

Art Therapy is a rather new field that has been shaped by many disciplines: art, art history, art education, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry and the medical sciences. Initially, Art Therapy was used in hospital settings, and within psychiatric hospitals. Art Therapy is now used with all age groups, in schools, with those suffering from drug and alcohol abuse, with individuals and groups for the means of personal self-expression and growth, to those suffering from the effects of natural and manmade disasters.

How does Art Therapy fit into the educational curriculum of Aikiyam School? Art and creativity are an enormous part of India's culture. Art and creativity are also of the utmost importance in the overall healthy development of all children. It has been well



d o c u m e n t e d in educational research that children who consistently participate in creative expression and the making of art, are better readers, display better creative thinking and problem solving abilities, and are better in math and science than children who are not provided with

opportunities for creative expression and the making of art.

Within educational settings I provide a mixture of art history, art education and art therapy. I expose

children to the mediums of art, techniques, styles and Artists throughout history, and allow them to express themselves freely and spontaneously without judgment, criticism and with as little interference as possible. We explore feelings, emotions, dreams and ideas through the creative process with a mixture of modalities such as art and journaling, poetry and literature. Working within a group context provides an opportunity to develop interpersonal, socialization and communication skills. Working individually, Art therapy creates an intensive, private avenue to explore personal, emotional issues while providing a safe, nurturing environment for the expression of feelings.

I believe that my role as an Art Therapist is to help people of all ages, abilities and disabilities, explore and express themselves authentically through art; that through art, we are offered a way to know ourselves from a new perspective and we are provided an



opportunity to better understand and experience the world around us. The children at Aikiyam School are well on their way in this creative and exciting journey.





## Aikiyam Students and Physical Education

Aikiyam students participate in sports at the New Creation Sports Complex located near the campus. Every day they have access to courts for tennis, basketball, and volleyball. Pictured are our students playing football, improving their basketball shot, and engaging in a game of volleyball. In the last few years we have received donations sports uniforms, as well as sports shoes. Physical education is an integral part of the child's development and with the easily accessible sports facilities nearby we will continue to explore new possibilities in this aspect of their learning. Following are a few words in particular about the facilities from one of its managers, Savitri.

"New Creation Sports has come a long way from its modest beginnings in 1991. It has been turned into a full sports complex with the contributions and work of our community: it has a basketball court, 2 tennis courts, a volleyball court, a 25m swimming pool, a gym, 2 dance halls, and a 200m race track. The children of all the schools of Auroville can come and do sports on a daily basis. It has become a recognised and well-used facility in the whole area."



### The one thing that you can always count on is change ...

Many of you remember that in 2008 Aikiyam School created two Special Needs programs: one for the lower primary grades (kindergarten to 3rd grade) and one for the higher primary grades (4th to 8th grade). For the lower grades, kindergarten to 3rd grade, the program identifies children with learning challenges at an early age in order to increase their chances to return to the general curriculum and to increase their integration in society. In the higher grades (4th to 8th grade) the students are taught life skills and vocational training which encourages them to become fully autonomous and self confident in different tasks and skills at their own rhythm and level of readiness.

So, we started the new school year as usual, on Monday 4 July, and within one week our older Special Needs students told us they wanted to return to their regular classrooms. After the initial surprise, we quickly came to understand that our senior Special Needs students (grades 4 to 8) had made sufficient progress during the last school year to be reintegrated into their regular classes. This was a pleasant, if unexpected surprise. During the next few weeks of regularly checking in with the teachers, students and parents it was agreed that extra tutoring would be made available for any of the Special Needs students if and when needed it. As of now, a couple of the students are showing remarkable progress, and fit perfectly into the regular classroom. Two or three others have recently begun receiving extra tutoring in Math, English and Tamil. In case you're wondering, the Special Needs program for the younger students (pre-creche to grade 3) continues as usual, and we're very pleased with how it is progressing. Even though we've all adjusted to the new program, we keep our eyes, ears and hearts open for more changes. We happily acknowledge that if and when a Special Needs program for the older students is needed, we'll be ready for the change and make it available.