Contents

Introduction ................................................................. 1
SAIIER office ............................................................... 2

Auroville schools:

Young children:
Auroville Pre-Crèche ....................................................... 3
Kindergarten ................................................................. 5
Nandanam Kindergarten .................................................... 7
Lilaloka ................................................................. 9

Primary schools:
Transition School ......................................................... 11
  • Auroville, Our Home ............................................. 19
Deepanam School ......................................................... 21
The Learning Community (TLC) ....................................... 26

Secondary schools:
Last School .............................................................. 30
Future School .............................................................. 32

Outreach schools and programs:
Aikiyam School ............................................................ 35
Isai Ambalam School ....................................................... 36
  • Efficient and effective (English) language learning system based on
    contemporary research in Natural Language Acquisition ............ 39
Arulvazhi Education Centre ............................................ 41
  • Yoga Training ....................................................... 43
Kuilai Creative Centre (KCC) ........................................... 45
Mira Cultural Group ....................................................... 46
Life Education Centre (LEC) .......................................... 47
Ilaignarkal Education Centre ............................................ 49

Continuing education:
Teachers’ Center ........................................................... 52
  • Supportive Learning Satellite ..................................... 54
  • Auroville Safeguarding and Child Protection (AVCP) ........... 57
Auroville Campus Initiative (ACI) ..................................... 62
  • Disha Info Desk & Events ........................................ 65
Scholarship and Educational Fund (SEF) ............................. 67

Physical education:
Dehashakti School of Physical Education .......................... 69
  • Dehashakti Football tournament .................................. 71
  • Physical Education training ...................................... 73
New Creation Sports .......................................................... 74
Auroville Sports Resource Centre (AVSRC) .............................. 75

Arts and culture:

CRIPA (Centre for Research in the Performing Arts) ................... 76
  • Auroville Choirs ......................................................... 77
  • Music teaching (by Shakti) ........................................... 79
  • Music teaching (by Pushkar) ......................................... 80
Auroville Theatre Group .................................................... 83
Kalabhumi Art Studio ..................................................... 84
Aurofilm ........................................................................... 87
  • Indian Film Festival in Auroville .................................... 89

Research and studies:

Savitri Bhavan ................................................................. 90
  • Divine Flowers exhibition ............................................. 93
Unity Pavilion .................................................................... 95
The Mother’s Flower Garden ............................................. 97
Auroville Library ............................................................. 98
Laboratory of Evolution – Centre for Human Unity (LOE-CHU) .... 99
Agni Veda Research ......................................................... 101

Supporting services:

Kailash Youth Residency ..................................................... 103

Auroville community projects:

Citizens' Assembly Pilot ..................................................... 106
Increasing Water Literacy in Auroville .................................. 116
Auroville, An Experiment in Spiritually Prefigurative Utopianism .... 119
Auroville Research Platform ............................................. 122
Researching the immediate and long-term impacts of the kNOw
  PLASTICS Educational Programme .................................. 124
Samskritam Auroville ....................................................... 129
“Savitri for the Golden Child” .......................................... 134
“The Miracle Forest” ....................................................... 136
Ashwagandha Horses ....................................................... 137
Awareness Through the Body (ATB) .................................. 141
Creative Movement ......................................................... 142
Auroville Rainbow Child .................................................. 144
Auroville Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) ................................ 146
Kalarippayattu Guide Book ................................................ 148
Scuba Diving Training ...................................................... 149
Auroville Art Camp 2021 .................................................. 150
“Nachiketas” ................................................................. 152
Environmental Education in Auroville Bioregion .................... 153
Printing “Native Trees of Auroville” booklet ......................... 154
Translating “Reviving Vegetable Diversity” into Tamil ............... 155
Payanam Cycling Team .................................................... 157
Auroville Cleanup Group .................................................. 158
Introduction

Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) is the umbrella organization for education in Auroville. Unique on earth, Auroville is an ongoing experiment in human unity where the aim is that residents let the Divine, the true core of individuality and of existence, become a living presence in all activities of life. Auroville’s charter places education in the centre of human life: “a place of unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.”

The care and upbringing of children, their formal and informal education, constant further studies and self-improvement are an important part of the Auroville experience. SAIIER has been holding this trust and responsibility for the last 37 years.

SAIIER has 42 sub-units, including schools for children of Aurovilians, schools for children from Auroville’s surrounding villages, centres for physical education, for study of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri, of higher and ancient Sanskrit and for the arts, libraries and a Teachers' Center. SAIIER supports these units and their activities through a central administration, coordinating between them, responding to the needs of the community and carrying forward new initiatives in the field of education.

SAIIER receives a yearly grant from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (now Education Department), Government of India, and grants under CSR funds from Indian corporations as well as private donations and grants for continuous support of its sub-units. These grants support the school activities, research in social sciences, new construction projects in Auroville, and new and interesting projects proposed by members of the Auroville community.

This report covers the activities of the year of SAIIER sub-units as described by the Aurovilians working there. It also includes reports from each of the short-term projects and activities SAIIER supported this year.
SAIIER operates from an office building located next to the Auroville Foundation Bhavan in Auroville’s administrative area. This year the SAIIER team included:

- Four executives: Ashoke, Chali, Divya, Sanjeev
- Office staff: Arun, Bhuvaneshwari, Divij, Iyyannar, Kristen, Lijun, Ramu
- The SAIIER Board: Ashoke, Chali, Divya, Jean-Yves, Jyoti K., Lucas, Manas, Sanjeev, Sauro

The SAIIER building offers a conference hall, two small meeting rooms, and desks which are utilized by education-related groups. The Teachers’ Center is adjacent, providing a meeting point and resource center for all teachers of Auroville and Outreach schools.

Activities of the year:

This was an unusual year with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting all of India including Auroville. SAIIER continued its work of managing grants and donations, coordinating construction projects, and supporting research projects and activities in Auroville when they could take place.

SAIIER supported 37 projects proposed and held by members of the community, as detailed in this report.

Construction projects:

SAIIER oversaw the completion of the following projects in 2020-21 supported by private donors and the Government of India:

- ‘Yellow group’ classroom, Kindergarten – total project cost Rs. 9.52 lakhs
- Herbarium, Auroville Botanical Gardens – total project cost Rs. 43.68 lakhs
- Completion of Dehashakti School of Physical Education climbing wall – total project cost Rs. 15.4 lakhs

Several other construction projects are near completion, including SAIIER Staff Quarters ‘Prosperity’ Phase 2 and ‘Harmony’ phases 2 & 3.

Reflections:

There is a growing reflection by SAIIER Executives and Board to broadbase the teachings of integral education and to hold regular workshops and enquiry into Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s words on Education. The key differentiating aspect of education in Auroville which is generally missed in the mainstream, is the recognition of the psychic being and bringing greater awareness to children and teachers. Physical, Vital, Mental and Psychic and spiritual education is the core of Mother’s teaching regarding education and SAIIER’s aim is to further this practice, knowledge and understanding in Auroville schools.

This year saw most of the schools in Auroville having to shift from in-person to online learning, with varying degrees of success. Teachers and students learned through this experience the value of interacting with each other in the social environment that is a school. The physical, energetic, emotional, social parts of the being which are typically nourished through being together in the same space were deprived of the normal enriching environment in which they grow. As we emerge from extended lockdowns, Aurovilians and Auroville children are perhaps better able to appreciate all that we are given in living here.

SAIIER office
Auroville Pre-Crèche

by Auroprem, Tatiana and all teachers

The aim of Auroville Pre-Crèche is to offer the pre-school kids of Auroville a safe and harmonious atmosphere for being, exploring, and learning. The parents can find here a supportive place to meet and share their experience about raising children.

Activities of the year:

Pre-Crèche usually has two groups, the Babies Group and the Toddlers Group.

The Babies Group is for babies from 8 months old to 1½ year old who are accompanied by one of their parents. The group gathers 2 to 3 times a week. Due to Corona we didn't open this section for this year.

The Toddlers Group is a regular activity where kids aged 1½ to 2½ years old stay without their parents. Due to the covid-19 situation, we were open only for 3 months starting from middle January to mid April. We had around 22 children.

In order to follow all the precautionary measures we made smaller groups of 5 kids every day and only twice a week for the same kids. As the situation was very new to us it was a tough time for the teachers and the kids as well.

The adaptation process this year was very difficult due to losing seven months due to Corona and the kids had become a little bigger than usual. Also they had adapted themselves to be with their own parents during these difficult times. We could not hold a summer program this year, which usually helps the adaptation process of the kids.

We had to be very careful in this situation and chose games in order that the kids kept physical distance from each other. These games mostly took place outside in the playground. We created a little garden outdoors. The kids would water the plants and enjoyed doing this. When going out for a little walk in the playground, the kids would collect small tile pieces out of their own interest. We created a new activity in the playground, where a net is placed and the kids would throw a ball into it and play.

Outcomes:

We opened only in the middle of January with a total number of 22 irregular kids due to the epidemic and the Government orders. The school remained closed until we came to a conclusion taking our own risks to keep the school open and trying to minimise the negative effects. We kept the school open from 8:40am to 11:40am. Later on we segregated the full batch of children into two groups called ‘Jasmine’ and ‘Rose’, which came to school on alternative days.

Most of the activities were conducted outdoors in order to provide the group with more space. And as we started the school year a bit late compared to the other years, it was more difficult for the kids to stay apart from their parents even if it was for a little while.

Compared to all the other years, this year’s experience was completely different. Even though it was a bit tough at the start, most of us were satisfied with the outcome. In the end we had
to shut down again due to the increasing corona cases. We are not prepared now to take any more risks.

Reflections:

This year was very special. We have never been in this situation before and this gave us enough time to do small things amongst the team of teachers.

The most challenging aspect was to face the Corona in front of us not knowing what we were dealing with.

The adaptation period this year was very different and as we had to explore new ways; we as teachers also experienced and learned new things. Some kids had a noticeable sense of insecurity in the new environment, because of the prolonged social isolation. As we had to allow only a limited number of people on campus, we separated our usual group into two, so kids were coming on alternative days and for a shorter period of time. Often we had less than the planned number of kids attending our program, due to signs of health uneasiness, and this reduced the chances for some of them to make friends and play freely. As a result, the adaptation period became longer and with set-backs. Normally in forming the relationship with each child we rely a lot on close physical contact, which this year was somewhat less spontaneous.

Conclusion:

As all teachers love what they are doing at the school it was a huge disappointment to miss school for the most of the year.

With the sudden challenges in the world, we too were pushed to grow in consciousness and there was a stronger drive for harmony, truthfulness and serving the Spirit of Auroville. We took the advice of an elderly Aurovilian, who in her youth had been asked by the Mother to take care of the youngest kids in the Ashram school, to create the right atmosphere by calling the Mother's presence and guidance. It is an ongoing process for us, but in these times it is becoming even more imperative.
The Kindergarten has existed since 1985 in Center Field for small children of Auroville. This year, the teachers tried during the lockdown to keep contact with the children and parents, proposing outings in Auroville and activities to do at home. Later we welcomed the children in small groups in the premises of the school.

Activities of the year:

This year we had 49 students in our four groups: 9 three-year-olds, 14 four-year-olds, 16 five-year-olds, and 10 six-year-olds.

From May to August, the teachers worked painting all structures of the 2 playgrounds, repairing material and preparing for opening of the school.

In August, the bigger children were offered crafts, activities and worksheets to do at home, and from September outings in Auroville every week. Two other groups followed, taking only half the children each time, as the groups were bigger.

In mid December, the bigger group came some days to school, and started working on projects and reading and writing. In January, they came every day and other programs were offered: Play of Painting, Write Dance, Awareness Through the Body (ATB), clay, Tamil class.

Other groups opened too, first 2 days a week and 1 day outing for each child, then every day.

The group of smaller children at first took some parents and children together twice a week, then kept the children alone, but only 5 at a time.

Outcomes:

A strong sense of companionship developed between the children within each group. As they were separated from their peers for months, they were happy to be together again.
Visiting farms, parks and communities in Auroville gave the children a better knowledge of Auroville, where they are living.

The children progressed at a very quick pace, eager to learn, absorbing the teacher’s words like sponges.

**Research highlights:**

During the months when the school was closed, the teachers started their bi-monthly meeting by reading and reflecting on Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s words on Education.

When we again received the children at school, we discovered that we need not push them to follow a schedule, the children grow and develop naturally very well by themselves. We should be more relaxed and open to follow the children, while proposing new things for them to discover and experiment.

**Reflections:**

The sharing between teachers about Education in the light of Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s words was a meaningful experience this year.

We had more contacts and good interactions with those parents who normally don’t dare or take time to stop at school.

Our challenges were to never know when the school would be able to open to the children, and to decide what to offer them to do at home when it was not possible to be with them. This taught us to be flexible.

We also couldn’t know exactly the children’s abilities before having them at school – if the parents did the homework for them or helped them to do it.

**Conclusion:**

We were happily surprised by the progress the children made without much attending Kindergarten.
The special goal this year was to deal with the challenges caused by the pandemic: to find ways to support the children who were confined at home and help parents deal with this unusual situation where home schooling had become a necessity, for which most were totally unprepared.

We have 4 groups at Nandanam: Jalam Group (age 2½ to 3½ years), Prithvi Group (age 3½ to 4½ years), Vayu Group (age 4½ to 5½ years), and Agni Group (age 5½ to 6½ years). This year we had 54 children in all. 22 teachers guided the parents with activities and material to be taken home and they supported their children at home.

Financial sustainability was also our goal during this period and we did our very best to make ends meet.

**Activities of the year:**

Nandanam Kindergarten had to close down suddenly in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and to this date it remains closed. This means that we have no substantial activity for the year to report.

However we felt that children needed to be supported and engaged during these difficult times and as teachers we felt called upon to rise up to the occasion and meet the challenges. We were clear that we didn’t want to go for an online platform as screen time for children so tender of age is not good.

Thus we waited for a few months during the full lockdown trying to get our own footing in these challenging and difficult times. Once official permission for small gatherings was given, following all the Covid-19 safety protocols, we decided to invite parents to the campus in staggered manner once a week, to collect education material plus art and craft activities that were prepared for the children. Thus once a week we had a brief individual meeting with parents to receive the activities done by the children, discuss how things were going at home and also to proposed new activities and lend other educational material.

Before inviting parents to school for weekly meetings, some teachers organized home visits following all the Covid-19 safety protocols. They took a little gift for each child consisting of a notebook, a pencil and an eraser. The intention was to connect with the children directly so that when activities were brought home by parents, children would know where they were coming from and who was sending them – they could put a face to a name. This way if school reopened one day re-integration would also be easier. It was also an occasion to know the family background of children and also discover their personalities. While a few children came boldly forward, others hid under a table or behind a door or clasped daddy’s long legs, partly curious partly shy. Whatever their response, all the children and the entire family was really happy to receive the visit and it immediately built a sense of trust and collaboration between all.

Once in a while we also organized to meet the children in open air community spaces, in small groups and following the safety protocols for Covid-19. It allowed us to directly connect with the children and know where they were in their journey.

The fact that school was closed gave us teachers more time in hand to study and widen our learning as educators, deepen our connections as a team and through reflections and sharing strengthen the alignment to our goal and vision.

Always following the safety protocols for Covid-19, when small gatherings were allowed, we
had a workshop of several days on Positive Discipline for Early Childhood Educators. We also had a workshop with several sessions on Exploring Paths of Music Education.

Outcomes:

Though we could not offer children regular classes and the rich school program, we saw that sending work home for children was very much appreciated by the parents and that children really had something to look forward to every week. It allowed children to stay connected with the school and have a basic educational program for their overall development in spite of the fact that school was closed.

54 children were supported by the teachers and 20 teachers learnt to adapt themselves to the ground realities of the pandemic and support the children differently.

Parents of 54 children received aid during this lock down, to keep the children engaged in a constructive manner.

Reflections:

While we were happy that we could offer something to the children in spite of the school being closed, we were acutely aware of its limits and challenges.

Auroville schools are child-centric and Free Progress is its core principle which calls for a flexible program for children. When children are in school we can adapt our program to their needs, both individually and as a group. When we send designed activities at home then the activities lose their flexibility.

As many things can only be done in the campus, since the whole set up is here, what we could offer as a home program was very limited. Moreover, parents, though with good intentions, tend to over-guide, direct and impose their vision and understanding of the activity on the children rather than allowing things to emerge from them. The craft material we offered home was not necessarily what the child could and wanted to work with at that moment and the parents don’t have material and psychological resources to handle that, whereas if they were doing the activities at school we can always adapt the activity to their needs and interest.

