

Auroville, May 2022



Dear Friends,

Deepam turns 30!

In February we celebrated our 30th birthday which was a very touching affair. Some of our alumni students joined us and it was wonderful to see them again and observe how many have grown into strong independent young adults. Unfortunately not all of them have flourished, but we hope and believe that the time they spent at Deepam has still had a positive influence in their lives. Originally we had planned a big celebration and open house, but in January we were hit by the third wave of COVID and had to close Deepam again. Luckily it passed quickly and the situation is calm again.



Deepam began working with disabled children from the local village on a playground under the tamarind trees in 1992. In 1995 we moved into our first therapy room, and since then we have continued to grow into a respectable therapy centre that provides a large variety of opportunities and therapies for our children and young people. Our work over the last 30 years has required constant adaptation to the circumstances and changes in society, and has pushed us to continue learning both professionally and personally. In the early years the focus was on gaining experience and training employees. We also had to learn how to run and manage an organisation for the first time. With experience and time, the quality of our work has continued to improve and expand.

Over the years, the diagnoses and needs of the children have also changed. 30 years ago there were many children with polio who have long since grown up, and thanks to large vaccination programs, we no longer see polio cases. In recent years, we increasingly see children with autism and behavioural challenges which requires a completely different approach. There are always new challenges and opportunities for learning which our team members embrace with interest and compassion. Many volunteers have also contributed and left their mark on Deepam throughout the years, and we are infinitely grateful for their time and energy, as well as the trust and support of our loyal donors who have made our work and growth possible.

Parents Day at Deepam

On a Sunday in March we invited the parents of our students for a day of sharing. Our children and young adults proudly sang a few songs, performed dances and demonstrated what they had learned in yoga class. They also took their parents on a tour of Deepam where their paintings and handicrafts were displayed alongside boards showing some of their work from maths, English and Tamil classes. Students and parents alike also enjoyed a slideshow of photos both current and from the early days, and had fun seeing photos



from many years ago. It was a lovely and lively occasion and the parents were very happy to see the outcomes of their children's hard work.



A trip to the mountains

Emerging out of the third lockdown in two years, we rented a coach at the beginning of April and went to Wayanad in Kerala with our older students from the day program at Deepam. Several had never been on an overnight trip with us before (the youngest is just 11 years old) and the anticipation was high. We arrived at our home for the next four days after 20 hours of driving along windy and bumpy mountain roads. Both journeys there and back took much longer than anticipated due to travel sickness, an overheating engine, toilet breaks and getting lost, but the students never complained and made the most of the long journeys by singing enthusiastically and dancing along to very loud music in the coach aisle (while driving!).



We stayed in a large house where we were warmly welcomed with delicious home-cooked Kerala-style food. We would wake up to misty mornings which many of the students and team had not seen before, and we enjoyed the cool climate which was a refreshing break from the hot and humid Tamil Nadu summer. During the days we went on small trips to a bird park, a botanical garden, to the tallest waterfall in Kerala (including a swim in the river), a beautiful lake where we rode on pedal boats, on jeeps up a very bumpy dirt track to a beautiful river with fresh clear water, and to many stunning viewing points. Many of the mountain ranges were covered with tea bushes and we were able to see how coffee, cardamom and pepper grows. On the last evening, after a downpour, we had a bonfire and dance party with a lot of laughter.

Travelling with 32 people in a bus requires patience and mutual consideration, but we were all touched and impressed by the constant positivity and togetherness of the students. They are an exceptional group of children and young people who have such a natural ability to be kind and supportive of each other and the team. Nobody was homesick and we enjoyed a wonderful harmonious and joyful time together. This trip will be remembered for a long time to come.

Best wishes and a big thank you from our children and team.

Angelika Ehrle and Lawrence Selvi

