

Prayas Trust

PRAYAS TIMES

The joy of giving back

Volume 4, Issue 1

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LIVING WITH DIGNITY

Enjoying a little
sunlight during their
twilight years.



CREATING A PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMMUNITY!



At the outset, I take this opportunity to wish all of you a very happy, prosperous and healthy 2020!!

As always, we have continued our mission of helping the needy and I am happy to share that our Sustainable Village Development programme has gained momentum in the three Panchayats of Pandur, Irumbulicheri and Edayathur of Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu. Our emphasis here has been to ensure that every child between the age of 6-18 gets quality education and improve the health of women in the society. At Pandur, a 'Smart' classroom at the Government Higher Secondary School is giving more children the benefits of computer education while our mushrooming Child Learning Centres are constantly reinforcing the need for education in these villages.

Over the years, our associations with a wide cross section of partners have become increasingly richer as we strive together to make a difference to the lives of many. This issue of Prayas Times feature the inspiring work of some of these NGOs. I am extremely happy and proud of the progress we have made and Prayas Trust will remain committed to take our collaborative efforts to a new level going forward.

We invite you to share your thoughts and ideas to create a more socially responsible community. It could be anything from focusing on peace, integration, inclusion, environment, education, etc. The top five ideas will be published in the next issue of Prayas Times. The idea behind this initiative is to create a purpose-driven, thinking community which can inspire action and change lives.

Tomorrow is full of promise and filled with opportunities to deliver on our plans and commitments. As we continue our journey into 2020, we are confident that we will be able to educate more children, empower more underprivileged women, improve sanitation, build villages, and much more. Most importantly, we hope to continue to make a capital social investment of giving back to the community.

Happy reading!

Mrs. Meena Subrahmanyam
President - Prayas Trust

BLOOMING IN SUNSETS

Clad in a green sari, 80-year-old Rajeshwari is a picture of calm with a look that seems to say, "I am at peace here." Having lost her husband 30 years ago and living with three children in penury, it was her decision to come to Sri Harihara Sudha Seva Samithi in her twilight years to live with dignity "in the company of all my sisters and brothers here" referring to the 50 odd inmates of the old age home.

Nestled in the serenity of Thirumullaivayil in Chennai, the old age home is the dream project of Mr Sethuraman and Mrs Padma supported by Prayas Trust over the years. Here, the elderly are encouraged to participate in various extracurricular activities to improve their cognitive abilities and pursue their hobbies. Some are in contact with their families who visit them periodically, but others miss their families who seem to have lost them in the fast pace of life. Vatsala, a resident at the home for the past 10 years, says "My husband was not a good man, so I left him. I am well cared for here. Most importantly, I feel as if I have a family," she says with misty eyes.

71-year-old Kalyani quips, "We are happy here. We have a routine. If we have aches and pains, we get medical assistance. There is no question of loneliness." She then breaks into an impromptu song, 'Kurai ondrumillai, marai moorthi kanna' (Oh Krishna, Lord of the Vedas, I do not have any problems), much to the delight of the others who promptly join in.



Mr. Ganesh & Mrs. Usha Ganesh

"I have finally learnt to smile," says Usha. "With our medical needs taken care of, I can now pursue my interest in stitching and the blouses I stitch are well appreciated. We are no longer a burden to anyone."

Usha, 50 and her husband, Ganesh who is severely affected by disability, live at the home in peace and harmony. With neither support from her family nor any resources to speak of, Usha found it impossible to meet Ganesh's medical needs on her own, with a daughter to take care of. Succour took the form of Sri Harihara Sudha Seva Samithi. "I have finally learnt to smile," says Usha. "With our medical needs taken care of, I can now pursue my interest in stitching and the blouses I stitch are well appreciated. We are no longer a burden to anyone. Our daughter, who studies in second year college, visits us once a month. What I like most here is the atmosphere. There is so much of love and care."

The caregivers and team at the home ensure that the elderly residents are engaged in various activities, festival celebrations and religious events throughout the year. Medical attention is given to them as per their assigned charts.

"It is very easy to slip into isolation and depression during the sunset years of your life. But here we ensure that the elderly get an opportunity to relax, follow their passion and enjoy companionship," says Mr Sethuraman, as he is surrounded by several aged smiling faces; smiles born out of genuine care and love .