Closer collaboration with parents was an added learning for us. It made us more aware of the ground reality of different families and gave us the resilience to deal with them. Parents took responsibility for their children and dedicated a lot of time and energy for them. Collaborating with parents thus was very inspiring and next year we would definitely like to see how we can partner more with them in their children’s education.

Conclusion:

While we adapted ourselves to the situation, it really made us realize as never before the value of our work in school and the richness of the learning environment we normally offer. This, plus the various workshops that we did have brought the team even more strongly together with renewed energy and motivation.

We sincerely hope that we will be able to open school next year and that the Pandemic will be behind the shoulders for the whole world.
Lilaloka

by Anna, Jitta and Marianne

The vision of Lilaloka (‘the universe of Play’ in Sanskrit) is to be a Self-Learning and Resource Centre for the Child. Lilaloka offers various activities based on self-discovery and spontaneous self-learning through Play, which allow the child to reveal himself as an individual and amongst others, without competition or judgment.

Lilalolaka is open to all children, schooled or not, having difficulties or not, beyond all categorizations and allowing mixes of ages. The team of Lilaloka works in collaboration with schools and parents, considering each child as an evolving being.

In the field of children with special needs that are referred by some Auroville schools, Marianne collaborates with Marion of the Teachers’ Center.

For children with or without special needs from our community, their parents can contact Anna or Jitta directly.

Activities of the year:

Due to the coronavirus situation prevailing since 25th March 2020, Lilaloka and the 3 facilitators Anna, Jitta and Marianne had to adapt to the crisis and change the way we worked with the children. We decided to open Lilaloka as there was a real need to give a hand to the children without access to internet, children being isolated and parents overworked. We started at the beginning of September and soon we had around 55 children weekly. We all basically worked on one-to-one sessions according to Covid SOP’s.

Marianne:

I went from giving Shiatsu and play therapy to a more curriculum-focused approach covering basic reading and mathematics, in order to help children whose families' level in English was not enough to help them. This was done in communication with their teachers. I welcomed kids aged 6 to 10 years old, once or twice a week depending on the need, for 1h30 each session.

I started to teach reading to one kid in first grade. For the other first grade children I worked in accordance with their main teacher to reinforce the basis of reading and for some also on numbers, addition and subtraction. Work has been done in accordance with the school teachers and we had regular meetings to assess the children.

The one and half hours session was usually divided between work and puzzles, games with letters, working on short span attention through small exercises of meditation, and on kinaesthetic level by using juggling, to help them understand the power of breathing and focusing on the task at hand. I also did some mirroring exercises to develop attention in looking and hearing.

With the older kids, from age 9, I mainly helped them with their homework and with learning a basis for how to structure their tasks.

Anna:

This year we, as a team, felt Anna should work with fewer children. So she did a lot of the other work for Lilaloka: reports writing, running after funds etc. She continued individual work with the children especially in art. She also started sessions with parents and children.
Jitta:

I offered individual play sessions which aim to provide the opportunity for children to explore themselves, to be themselves, to find their joy that connects to a deeper layer inside, in the presence of an adult. To contribute to a balanced unfolding of children’s potentials by allowing them to face challenges and find their own way in dealing with them.

The sessions are centered around the child, meaning that he/she is the one who leads the play. There is an atmosphere created for the child to feel safe and accepted as he is, feel as comfortable and free as possible to do/express what he/she needs to. We are there to acknowledge and reflect to the child some of the facts and feelings he expresses so that he gets insight into his behavior, feels accepted and free to change or continue. Each way is according to the child and the moment. We do not direct the play or conversation. The only limitations set to make the child aware of his/her responsibility in relationship with the adult are no destruction of play material, room or furniture, and no violence towards the adult or him/herself.

I also continued to offer yoga and a space to share, for a small group of 5 young adults (18+). They did their yoga practice and shared about themselves as for this age it was a very difficult year; some were in their first year of university and all had to figure if and how/what to do in the school year 2021.

I also adapted to the present global situation by taking small groups of 5 children on walks through nature.

Outcomes:

The most important aspect of Lilaloka is to provide a safe place where children feel at ease to be themselves and respect the others for who they are.

All the 3 facilitators could observe that without being able to attend normal schooling, the lack of interacting in groups really affected the children. Due to children being cut off from socializing and most probably spending a lot of time doing things on their own, children would ask Jitta to join them and help build their world and play. Which she did. This developed a new way of individual play: “my imaginary world” (Jitta has written a separate report about that). It was one research that really developed during this year.

Reflections:

We managed increasingly to provide a space where the vision of Lilaloka could be manifested and to provide various activities based on self-discovery and spontaneous self-learning through Play.

However, what we would like to do and provide is not fully possible as long as we have insufficient funds. We got a donation from Foundation for World Education (FWE) which was used to make the Play of Painting / art space waterproof. As we had a small amount of money left we decided to use it to bring running water into the building and install a sink with tap so we finally could properly wash our hands in the building. We also got a donation from a private donor of 1,000 dollars.

Conclusion:

There is a need and demand to do workshops for parents and teachers especially in the field of the material and toys that Anna developed in the last 10 years.

There is a need and increasing demand for more individual play sessions and group sessions.

“Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.”
Transition School
by Mary and Transition team

Transition School is an elementary and middle school for Auroville. Our students range in age from 6-14. The aim underlying our work at Transition School is to seek to realize the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to promote human unity and to help the children develop integrally, so that they may realize their full potential. Our program initiates what will hopefully be a life-long process of individual development towards a balance of body, mind, and spirit. Here, children and adults from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds work and grow together in an atmosphere of protected freedom that manifests beauty and harmony. This diversity of cultures and national background in Auroville, and in Transition School, offers ample opportunity for all of us to develop an understanding that we are citizens of the world.

As we work and play with others from many different countries and cultural groups, we tend to develop a better understanding of people and differences. This is essential in our world and leads to appreciation of others. Within the Transition School community all relationships (between teachers and students, as well as within and in between the teacher and staff teams) are based on trust, mutual support and a deep aspiration for unending progress.

Our ultimate goal is to prepare our children and ourselves to live in a higher consciousness to manifest a truer and higher life on earth.

Activities and Outcomes of the year:

This year we had 159 students enrolled. At the end of March we were very surprised by the shutdown of the school – from one day to the next. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented education disruption. Schools all over the world were closed due to the spread of the virus. We missed that last month of school, and at that time we realized we would have to learn new skills to be able to guide the children. This school year we were faced with a new challenge, as were schools all over the world.

Throughout the summer, members of our team prepared for the likelihood that we would not be able to open the school; we met to work out ways to learn how to use internet facilities and programs that the children could access independently or with the help of their parents or someone else. There was variety in the approach as the children of different ages have different needs. Below are a few examples.

First Grade:

How do you introduce first graders to the concept of school online? How do you teach 6-year-olds to read over Zoom? I realized that I was in the hands of the class parents and tried to think of what would be easiest for them. I invited the parents to pick up books that introduce the alphabet and the numbers. My assistant and I then started to make videos, one for each letter of the alphabet and numbers between 1 and 20. We created a WhatsApp group where we posted the videos. Parents then took pictures of their child’s completed work and sent them back to us. After a while they started doing pages in the math book at home. The instructions from our side were a mix of homemade videos and already existing videos that I found on YouTube. All was sent via WhatsApp. To make the ‘school day’ more fun for them I started to post videos of storybooks being told, dance/movement games and crafts challenges.

After 1 month I decided that we needed to meet in order to start to teach reading. We found an empty house and met the children once a week in small groups of 4 or 5. This developed
into meetings twice a week and by October we started meeting in small groups 4 times a week. By now we had added subjects like music and Tamil. Eventually they were able to participate in ATB (Awareness Through the Body) and Arts and Crafts.

Reflections: With the online learning, children got varied support from home and as usual the children that were already doing well were the ones who got well stimulated by their parents. Some of these children thrived from the situation while others got even more behind than they would have been in a classroom learning setup. The gaps between the students increased. Some parents were very frustrated with the situation and complained about it.

The small groups were the saving grace for us. When we started to see them we were able to give full individual attention to every one of the students. Perhaps the session was only 60 minutes but it was 60 minutes of quality, something that I rarely have been able to give as a teacher.

After a month or so we started to identify some students in need of extra help. They were not getting help from home and our short sessions were not enough for them. I got in contact with the team at Lilaloka and they started seeing some of these children on a regular basis. The results were amazing and we had a good and regular contact between our teams regarding everything from homework to contact with parents.

When we increased the hours that we were meeting, we saw the need for the students to move their bodies. It just isn’t fair to ask a 6-year-old to sit down for 3 or 4 hours and you won’t get a very pretty result if you try it. We started to take our students for walks on the nature paths around the area, something they thoroughly enjoyed. Sometimes we stopped in a clearing to play. We also started to take them to the nearby skate park to play once a week.

Summary: Academically this year’s first graders are doing ok. I would say though that you can still see the gaps in their learning from starting up online, especially in math. But they all read and they all write. One way or another we managed to bring them to an acceptable level. We also managed to complete most of our curriculum. From this year I will like to bring the small group learning with me and apply it on our normal school day curriculum.

Second Grade:

In July, before school normally started this year, the 2nd grade teachers discussed ideas to move forward and support learning with the children. Books were copied and given to the parents. Some YouTube videos were created to review English – letters, sounds, sequencing and learning new material to work in the new books. Math was done by WhatsApp recordings.

Not all parents were able to fully support their children at home. The children watched the videos and worked on their 2nd grade books. After some time it became clear that online lessons and math recordings were very difficult to follow even with the help from the parents. Moreover some parents were unable to support their child when they faced a difficulty in learning.

Children needed help from us – the teachers – to support their learning. Since we were 3 teachers, the class was divided into 3 groups. Each teacher met the same group of children (5 or 6) off campus twice a week to help learn the new 2nd grade material in math, English and handwriting. Since the school had closed abruptly the previous March when children were in 1st grade, it became apparent that these children had forgotten some of the basics like letters and their sounds. Many had difficulties or blocks in basic addition and number sense. Each difficulty became an opportunity to simplify and make learning more playful. For instance, providing 2 dice to roll and add the total, games in English with onset and rhymes, reading to the children and providing time to read themselves were some of the strategies used. Slowly the children were learning again!

In January it was felt the children would benefit working with all 3 teachers. A schedule was created. Most of the time children were engaged in class activities. However, some of the time small group work continued in order to provide more individualized learning support and attention. At this point some noticeable changes in the children occurred. Meeting with classmates supported social
skills development. Most children began to display signs of emotional stability and comfort in the
class. Slowly and steadily overall academic performance improved.

Most of the ‘teaching’ this year was to ensure children received the essential support to
meet basic requirements in English and Math for 2nd grade. In addition, they delved into a project
“All About Plants” and planted a bountiful garden. They explored the school value of this year –
‘Acceptance’ – through art, reading, answering questions, having discussions and doing skits. They
had an acceptance/ kindness box where they shared acts of kindness they witnessed or did
themselves. They were beginning to realize that by putting attention on something (kindness/
acceptance), they began to notice and display more kindness.

At the end of the school year children were asked questions about their feelings since school
closure in March 2020 until April 2021. They were encouraged to be truthful to help us understand
their experience throughout this time. Here are some of their responses to each question:

March 2020 – School closed early in first grade:
  ● Many expressed that school had been fun and in closing early, all children felt sad
    and one was surprised.

July 2020 – Online school (YouTube videos for English, WhatsApp recordings for math):
  ● Happy (I could learn still. Helpful for me to learn; fun; I could learn at home; fun to
do with our teacher, watch YouTube videos; the teachers kept us busy.)
  ● Excited (YouTube videos.)
  ● Surprised (Everything was new.)
  ● Sad (I love school so much.)
  ● Mad (I had work again yet happy to watch videos.)

August 2020 – Meeting 1 teacher 2 times a week in small groups:
  ● Most felt happy (Because I read a lot; teacher was helping me; meeting teacher and
  friends; it was fun.)
  ● Scared (Do not know what will happen.)
  ● Shy (Teacher was new.)
  ● Mad (I didn’t like school anymore.)
  ● Sad (Could not see all my friends.)
  ● Excited (To meet a teacher.)
  ● Surprised (“Even gooder.”)

January 2021 – Meet all teachers and classmates:
  ● Most felt excited or happy (See all my friends; see all teachers; I really like school and
  wanted to meet all teachers; fun!)
  ● At first shy (Too many people. Then liked coming to school and not shy. At first
  scared but then was excited.)

End of April 2021 – School year over and school still closed:
  ● Sad (Couldn’t learn; I want to go to school; still closed; school year so short.)
  ● Disappointed (End of school; school closed; it is strange.)
  ● Confused (School closed suddenly.)
  ● Happy (Soon in 3rd grade)
  ● Worried (School closed.)

What would you change to help you learn more?
  ● Open school soon; start school earlier; learn more things; learn about humans; start
  the school fully; do some homeschooling; learn new words; use Khan Academy app.
In this difficult time we had to find ways to support children’s progress. Teaching online was clearly not productive for these young learners. Alternative solutions were tried and modified wherever necessary. We used games, manipulatives, small groups and one-on-one learning. We noticed that children learned more when off the screens and using their hands. Technology can add and complement teaching, but this year it became clear to us that face to face interaction, and the use of hands-on manipulatives – dice, abacus, etc. – are essential for children, as it brings out interest, motivation to learn, engagement and supports attention. As evidenced in their responses to the questionnaire, these children want more time and opportunities to learn.

Fifth Grade:

This past school year has been an unusual and challenging one for everyone involved: teachers, students and parents. We have all had to adapt to a new situation nobody was prepared for. And yet, however difficult it may have been at times, we all learned and experienced so much together.

Academically, though we managed to cover the basics, some of what was planned couldn’t be done. And of course, all outings and field trips, which the children always look forward to, were cancelled.

At the beginning of the year, we started classes online, first through WhatsApp and then through Zoom meetings and that had its own set of challenges. Some months later, as the situation improved, we started meeting the children in small groups and we were all so happy to be able to do that, as so much of the learning really happens when we are in a group, sharing and working together.

When asked about their experiences with online learning during the lockdown, most students agreed that the most difficult during lockdown was not being able to go out and be with their friends. “It was boring to be alone at home and not be able to spend time with our friends,” said a student. Some children didn’t have access to a device such as a computer or phone, so couldn’t participate in the Zoom classes. Others had bad internet connections: “It was very frustrating when the internet connection was bad, as we kept getting disconnected from the zoom class,” shared another.

Also as many parents were out working, some students couldn’t ask them for help with their work when they needed it. One student also shared that: “Because of the stress of the lockdown, everyone got angry more easily.” Though there were many challenges with online learning, some children enjoyed it. “We could stay in our pajamas, have snacks during classes, it was more relaxed,” said one. And another, who often brought her cat to greet us: “And we could show our pets to our friends and teachers!”

Everyone was really happy when we finally started to meet in small groups. “We could finally see our friends again, and meet our new teachers,” shared a student enthusiastically. “And it was so nice when we started having some ATB, Arts and Crafts and Music!” “It felt more like real school again!”

Some of the things the children really missed this year were field trips and outings, but also our annual school dress-up party, a special event everyone loves, which we obviously have not been able to have for the past two years.

Seventh and Eighth Grades:

The Middle School classes worked online with their teachers. We used a combination of Zoom, WhatsApp and e-mail for correspondence; this was new to all of us. We intended to keep the program as regular and inclusive as possible; these are the final years for these children who need and deserve to be ready for the next step in their education. Although ATB was not possible early in the year, Joan prepared concentration exercises which we listened to and worked together on. We used many visual lessons online, in many areas of study, such as science, history and even grammar.
Most of the students, with the help of their parents, set up their own afternoon physical education and arts and music programs. We met 5 days a week and tried to help the students, but there were difficulties. Some of us had technological problems off and on and some of the students were not able to relate to the online atmosphere.

Grade 7 students began an exploration of English Literature. We started the year by reading short biographies from a book called “Heroes”. Through this project they met many heroes from all around the world — people who have made noble or brave contributions to their society or in some cases to the world. They also practiced writing summaries and paragraphs which reflected their understanding and their feelings. The students then chose a hero to learn about; they read and did research, then wrote their first essay. They enjoyed this and went on to read other works of literature. They were also introduced to a Science program that was a balanced program of environmental science, biology, chemistry and basic physics concepts. We will continue this program and go deeper next year. We made ample use of short lessons on YouTube and other science sites online. This was helpful for the students. These are just two examples of ways that we were able to make the best of online learning.

