

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the sixth edition of Svarnim Puducherry's monthly newsletter, the last of 2022. With the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Svarnim Puducherry has expanded its roles in social and environmental responsibilities that we hope reflects Their Vision of how nature and society relations ought to be. In this endeavor we would be very grateful to receive your feedback and reviews as that would help us move forward together. Thank you all for being with us!

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHILDREN - ORC

Education

The cornerstone of ORC's positive mental health program is the Smart 40 camp.

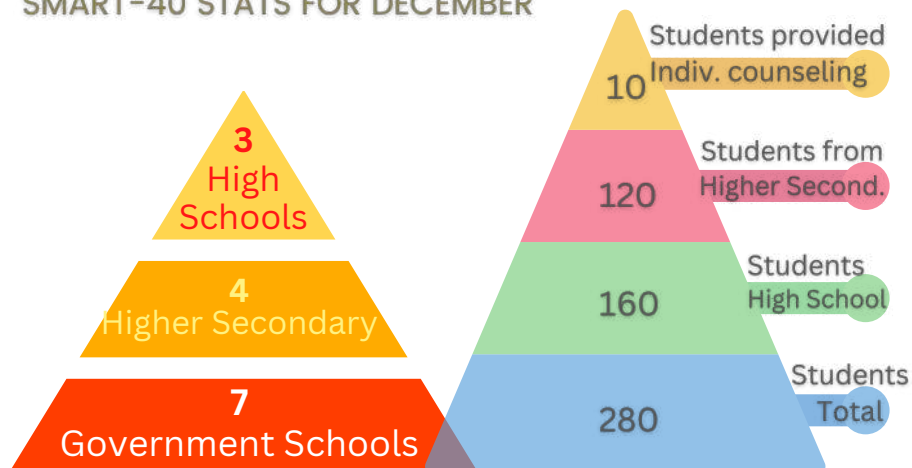


The Smart-40 camps aim to inculcate life skills in school children. The camps use group activities to learn life skills considered essential for leading a responsible life. The skills that we focus in these camps include self-awareness, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, communication skills, interpersonal relationship and coping with stress and emotions.

The core team that conducts the Smart-40 camps in each school consists of Svarnim's ORC team members, the school Principal and the school Nodal teachers.

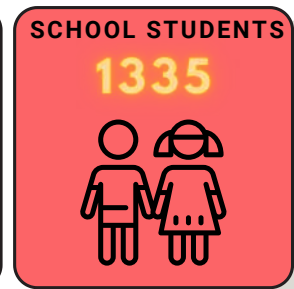
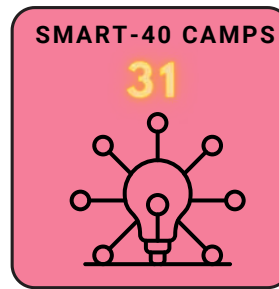
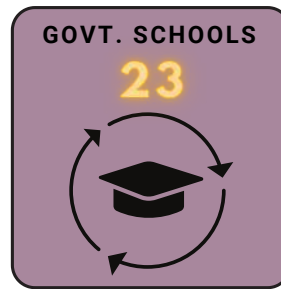
During December '23, we conducted Smart-40 camps in 7 government schools of Puducherry. Among these, 4 camps were at the High School and 3 were at the Higher Secondary level. 160 high school students and 120 higher secondary students benefited from these camps. 10 students who required additional support were given individual counselling.

SMART-40 STATS FOR DECEMBER



So far, during the current academic year, the ORC team has completed 31 Smart-40 camps in 23 Government schools of Puducherry. 1335 students participated in these camps.

SMART-40 STATS FOR AUGUST TO DECEMBER '22



Almost without fail, in the period after the camps were conducted, respective school teachers were unanimous in their feedback, that positive changes were visible in the attitudes and behavior of the students.



BRIDGE EDUCATION PROGRAM

This Bridge program was begun two years ago, initially to help students with learning gaps caused by Covid school lockdowns. Post-Covid, it was realised that children from the most marginal backgrounds are at a greater disadvantage to other social groups and would continue to face learning difficulties which can lead to drop outs and delinquencies.

To showcase how Svarnim tries to integrate and inter-connect different programs that are managed by us, here is an example of how our ORC and Bridge Education teams got together to provide positive mental health support to the most marginal of Puducherry's student communities.



Svarnim brought the two teams together to Sri Aurobindo Society and gave positive mental health training programs for those young children. Through demonstration and group practice, the ORC team explained the values of teamwork, time management, tolerance, the role of parents and elders, and the importance of education in their lives.





Four months since this program started and two months since the school outreach component began, the Science Education program is moving ahead full steam and gaining in popularity. Find out more about our activities in the small description below.

Our Science outreach program tries to inspire children to be curious and tries to support their sense of wonder. It is hoped that through this sense of wonder children will develop a desire to learn and expand upon their innate wish to explore how the world works.