MAKING EDUCATION SMARTER IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

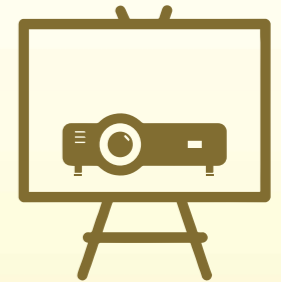
The Sustainable Village Upliftment Programme (SVUP) of Prayas Trust has ensured self-reliance in all aspects of education, community health, self-employment and sustainable livelihoods of the adopted villages. Focussing on women's health and child education as the first step of rural development, the team in partnership with Hand in Hand India have made significant headway in three panchayats of Pandur, Irumbulicheri and Edayathur of Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu.

Quality education is an essential requisite in today's competitive world and Smart Classes have modernized the method of teaching and learning in rural India that is helping in better concept formation, concept elaboration, improvement in reading skills and academic achievement. The smart e-learning concepts and tech friendly approach to learning have been effectively incorporated at the Government Higher Secondary School at Pandur.

The digital initiative has significantly changed the classroom environment. Students are eager to attend classes and participate; retention levels have increased, and students are engaged in healthy competition.

"There is a marked improvement in learning among the students. They are now able to grasp concepts promptly with visual and audio support that has reduced the workload of teachers," says Mrs. Arasi, Headmistress. "Earlier teachers were overworked preparing for the class with charts and diagrams. But now, with computer-aided graphics and videos, they find it easy to explain the same diagrams more effectively," she adds.

Assessment is based on tests and classroom activities. Each student is assessed on the level of education they require based on the test scores. Three levels of curriculum assessment are based on the state board syllabus. The schoolteachers, students and parents are all praise and gratitude for the exemplary educational and learning support of Prayas Trust in their villages.



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REINFORCING EDUCATION THROUGH CHILDREN LEARNING CENTRES

A few kilometers off the main road in the panchayat of Edayathur in Chengalpattu district, one can hear the cacophony of words and numbers being repeated post 4 pm. Situated right in the center of the village, the Children Learning Centre (CLC) is the landmark for any newcomer.

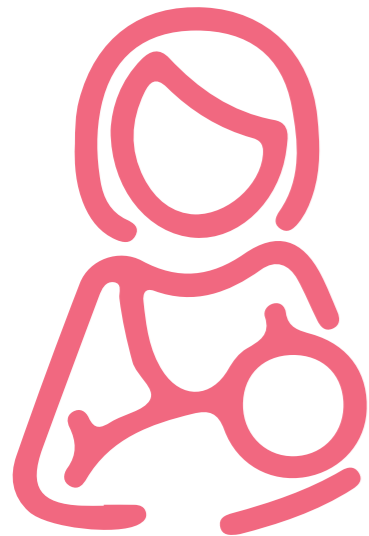
The Centre has been at play for the past 10 months since the Prayas Trust joined hands with Hand in Hand India to ensure a more effective way of learning. 130 children from the regular school between grades 2nd to 5th, attend the evening teaching classes. They have been identified as 'slow learners,' weak in Maths and Tamil and thus given extra and personal guidance. Harini, the CLC teacher who began her career with the projects says that she even teaches them a bit of English, GK, basics in computers and guides the older children to improve their job prospects.

The school has adopted an interesting teaching approach in which the curriculum identifies the progress of an individual student rather than a class collective. An achievement tracker for each subject is decided on the level of assessment the student is capable of, and more attention is given to those who need improvement. CLC classes have brought about a 45% improvement in the regular class. Over the past 10 months, teachers and parents have seen a vast change in attention spans and class participation.



Prayas Trust runs five such CLCs in the project area.

BREAST FEEDING AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR MOTHERS



A breastfeeding awareness campaign was organized by Prayas Trust in association with Rotary Club of Chennai Silk City and Family Planning Association of India at Prayas Medical Centre focusing on expecting and lactating mothers. Dr. Meenakshi and

Dr. Vijaya explained the importance of breast feeding, knowledge about colostrum, hygiene practice during lactating and nutrition for infants. The young mothers were given gifts for the babies along with hampers containing protein powder, dates, biscuits and fruits.