Two exciting Auroville experiences from Grade 8:

- John Harper joined the Transition team in October 2020 to teach science to the 8th grade. John is a Matrimandir executive and has worked there for many years, and he could give the children in-depth insights into the work at Matrimandir. This was incorporated into the science programme. The eighth grade visited the Matrimandir test pond to listen to a talk on the geology of the area. This comprehensive interactive talk by Giulio was for interested adults and children. The students learnt that the hole we were standing in is Cuddalore sandstone which is 1.8 to 23 million years old. Below that is Manaveli clay, which can be seen on the surface at the Auroville Visitors’ Centre. It was fascinating to consider that the place we were standing in was once full of rivers, which is evident from the quartz pebbles that can be found there. The students learnt about the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, and that the red earth we see around us is due to the rusted iron content in the soil.

- In the last term, as part of a physics project on light, the class visited the petals of the Matrimandir. Everyone had the opportunity to choose a quality and spend some time alone in the petal focusing on that quality – goodness, courage, gratitude, humility, and more. It was fascinating to see the thought that had gone into matching these different qualities with the colours – to find the exact hue that expressed that quality. Thulasi demonstrated how the colours of the petals are achieved through light, and she showed us how different coloured filters are combined to achieve the desired colour. The students had the chance to explore the colour/light combinations themselves.

Comments from Middle School students regarding the school year:

1. Which are the most useful activities?
   - I think the most useful thing I’ve learnt this year is being able to work online.
   - It was pretty hard in the beginning but then it got easier, and by the end of it, I got the hang of it.
   - Learning to work a little bit independently.
   - I liked the choice of subjects.
   - The math lessons were very necessary, and ATB is very important for me as it helps me emotionally.
   - Homework that we got from our online classes felt most useful to keep up with my growth. It made sure I was thinking about the subject even after class was over.
   - Reminders on WhatsApp were helpful.
2. What was useful to keep up your learning and growth?
   - The way we kept consistently working all through helped me make sure I didn’t lose too much.
   - It was really useful for me to finish the work when I got it instead of procrastinating.
   - Studying, and my mum helping and pushing me to work. I couldn’t have done it without her!
   - The teachers were always there — we knew they would be there.

3. What were the most frustrating moments? How did you address that?
   - I have a hard time understanding things on my own. I learnt how to work better on my own, but also that I am the kind of person who needs a proper, spoken explanation.
   - To be home all the time. And honestly, being home wasn’t the right environment. It made me less interested in learning, although I tried my best to keep motivating myself. And in the end, I just got used to it.
   - The most frustrating experience was when my device’s mic was not working well and I wasn’t able to speak normally in class. The teacher later helped me find a pair of appropriate headphones. I learnt that people are willing to help in times of need.
   - I had a lot of trouble with my internet connection — sometimes it just wouldn’t connect!

4. Further thoughts:
   - When I look back, I think I should have made a schedule for myself from the beginning and followed it.
   - I’m glad that my schooling didn’t stop entirely because it kept me occupied and happy. I learnt that I don’t need people as much as I thought. And I saw exactly how hard the schoolteachers would work for my education.
   - I learnt that I should enjoy things while they’re here and not take things for granted.
   - I think I’ve learnt how much I depend on school and how much a part of my life it is.
   - I was really lazy in the beginning — for a long time and I didn’t do anything. My teacher kept trying to help me but I still didn’t do anything. Finally I am happy to be participating again and thankful.
   - I feel like I lost a big chunk of my life during the pandemic. I am grateful for online school since not only did I learn but it also supports me mentally by giving me something to do and interaction with my classmates and teachers.
   - I learnt that I can be alone and be mentally healthy for long periods of time and that the school and teachers make the effort to have classes be as enjoyable as they can and push to make them happen.
   - The benefits of learning online are: being in your own environment as opposed to school, being able to do things at your own pace, and not having someone look over you.
   - Well, I remember that my work level kept dipping from high to low. I feel I ended on a high note. The school was very helpful and very quick to go online, so we didn’t have too many weeks without school.

5. What did you miss about school when you were at home?
   - I missed learning with other people and being more free with the classes, meaning to explore other topics that come up in class which we couldn’t do with online school because our time limit was much more strict.
   - I missed the socializing and seeing everyone.
6. How did you feel when you heard the school would close?

- At first, when school closed, I was pretty happy. I thought I would have a two-week break and then school would start again and it would all go back to normal. By the end of August/beginning of September, I was praying that schools would be able to go back soon, but that didn’t happen.
- I thought — Oh great this will be a good holiday!! Now I just hope that school can open in the next school year.

Music education, online (by Matthew):

Teaching a creative subject such as music over the internet to 20 children might be considered an impossible task. Already a challenge to work with large groups of students in person, how would it be possible over a large distance?

Despite the difficulties of the last year, and the irregular situation that the pandemic forced upon us, fortunately the groundwork for such work was already laid years before. Modern ways of communicating such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and others had been around for a long time, and such classes were actually already happening. India especially, is a large country so it was commonplace to use modern technology in order to save people time and money to learn an instrument or music in general. Music these days is truly global, so learning Carnatic music in America or Jazz in South India has been quite feasible for a while.

Having said that, teaching an individual class is one thing, but a full group of children, all with different technical skills, requirements and on-line connections, was not something that had been done with any regularity. The one-to-one class over Skype needed to be rethought. Realising this was the first step. Real time classes with many students would not work, so how else could music then be taught? Could modern technology still be used, but in a different way?

The answer was to be creative. Classes and projects had to offer students manageable work that they could do, mainly on their own, but with the help of technology such as cellphones and laptops. Almost anyone can record a voice message – the first step to singing and sharing a song. Most people knew how to make and send a video, another way of sharing a project with other people. Teachers would send their own videos, voice messages and PDF’s for children to work on, to be returned later by email or WhatsApp. With the creation of text groups, so that messages could easily reach everyone instantly, everyone could get involved, at least in some way.

Of course, things did not always go according to plan. The downside was lack of immediate help for the student. When things were difficult, without a teacher in front to ask, the quickest solution was to avoid doing the work. Furthermore, the teacher would have to be able to respond quickly and efficiently to approximately 15-20 students per class. Over a total of eight grades, that becomes a task that was difficult to manage. Follow-up from both the sides of the teacher and the student was a major challenge. It required a new level of self-discipline from both sides.

Furthermore, the younger the students were, the more help that they needed. It quickly became apparent that below a certain age, learning music online was completely impractical, and waiting until a time that teachers could safely meet with the students was a better idea.

Overall, considering the difficulties we were under, both teachers and students managed very well. Some students were very resourceful and undertook extremely creative projects using mobile applications and various recording devices. For those who were more shy in class, this even gave them an opportunity to do things that they may not have done in person. For others, it was extremely difficult. Some found it tough to motivate themselves to do the work when life was challenging elsewhere. School is such a structured environment and offers a great deal of support in many ways. Many children missed having the immediate guidance and channeling that a schedule and physical presence gave them.
Awareness Through the Body (ATB):

In the midst of the most atypical school year possible I noticed that the ATB sessions brought a sense of ease, connectedness and grounding to the children. We were very fortunate that in the beginning of October, Yoga centers were allowed to open with all due SOPs, and we were able to work with the children. ATB sessions provided children a space where to take a break from life and reconnect to a more intimate sense of themselves, others and nature (the living world). The children could have a space to move away from the constant pull of the media, the social situation, the busy world around them, and get back to their own sensations as they sense and perceive them from inside in their unique individual way. To that end, the work we did with an activity we call ‘Sticks’ was particularly useful as well as the sensory explorations with the elements Earth and Air.

Sticks is a group exercise that consists in coordinating a whole group into rhythmically throwing and catching bamboo sticks that pass sideways from person to person along a circle. This exercise, while ensuring social distancing, provided children the body-felt sense of being part of the group, and the possibility to practice being an active member of a group in a positive, responsive way. The exercise also gave children the opportunity for developing soft, sustained, selective attention and the capacity to be present – being part of a group from a deeper sense of one’s own unique presence.

We used outdoors and indoors explorations with elements Earth and Air. These explorations consisted of a series of interlinked sessions that build upon each other, helping children to progressively deepen into themselves. One of the main highlights of those explorations was that in different ways both elements offered the opportunity for children to deeply release inner tensions, inner shrinkings or anything that did not feel right inside of them, and find a way to let their being ease into harmonization and wellbeing.

Here follow some transcriptions from the written feedback paper that 7th and 8th graders wrote after an outdoor exploration on Air element:

● “The air made me feel open, light, free. I realized that air is more than just the thing we breathe. Air is life, it helps us live. It is a strong thing but is soft and beautiful. It made me feel calm as well, like I had no worries, I could just stay calm. It also made me feel inside my body. Not just outside but inside as well, it made me feel and realize both, mentally and emotionally.”

● “Time passed by so quickly. It was different; I don’t know how to say it. It felt there was a quiet girl inside me. My mind was quiet and didn’t think of anything and nothing was running in my mind.”

● “My skin felt very sensitive and I felt like waves of air flowing around me constantly. My attention was stolen away by places I wanted to go and people whispering now and then. When I stared at the clouds the sensations I felt was emptiness as if I was softly floating in the air, but I myself was hardly there. My head felt hollow and my body felt like it could drift apart at any moment.”

Conclusion:

During the later part of the year, teachers met regularly to discuss the situation with schooling. We shared our experiences and discussed ways to move forward. It was clear that although generally children were progressing, they needed more personal interaction and care. By January, we came to the conclusion that it was essential to meet the children from time to time even though school was closed, as many of the children were isolated and were having difficulties. So the teachers met with small groups of students to have personal contact and to help them. This made a big difference for both students and teachers. Some of the students had never met their teachers ‘in person’ – and this was wonderful for them. The children and the teachers felt that education with others, in person was much more productive and enjoyable.
“Auroville, Our Home”
a project of Transition School
by Mary and Transition Team members

“Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity.”

~ The Mother

This quote expresses an underlying theme in the development of the program of study for Transition School students, “Auroville, Our Home”. The activities and the research that we do with the children are tools to help us understand our unique town, Auroville.

This is the third year that the members of the Transition Team have worked together to develop and expand a project-based program to help our children learn more about Auroville: the unique vision that it is based on, the history and the present day opportunities and realities in Auroville. Learning about Auroville is important for the children because it helps them to become aware of the philosophy, goals and values of Auroville. It will help them to become more active, involved members of the Auroville community. Additionally, they will become more aware about what it is that makes Auroville a ‘special’ place, different from other places and also it is important for children everywhere to understand their hometown — know about where they live.

Outings to visit workplaces and areas in Auroville and opportunities to meet the Aurovilians have been favorite activities. This year the opportunities to go places and meet people were very limited because of the Covid 19 virus and the restrictions that it put on all.

Teachers and children of all groups worked more on activities that involved research on topics of interest to the children. This was followed by discussion and other forms of expression such as poetry, artwork and writing.

Description of project:

We are continuing to work towards a project-based program in which the students and the teachers are able to add onto what we have learned and experienced through active inquiry and research. As this is the third year that many of these children have spent some time on “Auroville, Our Home”, they had background knowledge from the earlier years. The major areas of study in this project are: the Vision and the History of Auroville, the present organization of Auroville, and the People – the Aurovilians and their work, their activities and their dreams.

The younger children (grades 1-5) started the time with open discussions about what they remembered and what they would like to know more about. They enthusiastically remembered a lot. The teachers and the children spoke about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s Dream of Auroville. In order to help these young children understand this vision, many of the teachers read the book “Tell me, my friend, what is this Auroville?” This is
a book written for children by an Aurovilian and aims to help the young children better understand Auroville.

The children were asked to reflect and think about what Auroville meant for them and they wrote beautiful texts, which they illustrated with colorful drawings and put up in our classroom. They expressed these using different types of writing, ranging from simple sentences to more complex paragraph writing. The children illustrated many of their ideas and their dreams for Auroville. One major project by the grade 4 class was that they made a big poster of the Master Plan with many details. It was encouraging to see their enthusiasm. The children also visited the Matrimandir in small groups. This was a great highlight in the project!

The Middle School children looked at the beginning of a timeline that an earlier class had started. They added many new dates to this timeline. In the seventh-grade class the children looked at the Auroville timeline and were interested in the many events that were on the timeline. This led to lively discussion and generated a lot of interest, enthusiasm and many questions. We decided to try to add events to the timeline and were quite successful. We will keep adding events present and past to this timeline.

With this age group it is interesting to define and talk about what is meant by the vision of Auroville. They read “A Dream”, The Charter of Auroville, and “To Be a True Aurovilian” and were asked to try to interpret the meaning of each one. It led to an interesting conversation and some debate.

Poetry was also a great favorite for the students. We ended our work together with a poetry writing session with Auroville as the theme. In reading these poems written by young adolescents you will see a deep understanding and love for Auroville.

“Auroville”
by Ishana

A flower that is Auroville
A small little bud that has blossomed into a town of creativity and growth
fostering generations of people, giving them homes where they can run around barefoot, climb trees and soak in the sun.

Every day you are growing into being a beautiful flower where butterflies and bees can come and collect pollen.

Soon there will be a meadow of light, beauty, and creativity.

Outcomes:

Although our activities were limited, the project stayed alive, and the children continued their exploration of Auroville. We do hope to be able to continue our physical exploration next year. It is a great learning experience to meet our fellow Aurovilians in the workplace or at home and additionally to learn from all of the innovative and exciting work that is happening in Auroville.

Reflections and conclusion:

This is a very rewarding project for all: the teachers, the students and the Aurovilians we all interacted with. The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and Auroville’s aspiration for Human Unity became much more tangible for the children of all ages. Here we have outlined just some of the activities and projects that happened this year. We now plan to make a program in which “Auroville, Our Home”, is an underlying theme in a field of study for the children of Transition School.
Deapanam School

by all class teachers (Falguni, Deepa, Anu, Shaalini, Priti, Mahavir)

Inspired by the Integral education of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Deapanam School aims to offer the children an atmosphere of freedom and creativity which supports the natural development of children and imparts the joy of learning with independence and responsibility. Our ultimate objective is to help identify in each child their full potential and bring out their best. Each child is given a chance to develop at his/her own pace and children are divided into mixed age groups.

Deapanam is one of the 3 primary/middle schools of Auroville. As a small community school it aims to provide a balanced program of academic study, arts, play and exploration to children aged from 7 to 14 years. The subjects taught include English, Maths, Science, History, Awareness Through the Body (ATB), Craft, Painting and Clay. The students work on different projects during the year allowing them to explore various areas and go on field trips within Auroville and beyond.

Additionally, this year, the school aimed to include longer Math and Language sessions (1.5 hours) for the older group and to build in some free hours to aid the creative process.

Activities of the year:

We had a total of 54 students this year, in 4 groups: Light (7 & 8 year olds), Peace (9 & 10 year olds), Grace (11 & 12 year olds) and Faith (13 & 14 year olds). A teaching team of approximately 14 full time and 5 part time paid staff worked in Deapanam this year. A further handful of adults from across the community come to offer certain activities with the children. Specifically, according to the four class groups, the highlights of the year were as follows:

Light group (7 & 8 year olds):

This year, we had a group of 13 kids coming from different nationalities and all were first graders in the mixed age group classroom. Due to the Covid situation, we scheduled outdoor classes for small groups of kids to come only on specific days of the week. The facilitators offered experiential learning in the gardens by using pebbles and dry leaves to count and create beauty with mandalas.

We did a project on the Sun and the Moon to connect to our class name – ‘Light’ group. As part of the project, the children were introduced to Indian classical music and learnt a song about the Sun in Sanskrit. Since they were spending more time at home, we requested the parents to also chip in and help gather some interesting facts about the Sun and the Moon to share with the class. The topic was also explored with hands as the children created clay models of the Sun and the Moon.

In Craft, the children created a mobile out of recycled materials and coconut shells and a table mat. While doing this meticulous work, they developed concentration and fine motor skills.

For Painting, we chose poster color on wet paper as the medium and the children enjoyed the freedom of mixing various colors on paper. Gradually we introduced leaf printing with different color combinations.

For Clay, the students were given an introduction to a few basic techniques of working with clay such as pinch pots and coiling. For many of the students this was their first time working with clay. The classes were a balance between building their motor skills over the year and giving them the space to explore the material on their own intuitively. We also worked on specific themes such as recognising shapes (circle, square triangle, rectangle) and creating animals from simple forms.
Peace group (9 & 10 year olds):

This year presented a unique situation and we could not meet for long hours due to the pandemic. However, we managed to have some outdoor classes as and when the situation was safe enough for the children of the community to meet and learn together. At the end of the school year, the children were asked to reflect on what they missed out on and what they gained due to this special circumstance. Here is what they had to say...

What they missed due to the Covid situation:
Eating lunch together, staying for longer hours in school, the whole-school assembly and concentration on Friday mornings that brought about calmness, swimming in La Piscine on Fridays, birthday cakes baked end of each month in school, Secret Santa and Cultural programs, Open House and sleep overs in school, field trips and travelling by the school bus.

