

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fifth edition of Svarnim Puducherry's monthly newsletter. With the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Svarnim Puducherry has taken on the roles of social and environmental responsibilities in a way that 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

ORC program aims to provide mental health support to children who need psycho-social support.



During the academic year 2022-23, our target is to provide counseling services to students in 50 government schools. So far till the end of November, the ORC team has completed 25 Smart-40 camps in 18 Government schools of Puducherry reaching out to 1105 students.

The major components of the ORC program for each school involve: a three-day Smart-40 camp, individual counseling services for every student, and a one-day follow-up camp.

The camps provide students with life-skills that include understanding the importance of family, the value of education and time management, skills that help in concentration, decision-making and problem-solving, and capacity to engage creatively with teamwork.

SMART-40 CAMPS

During November, 13 Smart-40 camps were conducted in different government schools of Puducherry. Among these, 8 were at the High School level, and 5 were at the Higher Secondary level. 320 High School and 200 Higher Secondary students benefited from these Smart-40 camp. Each of these camps were designed as group and activity-based learning experience for the students.



ONE-DAY FOLLOW-UP CAMP

One day follow-up camps were conducted during November for high school level students in two schools. Eighty students who had participated in earlier Smart-40 camps, attended these follow-up camps.

Besides narrating how their individual life experiences were affected by the ORC program, students were very creative in making cloth banners depicting their thoughts. Their active participation during the follow-up camps also helped them connect with the other students.



GENERAL AWARENESS PROGRAM

An awareness program on 'Emotions and Stress – Recognition and Management' was conducted for volunteers with the NSS (National Service Scheme). 50 youth from different colleges and universities participated in the program which was organized at the Kasturibha Gandhi Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Bahour.

This program taught the practical ways to identify and handle emotions and stress. This was followed with a mindfulness session through which the students were able to internalize these concepts and introspect within themselves.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Students expressed that the interactions and discussions with other students was a valuable and novel learning experience for them. Furthermore, through Smart-40 activities, they felt that they had learnt the value of time management for their school work, and felt a new appreciation for their parents and family.

Teachers felt that these programs would help the students to have a meaningful life by implementing the learnt skills in their day-to-day life. They also expressed gratitude to the Sri Aurobindo society for organizing the camps.





This would-be center of excellence for hands-on teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics as well as the Arts & Humanities is expected to cater to students of all schools in the middle, high and higher secondary levels of Puducherry.

During the month of November '22, outreach programs to promote scientific curiosity were conducted in 4 schools. In addition, the Svarnim STEM team also organized a stall at a science exhibition conducted by Government High School, Vadhanur on their own premises.

In all 207 students benefited from these programs this month. The curiosity and enthusiasm of students was easily apparent during the demonstrations, which covered the themes of: Sound, Liberation of Gases, and Parts of a Flower.



During the outreach programs, students were divided into small groups, where they were encouraged to participate in discussions and share their perceptions related to the scientific theme of the day.

Following this, the science experiments and demonstrations were carried out in a participatory manner, through which the students share and discuss their observations. This interactive process emboldens the students to ask questions and delve deeper into the topics and come out with answers on their own.



This hands-on experiential approach provides a good complement to the contexts and purpose of formal learning. It also affords the students an opportunity to perform activities as a group and provides an avenue for further engagement among students and with their teachers.



SCHOOLS COVERED DURING THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

SCHOOL NAME	LOCATION	TOPIC	NO. OF STUDENTS
SHREE BHARAT VIDYASHRAM	OUSTERI	SOUND	32
CRN SCHOOL	LAWSPET	SOUND	80
ANNAI SARADHADEVI GHS	VADHANUR	SCIENCE EXHIBITION	100
GOVT. MIDDLE SCHOOL	MANAPET	OPTICS	38
GOVT. HIGH SCHOOL	KEEZHPARIKALPET	NUTRITION	37

A preliminary brochure for the Science aspect of the STEM Resource Centre has been prepared. It is hoped that this will help us convey the broader scope of this program and create greater awareness about this initiative by Svarnim Puducherry.



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.