CELEBRATING TEACHERS AT THE PRAYAS TUITION CENTRE

A power-packed cultural show by the students to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of teachers towards learning and overall development was the highpoint of the Teacher's Day celebrations at a gayly decorated Prayas Tuition Centre. The teachers were then felicitated, who in turn expressed their gratitude to the Prayas team.



EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED



Prayas Trust sponsored the school fees of 15 visually challenged students of Nilacharal Ashram. The founder of Nilacharal, Mr Radhakrishnan and team thanked Prayas Trust for the timely support.



A DAY TO REMEMBER AT THE PRAYAS SUMMER CAMP!

Happy and engaged students sang and danced their way through a cultural performance at a summer camp conducted at the Prayas Tuition Centre and tailoring unit. The structured summer camp that included a well enacted play titled 'Good Touch and Bad Touch,' was a lot of fun, allowing the children the opportunity to express their creativity while socializing and learning new skills. The tailoring unit students displayed their latest work like designer blouses with intricate filigree designs. A day to remember, during which nutritious refreshments were served, ended with the students thanking the Prayas team for a wonderful experience.



SEEDING FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

A seed ball making activity for the season was initiated by the Prayas Trust members at the Green nursery of L&T Construction during which they demonstrated to the members how to make seed balls using balls of clay and informed them on when and where the seeds should be used. The all women team were actively involved in this greening process during which they made plant bags by filling bags with red soil and manure mixture. A small but sure step to sustain the environment.





23 YEARS OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE

A movement ... a flight for freedom... a statement of faith - is the vision statement of Vidyasagar and hence it was hardly surprising that Mrs Poonam Natarajan, Founder of Vidya Sagar and Chairperson of the National Trust at the Ministry of Social Welfare and Chief Guest of the day, set the tone for the 23rd Annual Celebrations of Prayas Trust by impassionedly championing the rights of independent living of people with disabilities through robust support systems that are different from those available in the mainstream. She called for greater sensitivity to their needs; to explore more ways to live in a more inclusive society.

It was an occasion to celebrate for Prayas Trust too having completed 23 wonderful years of dedicated service to the society and spreading their comforting influence into the areas of Healthcare, Education, Childcare, Sanitation, Women Empowerment and Smart and Sustainable Village Development.



Emphasizing the importance of giving back to society and being empathetic to the needs of the less fortunate, Mrs. Meena Subrahmanyam, President Prayas Trust, in her address, encapsulated the latest initiatives of Prayas Trust, announced the new office bearers, congratulated the outgoing team for their dedication and selfless service and appealed for more people to come forward to make a difference to the lives of the downtrodden.

A slew of newly introduced initiatives were the highlights of the Secretary, Mrs. Sathya Ravichandran's report on the activities of the Prayas Trust over the past two years. She sincerely thanked the team for their wholehearted support. Mrs Jayashree Dinesh, Treasurer shared a detailed financial report of the Trust.

The stage was then set alight by the musician Nikhil Mathew and team with a brilliant musical presentation while the Prayas members gave a delightful thematic dance performance incorporating various dance forms.

An evening of purpose and fun was rounded off with everyone taking away giveaway jute bags to spread the message of 'No' to plastic and the memories of a day well spent.





Snapshots...



WHEN AGE IS JUST A NUMBER!



1st October 2019 was a bright lettered day for 850+ senior citizens from 21 free Old Age Homes and Community Centres at the Sri Kuchalambal Kalyana Mahal, as they enthusiastically participated in the events and games specially organized for them by Prayas Trust in collaboration with NGO partner HelpAge India, Chennai to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons. There was music, dance, games, and even a fashion show!

The International Day for Senior Citizens is an opportunity to focus on the important contribution of these elders to society and highlight their needs. Along with some top artists from the city, the children too formed a part of the entertainment and their interaction with the seniors was extremely warm, friendly and fruitful.

“We have been supporting this event for over the years and are glad that we are able to bring a little sunshine into the lives of these elders who are in the sunset of their lives,” smiled Mrs. Meena Subrahmanyam, President Prayas Trust, “It is fascinating to see their enthusiasm and zest for life in spite of the hardships they have had to endure. We are delighted that we created some beautiful memories for them to take back. They prove to us again and again that age is just a number.”