New skills and hobbies they picked up in their free time:
Playing instruments like piano and violin, cooking and baking, surfing, sewing, healing animals, building with Lego, learning new indoor games, cycling, reading, badminton, table tennis and basketball.

We managed to do less than what we usually do in a regular school year due to the shorter hours of interaction. When we could meet it was important for us to support Social/Emotional Learning and allowed time and space for the children to share their feelings, engage in art, clay and painting that support self expression. The parents played an important role in supporting the learning process as the children spent more time at home.

We did a project on the History of Tamil Nadu. After exploring the history of Auroville last year, we continued exploring the history of Tamil Nadu and learnt about the culture, symbols, local flora and fauna. The children created a booklet and were introduced to the basics of geography through coloring of the state map and marking the location of districts in and around Auroville.

In Science, this school year we studied the kingdom of plants. We looked into what is common in all of them and what they need to be alive. We studied in detail the different parts of the plants and the processes that take place in each of them: seeds (germination), fruit (seeds containers and seed dispersal), flowers (reproduction), leaves (photosynthesis), stem (transport system). We also looked at the whole life cycle of the angiosperms, the importance and interconnectedness of plants with the rest of the biosphere and their uniqueness and diversity. Finally, we studied plant and animal cells and made personalized models using different materials.

Clay classes with Peace group students this year were focused on teaching them new techniques in addition to what they had learnt in previous years. This included slab work, a study of textures and surface, and building in clay on a larger scale. We also worked on improving their skills in clay attachments, avoiding cracks and finishing a piece with finesse. The classes alternated between giving them a topic or demonstrating a technique to work on and classes where they were given the freedom to create and express intuitively their own ideas.

In Craft this year, the children worked with looms and mastered their weaving skills. They created pouches and bags. Weaving helped them build more concentration and patience. Using recycled materials, coconut shells and feathers, the children made a model of a bird. In addition, using pressed natural flowers, they made beautiful table mats for their home.

For Painting, we chose poster colors on wet paper. Children enjoyed their hand movements while mixing colors on paper and we gradually introduced themes like rain, forest, sea, sunset etc. They were fully concentrated while painting and they also enjoyed leaf printing, pattern/form drawing and splashing colors.
Dakshayani, a Savi volunteer conducted weekly music lessons during the last term of the year. The joy of learning a classical art-form from a passionate teacher and singing together as a group is an experience that the children will cherish for a long time. They were led effortlessly into the theory and practice of listening to the rhythm and beats and then the lyrics. The children also learnt to play the Tanpura, to listen and tune into the pitch and also explored how the harmonium works with the help of a professional. The curiosity and enthusiasm of the children to explore the musical instruments was heartening and motivating for the adults holding space.

We were able to continue with our normal field trips to the Matrimandir on Tuesdays, and visited the Botanical Gardens.

Grace group (11 & 12 year olds):

The school year started with an unclear situation about what to do as a school. When we started the school in July 2020, we were not meeting the students in person due to the pandemic, we used Google Classroom for subjects like English, Math, Science, History and Geography. But it was challenging to do online classes and include languages like French and Tamil. Google Classroom was the main platform for giving them assignments, announcements, sharing of online educational videos and materials as well as interactive notebooks. We used Flipgrid for sharing videos made by the students.

It was difficult to connect with kids through online classrooms. After a few weeks, we started meeting kids in small groups in an open space.

For English we mainly focused on grammar, comprehension and creative writing, with essays on different subjects, poems and word games which developed their vocabulary. To conclude all their creative writing, we created individual poem books for each kid for this year. The children were amazed to see their poems and most wrote in their reflection sheet that they improved a lot in writing.

For History and Geography we used online platforms as well as weekly pick-up of class materials (handouts, worksheets and items for projects). They had a weekly one hour Zoom class with a mixture of lecture material, discussion and experiments (for example making a compass). We started the year with a class theme of Oceans. As part of this, we covered a review of world geography looking at maps and then looked at the history of ocean exploration from the early Polynesians to the European age of explorations.

We then moved on to study Ancient Greece. Whilst also learning about the Ancient Greek civilisation and their accomplishments and way of life, we studied The Odyssey by Homer. Each week, the reading of a chapter of The Odyssey was recorded by the teacher and she uploaded the pictures from the chapter as well so that each student could listen in their own time, make a summary of the chapter and then participate in the discussion in Zoom class. The culmination of our study of The Odyssey was a play on Zoom, “The Cyclops in the Cave”. This project was not without its challenges: unreliable internet, timing of lines, costumes and props all had to be coordinated online. After much hard work by the children, we produced a recording of a 13 minute online play that they could be proud of and share with their friends and families.

For Science, at the beginning we used Google Classroom, and through different educational videos and assignments, looked into the Scientific Method and the scientific way of thinking. But the teacher never felt very connected to the kids in that way. We all felt better after meeting in person...
outdoors where we could experiment and think together. We started to do experiments with eggs, so we could explore science through a very familiar object. We experimented with density, pressure, acid and base, osmosis and diffusion. We studied the parts of an egg and its composition and that brought us to study the proteins and amino acids.

After, we continued with other biomolecules; carbohydrates, lipids and nucleic acids, and that made us ready to start talking about LIFE, what is it, the conditions on Earth for it and how scientists think life started in the early Earth. We studied the first forms of life and how life was interacting and changing the environment.

Later, we looked into the different kinds of cells and the cell evolution, we studied in more detail the Eukaryotic cells. Then, we were ready to understand what is a virus, its replication cycle and what are the immune systems and vaccines.

In Painting, we began with an exploration of different media and painting and drawing techniques. We gradually switched to the structure drawing method, which is ideal for observation drawing as well as imaginative drawing. All the exercises given aimed to improve understanding of the form and drawing skills and to develop students’ painting and drawing skills. We tried a variety of approaches for drawing landscape, still nature and the human form in order to expand skills in observational and expression techniques, and understanding of pictorial compositions as a part of visual communication.

The children greatly enjoyed a creative way of using traditional tools and media to depict different subject matter and backgrounds. They were also challenged to design and execute a specific topic or area of content of their own choice.

In Clay this year, we focused on bringing forward a personal aesthetic and expression of the student. The students were encouraged to create works based on personal themes and ideas combining all the techniques they had learnt over the past two years such as pinching, coiling and slab work. The work made by the students included a wide range of functional work such as bowls, mugs, a phone music booster, as well as sculptural work of figure heads, houses, and abstract forms. Over the year the students faced challenges with bringing their concept into actual 3-d forms in clay, however with guidance from the teacher, they were able to find confidence in their skills and overcome their failures through persistence.

Craft was mainly focused on weaving bags, pouches and an Origami modular Sonobe unit that was displayed at PTDC. The children also created flowers like Lily, Tulip and Rose and had fun with Spinners too. After a few weeks, the children created another unit with Peace Cranes for display at PTDC. Generally there was a good atmosphere in the classroom of concentration, engagement, interest and collaboration.

At the end of the school year, we asked the students to reflect on how the year was and this is how they felt:

- We wish we had full day school like we used to have.
- I missed school, play time with my friends and lunch at school.
- This year I felt I didn’t learn much because of less time at school.
- We didn’t enjoy online classes at all. There was not much interaction like how we do in the classroom and not much connection felt with teachers and classmates.

Faith group (13 & 14 year olds):

The lockdown and the Pandemic crisis continued throughout the school year. The students initially struggled to adjust to online learning due to lack of devices and internet access. For online learning, however, Google Classroom proved to be a good tool. For connecting and learning together, we later also used mobile video recording and zoom meetings once a week.
Even in the face of the pandemic crisis, it was an opportunity for students to develop their own interests given that they had more time to themselves. This quote from Haruki Murakami describes the opportunity in crisis very well: “When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.”

A highlight of the year was our “Kaleidoscope” magazine, the key project for the past two years for the Faith group students to express their creativity and hone their writing skills. Despite the lockdown, it was possible to publish the monthly magazine by working together online through collaboration on Google Slides. They learned to edit, work with deadlines, interview people in the Auroville community and work towards a common goal.

For Science, the students were given an assignment to do an experiment at home and record their explanation on a mobile device. They then uploaded it on flipgrid.com for all to view and learn.

Our experience with Math class was that due to lack of internet and devices, the students had difficulty joining Zoom sessions regularly. Hence, classes were held once a week and effort was made to make it fun and engaging. Using Google Jamboard to teach online was a good experience.

In English class, the children were given space to think, express, dream and debate, apart from learning language and literature. A lot of focus was on creative writing. The students participated in NaNoWriMo (“National Novel Writing Month”), where they wrote a novel online. They were familiarised with various forms of poetry and works of famous poets. At the end of the school year, the students recited the poems written by them one evening for a small group consisting of parents and teachers. This year, a lot of energy also went into the publishing of “Kaleidoscope” magazine as we struggled with a small number and lack of a good internet facility.

Students visited Newland forest and Raveena forest and did their research on flora and fauna of the space.

One of the students reflected about her time in Faith group:

“Being in Faith is way harder and challenging than it looks like. But it’s fun at the same time. Faith group, to me, is being responsible for doing things I have never done before. The most challenging thing was the Kaleidoscope and NaNoWriMo novel. Kaleidoscope is hard to manage since we publish it every month and there are deadlines.”

Overall, it was a very difficult year for teachers as well as students due to the pandemic. Looking at it positively, the students made an effort to adapt to online learning and pursue other hobbies and learn on their own, like board games, cooking and gardening.
The Learning Community (TLC)

by Tamar and TLC facilitators

TLC is an intentional learning community for families who reside and work in Auroville. TLC aims at implementing a living and growing research into Integral Education as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. TLC is constantly evolving, and each passing year points us in the direction of deepening for the coming year. Sri Aurobindo’s three principles guide us in this process, and the children show us the way.

This year has been a special year like none before, due to the extraordinary circumstances presented to us through the global Covid situation. Despite lockdowns and strict protocols, we found ways to continue working with the children, which adhered to changing and challenging government guidelines. We made much use of our homes in order to work with small groups of children through various activities, which enabled the children to continue their learning journeys and remain in touch with their peers and adult facilitators.

Activities of the year:

This year we worked with 17 children ranging from the age of 5-12 years and their parents.

Evergreen Explorations:

Several of TLC’s children met twice a week in Evergreen community for a morning of free exploration. Activities emerged naturally, following their interest and flow. The children participated in a ‘survival in nature’ project and after learning about how to light a fire, they began exploring the forest in Evergreen. They discovered a plot of land ready for the planting of new trees and a large trench where the children have been experimenting with their physical capacities, climbing down and up the earth slopes, and jumping across the trench. Children learned to help each other and directly follow the rules of nature, both in free interaction and with the elements of the environment around them.

Evergreen offers the opportunity for the children to self-direct and flow with their individual rhythms and interests. The older learners explored creative writing, research, Tamil and other activities which emerged spontaneously. Origami and knitting held the attention of some, while others were drawn to individual research projects and art.

“A Literary Cup of Tea” magazine:

One of the early outcomes of this special lockdown year was that the older children arrived at the idea of creating a magazine, through which each one could write and learn about topics of their interest. These topics included story writing, jokes, research and journalistic writing, sharing a book or movie review and others. The small group met once weekly to progress together. They did fundraising to pay for the printing of the magazine, interviewed people, went out into the bioregion to get inspiration for their writing. They learnt layout and foundational knowledge for printing. Group processes and the dynamics of growing a new project offered many learning opportunities in various fields. The biggest value of this project was that it was completely child-led, child-motivated, child-driven, and executed by the children. They have produced three issues of their magazine during the past year, which they call the LCT – a Literary Cup of Tea.
Creative Movement:

Creatively designed movement activities use the physical to access other parts of the being: emotional, mental, intellectual, psychological, social etc. Through simple body movements, participants learn to explore the self and interaction with others. Creative Movement enhances skills needed by the children and encourages deeper awareness.

When the lockdown eased in January, we held these sessions once a week in two small groups. We could move freely during the sessions, in the building & under the trees, so we could run around freely, make noise without disturbing others, be with the natural space around us and use what it provided, for e.g. sticks, stones, leaves, flowers, rocks, soil, for our activities.

Areas of focus were emotional expression, group dynamics, helping each other, attention spans, and learning to draw from inner reserves of self awareness. For example, a small group stands in a circle, each child balancing a leaf on his/her shoulder, while passing a stone around with their feet. (See also project report on Creative Movement.)

Physical Activities:

With the pandemic situation it was challenging for kids not to be able to do any of the team sports that they enjoy. We came up with some enjoyable solutions to the situation. A cycling group was organised once a week. A few parents led small groups of children on different routes around the Auroville cycling paths. The younger kids did shorter routes for half an hour; the older kids did longer, more challenging routes for an hour or more.

When the pandemic situation became better, pools were still not open for children, but we had had a good monsoon and some large ponds in Auroville filled up. So we went together in small groups to swim in the Aurodam pond once a week.

Seeds of Nature:

The “Seeds of Nature” project continues to involve children in the garden and in the preparation of meals in TLC. The intent is to get closer and closer to our Mother Earth, to learn from her and to eat local and seasonal foods. This year the children worked in small groups and have started their own personal gardens, which encourages them to explore the cycles of nature and care for the environment. They are very proud of these little personal gardens especially when the garden gives fruit and vegetables ready to taste.

In Natural Science activities children learned about different types of plants, when is the optimal time to grow them, which plants grow in Auroville and the different seasons we have in this country. They observed flowers, leaves, roots, seeds, insects and finally we went to visit Savitri Nursery to see and learn how to create our own nursery for next year’s seedlings.

Future Amazing TLC:

This project began with the children imagining the future of TLC’s campus (‘Basecamp’). The project emerged from a longing to return to the campus which had been closed due to lockdown regulations. The children began dreaming about what they would like to do and change on the campus once they were allowed to return.

Following are some of the ideas that emerged:

1. Library (to have a quiet space to read)
2. Art Space
3. A history wall of TLC
4. The restaurant (to open a restaurant and learn varied recipes, work with local, seasonal ingredients and welcome people to TLC)
5. Language lab (to learn many different languages)
6. Computer lab (as a base for the work on the “Literary Cup of Tea”)
7. Playground in the forest
8. Kindergarten for small kids

Children have been working on these ideas in small groups for the past few months, each group working on a different area of interest: planning, budgeting, designing, dreaming….

**Humanscapes math:**

On Wednesday mornings a group of the younger children met in Humanscapes hall for a morning dedicated to mathematical exploration, singing and games.

The morning usually started by singing a song that the children chose in their mother tongue. It was a beautiful way to expose the children to different languages and music, each of them brought a song and experienced being the leader for that activity.

One child took up the task to organise some mathematical games. He prepared the game at home and then proposed it to the group. We had a lot of fun and it has been a good entry point to connect the children to new mathematical concepts. Each child explored and learned different mathematical concepts according to his/her own pace and time, mainly with the help of Montessori materials.

The mornings would usually end with a collective game.

**Outcomes:**

The children and adults benefited from this lockdown period in many ways. It gave time and opportunity to think out of the box, be creative, and for each one to take even more charge of their learning journey. We moved out into the community in small groups, which gave freshness, and also different days in different places offered a variation and sense of community.

Our children were easily able to adapt and take initiative, as our pedagogy builds on self-drive and adaptability. We could see that in a new real-life situation our methodology proved itself to be very effective, and children were not so dependent on ‘school’ for their learning.

As many families in Auroville were struggling with their children at home, we were able to integrate several non-TLC kids during the lockdown. This was a lovely opportunity for inclusion, as
children are often separated in our Auroville schools when they have their regular schedules. This was appreciated by both children and parents.

Research highlights:

- We continued to deepen the research we began last year, aiming to better understand and refine our attempts to practice Integral Education. We are in the final stages of completing our research documentary. We have also applied to have an exhibition to share our work, which will be shown at Centre d'Art next year. The research has also yielded a presentation about TLC aimed at new families potentially interested in joining TLC. This presentation was offered on two occasions in December 2020.
- We have also had deeper conversations about Integral education, to ascertain how to advance in our work with the children next year. Many new insights and experiences emerged with the circumstances of the lockdown, opening up innovative perspectives. Especially important aspects of integral education such as the children leading their own learning and finding their own motivation came to the forefront this year.
- We have taken the opportunity to delve deeper through research on our pedagogical projects. We have been working with a part-time volunteer who is in the process of finalising a research paper on our work with field-trips.
- Research has become an integral tool for our work and we have in place a team dedicated to this work, which is closely linked to how we are evolving in both our work and documentation.

