



November 2023

Dear Friends,

We are happy to bring you this edition of our newsletter. We hope it finds you well and that the coming festive season is a good one for you all.

This year we had an extremely long and hot summer, stretching on from March till October. Due to the humidity, temperatures are often calculated to have a “real feel” of up to 15°C higher than the actual temperature, so when the thermometer is reading 40°C you can imagine how challenging that is to function in, for both our team and students. We don’t usually take more than one week of summer holidays at Deepam as our children need their regular therapies and health care, so it was a tough summer for us all. As the heat ends, the monsoon season starts with heavy thunderstorms. At the beginning of October, a lightning strike struck Deepam damaging several electronic devices. Luckily no one was harmed, but it did cost substantial time and money to fix everything.

In positive news, we are proud to share that several of our long-term students have recently got jobs or entered further training outside of Deepam and have transitioned into a more independent life. This is great news for them, their families and for us, and allows us to focus more energy on the new students. These younger students often have diagnoses of autism, hyperactivity and behavioural conditions and require a lot of guidance to engage in the varied activities at Deepam. Two of these girls are currently in the process of integrating into our day care program. Here are their stories:

**Yogalakshmi** is a tall and strong eleven-year-old girl. She was four years old when her parents brought her to us saying that she had difficulties with speech. It was clear from the start that the challenges she faces extend far beyond speech, so we began regular individual sessions with her and her mother. Unfortunately, Yoga has missed quite a lot of time at Deepam due to severe epilepsy that causes regular seizures. Twice last year she acquired bad burn wounds from falling against hot milk boiling on the stove at home. Despite all her setbacks, our brave and strong-willed Yoga continues to develop and is now managing much better in a group environment. She is still impulsive and needs individual supervision, but is now participating well in group painting, music and clay classes. We hope that Yoga will continue to go from strength to strength and fulfil her potential.

**Charuhasini** is a very small five-year-old girl with an undersized head due to microcephaly. Charu is intelligent, sweet and charms everyone. She was used to getting her own way by flashing her innocent smile and is now, with a lot of consistent guidance, reluctantly learning to follow rules. She is also learning to eat by herself and use the toilet. Both are challenging and she has a way to go, but she has a lot of potential and we expect and hope that she will thrive at Deepam.



Of course, nothing would be possible without our wonderful team and volunteers who work tirelessly with such care and dedication. We would like to introduce two of our long-term volunteers who contribute to Deepam with their full heart and are embraced by everyone:

**Jyothi** is from Kerala and has been volunteering with us for two years.

*“I feel blessed to work with the team at Deepam and the lovely kids in such a serene environment. I offer three main activities: Music, soap making with ready-made materials and preparation of simple food dishes (Jothi’s salads are a favourite at Deepam!). My focus is on systematic step by step instructions from preparing the ingredients to cleaning up the workspace and following hygiene. The necessary steps are written down on the board or shown with symbols so the students can learn in a way that suits their learning styles. My own passion is music and I love to give sound sessions and vocal exercises at Deepam. I use different instruments and rhythms to promote listening and awareness of the body and environment. At the end of every session the children lay down, close their eyes and receive a ‘sound bath’. Even the most hyperactive ones relax deeply and sometimes even fall asleep.”*

**Karthick** is from Tamil Nadu and speaks the local language which is a big plus as our students don’t speak English. He has settled in Auroville with his family and works as an IT specialist.

*“Two years ago, I joined the farm project during the COVID restrictions that schools faced at that time. I fell in love with the Deepam kids, and this bond is lasting. Presently I help to prepare learning materials for Deepam, as well as helping where needed with driving the school van and supervising the children when the team have their fortnightly meeting. I am always in awe of the extraordinary patience and dedication of the Deepam team. Even the smallest improvements with some of the children can take years of work. I have learnt a lot from the staff and the kids equally. Above all, the love that Deepam showers is the biggest gift.”*

We are very lucky that at about the same time that Haritha left us after two years work to pursue her masters in speech therapy, **Rajeshwari** decided to join Deepam full time. Raji grew up in Auroville and has often supported us with professional advice.

*“I have worked as a consultant audiologist and speech therapist in a private clinic in Pondicherry for 8 years where I gained experience in assessing speech and hearing disorders in both children and adults. At Deepam I am doing hearing assessments (audiometry) for children with hearing loss, and I program the required hearing aids accordingly and give auditory training and speech therapy. I also have the chance to give speech therapy to children who have articulation difficulties or other speech related disorders. It is rewarding to work in the multi-disciplinary team at Deepam where I can share everything with my colleagues.”*

Raji was also instrumental in helping set up our new “smart classroom”. One of our therapy rooms was made soundproof and fitted with a digital touchscreen complete with educational software. This allows students to have a multi-sensory approach to learning where they can explore writing, colouring, 3D shapes, language, maths and science in an interactive and engaging way. Autistic children, especially, respond well to the use of images and videos. Celebrations are always a big part of life at Deepam, and everyone gets involved in the preparations. We celebrate most of the traditional Indian festivals as well as Christmas and



Easter, and the meaning behind each celebration is explained to our children. The second half of the year is especially busy with Krishna Jayanthi, Ganesh and Saraswati pooja, and Navratri which stretches over nine days. Diwali, the festival of light, is celebrated all over India in November and is followed by Karthigai Deepam which is only celebrated in Tamil Nadu. As “deepam” is the word for oil lamp and our namesake, we celebrate by lighting 2000 oil lamps around our centre in a magical display.



As the year draws to an end, our children and team members would like to thank you for your support and wish you all the best for Christmas and the new year.

*Angelika & Selvi*

