

Auroville May 2023



Dear friends of Deepam,

With this letter we share some of the joys and the challenges that we face at Deepam. Our daily work with the children can be both beautiful and intense. We are currently in the process of integrating three children with autism into our day-care group which requires a lot of care and attention. A few new young children with neurological conditions and autism have also joined us for early intervention. We begin by giving them individual therapy sessions together with their parents and referring them to the local paediatric hospital department that we work closely with for any follow ups required. It can be difficult to acknowledge the home lives of some of these children who would need more appropriate care and attention in order to thrive. At our recent parents gathering we reminded parents again about hygiene, offering healthy food (e.g. fruit instead of sweets), to limit TV and mobile phone use, to ensure their children get regular food and sleep, to avoid tea and coffee for children and to find alternative consequences to unwanted behaviour rather than smacking them. We hope our advice is taken on board. Following this meeting, the day-care children did a well-received collection of performances for their parents including singing, dancing, yoga and two of our boys did a skilful demonstration of Kalaripayattu (a traditional Indian martial art).



In February we had the very special pleasure of celebrating the Tamil wedding of our team member Leo and her partner Allan at Deepam. The team and children prepared the celebration and hosted almost 40 of their family and friends from the UK and Europe who came for the occasion. After two years of postponing the wedding due to Covid, it was third time lucky and it was a very special occasion. After the ceremony, there were circle dances and a delicious lunch at Deepam enjoyed by all. It was wonderful to have the Deepam family, who are so close to the couple's heart, celebrating together with their loved ones from overseas in a celebration of Tamil culture. Leo and Allan were very happy and touched. This will remain an unforgettable day for all.

Alongside the joy and celebration, we have also had great sadness. In the past months we have had a lot of sickness in both the children and team members. There has been a particularly nasty strain of virus that many people caught including some of our students. Here are the stories of three special people who have been under our care who have passed away in the last few months.



Anjalai suffered meningitis when she was 3 years old and was left with a paralysed arm and leg and an intellectual disability. She was an especially warm and friendly person who first came to our playground under the trees as an eight-year-old in January 1992. She did not receive the support needed from her family and was often seen unkempt and alone on the road. Her situation worsened even further after her parents passed away. Anjalai was part of our day-care group for many years, but left a few years ago when she had outgrown the other children. In recent years, Deepam supported Anjalai with regular food parcels and healthcare support. Her siblings had not informed us when she was sick this time and did not bring her to a hospital, so we were quite shocked when we heard that Anjalai had passed away.





Palani was 37, had a severe seizure disorder and a learning disability. He did not receive the support he needed as a child which resulted in him picking up habits like smoking and drinking. Because of this, and him already being an adult when we met him, we were unfortunately unable to integrate him into the day-care group or offer him the rounded care that we would have liked to. However, we helped him where we could with medical support, clothing and footwear. He was always seen on the street corner outside the tea shop in his village, greeting passers-by and charming people into buying him tea and food. His presence will be missed by many.

Sarvajith has been coming to Deepam for 10 years and has received a lot of therapy. Walking was challenging for him on his skinny legs and required concentration. Chewing and swallowing were also difficult for him and eating was an exercise in patience. Due to this he was malnourished and much too small for a twelve year old. Without the regular meals and therapies at Deepam during the Covid lockdowns, his health suffered greatly. He received blood transfusions several times over the last years due to extreme anaemia. Sarvajith contracted the flu virus in January and was in intensive care for weeks. During this time, his beloved father who he was often seen with on his motorcycle or tractor, died suddenly of a heart attack. Sarvajith died a few days later. Here are some words written by our team:



- * *“A little fragile boy with a deep gaze and a witty smile.”*
- * *“He taught me compassion. I experienced so many precious moments with him.”*
- * *“He was always seen near our team member Palani who was like a father figure to him.”*
- * *“It made us so happy seeing Sarvajith dancing with others in the bus during one of our outings.”*
- * *“He never forgot to bring a flower for the morning prayer. We have the feeling that he is still with us.”*
- * *“A tiny figure with slender limbs, scaly skin, slower movements, and an extraordinary spirit. ‘Jithu’ as he was fondly called, had a powerful name ‘Sarvajith’ which means ‘always victorious’. He was victorious indeed, for every daily chore would be a huge challenge for little Jithu. He did not move mountains, but he moved our hearts. With Jithu you had to slow down and taste the stillness of life. Jithu’s words were measured for he could not afford to be otherwise. While many of us struggle to keep our mouth from hurting others, it was effortless for him. Jithu loved interacting with friends at Deepam. A complete life is not the one that was born with full abilities, but the one that lives to the fullest of its abilities. Jithu, thank you for inspiring us!”*

Although we miss these special souls, we know that their lives were not easy and now they are free. They will live fondly in our memories.

Many greetings from our children and our team,
Angelika Ehrle & Lawrence Selvi