Reflections:

This was a very positive year for The Learning Community. We have experienced a sense of calm and stability that has brought many opportunities for new and creative solutions to emerge in how to engage the children, while adjusting to the external restrictions. Our adult community has been in harmony and very connected and engaged in the various aspects of TLC, be it in facilitating the children, helping with communication, maintaining the campus and learning spaces, handling financial aspects, or engaging in the research project. All TLC parents have involved themselves in one of our working teams and these have been functioning more and more efficiently, lending to a very collaborative, creative and harmonious environment. The children too have found a sense of quiet and joy in the new manner of functioning and many new connections have formed between them.

In their end-of-year reflections, the children expressed that although they have missed being able to use the TLC Basecamp, they have enjoyed many aspects of this year’s changes, and would like to continue to work in the way we have been for the past year in certain areas.

Conclusion:

One of the biggest lessons of this past year was to remain in the present and focus on what works and what is possible. While we continue to dream, vision and plan the implementation of our projects and activities, we are also keeping in perspective that plans may change and reality may dictate otherwise. We are joyful in our current journey and feel immense growth and consolidation within The Learning Community.
A Secondary & Higher Secondary level school facility, Last School is unique in following the “Free Progress” approach: inviting the students to progressively define their own program of development. This approach has a demonstrable structuring effect on their personality and increases their autonomy, self-confidence and capacity of innovation. The school offers a curriculum designed to develop each child integrally through their mental, vital, physical and, when possible, to help them grow inwardly also.

The teachers assist the students in finding what they truly are and want to become, and to build in themselves a rich multifaceted personality, through a great variety of learning activities. This became all the more important in a context of restriction of activity due to the corona epidemic.

Activities of the year:

We had 30 full time students this year, from 14 to 18 years old, spread in different groups according to their level in each subject. 5 more students were coming part time for specific activities.

The normal program of Last School includes literature, visual art in all its forms, social sciences, natural sciences, philosophy, mathematics, physics & chemistry, languages, 3D modelling. Physical education is very much insisted upon as well as extra-curricular activities such as dance, music, theater, so that all the parts of the being are awakened and developed.

Art is an important component of the program having in it a triple objective: first, to refine the being and give to it a sense of beauty in everything, second, as an exercise of concentration and focus, and third as an opportunity to develop the capacity to work with matter and to make it a conscious expression of beauty.

Mathematics and sciences are approached to sharpen the analytical mind and awaken the intellectual integrity embedded in scientific methods.

Literature and language are used to develop the capacity to think and express oneself, whether in writing or orally, and to touch some of the most essential questions of human life and condition.

No subject is an end in itself but all serve as a means by which to address and develop diverse parts of the being.

The older students are encouraged to involve themselves into various Auroville activities as part of their school program.

This year was marked by the lockdown then by restrictions. We were not able to offer a normal full program to the students. Replacing our normal classes by online courses was not a valid option, since for us a school is first of all a place where people come together to create an atmosphere of growth and progress. This atmosphere is an active element of the school and had to be preserved.

The students were requested to create their own program and contact the teachers individually for help and guidance. Small groups were allowed in the school premises on a part time basis.

An additional member joined the team to follow up the students in a more individual way and make sure nobody was left behind.
Outcomes:

As a consequence of the context of the epidemic, there were fewer teaching hours delivered, but this was more than compensated by an increased autonomy on the side of the students, as well as more motivation and intensity in their work.

No case of covid contamination has been reported in the school.

Reflections:

Crises are an opportunity to create something new, to realize that we are not the victims of circumstances and that we are always able to respond creatively to challenges.
Future School

*by Cameron for Future School team*

Future School seeks to provide an environment in which Auroville youth and those dedicated to their education may reach their potential. Inspired by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the school aspires to create a platform for self-discovery. Students have the opportunity to find a deeper understanding of their responsibility to self, community and the world.

The school reflects the international character of Auroville, bringing together students and teachers from many different nationalities and cultures in a spirit of openness and harmony.

By offering many choices, the school seeks to balance independence and freedom on one hand, with respect and responsibility on the other. Students are supported in an interactive and open environment. They are at the same time encouraged to be aware of their choices and to forge their own path of growth and progress.

We strive to build an environment and educational program which will help the students to become self-aware and motivated while reaching their potential.

**Activities of the year:**

For the school year 2020 -21 there were 58 students enrolled, sixteen in the ninth grade, fourteen in the tenth grade, seventeen in the eleventh, and eleven in the twelfth.

We offer a wide range of subjects to our students:

- Languages - English (with Literature and Language options), French and German;
- Mathematics;
- Pure Sciences - Physics, Chemistry, Biology;
- Social Sciences - History, Geography, Economics, Psychology, Global Citizenship, Sports;
- Extra-curricular subjects such as Photography, Film, and Art.

Through our mentoring program we assist the students in making good individual choices that help them to explore and progress.

The school incorporates many different teaching/learning methods and environments: interactive teaching with class discussions, projects, tutorials, independent research, traditional lectures, online classrooms; small and large groups, one-on-one approach, peer teaching, work experience and self-study. In this way we try to meet the needs of each individual.

We feel that the combination of required areas of study and choice of subjects gives students the chance to both get in touch with new areas of knowledge as well as explore their own interests and needs.

This academic year due to the coronavirus pandemic the school was physically shut. We resorted to online classes using Google Classroom. By doing this we worked towards meeting our school goal – development of the mind – maintaining full school hours throughout the entire lockdown period.

The Google Classrooms had been set up for Future School by Prashant in 2016, but with the onset of the pandemic we made full use of them. Rather than using them as a supplementary resource to in-person class we made the shift to online learning. Teachers and students adapted to using Google Docs, Google Meet, Jamboard and other online resources to continue their education.
throughout the pandemic. Students learned how to submit work online, receive feedback and edit work all online.

Outcomes:

Future School managed to run its classes through the lockdown and provide education to the youth of Auroville.

This year Future School also started a Teachers’ reflection group, where through weekly meetings teachers had the opportunity to discuss teaching methodology, and were encouraged to try to implement new methods in their classes.

Research highlights:

The shift this year to online education provided an interesting opportunity to compare online education and the opportunities it provides with in-classroom learning. The advantages of online learning were the flexibility of sharing resources with the student body, and the greater computer literacy this encouraged in the entire school – a skill that is becoming increasingly valid in the modern world. However we found the net impact of online learning a negative. The loss of classroom interaction was detrimental to learning. Furthermore students and teachers missed the social element of classroom learning, and the fluidity of in-person discussions. Many students found asking questions and contributing to discussions over Meet overwhelming due to the novelty of having a class online. Some students also reported difficulty remaining engaged in classes without the physical presence of a teacher.

Reflections:

This year brought us many challenges. There was the pandemic, we had many technical issues with online classes, we had a shortage of both administrators and teachers and we struggled with the budget cuts. The unforeseen closing of the school was the first challenge we faced this academic year having to make the shift to online classes within two weeks. Running online classes required all the teachers to have access to the internet. This was challenged by both our server being hacked in the middle of the first term and a lightning strike that did significant damage to our infrastructure. We have had to adapt to having no full-time administrative staff due to difficulties finding qualified people, and also we will stop offering Global Citizenship and Psychology for incoming students next year due to teacher shortages. The insufficient budget was extremely challenging, due to the wages not being raised last year we lost a long-run employee who had worked eight years at Future School. We cut down on all expenses we could including staff welfare costs, repair costs, and printing – but we do not see this as being sustainable in the long run.

All of the above challenges however led us to developing greater resilience as a school. The ability to adapt to difficult situations and the capacity to find areas of improvement in each setback has proven meaningful to us throughout the year. We have drawn together as a team, both students and staff working together to achieve our educational goals. We have shifted the entire school system online onto Google Drive, making our documents more secure. Furthermore we have streamlined our processes to try and keep the administration running.

Future School learned that we have the ability to adapt and evolve through challenging times. As a team and as individuals we learned that we have the capacity to surpass our preconceived limitations. And on a more mundane level, we all learned a lot about using technology to aid education. The initial shift online was a crucial moment where students and teachers came together to cooperate in building a new educational framework to carry us through the pandemic.
Conclusion:

Our goal for this year was the development of the mind. We tried this academic year to enhance mental capacities through an emphasis on academic studying and learning. Despite all the challenges and changes we faced we managed to complete a full academic year and cover the standard educational material we would have studied. On a more noteworthy element this year allowed us to develop the mental endurance and the capacity of the mental to work against the vital distaste for demanding work.

Our goal for next year will be: To discover and see the Truth behind apparent life happenings and events.
This year we were not able to function as planned due to a complete freeze during the academic year. We moved to giving online classes through Zoom, in care and concern for the progress of the students.

**Activities of the year:**

This year we had 252 students enrolled in classes from Crèche to 8th standard. Class size was between 17 and 25.

Classes were conducted online for students in grades one through eight. For example, simple scientific process descriptions and mathematical geometry drawings were sent to the students through video. They were subsequently instructed to send their works to school through their parents or adults, and their works were evaluated by the respective teachers and sent to the students through the office. Our STEM Land teacher Saravanan too conducted online classes for 5th to 8th through Zoom and WhatsApp.

Students were also given a number of tutorials on how to search and download educational information from the internet to stimulate their thinking. Through this they are becoming more divergent thinkers, developing the attitude of knowing various things beyond the book.

Our Supportive Learning teacher created a WhatsApp group for her children and sent some videos of valuable programs like ‘brain yoga’, left and right coordination movements, tongue twisters, relaxation music etc.

No lessons were conducted for kindergarten classes as ordered by the government. But we took the opportunity for the kindergarten teachers to take Professional Development training with Ana.

Our librarian reorganized the library books and he registered all the new books after the due classification.

We conducted and evaluated the unitary prognostic test, mid-term and annual exams online for students to keep to the normal learning pattern. The response sheet sent by the students is a tool for the teachers to assess their progress.

**Reflections:**

Although many of us as teachers have experience, it was really a bit difficult at the beginning to teach lessons to the students using these new techniques. We accepted it as a challenge and did our best; we researched many books and tried many ways to develop our skills. But practically speaking many of our students do not possess Android cellular phones and/or had to deal with the failure of the cellular phone towers surrounding their houses to receive the signals clearly.

**Conclusion:**

The hard work and dedication of our teachers in the face of the most difficult circumstances is commendable. The students and parents who collaborated in our activities are also to be commended. We are grateful for this kind of support from parents, SAIIER and our well-wishers to cater the needs of our students hailing from surrounding villages of Auroville.
Isai Ambalam School

by Sanjeev R.

The goal of Isai Ambalam School is to support children and teachers to reach their highest potential. The challenge this year was the pandemic that started at the beginning of the academic year. We responded early and started giving online classes for grades 1 to 8 while still in the first wave lockdown. The parents who don't have a smartphone came to school once a week to get worksheets from their children's teachers.

During the Covid period all the teachers planned to improve their higher-order thinking ('HOT') skills in teaching and worked along with Anita on a Siddha curriculum.

Activities of the year:

This year we had 157 students enrolled in total, from lower kindergarten to Grade 8.

For a short time we were able to do small projects with the kids when the COVID cases were absent in the bioregion, and we started school with the older children in small numbers in the last week of January 2021. We had sessions in the morning from 9 to 12.30 pm. The children came with their parents and went home after lunch. Gradually the other grades also started coming with their parents. We took on activities to re-engage children into enjoying learning, engaging with the world around them, being outdoors as well as revisiting the basics especially for those who had not been able to follow up as well.

We had children come in for 3 days a week till before the elections in Tamil Nadu and Pudhucherry, when all the schools were closed down again, after which the second wave of COVID hit.

Our small projects with the kids included:

- **Auroville project:** In February the children watched videos about Mother and Auroville. We celebrated February as 'Auroville month' which includes the birthday of Auroville. The children made the Auroville symbol in the garden and planted seeds in it. They measured the dimension of each part and made a bund around it. They understood the concept of the dot at the center representing Unity, the inner circle representing Creation and the petals representing the power of expression and realisation.

- **Spinach project:** Fifth-grade children did a project on types of spinach that are available around them and in Auroville. They went to Solitude Farm and interviewed Krishna about spinach growing in their garden. The children wrote many questions before they went to the place. They interacted with Krishna with their questions and brought a variety of spinach to the school.

- **Vegetables project:** Grades 1 and 2 studied the vegetables and their uses. They had fun activities like drawing, colouring and pasting seeds.

- **Pirandai project:** 3rd-grade children learnt the uses of pirandai creeper. They created a song about pirandai and practiced it. They went around the school campus planting pirandai and made pirandai pickle.

- **Sparrow project:** The children learned many new things about sparrows and how they are connected to human life and agriculture, particularly in organic farming. They made sparrow nests at their home and invited the sparrows by feeding grains. The parents also enjoyed seeing their children's activities.
• **Corn project:** The children planted corn, pumpkin and some creepers. They harvested some vegetables for their school kitchen.

As well as our engagement with the children we progressed with the lease of land next to the school (the children now have access to another ¾ acre of space), engaged with “Byju’s” educational company for online learning, and the school was showcased by the Directorate of Education as a practical model to implement the National Educational Policy (2020).

**Byju’s app:**

Given that online learning is becoming a norm, we took the opportunity to partner with Byju’s through Asha for 100 licenses for their app for 3 years. The app contains Math, Science and Social Science lessons. Children can choose their class and lessons and watch the videos and answer the tasks given.

NESS (New Era Secondary School – our senior school, 9th to 12th grade) and Isai Ambalam School got the license for the children whose parents had a smartphone and were willing to give it a try. We had sessions with the parents of one grade at a time to explain the possibility and the ones who were keen on having this option opted for it.

So far from our school 40 children and teachers have installed the Byju’s app on their mobile phone and started using it. We have found that younger children (4th grade) need support of the parents to use this app as it’s in English. Given that we are in the second wave of the pandemic and under lockdown this is currently possible and useful.

For the remaining children we are continuing their online classes and the worksheets depending on what is available for the parents and children.

**Showcase of STEM Land and Isai Ambalam School by Directorate of Education:**

We have been documenting our work in blogs at STEM Land for over 5 years and at Isai Ambalam for about 2 years. In February I got a call from the Pondicherry Directorate of Education. They had been asked by the central government to make a presentation of practical examples of how education can be approached in line with the new NEP (National Education Policy). The representative, Muthulakshmi, called me after going through our blogs and informed me that she will be using Isai Ambalam School and STEM Land’s work at Udavi as examples to present to the central government of action through alternative education. It was refreshing to hear a government official looking for alternatives and experiential learning.

“Your information about Auroville outreach schools was useful and I was impressed by the activities carried by your students. Really ample opportunities are given to the students for holistic development. What our schools miss is that we never give ample time for our students to learn and discover the pattern or the underlying principle. Instead we provide the answer and never allow the student to think. The teachers are more concerned about marks in Board Exams. I am very happy to see that your students could repair minor faults, come with practical solutions for the problems. This prepares them for the future life where they boldly meet the challenges and come out successfully.”

**Outcomes:**

Teachers wrote 80 Tamil stories, typed them, added pictures and laminated them as a resource material for Tamil library. They also created 20 Tamil songs.

Teachers created 20 lesson plans for a Siddha curriculum and it will be used when the school reopens.
The learning outcomes were obviously not on par with what would have been possible with regular school.

**Research highlights:**

One paper was submitted to MES-11 (Mathematics Education and Society Conference) about ‘Education by Design’ (EBD) projects and experiences primarily of children at Isai Ambalam School, and we are awaiting the paper’s acceptance.

Our research project on English based on comprehensible input and natural language acquisition has made progress this year *(see following report)*.

**Reflections:**

Most meaningful this year was how teachers spent some of the time training themselves, and the efforts they made to reach out and connect to the children.

Reengaging the children during the short time they were at school was interesting and we took an effort to engage them and find ways to ground them.
Efficient and effective (English) language learning system based on contemporary research in Natural Language Acquisition

a project of Isai Ambalam School

by Raghu Prashanth R

Isai Language Research Lab is focused on developing classroom content which breathes life into classrooms and where learning happens naturally. We are making this happen by bridging the gap between research in multiple fields and classroom implementation. Effectively, we are bringing research outcomes into the classrooms. We are currently focusing on developing skill-specific content using TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Total Physical Response Storytelling) methodologies for English Language teaching befitting to our context.

The goals of this project were:

1. To enable children to communicate effectively in English language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes.
2. To establish content, classroom processes and training procedures in the Natural approach to learning for learning outcomes.
3. To address the challenges in the Foundational Literacy stage.

Description of project:

The core team of the Language Research Lab includes Sanjeev R., Raghu, Srilekha, Mohan, Sirisha, Archana, Shanti, Sankarabharanam and Isai Ambalam teachers. The team adapted various research-proven approaches in the domain of Natural Language Acquisition (NLA) to achieve the goals listed above, including Total Physical Response (TPR), TPR stories (TPRS), NLA Tools and other proprietary tools to develop language skills in children.