INVOKING BLESSINGS FROM ABOVE

Ayudha pooja & Saraswathi Pooja were celebrated with great fervor by Prayas Trust on 5th October 2019 at the Prayas Day Care Centre, Medical Centre, Tuition Centre, Tailoring Centre and Mobile Toy Van. All the office bearers, members and beneficiaries joined in the celebrations.



A CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATION WITH THE LION KING!

The movie 'The Lion King' was screened for underprivileged children as part of the Children's Day celebrations at the conference hall of Prayas Medical Centre who thoroughly enjoyed the film's poignant messages of good vs evil, love, friendship, legacy and embracing responsibilities.





BRINGING THE LIGHT OF JOY, THIS DIWALI



Diwali, the festival of lights, was celebrated by the service minded ladies of Prayas Trust the same way they have done for years by visiting their NGO partners to give gifts and utility items to the less fortunate.

The ladies first visited Gnanadarshan Seva foundation that runs several programmes for the education, wellbeing and overall grooming of visually challenged women. Spreading cheer and the spirit of giving, the members sponsored 100 mobility sticks to the visually challenged women who interacted with the Prayas members and expressed their gratitude and love by singing songs and sharing jokes.

Harihara Sudha Seva Samithi, an old age home run by a couple Mr Sethuraman and Mrs Padma at Thirumullaivayil in Chennai, was their next port of call where they gave sweets, fruits and monthly provisions to the senior citizens who were excited to see the team. The ladies interacted with the senior inmates listening to their dreams and life experiences accompanied with laughter.



Gifts and utility items



100 mobility sticks to the visually challenged women

The ladies later visited Nilacharal, an NGO that supports the education of rural visually challenged girls and children of poor widows. On being presented dresses and sarees that they had requested for, the young girls thanked the Prayas team wholeheartedly and took the opportunity to share their dreams for the future.

True to the spirit of Diwali, the ladies of Prayas Trust brought lots of light into a number of rather somber lives.



UNIFORMS FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED STUDENTS

Continuing their legacy of promoting education by providing educational assistance and supporting the needs of underprivileged students, members of Prayas Trust distributed uniforms to 123 needy students of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Saradha Vidyalaya Middle School.

Partnering with the NGO SERD (Social Education and Rural Development), Prayas Trust sponsored uniforms and school bags to the needy students of Periyakalakkadi village in Kancheepuram

District. 45 underprivileged children benefited from this noble cause. Dr. Ravikumar, Managing Trustee of SERD Trust and the students expressed their gratitude to the Prayas team.

Prayas Trust also sponsored uniforms to 64 students of Govt. High School Cowl Bazaar in Kanchipuram district in partnership with the NGO Smt Rajeshwari Radhakrishnan Charitable Trust.

Apart from these initiatives, Prayas Trust provided educational assistance to the students of Prayas Tuition Centre.



A MERRY CHRISTMAS AT PRAYAS TUITION CENTRE

Christmas, a season of joy, of giving and sharing, of laughter, brightly decorated trees, hollies and celebrating with family and friends over food and gifts, was celebrated at the Prayas Tuition Centre with students, teachers and members joining in the festivities. The most exciting part of the day was the arrival of Santa Claus with chocolates and gifts for the students. The Christmas celebrations set the tone for the new year that promises more happy faces, peace and prosperity.



HANDCRAFTED DOLLS TO MAKE A LIVING

Easy and effective techniques to make handmade textile dolls, trace fabric and make embellishments professionally were taught to a set of eager women participants at a two-day workshop organized by Prayas Trust in association with Usha International. The workshop helped the women trainees improve their skillsets, enhance their employability and empower them to earn a livelihood with this opportunity to make and sell these handcrafted products.



SPREADING THE JOY OF GIVING

"The act of giving, however small or big, is an act of spreading happiness, love and compassion," declared Mrs. Meena Subrahmanyan, President Prayas Trust, at a commemorative event to celebrate Daan Utsav or the Joy of Giving Week that is observed every year from 2nd to 8th October during which people are encouraged to contribute time, money, resources or skills. This year, school bags, writing pads, books for coloring and stationery items were distributed to the children of the contract employees of L&T HQ campus. "We are celebrating Daan Utsav for the second year," continued Mrs. Subrahmanyan, "and whether it is giving your time, sponsoring a child's education in need, or just being empathetic, it is all about making a difference to people's lives."



The act of giving, however small or big is an act of spreading happiness, love and compassion.