Preliminary health assessments and anthropometric measurements have been completed in the 15 schools that we have targeted this academic year. During the month of November, physical interventions have been initiated in all these schools. Prior to beginning the physical interventions all students received consent from their parents.

Interventions are always carried out through a coordinated effort between each school's physical education teacher and the Svarnim health team. Students actively participated in the physical exercises beginning with warm-ups and stretches for the whole body, followed by Hatha Yogasanas which include the Surya Namaskars, and finishing with relaxation techniques.

These activities are carried out as per each classes physical education time table, and are regularly monitored by the school's physical education teacher and members of the Svarnim health team. In a few schools, extra intervention during after-school hours are being given to students who were categorised as thinner, underweight and obese. These students are also encouraged to participate in games along with their local community play groups.



Kitchen Gardens in Schools

For five of the newly added schools this year, the kitchen garden program was begun by forming a groups of 16 students each from class 6. Each of the student groups worked with 10 varieties of seeds and four plant types. Students were trained on the land preparation and the process of seed-sowing, planting etc was explained to them. Each student was allotted one plant which was to be monitored from date of sowing to seed germination, through to the growth of the plant till harvest.



General Health Awareness



During the School Science Exhibition conducted by Annai Saradha Devi Govt High School, Vadhanur on 16th November 2022, the Svarnim health team organized a health checkup stall.

The team gave a talk explaining Body Mass Index (BMI), and how the BMI helps to assess a individual's health even before any investigations are carried out.



28 students, their parents and teachers benefited from this camp.





WATER LITERACY

In our ongoing efforts to sensitize children to the multidimensional values of water, and to improve student's capacity to effectively evaluate their observations and communicate their perceptions, Svarnim Puducherry completed the participatory water audits with the first set of 10 school in November'22.

CIRCULAR WASTE

Dr Sudevi Basu, one of Svarnim's volunteers and a member of Sri Aurobindo Society, visited Puducherry during the month of November. Dr Basu, is an Environmental Engineering faculty from the Department of Biotechnology Engineering at Sir M. Visvesvaraya Inst. of Technology, Bengaluru

Dr Basu carried out field visits to Pondy's waste management facilities and the lone open landfill site, and inspected some of the unregulated sewage in Pondy's peri-urban regions.



On 12th November at the Society auditorium, Dr Basu gave a talk on Circular Waste



Circular Waste is an economic approach to reducing and reusing material waste through a repeated process of recapturing used items to create new products and material that could reduce the cost and increase the life of essential infrastructure like roads, etc.

Inspired by Dr Basu's talk, other members of Puducherry's civil society shared their experiences in managing local solid waste, and the difficulties and challenges therein. Some pro-active suggestions came out of this interaction, particularly from the school teachers of the fishing community area of Bahour.



AUROVANAM – A NATURE BASED EDUCATION CAMP (IN-THE-MAKING)

The Interpretation Centre at AuroVanam is getting into its final shape with its front-verandah also in place. At AuroVanam, other ongoing works under progress are the Herbal garden (photo below), the Navagraha garden, etc.



It is interesting to note that a lot of birds are already visiting Aurovanam. Elsewhere, as plants grow in the butterfly garden, we hope to see a shift in the ecosystem.

These evolving habitats, along with the increasing variety of life-forms will truly be rich natural resource for children to explore and learn !!

INTERNS & VOLUNTEERS AT SVARNIM

Svarnim had three interns working with us in November '22.

M/s Srividya Lakshmi, Kuzhali and Anitha from Kasthurba College for Women, Villianur, Pondicherry carried out their internship as concurrent field work with us. The interns are being provided extensive field experience through our different projects and a chance to attend the various workshops that we are conducting.

Other than the above interns, M/s. Likandh and Mahendiran from Periyar Arts & Science College, Cuddalore, helped us with the Water Audit project in 10 schools of Puducherry where Svarnim team has been carrying out Water literacy project.

During Oct-November 2022, three students from Pondicherry University, Ms.Hannath, Mr. Adithyan and Mr.Rahul also interned with us. Thanks to all of them for having helped us in taking our projects to more schools and villages and we hope they also have learned from the rich field-experience.