We created lesson plans based on TPR and TPRS methodologies considering the children. We started creating a more advanced version of the content, considering both children and teachers. As part of this project various teacher training workshops were conducted relevant to the subject matter. 15 teachers were trained in this methodology, and 250 children benefitted.

Our approach and the material we developed has five phases:

**Phase 1: Listening and comprehension:** In this phase, we focus on comprehension in different contexts. The process we follow is focused on internalization of language rather than rote memorization. The language gets registered in physical and emotional dimensions.

**Phase 2: Speech generation:** In this phase, we focus on speech generation in a graded and natural way. Moving from comprehension to speech generation is a delicate process, which involves brainswitching. We are currently using TPRS methodology and art work to elicit speech.

**Phase 3: Developing reading fluency:** During this phase, proprietary NLA tools are used for developing reading fluency in the children, which are similar to Readers Theatre and phrase reading techniques. Actions and emotions are used to reduce eye fixations, increase reading comprehension and fluency.

**Phase 4: Developing writing skills:** In this phase, will focus on various aspects of writing skills like spelling, sentence structures and punctuation. Writing skills are developed by applying them in a real life context.
Phase 5: Academic reading and writing: In this phase, LSRW skills are developed in the earlier stages and are fine tuned to match the academic reading and writing skills.

Outcomes:
Teachers became more conscious of skills that children should learn while teaching. Teachers were able to identify the gaps in their language teaching methodology and started changing accordingly. There was a considerable improvement in skills, student engagement and joyful environment with the new lesson plans. Classrooms became livelier and more effective. Improvements became noticeable within a few classes we were able to conduct.

As Researchers we benefited through receiving and reading TPR, TPRS books and various relevant materials related to ELT. We attended conferences and got in touch with originators of the method and researchers worldwide and received feedback on our efforts.

We made an MoU with TATA Chemicals to implement this approach in their 6 village learning centers near Cuddalore. Work is in progress to implement the same in 14 more VLC’s in Mambattu, Andhra Pradesh.

Reflections:
The joy of discovery of simple yet profound things kept our enthusiasm and feeling of progress. The patterns we observed, whether it is in the Language Acquisition process, teaching process or in the working process made us more sensible human beings. Everyday “aha” moments made us more exuberant, alive and rigorous.

Whenever we got best results, it dawned on us that we were in better alignment with Sri Aurobindo’s principles of education. We feel that we had been inching towards the implementation of his principles. Then consciously, we started using Sri Aurobindo’s principles of education as our compass in our discussions and whenever we lost direction.

We want to breathe life into classrooms. Unless the team is more alive and exuberant with life it is not going to happen. Building a team of volunteers who can add this process was challenging.

This project has become an instrument for our inner sadhana and has become a constant learning companion.

Conclusion:
Currently, we are consolidating the work we have done into a proper package with all supporting systems (designing Assessments, Curriculum, Training videos, Audio content, sharing platform, etc.), needed to enable language skills in children.

We are looking at developing Master Trainers in this methodology and to establish a core research group.

We would like to create an open platform for engaging Researchers, Master Trainers, Consultants, Trainers for the implementation of Natural Approach in school curriculum, thereby providing guidance to students and parents, school management and policy makers on language learning.
Arulvazhi Education Centre

by Muthukumari

In Tamil ‘Arulvazhi’ means ‘Path of Grace’. Arulvazhi Education Centre aspires to follow the principles of Integral education described by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to develop the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual parts of the being for the children, young adults and women of Morattandi village. The aim is to provide value-based education in an atmosphere of simplicity, beauty, joy and harmony wherein the beneficiaries can develop naturally.

Activities of the year:

Arulvazhi has 4 different groups:

- **Play group** – 21 students from 1.5 yrs to 3 yrs old
- **Primary group** – 45 students from 4 to 15 yrs old
- **Yoga students** – 50 students from 10 to 18 yrs old
- **Women** – 29 adolescent girls and women from the age group of 16 to 60 yrs old

Due to the pandemic of covid-19, the school activities continued in different ways. We focused on conducting programs online.

**Digital Technology training**: Digital Technology training was offered to elder students and also to Arulvazhi team members for 3 months by computer teacher Ganesh. It was very useful to improve technology skills, especially the learning of Google Meet with our students. At the end of the session everyone has the confidence of digital technology capacities. 3 facilitators and 10 students participated for 3 months.

**The facilitators’ integral development**: Our resource persons Revathy and Rajagopalan from Bangalore offered Google Meet sessions twice weekly on Savitri and Sri Aurobindo’s other writings. These sessions brought unity and harmony within the team and also developed individuals’ reading and deep listening capacities.

**Children’s activities at home**: The covid-19 lockdown disturbed the children from the village in many ways. Arulvazhi offered drawing pads, colours and reading books to the children to use at home. This support helps the children’s creativity and makes them happy. 42 children were beneficiaries.

**Nutrition**: Arulvazhi cares for the children’s and mother’s health needs through basic healthy food and physical education. With covid-19 we were unable to support on daily basis, but we provided nutrition once monthly and also on days like the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s birthdays and other heritage celebrations. 145 children from Arulvazhi benefited.

**Events**: We celebrated Darshan days, Saraswathi, Ganesh Pooja, Kolu, Independence and Republic Days, Deepavali and Pongal, and Auroville's birthday.

**Get together**: Arulvazhi has been organising Auroville - Tamil Nadu seminars for more than 10 years, on particular topics in the light of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother’s teachings. This year due to
covid-19, the 2 days' seminar was conducted through Google Meet with 30 persons. The participants were Sri Aurobindo's devotees from different centres like Chengalpet, Trichy, Bangalore and Coimbatore along with participants from Auroville.

Everyone shared about the experience of the centres especially during the lockdown of covid-19.

This opportunity brings together collaboration of Auroville and outside places for better understanding of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings.

**Exchange program:** Following the principle of “From Near to Far”, this year we did various programs on different topics. Each program gave a special experience to children and adults, for the growth of physical, mental, vital and spiritual consciousness:

1. 28th February, Auroville's Birthday – marathon running with 45 children from Morattandi village
2. Cultural program with Promesse community and village people
3. Dyanam Kolam – with village women
4. Heritage Arts – Arulvazhi and Illaignarkal school
5. Savitri Bhavan and Bramanaspathi Kshetram
6. Physical education – with Arulvazhi and Thamarai children
7. Interactive session – with Outreach school teachers.

A total of 70 children and 34 adults participated in these programs.

**Outcomes:**

The beneficiaries of our programmes are children and adults from Morattandi village and outreach schools. This year we had 145 regular beneficiaries and an extra 69 beneficiaries for our special activities.

**Reflections:**

The covid-19 situation became a boon because we could contact many talented resource persons through Google Meets. The meaningful lesson of this year is that every difficulty is a stepping stone for jumping forward.
The intention of this project was for our students to learn to use yoga and mindfulness to improve their focus while developing a lifelong awareness of the importance of their physical and emotional health. Yoga provides a sustainable solution to improve students’ readiness to learn, while positively transforming the school culture.

Description of project:
The plan for this project was for yoga training to be given daily (Monday to Sunday except Saturday) in our school premises in the mornings from 6:00 a.m. to 7:15 a.m., and additionally an advanced level special class on Sunday evenings. Due to COVID I instead gave yoga classes 3 days in a week for these three months. Totally 12 classes were given in a month and 8 students regularly attended the class.

Different yoga practices were given for these three days, namely:
- Dhiyana Yoga
- Prana Yoga
- Asanas
- Kriyas
- Muthras (Special daily “Surya Namaskaram”)

After Yoga class, we provided snacks for all the participants like groundnut, green moong dal.

Our local Women’s club also did COVID time yoga practices including Prana Yoga and Dhiyana Yoga, at classes held in the Morattandi multipurpose hall. 15 members participated.

On 28 February 2021, our senior Yoga students gave a demonstration at the celebration of Auroville’s birthday held at Promesse community.

On 30 March, 30 students participated in Marathon training by running from Arulvazhi school to Sadhana Forest, nearly 10 kilometers.

I also had a first experience taking an online yoga class, which was a learning experience for me, and will be a useful option for students to continue yoga training in this pandemic situation.

Outcomes:
Yoga students receive many benefits from yoga practice:
- To have opportunities for beneficial motor breaks throughout the day.
- To ease anxiety and tension (such as pre-test or performance jitters).
- To enhance focus, concentration, comprehension and memory.
- To have opportunities for reflection, patience and insight reducing impulsivity and reactivity.
- To engage character-building activities and improve social and emotional intelligence.
- To improve listening skills.
- To wake up sluggish minds and creativity as needed.
- To enhance organizational and communications skills.
- To improve posture while preparing to sit comfortably.
• To enhance motor skills and balance.
• To improve mind/body awareness and connection.
• To improve confidence and self-esteem.
• To gain improved respect for oneself and others.
• To gain understanding and ability to integrate wellness concepts such as healthy eating.
• To develop the ability to tie in the concepts learned to daily life in and out of the classroom.
Kuilai Creative Centre (KCC)

by Selvaraj A.

The main goal of Kuilai Creative Centre (KCC) is to provide various kinds of extra-curricular and skill-oriented activities which benefit the children and help them to spend their leisure time valuably. Also important to us is to maintain and strengthen the relationship between people of the bio-region and Auroville.

Activities of the year:

Due to the Covid-19 situation, this year we had to minimize the number of activities and the number of months also. We concentrated on the essential activities which would really benefit the participants; evening tuition was the most important one, since all the schools in Tamilnadu were closed. The students had received their homework online and wished to get some help from somewhere and fortunately our centre was of great help in supporting their tuition needs. Some got help online and some came directly to the Centre.

Also, since the schools were closed, the parents felt grateful to be able to send their children to learn some extracurricular activities; these also helped in improving their immune system to fight against any kind of health disorders.

We had 18 regular participants in Tuition, 12 in Hip-Hop, 6 in Bharatha Naattiyam, 5 in Music and 12 in Silambam. Some more students attended for a shorter time. Most of the participants were from the nearby surroundings, some of them from Auroville.

Outcomes:

This year, people felt the real need of having this space of KCC, because they found many kinds of extracurricular activities at their nearby space, especially during the lockdown periods. When all the schools were closed, our KCC could function and provide programmes to the people from October 2020 onwards since we fall under a different criterion from the schools. So, the parents and the participants felt really satisfied and shared that their children were not occupied in front of TVs or mobile phones, but at least, for some hours, they were put in a space where they were able to concentrate and be relaxed from their mental tensions.

Reflections and conclusion:

Participants have been asking us to expand our activities and approached us to generate more of these skilled-oriented activities, such as Computer, Yoga, Tailoring, Art and Crafts, Writing exercises, Language learning, etc. We replied to them that we couldn’t assure anything, but hope to offer better possibilities in the future.

Our activities and efforts really depend on the feedback from the participants and people. Receiving these requests really put us in a successful mode, and we feel that it is a real credit to efforts that they are asking for more activities from our platform.
Mira Cultural Group

by Grace

Mira Cultural Group encourages women & children of our community to learn extracurricular activities outside of school studies. These activities are connected to the rich heritage of Bharatiya Samskritam.

This type of program offers unique opportunities to Auroville and village students who are not able to join such classes in the city. In the future elder students may teach new ones.

Besides, as a team, we also benefit, learn and grow as we love to create a place that encourages and promotes collectivity.

Activities of the year:

In 2020 it was a difficult situation all over the world. Schools were closed and everybody was isolated in the house only. From October it was a slight release from the Covid situation. The children enjoyed starting their classes.

This year we had 8 children learning Bharatanatiyam (from Auroville and Pondicherry schools), and 19 children learning folk/contemporary dance (from Auroville schools, Udavi School and Moratandi village).

The classes took place on the weekends at the SAWCHU building in Bharat Nivas.

Reflections:

Children are very eager to learn and want to progress. But we realize that some disciplines like Raga in classical music, but also dance, require very regular if not daily practice.

Nowadays the teachers are charging for a student and not for the class. But we always find the teachers who are willing to give classes without concern for the number of students. That way more students can benefit from our programme.

This year some of the parents were worried to send their children to the classes due to fear of Covid.

Conclusion:

The program has helped to foster the development of the women and children at the personal and the community level. On top of that we seek to provide occasions for contact between Auroville and the bioregion and aspire to open up that space, to build bridges of friendship and collaboration between the two.

We are working in the name of togetherness and interconnectedness. The students’ interest in collaborating in this way inspires us to keep working together.
Life Education Centre (LEC)

by Devi

Life Education Centre aims to:

- Offer a space for young women from the villages where they can be provided opportunities for personal growth and livelihood.
- Provide activities that could enhance physical, mental, and sensorial capacities.
- Be a connecting space between Auroville and the villages.
- Be a learning space for everyone.

Activities of the year:

LEC has 10 regular participants, plus students who receive guidance for college courses and career options, and workshop participants. The Center is a place for growth and in that sense whoever is participating in programs (whether every day or not) is a beneficiary.

The COVID-19 circumstances did not allow accommodating teenage girls as they are in the school-going age and schools were closed under Govt restrictions. The teenagers attended when the lockdown was not in place.

We had to restrict workshops and other gatherings like career guidance sessions due to restrictions in gathering in groups.

That said, our activities continued as follows:

- **Yoga**: A professional yoga therapist who came to Auroville as a volunteer but had to stay back because of travel restrictions offered classes every week. The LEC women were doing weekly yoga classes prior to the classes of the visiting teacher, but learned and gained much through the classes offered by her.

- **Aviva**: Weekly classes to exercise the pelvic region were offered by Indirani.

- **Circle Way**: A new way of discussing and sharing was introduced through the methodology of Circle Way facilitated by Devi. Weekly sessions of group discussions have always been held at LEC that have offered time and space for the women to share their issues – personal and social, and opinions as well as offer suggestions to other women through talking. Circle Way follows similar principles while allowing more focused discussions aimed at deeper listening and responding. When situations of COVID ease, the sessions will be conducted again with adaptations made according to the needs of the women at LEC.

- **Expressive Arts Therapy**: When there was a small window of relaxation in restrictions due to COVID, LEC was able to welcome a group of expressive arts therapists. It was a beautiful exposure to the women at LEC to interact and engage in expressions of creativity with the visiting group who also equally enjoyed the experience. The expressions took the form of free-flowing art with kolam and flowers. It ended with chanting and sharing experiences.

  One of the Expressive Arts Therapists continues to offer weekly sessions for the women at LEC.

- **Nature Cure Camp**: Three women attended a 5-day nature cure training that was offered by an experienced and renowned nature cure physician Dr. Arun Sharma. The women went through the camp attending lectures, and learning and practicing the principles of nature
cure. Organizing and conducting an introductory level camp was getting planned at LEC when another wave of COVID has hit. We will pick it up when situations ease.

- **Stewardship Session**: Three women attended a two-day “Stewardship for New Emergence” session based on the theme of collaboration and coming together in organizations to plan projects and solve problems. The session was immensely informative and experiential. The knowledge gained will be put into practice at LEC.

- **Tailoring and embroidery**: Women continued to improve their tailoring, embroidery and crochet skills.
  Special wall art works were designed and guided by Devi. These were hand embroidered by senior women.

- **Making and using bio-enzymes**: A workshop for making bioenzymes for cleaning using citrus peels was done by Nina. At LEC, bioenzyme solution made by the women is used for cleaning without the need to buy commercially available harsh cleaning agents.

**Outcomes:**
LEC creates a special environment for learning through informal ways. The activities help women gain confidence, become aware of themselves and the society.

**Reflections:**
LEC attempts to integrate learning, working and progressing individually and as a community. It is a meaningful and needed experiment. It was a year that once again proved how much the Centre is needed during challenging times like now – for the women to be together, to share their fears about uncertain times – fears about health, finances etc. and to gain strength and comfort from each other.

**Conclusion:**
Activities will continue in the next year with refinement as needed. We will embrace uncertainties that COVID-19 has brought and work based on priorities as the situation evolves and demands. The year will be important to have LEC as a space for women from the villages to reflect on the unprecedented situation that humanity is in, the situation in the villages, impacts on their own lives, to share their fears and concerns, and have guidance as and when needed.
Ilaignarkal Education Centre was started under a tree in the Matrimandir Nursery in 1976. Our vision is to strive to be a pioneer in providing overall development of students who will become beacons of progress, human unity and harmony, following the Mother’s Charter and guidance. Our core values are Human Unity, worker’s welfare and co-evolution of the neighbourhood.

Ilaignarkal is one of the pioneering pilot units initiated to offer non-formal, value-oriented learning for all age groups, mainly aiming to impart basic education to the workforce of Auroville and their wards hailing from the neighbouring Tamil villages. Ilaignarkal plays the bridging role between the ancient native cultural setting and Auroville, the city of the Future.