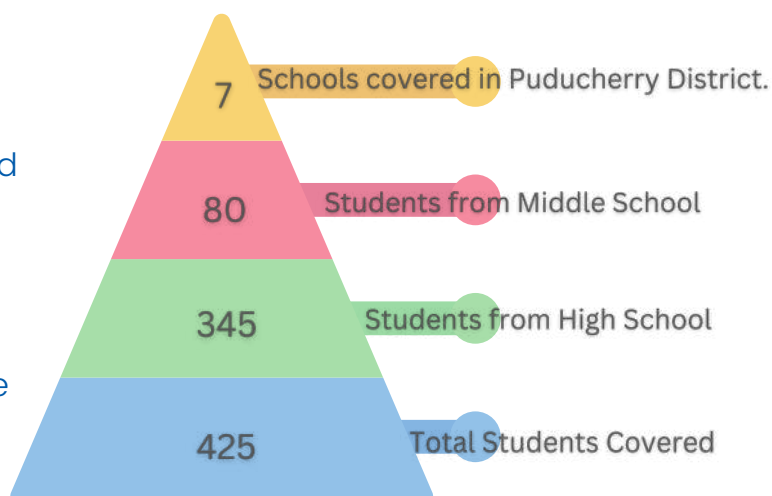


Children can develop confidence by being curious. By encouraging students to believe in themselves, and by allowing them to experiment and learn from their mistakes, can help prepare students to take risks in the face of difficulties that they may face.



SCIENCE OUTREACH STATS FOR DECEMBER

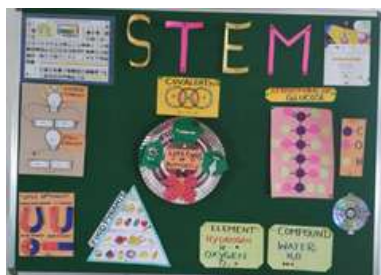
During December '22, Science Outreach programs were conducted in 07 schools, benefitting 425 students. Among the schools covered, 6 were High Schools (up to 10th class) and 1 was in Middle School (up to 8th class).



IN-HOUSE FACILITY FOR SCIENCE LEARNING

The demand for our Science outreach program is rising, even from the most marginal of communities. To support this growing demand, we recently expanded our office into small hall to create an in-house learning facility.

As of now this hall has a small library and storage facilities at the perimeter, and movable chair-cum-desks, floor mats for sitting larger groups, and other furniture for collaboration and presentation.



SCIENCE AND NUTRITION

In another example of integration and connectivity between our programs, seen here is Reshma, our biology subject expert from the STEM team explaining the science behind nutrition and health to school students.



The science and nutrition sessions typically start by understanding the contents of a healthy diet, followed by understanding the quantity and quality of nutrients we can get from a balanced diet, and concludes with the consequences one might face from imbalances in the diet. Needless to say, each of these learnings are carried out with a mix of lessons, discussions, hands-on activities and group presentations.

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, they are a helper and a guide. Their business is to suggest and not to impose.

Sri Aurobindo



This program under our Health and Wellness Initiative focuses on the health, physical fitness and nutrition of government school students in the middle to higher secondary levels.

One of the goals of this program is to sensitize students and their parents about the importance of healthy diet, hygienic practices to prevent infections and physical activities to promote good health. Our awareness sessions include activities like informative talks, participatory role play and puppet shows, and group discussions.

Besides creating awareness about the science behind nutrition, as explained in the previous section, the health team also organized a Puppetry Workshop to stimulate understanding of nutrition and hygiene through role play. 20 students from different schools participated in this workshop.



The school Kitchen Gardens, which are a highly practical and very hands-on form of learning are progressing well. This exercise is expected to help the children to not only learn how to grow food, but also identify their nutrition needs and select plants that meet those needs.



SNAPSHOT OF KITCHEN GARDENS IN DIFFERENT SCHOOLS



COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTREACH - CANCER AWARENESS

Svarnim also reached out to communities in the neighborhoods of different schools. The health team began by identifying the current health needs by interacting with the community members. The team also sought out members of local SHG groups and Anganwadi teachers.

Four community awareness sessions were conducted during the month of December. Based on identified needs, three sessions on cancer awareness, especially breast and cervical cancer, and one session on mental health were carried out.



For the cancer sessions we collaborated with East Coast Institute of Medical Science, Moolakulam. Resource persons from the Institute consisted of Mrs. Kavitha, Vice Principal, Mrs. Vallatharasi, Assistant professor, Mrs. Badma Priya, Assistant professor, Mrs. D. Josphin Martina, Assistant Professor Mrs. N. Revathi, Assistant Professor.

Along with Svarnim's health team, these experts demonstrated to local women groups how self-examination techniques can be carried out to identify the initial stage of cancer. The different stages of breast and cervical cancer were also explained along with the various types of treatments.

A total of 83 women, from Muthialpet, Keezhparikalpet and Kalmandapam, ranging from 18 to 70 years of age, participated in the cancer awareness programs.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH - MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

In Ganapathichettikulam, the Svarnim health team organized a mental health awareness session for the local community. Dr Jaychandran focused on the concept of empathy –its meaning and how it needs to be practiced in the day-to-day life for each of us.