Mrs. Meena Subrahmanyan
President - Prayas Trust



EYEING A BETTER FUTURE



193
people
benefitted



19
people were referred
for eye surgery



155
People were given free
lenses and spectacles



193 people benefitted from a free eye check-up camp organized by Prayas Trust along with Shankara Netralaya at the Prayas Tuition Centre on Saturday, 21st December 2019. After the customary inauguration that was attended by office bearers, members and staff of Prayas Trust, the camp commenced.

Various tests like auto refraction, manual vision checkup, slit-lamp test followed by ophthalmologist consultation and counselling were conducted. 19 people were referred for eye surgery while another 155 were given free lenses and spectacles.

"Such initiatives help poor people like me who cannot afford expensive procedures and medicines," said Rani, a beneficiary of the camp. "The doctors assured me a free surgery after which I will be able to see properly," she added with gratitude, that was expressed by all the patients.



PRAYAS MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS FOR THE DESERVING

Prayas Trust has been offering Merit Scholarships to deserving students of L&T Construction employees who are in Contract, Supervisory and Non-Supervisory cadres including Drivers & those in TC Cadres working in the HQ campus. The Scholarship aims to encourage students to take charge of their future through education.

The Prayas Merit Scholarships 2019 felicitated students who have passed their 10th and 12th standard examinations with a minimum of 80% with cash awards and certificates of merit.

Prayas Merit Scholarship is helpful for students as it covers a substantial portion of their educational expenses. The children and their parents spoke about their future and had a fulfilling interaction with the Prayas team.

The cultural element of the programme was provided by Amruthahasini, a student of Prayas Tuition Centre, who gave a brilliant dance performance. The group dance performance by the tiny tots of Prayas Day Care Centre also captivated the audience.



YOGA FOR THE MIND AND BODY

International Yoga Day was celebrated at Prayas Medical Centre with great enthusiasm. A yoga session and an awareness programme was conducted by Mrs Akshaya Babu for the staff of Prayas Medical Centre, Tuition Centre, Tailoring Unit and Mobile Toy Van. She demonstrated various 'asanas' and explained the benefits. She said that yoga was a holistic approach to health and well-being and practicing it can increase life expectancy. She encouraged them to practice yoga to remain fit and to improve their concentration. The staff thanked Prayas Trust for giving them an opportunity to achieve a better life, physically, mentally and spiritually through yoga.



USHERING THE FESTIVAL OF HARVEST



The harvest festival Pongal was celebrated with great fervor at the Prayas Tuition Centre. Students and members performed folkdances like Kummi and Kollattam (stick dance) that are characterized by rhythmic clapping and using sticks in synchronized movements. The traditional Pongal dish was prepared amidst chants of Pongal-o-Pongal and distributed to all.





SKILLING WOMEN TO FIND THEIR FEET

Prayas Trust provides vocational training in cutting and tailoring to empower women with skills to start a business of their own and become financially independent. Through training and certifications, Prayas Trust intends to make the women trainees confident and self-sufficient, and as they can continue their stitching work from home, they can play their dual roles of mothers and homemakers.

Through these cutting and tailoring courses, women learn the art of embroidery, designing clothes, and stitching. Depending upon their interest, they either learn basic stitching or opt for the advanced course on completion of which the women trainees are given a Career Launch Kit with all material required to set them off on the road to independence. They can even choose to purchase a sewing machine at a subsidized rate in instalments.

The young women are encouraged to work cohesively in groups and stitch various garments, night wear, embroidery work, for which they get paid for by Prayas Trust. This time, the stitched garments were donated to the Egmore Children's Hospital benefitting 100 mothers and their newborns.



Pave the way for a better tomorrow!



We invite you to share your thoughts and ideas for a better future. It could be anything from focusing on peace, integration, inclusion, environment, education or incredible break-throughs and life hacks.

Top five ideas will be published in the next issue of Prayas Times.

Write to us at prayastrust@gmail.com with your suggestions along with your full name, photograph and supporting photographs if any, related to your idea.

Let's drive change and inspire action !

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EVEN A SMALL CONTRIBUTION
**TOWARDS ANY OF OUR CAUSES WILL
GO A LONG WAY IN HELPING SOMEONE**

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Reach out to us at **044-2815 4632** or mail us at **prayastrust@gmail.com**,
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