Special goals of the year 2020-21 (year of Pandemic):

- Work towards a more planned way for the total wellbeing of the Auroville workforce and their families (physical health, psychological, social and spiritual).
- Distribute supplementary food, herbal items to prevent diseases, protein supplement and simple breathing exercise.
- Start a garden on our campus with available space and materials, for the produce to be distributed to the beneficiaries.

Activities of the year:

Beneficiaries of Ilaignarkal are adult workers, their family members and other educational institutions. We had 20 students in our Bharathipuram (Kottaikarai) school-going age group; 18 Bharati Educare girl students; 15 adult Auroville workers; and satellite classes for Oli School teachers and Mohanam team members.

Joyful Learning project – for ages 10-14 years:

- Due to the Pandemic and the closure of schools, to help children who are stuck in home without being able to engage and express themselves completely, we distributed kids’ story books to 30 children from Bommaiarpalayam Panchyat Union School (VIII Std.) to make their time interesting in their homes with the help of the Headmaster.
- 20 students from Bharathipuram adjacent to Matrimandir Nursery attended weekly classes in two batches and presented essays and poems written by them. Our school team appreciated their learning efficiency. We provided 4 sets of new Tamil books for reading.
- The Spring season (Vasant) is celebrated by identifying the various wild plants and flowers springing naturally in our campus. Recently, our Siddha physician Mr. K.P. Selvam from Vellore showed us two special herbs: Nannari (Sarasprilla) and Elumbuotti Thazhai (Bone-setting green) growing naturally in the dry red soil zone. We have already identified more than 100 plants present in Ilaignarkal Education Centre campus through a teamwork lead by our resource person B. Anandou.
Health and Healing – for all age groups, both men and women:

- Yoga courses with 18 workers were conducted by our staff member Mr. B. Anandou under our satellite class at Auroville Electrical Service from June to August 2020. On completion of the Yoga course, we distributed certificates of appreciation to the participants. Mr. Ponnusamy, the Executive handed over the certificates to his entire team on 5th September 2020.

- We held yoga classes for women conducted by Ms. Muthukumari and Ms. Adreana. Breathing exercises were taught every Monday and Wednesday to our staff and young students numbering 15.

- A multigrain health drink was prepared in our campus and distributed to the children at their homes to enhance protein supplements. We named the health mix powder as “Olga Multigrain Health Beverage” in the memory of our precious donor Olga from the Netherlands. She passed away last year. Olga has been a very good supporter of our centre. The process of the preparation of Olga multigrain health drink powder was taught to the children and their parents after the rainy days.

Our Library was open throughout the year for reading sessions and access to all books and magazines, including our publications on health, healing and physiological support.

We continued publishing our ongoing Tamil Newsletter “Auroville Seythi Mada”, with articles on culture and environment and in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s words get an important place. We also issued a digital version of our English Newsletter “Auroville Vaasal”, including articles on what Sri Aurobindo said about Tamil language, historical background on a city in Tamil Nadu, and a personality interview of a friend of Auroville.

18 girls from our Bharati Educare programme passed to higher classes, and we are mentoring a few of them to pursue higher education in colleges.

We started a new event, “Pagirvu”, a circle of offerings, sharing & caring with love. We had a heartwarming initiation of this circle on August 15. In these gatherings we share vegetables, fruits, home-made pickles, eatables, handmade bags etc. with each other.

We started organic farming with seasonal vegetables in our campus. Thiru. Sivaprakasam & Thiru. Sundar, two young organic farmers from the bioregion helped us make it.

In our regular Thursday circle, “Viyazha Vattam”, we share and discuss Tamil literature topics. This year the program was facilitated by new members of our team, and with the help of Auroville Radio the recordings were made available on the Auroville Radio website.

We celebrated Navarathri Kolu Festival from 19th to 30th October, 2020. This year our theme was “Animal Kingdom in the Evolutionary Process”. We showed that the fish in the water is ‘Macha avatara’ in the order of ‘Das avatara’, and the lion roaming in the forest is the lion vehicle of Goddess Durga. The elephant is the lord Ganesha, the monkey is the lord Hanuman. A lot of village children, employees of Auroville and friends from Puducherry came to enjoy the dolls, dance and music and discourses on the festival.

On October 24th, the “United Nations Day” was celebrated on our campus. Yatra Multimedia and the Thazhi Foundation, Puducherry attended and enhanced the human relationship with entertainment and light sensitization of the golden dusk. In our open air arena, Miss
Shanmugapriya danced for the ancient Tamil song “Yaathum Oore Yaavarumkeleer” composed by the great musician Dr. Arimazham Padmanaban.

We conducted a three-day Kolam workshop in March with natural colours. Kolam with double stroke style (*Rettai Izhai*) was demonstrated by Ms. Saraswathi Chandrasekar from Bangalore. Women from neighbouring villages and students of our centre attended the workshop. They learned the traditional ritualistic patterns and also created their own designs. The workshop was well appreciated by the participants.

On 13th March 2021 we had a joint workshop on art and culture with a group of youth from Arulvazhi school. All the participants exchanged ideas, working in four groups in rotation: Clay work (clay seed balls for planting trees in our region), Sewing (learning to mend our own garments), Drawing (posters, bookmarks), and Raw food preparation.

At our centre we have been conducting chanting, group meditation, and recitation at 10am every day for world peace and harmony, all through the year.

**Outcomes:**

Health and hygiene was the focus throughout the year. Our perspectives shifted towards well-being more predominantly during this year. Regular training on vocational and art education, distribution of educational materials, nutritional products, and wellbeing products gave us a new area of service opportunity during this year of non-conduct.

New modes of communication were explored and we want to continue exploring the same in the upcoming days.

We have vibrant and young friends associated with us as resource people helping in many of our projects. Sivakumar is an Aurovilian helping us in management, communications and innovative programs; SaiPriya is a Newcomer and linguist helping us in Auroville Radio programs and translation; Sivaprakasam and Sundar are organic farmers helping us in organic farm produce.

**Research highlights:**

We collaborated with Auroville Radio for the broadcast of our weekly Thursday reading circle. We were allocated a 30 minutes slot every week to do a Tamil literary program. With this new opportunity, we would like to further explore sharing our knowledge to many listeners across the globe. A few topics already covered are:

- Bharathiyar’s *Puthiya Aathichudi* by R.Meenakshi and SaiPriya
- Thirumoolar - *Thirumandhiram* by R.Meenakshi and SaiPriya
- Auroville, its Charter, Dream and words of wisdom by the Mother by R.Meenakshi
- Children’s rhymes and stories and educational songs, set to tune by Ilaignarkal team
- Ancient Sangam poetry “Akham” and “Puram” commentary rendered by our team

**Conclusion:**

The growing number of young people joining our team gives us a lot of opportunities in the field of education and service to Auroville. This combination of elders and young people in our team could be well utilized for the collective evolution of life in Auroville.
Teachers’ Center
by Ana, Marion and Francoise

The aim of the Teachers’ Center is to support, at the maximum of our capacities, teachers in Auroville who are already working in schools or those who wish to be prepared to become a teacher. We work at developing Integral Education in Auroville and outside of Auroville.

We have three programs going on at the Teachers’ Center at this moment:
1. Supportive Learning Satellite (see following report).
2. Professional Development Program happening at Aikiyam School Kindergarten.
3. The ongoing Professional Development in other Auroville schools.

This year 2020-21 has been very special due to the Covid-19 Pandemic world reality. Our secretary took the initiative to support schools explaining how to create a platform online and suggesting resources for teaching online. She supported kindergarten teachers in Auroville and Outreach schools, Primary school teachers, and the Professional Development program happening at Teachers Center.

Activities of the year:

Professional Development at Aikiyam School:

This project started in the year 2019 trying to fulfill the needs of teachers in Aikiyam School. The Foundation for World Education funded the project and we started to transform the Kindergarten, providing an approach closest to Holistic Education and Integral Education.

As the schools were closed this program could not reach the 75 kids that were supposed to be the beneficiaries. But it gave an enormous possibility to work deeply with the teachers who had enough time to dedicate for training.

From April 2020 to March 2021 a group of 7 teachers have been learning about Montessori Educational Method, preparation of classrooms set-up and materials.

Online workshop “From Sensorial to Geometry and Maths”

In February 2021 we started this online workshop, which is based in a holistic approach. For this course we opened new platforms in Edmodo to post information and materials that support the learning process. 30 teachers from different schools are taking part.

The teachers have weekly practice and assessment in how to use materials for Maths and Geometry. They are working on material preparation for their own benefit and needs, and have to prepare a file with their notes and the material that they are going to use with the children. They will be given a certificate at the end of the course (May 7, 2021).

Planning 2-year Professional Development program

We are planning to facilitate a 2-year long Professional Development program for teachers. Already, approximately 10 teachers are interested to join. Facilitators with different skills in Auroville and abroad will be involved. The planning is ongoing, and we are hoping to start in August 2021.
Online classes

We are giving individual online classes to teachers who need work on specific topics like “Child Development”.

One more platform was opened in Edmodo for the professional development of the Kindergarten teachers.

The Supportive Learning Satellite

This was the first phase of a project to extend and equip the Supportive Learning Service, an internal project of the Teachers’ Centre in collaboration with Lilaloka, for children in need of emotional, behavioral and learning support, together with their families. (See following report)

Outcomes:

We created the bases for teachers at Aikiyam Kindergarten to work with different approaches. We made a PowerPoint presentation on this project, hoping that in the future it can be a model for other educators in Auroville and outside of Auroville.

Around 30 teachers working in Auroville schools and educational projects, and few volunteers, participated in the online workshop for making Math and Geometry more understandable to their students. Material was created.

The Supportive Learning Satellite (SLS) now has clear referral pathways which makes it easier for teachers /schools to refer a child for help and assessment.

The SLS teachers operating under the Teachers’ Center and Lilaloka have been able to take on a wider role of Professional Development, leading to a ‘trickle down’ effect from islands of expertise, from which all Auroville institutions are beginning to benefit.

Research highlights:

We are developing a workbook for teachers based on Montessori principles and how they are linked to Integral Education principles. This workbook is in process, five chapters are finished out of ten.

We created three platforms online for professional development to fulfill the needs of the ongoing programs, including teacher resources (didactic material, videos, homework). Interactive Zoom sessions happened. Teachers had to learn how to use these new tools.

It was found that the training is more efficient when both online classes and traditional meetings with participants physically present are used. In an Integral Education approach the teachers have to experience physically, emotionally and mentally the educational material they are going to propose to the children. And this cannot be done online.

Reflections:

The most meaningful process this year was the transformation of the teachers in the Kindergarten section at Aikiyam. Teachers deepened their understanding of child development; they could experience at home with their children and grandchildren the value of what they have learned. They became eager to create a classroom set-up and materials to follow and enhance the learning process of the children. They gained confidence and energy in the process.

Challenging this year was the pandemic and finding ways to keep working with the teachers under the present circumstances.
Supportive Learning Satellite
a project of the Teachers’ Center

by Marion

This project was to extend and equip the Supportive Learning Service (SLS), an internal project of the Teachers’ Centre, to further develop a learning satellite and hub for children in need of emotional, behavioural and learning support, together with their families.

The Supportive Learning Satellite consists of 3 teachers attached to the Teacher’ Centre (Jo Cuypers, Marion Meakin and Thamilselvi Somasundaram, soon to be joined by Ana Daniela), and the teaching staff of Lilaloka (Marianne Dubouchet and Jitta Skoles).

All students from Auroville and Bioregion schools can benefit from this service. Students from Nandanam, Kindergarten, Deepanam and Transition have benefitted from the individual attention, diagnostic micro-teaching and emotional/behavioural support that the SLS has been able to provide in spite of the difficult circumstances during this Covid time. Lockdowns and school restrictions have made it difficult to fully engage with all schools and students.

Description of project:
The Supportive Learning Satellite - A two-centre hub:
The idea of a Supportive Learning Satellite, working independently from schools with maintenances targeted through the Teachers’ Centre, emerged from the growing caseload of Lilaloka which was, at that time, working on extremely limited maintenances in a half-built facility, plus a Supportive Learning Service, operating from the Teachers’ Centre, with no independent premises and no means of recruiting dedicated SLS teachers. There was a waiting list of students in need of support.

This year the Teachers’ Centre and Lilaloka acted together as a twin hub for services providing targeted support for schools who do not have sufficient maintenances for a nominated Supportive Learning teacher or who have a light, but significant, supportive learning caseload.

Referrals to the SLS were discussed with Lilaloka to decide on appropriate packages of support, and vice versa. Sometimes there is a mixed resource approach where a SLS teacher sees a referred child in Lilaloka’s premises. Teachers and facilitators often confer.

As well as seeing individual students in Lilaloka, teachers are trained to go into schools, when possible, for observations, consultations with teachers and, sometimes, parents.

More academic support is afforded on a one-to-one basis in schools in cooperation with the class teacher.

Parents and families:
Working in the field of supportive learning also includes working with parents and families, and we have been able to extend our interactions in this field by recruiting Tamilzhselvi, a qualified and experienced teacher who grew up in the surrounding culture. Through her basic training with Auroville Child Protection (AVCP) and her knowledge of supportive learning / early education, she has been able to extend her role into a social work capacity and be a support and bridge for Tamil-speaking parents and families to further support their children as well as be a liaison for schools.
**Bioregion:**

The Thamarai community learning centres are also benefitting from our service. Both Marion and Tamizhselvi from SLS are working with Thamarai facilitators to enable them to support the children of the bioregion in areas of remedial literacy and English as a Second Language.

The SLS also acts as a referral bridge liaising with teachers in Auroville and Outreach schools who have skills required and requested by Thamarai or other schools. A teacher from Aikiyam is working with Thamarai in this capacity in the area of behaviour management.

There are now plans to help assess children with learning difficulties through the After School facility of Thamarai, when conditions allow, and provide professional development for the facilitators in this field.

**Education and professional development:**

Teachers and facilitators of the Supportive Learning Satellite are working on providing packages of training from their own particular disciplines. These are being delivered to Tamizhselvi as in-house training and some have been uploaded onto Edmodo, the online education portal. Still more are being designed for delivery in schools.

- **Jo (SLS)** - Difficulties in numbers and maths
  - Dyscalculia
- **Ana (TC/SLS)** - Child development from a Montessori perspective
  (also working with the kindergarten in Aikiyam School)
- **Marianne (Lilaloka/SLS)** - The emotional and behavioral component of early learning
  - Enabling the student to maintain focus and attention
  - Micro-teaching – task analysis
- **Marion (TC/SLS)** - “How the Special Needs Brain Learns” (Supportive Learning coursebook)
- **Madras Dyslexia Association (MDA)** - Dyslexia and Remedial Strategies, a 7-week online course. This was offered through the SLS to teachers in schools as well as teachers from the SLS.

**Auroville Safeguarding and Child Protection (AVCP):**

Tamizhselvi played a significant role in the newly fledged AVCP team, taking on casework and translation, participating in meetings with stakeholders and working and planning workshops. She has taken part in team building with Koodam:

- Creating the AVCP vision and purpose
- Team roles, functions and tasks
- A systematic approach to task management
- Team agreements and ethics
- Our talents, skills, curiosities
- What helps us and what blocks us

She also trained with Himanshu Gupta, professional child protection social worker in casework practice and Child Protection Legislation in the following areas:

- The vulnerability of children
- UNCRC – fundamental rights
- CWC and its case intervention procedure
- POCSO Act 2012
- Juvenile Justice Act – principles and definitions
- Juvenile Justice Act – structures for implementation (national to village level)
● The role of a community organiser
● Childhood and child development stages
● What is social work?
● Principles and types of social work

For further information about the work of the AVCP in which Thamilselvi took part, please see the project report for “Auroville Safeguarding and Child Protection”.

Outcomes:

Referral pathways and the two-centre hub:

The Supportive Learning Satellite now has clear referral pathways which makes it easier for teachers/schools to refer a child for help and assessment.

A recent instance: Nandanam referred a child to Marion (TC/SLS) who observed the child and spoke to the teachers, school executive and the parents. The child and parents were referred to Angelika (Deepam) resulting in a package of support given at school and more in depth support on a behavioral-emotional level at Lilaloka twice a week. This whole process took about 10 days.

It also resulted in Angelika running a session for the teachers of Nandanam, SLS and others who wanted to join, in ‘Early Pencil/Writing Skills and the Significance of Children’s Drawing’.

There are now clear pathways and protocols for facilitating referrals, enabling early identification and the possibilities of supporting the child, school and parents to resolve the issues before they become entrenched.