This was followed by Dr Vinothkumar demonstrating the concepts of mental health using the balloon metaphor.



Using balloons and plastic glass, Dr Vinothkumar explained how thoughts and feelings are like the air filling up a balloon, and how this metaphor could be used to help explain and even manage one's feelings.



The 17 members (14 female and 3 male) who participated spoke about psychological issues and discussion moved towards how to tackle depression. At the end of the session Mrs. Thirupama, Staff Nurse, PHC, Ganapathichettikulam, spoke about how crucial such awareness sessions are as they help spread a better understanding on mental health issues as it affects every one of us.



In addition to the above programs, the Svarnim Health team is in the process of designing a KAP survey to assess students' understanding, or lack thereof, regarding health and nutrition. This Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey which will be carried out for students from class 5 to class 8 in 5 government schools, will help us establish a baseline for future assessment of our health interventions. During the month of December, the Health team were finalizing the survey protocols and questionnaire for the same.

AUROVANAM

In anticipation of wet weather, most works were held off during December. Plant signages have already begun, and are expected to gather steam once the monsoons are officially over.

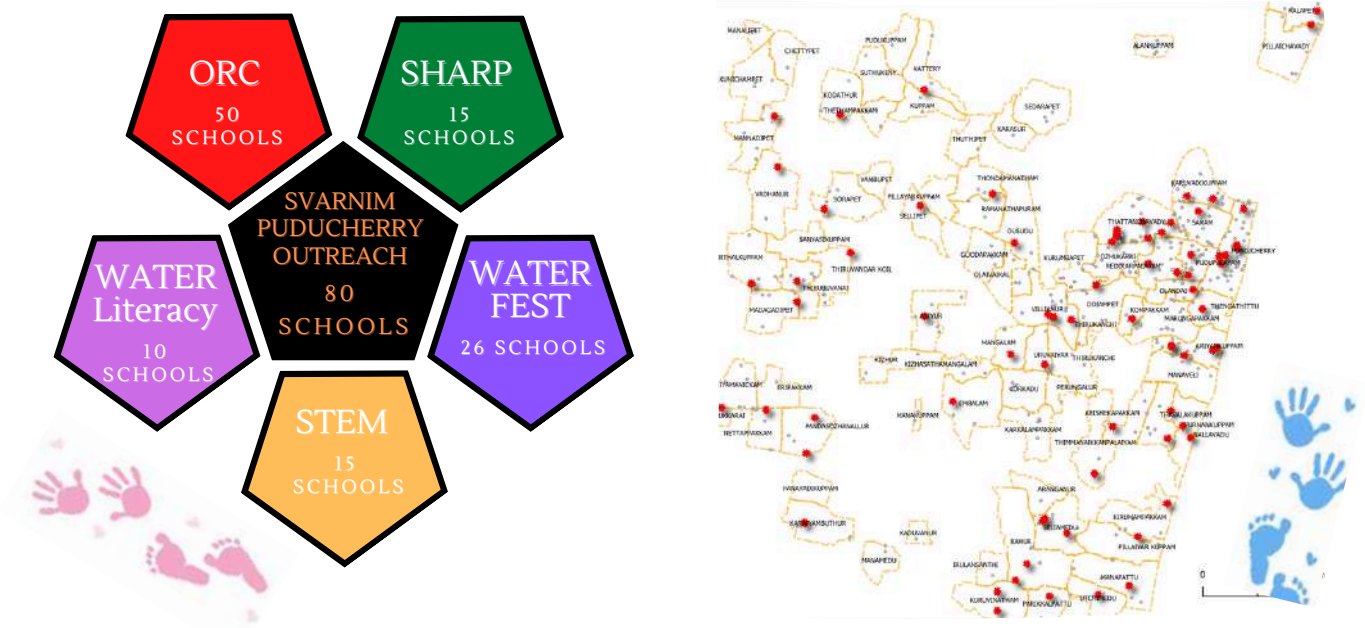
Aside from, signages, the decentralised waste water treatment DEWATS will be completed in January '23.



SNAPSHOT OF SVARNIM'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Svarnim Puducherry's initiatives and programs can be categorised under Education, Health & Wellness, and Environmental Sustainability. However, activities run under these programs are not in silos. All our activities interconnect and feed off and into each other.

At the same time, in continuation of the theme of this newsletter, which is to provide a bird's eyeview of our educational program, here is an infographic depicting our school outreach activities and their geographical spread in Puducherry.



The main features of our Educational program are to:

- Work with the government school system, students and teachers so as to improve and bring about an interdisciplinary and experiential form of education.
- Form partnerships with local communities, and other stakeholders to provide more avenues that can help improve access and benefit sharing of knowledge.
- Work with students and communities to improve scientific temperament.
- Engage the Educational program with the other programs of Sri Aurobindo Society and wherever possible with like-minded institutions within and outside Puducherry.

VOLUNTEERS & INTERNS

During December '23, due to semester exams Svarnim did not have any new student volunteers or interns joining the team. We are however expecting 20 interns starting from January'23.

Aside from students, our long term but remote volunteers are continuing their collaboration with us.