Self-supporting training:

The Supportive Learning Satellite is becoming self-supporting in terms of training. There is a ‘trickle down’ effect from islands of expertise around the SLS, Lilaloka and Teachers’ Centre and also from teachers in Auroville and Outreach schools, which all Auroville institutions are beginning to benefit from.

Thamizhselvi is now able to take this training on into the bioregion via Thamarai.

Reflections:

There was, from the start, recognition of the value of this project from the participants and stakeholders. There has been clear cooperation and a willingness to share expertise and resources.

Also meaningful was the identification of professional development facilitators from within the service.

The appointment of a Tamil teacher from the local area has proved to be very successful in working with both children and families, in ways which have exceeded expectation.

The anticipated child psychologist decided not to join Auroville and there have been no replacements. However, we continue to work with Mattram psychological service when appropriate.

Whilst an individual taking a hybrid role between SLS and AVCP had potential, in practical terms it didn’t really work out. Meetings, sessions with children and general expectations of the two roles were often conflicting. It would be better to develop this into a full time role in SLS.

Conclusion:

The Supportive Learning Satellite wants to continue its work and expand its capacity to meet a growing need in both delivery and training. It also hopes to be able to expand its role in Professional Development, running both online and live interactive workshops for teachers and facilitators.
Auroville Safeguarding and Child Protection (AVCP)

by Honor and Marion

The scope of this project was:

- To better understand existing child protection in schools and the Auroville community, identify school safeguarding focal points (SGFP) and any relevant existing services.
- To create and train an AVCP core team to develop and implement child protection measures and an operational service with and for the community.
- To set up an AVCP policy document detailing case management procedures and cooperation with stakeholders, leading to a child protection policy for schools and later an Auroville-wide policy.
- To generally raise awareness on child safety in Auroville and the bioregion through Outreach schools and centers.

The AVCP has seen its primary work as beginning in schools. This has not been as expansive as we would have wished due to the Covid emergency and the closure of schools, sports clubs etc.

We focused on working with schools on a survey of need and on identifying safeguarding focal points (SGFP) – individuals who are willing to train and work with AVCP in being a ‘safe person’ for children to talk with, being a school’s liaison with AVCP and other schools, and who will ultimately take on training and support in their schools.

Description of project:

Following on from a previous period of work done by the project holders, Bridget, Honor and Marion, the AVCP project was officially started with the formation of a core team of 5 people: Harishini, Himanshu, Honor, Marion and Thamizh Selvi, in September 2020. Early in the project, a local support and an international advisory group were established to provide support for the core team in their work. The project was funded by both Stichting de Zaaier and SAIIER.

AVCP was a new, mixed team that came together to work in a field that is complex and sensitive. For these reasons, it was felt that investing time in team capacity building was important. The financial investment was negligible thanks to the resources and opportunities available within Auroville. AVCP participated in three distinct capacity building exercises:

1. **Team building sessions with Koodam** – 6 sessions covering the topics: AVCP vision and purpose; team roles, functions and tasks; systematic approach to task management; team agreements and ethics; our talents, skills, curiosities; what helps us and what blocks us.

2. **Friday learning sessions with Himanshu** – Sharing with the team on various topics around child protection work:
   - International and national legal framework (the UNCRC, Indian law (Juvenile Justice & POCSO acts)) and structures for implementation.
   - Childhood and child development stages.
   - Child protection – general principles.
   - Social work – general principles.
   - Role of community organizer.
3. **Radical Transformational Leadership** – Three 3-day workshops (by Monica Sharma & team – Bridget is a resource person and Honor is a practitioner coach for this work) – learning to use design templates and project management tools, and encouraging each member to practice radical transformational leadership in their work and lives.

Further capacity building is planned with: Stefanie (advisory group) on training content and formats and overall child protection system strengthening strategy; Laetitia (advisory group) on working with parents and developing intercultural formats for workshops; Tulir for updated training on sensitisation programmes; Sigrid (Auroville therapist) on recognising and handling trauma.

**Case management:**

Besides prevention measures, intervention or case management is the main work that is included in child protection. For AVCP this has included all the steps necessary to set up a system to allow for both reporting and responding to any cases of children in need of care and protection, as and when needed. Case management is led by Himanshu, as the lead social worker. Harishini, also trained in social work, was the second case manager. Other members of the team step in to support, observe, or communicate with working groups, as required.

The first activity required setting up the AVCP case documentation templates and procedures:

- Creating an AVCP case database to track and monitor cases and other required standardised templates.
- Creating AVCP case management procedures and protocols – this is an ongoing process as clarity on needs is gained with experience and as partnerships are built. Currently Stefanie is working closely with Himanshu to bring this task to conclusion by end July 2021.

As part of continued case management, case workers engaged in receiving initial complaints or reports, and creating and populating the case file (data base, registration, documenting interviews and progress, supporting and liaising with stakeholders).

Since starting our work in August 2020, there have been 12 cases brought to the attention of the AVCP team. All concerns brought to AVCP are considered and qualify as ‘cases’ but not all of these involve what the Indian law describes as a case of ‘child in need of care and protection’. When there is a case of CNCP, the case is more likely to involve recourse to outside interventions (police, child welfare committee, etc.). Of these 12 cases, 3 concerned Aurovillian children, the others involved non-Aurovillian adults and/or children. The issues encountered in these cases include: online pedophile activity, neglect, sexual assault, physical abuse, emotional abuse and domestic instability due to parental conflict. Two of the cases are ongoing and the others are closed or the complaint was unfounded or retracted.

**Needs assessment – Understanding Auroville’s child protection needs:**

To develop a data-supported understanding of Auroville’s needs in terms of child safety and wellbeing, it was felt that a baseline survey, including both literature review as well as data gathering, would be necessary. A baseline survey is a fundamental step to the elaboration of a project such as AVCP which aims to work towards bringing social and systems change. It helps to anchor the project within its context, thereby helping to define actions and strategies. Additionally, this action would help to establish project indicators for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

The baseline survey involved a survey of teachers from both Auroville and outreach schools. A summarised, preliminary account of the findings from the teachers’ survey are available. A more detailed analysis is underway and it is hoped that further data from parents and children will serve to confirm the validity of the teacher survey data.
**Liaison and partnership building:**

Much of the work required to develop a child protection system involves liaison and partnership building, particularly in a context such as Auroville, where such a system is not in place and requires time to build reliability, transparency and trust. In the past 9 months AVCP was engaged in the following:

- AVCP met with the previous Auroville Child Protection Service (CPS) to understand the challenges they faced and receive suggestions to improve the work of the current AVCP.
- Established links with local government agencies: the Villupuram Child Welfare Committee and District Child Protection Unit. AVCP visited their offices in September 2020, shared about the AVCP project and asked about their work.
- Sharing about the project with school boards: Auroville School Board, Outreach Board and SAIER Board.
- Meeting with AV and Outreach school teaching teams to present the AVCP project and conduct the teacher survey.

We began building partnerships with AV services:

- **Mattram** – To explore how intervention can be done in child-related cases together. Monthly meetings are happening to discuss shared cases.
- **AVSST (Auroville Safety and Security Team)** – Several meetings have taken place relating to new and ongoing cases. All phone numbers for ease of contacting in an emergency have been established. Anandamayi is the designated police liaison person. AVCP has been looking at establishing an easy system for police verification for volunteers (as required by POCSO regulations 2020).
- **Entry Service** – AVCP met in December 2020 and shared about AVCP’s work and informed of the need for fluid communication between Entry and AVCP regarding any allegations of child rights violations with regard to new members of the community.
- **Savi** – AVCP met Savi to discuss the possibility of requesting police clearance from their countries for all volunteers coming to Auroville to work with children (as required by POCSO regulations 2020).
- **Working Committee (WCom)** – WCom informed that any case which needs to be reported to external authorities (outside Auroville), must go through WCom first. Otherwise, AVCP can take decisions for cases dealt with.
- **Social service hub** – AVCP has participated in all meetings discussing the possible formation of a social service hub for Auroville. This has been led by the AV Council. For now, no designated person or team has been assigned to move forward with this.
- **Auroville Village Action group (AVAG)** – Two AVCP team members went to visit AVAG and discuss the AVCP project with Anbu.

We are also liaising with AV resource people who have worked or are working on educational programmes and materials that relate to child protection:

- SuryaGandhi – ‘Safe Touch’ training for schools.
- Valentine – ‘Peer Educator Network’ (trained with Juan Andres), who has worked with groups on issues affecting youth (sexuality, consent, alcohol and drugs, boundaries).
- Paula Murphy – ‘Our Whole Lives (OWL)’, a comprehensive sexual education programme for children of different age groups.
- Auromira and Nadia – who have created a program ‘Chrysalis: transformation program for youth’ for children aged 10-15, covering puberty, menstruality, sexuality education.
● Gopa (Mattram) – sessions with 5th & 6th graders on Social and Emotional Learning.
● Smiti and Bhavyo – who run a ‘Bridging the Gap’ program for youth.
● Rita – ‘Be True Not Violent’ curriculum developed in AV.
● Dr. Sue Jennings (international advisory group) – ‘Neuro-Dramatic Play’ basis for child protection programmes with children.
● Mathilde – AV creative therapist.

Awareness raising and sensitisation in the community:
● Educators’ workshop on child protection (Feb 2020) – run by the three project holders with Heidi (support group member), for teachers and therapists working in education in Auroville.
● 2nd Educators’ workshop – on March 6th 2021, we re-ran the Educators’ workshop for those who had missed it or elected to attend again.
● Two learning sessions on child protection – delivered to Thamarai team of facilitators in December 2020.

Reflections:

Reflections on case management so far:
● Case work is new to most team members and it takes time to gain alignment. It is clear how important it is that trained and experienced people manage case work.
● AVCP needs to continue clarifying its remit and boundaries in terms of intervention. There is a need to continue building partnerships to establish a clear understanding of case procedure, process and protocols both internally and with stakeholders.
● AVCP needs to work on building clarity and confidence in their partnership with working groups (WCom and AV Council) in how and when to involve outside authorities (district child welfare committee and police) in cases where needed.

General reflections on the past 9 months:
● In terms of overall strategy for AVCP work with the AV community, it makes sense to ensure that there is a strong emphasis on prevention work and caution is taken that intervention (case work) does not take up too much of the team’s time and energy. Ultimately, effective prevention measures should reduce the need for intervention and it is important not to fall into a pattern of ‘fire fighting’. The prevention/intervention balance is one which needs to be carefully managed to ensure that referrals receive adequate support while putting in place a system of prevention through education in schools, with parents and in the community.

● As a general approach, ‘community-based child protection systems strengthening’ makes most sense as it empowers the community to take leadership and ownership in enabling children’s wellbeing. This means that AVCP needs to be ‘bottom-up’ in its approach with the community – recognizing the resources and strengths within the community, first and foremost, and building on them. An expert-driven, didactic approach, with the notion of an external agency solving the problems, does not seem appropriate. Thus child protection is everyone’s responsibility.

● It is also necessary to notice the gaps in the child protection system, making them (and the intention to work on them) explicit and being ready to stand up and speak out when necessary.
During our work as a team, it will be important to focus on learning-in-action opportunities, both internally and as a format for training courses to be given. Theoretical understanding is valuable but needs to be applied and practiced.

At the end of March 2021, three of the core team members left. Thamizh selvi’s role, split between AVCP and the Supportive Learning Satellite (SLS), became difficult. As SLS work increased there emerged a conflict between her commitment to the two roles. It was suggested that the role in SLS would take precedence, but she would retain strong ties to AVCP in her capacity as an SLS teacher working with schools and educational units. Both Thamilzh selvi and Harishini had SAIIER maintenance grants which ended in March while Thamilzh selvi transferred her work to SLS at the Teachers’ Centre, Harishini left the team. Marion chose to move from the core team to the support group.

Overall, building clarity and direction on a complex and emerging field (in Auroville), with a mixed team, has been a challenge. It seems that strong leadership, with clear task planning and accountabilities needs to improve. Additionally, a clearer understanding of the skills and competencies of team members was needed to be able to better support and guide each team member in their role. AVCP now needs to look at what is the best way to move forward with the current core team.

**Conclusion:**
Safeguarding and child protection is a complex topic, involving many stakeholders. Despite an increasingly comprehensive Indian legal framework, available resources for implementation at the local community level are negligible or at best, piecemeal. Within the small Auroville community and surrounding villages, while some informal family or community based support does exist, there are few systemic child protection measures in place (policies, social welfare services, etc.) and little recourse to legal justice. There is therefore much work to be done to build a child protection system for Auroville and the bioregion and to define how best this can be articulated between different stakeholders, building in accountability, monitoring and evaluation.

The AVCP team benefits from a strong network of support people in and around Auroville. However, future work will require dedicated human resources within the core team to generate results. It will be important for the core team to stabilise and gain a stable core, with the required competencies and commitment. In the following months the team is focusing on finalising the case management procedures and building these into a policy document that will be extrapolated to connect to child protection policy for schools. Parallel to this, the team is looking at developing awareness and sensitisation programs for teachers and children. One such program is to develop learning-in-action programs for teachers and youth in collaboration with the Radical Transformational Leadership team with Monica Sharma. There is also a plan to create a short film (drama) and a travelling street theatre performed by children.
Auroville Campus Initiative (ACI) exists to facilitate the emergence of Auroville as a new kind of a learning place, a higher education destination on the map of the world, using new and cutting-edge methods and grounded in the integral worldview of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This is done by developing intense transformative structured learning courses, helping students weave self-designed learning journeys in Auroville and helping Aurovilians offer their courses through the Auroville Campus Platform (https://edu.auroville.org).

Activities of the year:

The last year began with our “Svādhyāya 2.0” program in May - June 2020. Svadhyaya is an eight week course for seekers of integral knowledge, that helps one dive deep into the wisdom of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through project- and practice-based learning with a sangha of seekers. https://svadhyaya.auroville.org

In the pandemic year, we worked significantly on building and strengthening ACI’s alumni community network spread across India and the world. We had Swadharma Summer School in July-August 2021, Swadharma Winter School in December 2021, and regular Swadharma Coaching Circle Triads beginning in January 2021. We also have a regular Swadharma Newsletter called “Swadharma Bulletin” going out since August 2021.

On August 15, we launched the ACI website (https://aci.auroville.org) as well as the Integral Education Portal. The engagement on the Integral Education Portal is 600 people, with a team of 20 volunteers keeping it up to date, with a newsletter being sent out biweekly to its subscribers on an Integral Education theme of the month, bringing the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to interested adult practitioners in any field in a simple and digestible way. https://ie.auroville/#subscribe

Lately, the Integral Education Portal also launched the Humility Journey, where 144 participants are together.

Then thrice, from August - November 2020 & thereafter in January 2021 & February 2021, “Savitri Painting Courses” were delivered. Savitri Painting is a process where art, music and poetry are used as transformative tools of touching one’s deepest essence. The course has been highly successful and has a huge waiting list. https://aci.auroville.org/savitripainting

We could not hold Swadharma last year due to the pandemic. Instead we had “Prayoga” (https://aci.auroville.org/prayoga) where 12 students participated in a 12 week learning journey with an intention to bridge their inner transformation journey with outer social work.

At Disha Info Desk, 14 youths reached out to us for support. Disha also held 6 workshops: 3 online and three in person. (See following report)

Outcomes:

Our huge exercise of building a robust alumni community, a community of online volunteers was one of the biggest successes of the year.

The participants in our programs were:

- Savitri Painting: 36
- Prayoga: 12
The participants of different courses benefitted differently depending on the objectives of the course. Across courses, the feedback was a high degree of self-transformation – a shift in better self-awareness, a shift towards practices and habits that enable one to be more conscious in daily life, a shift in attitudes, thoughts and feelings, a shift in the center of operation, and a shift in work and relationships. For Svādhyāya one of the biggest feedbacks was that participants are learning how to translate the teachings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo into everyday life.

For Prayoga, the major benefit of the course was learning how to shift one's life through shifting simple things like routine, calendars, sleep, decluttering, food & being aware and engaging in topics of self; as well as in the collective living domain with e.g. water, waste, community, economy, governance. Participants also worked on a project of their own choice.

The students of Prayoga and Svādhyāya (and in fact of all our courses) are continuing to build their collective structured learning journeys long term, and are continuously in touch with us.

“Savitri Painting” was one of the biggest highlights of the year. It is a completely original discovery wherein the mantric power of Savitri helps create subtle and powerful shifts in life.

Integral Education Portal subscribers have been benefiting by learning the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in a simple way, applying the learnings in their lives through simple self-development practices. Gradually the portal will evolve to help them apply these learnings in education.

Students coming through the Auroville Campus Platform benefitted through personalised assistance in helping them design self-designing learning journeys in Auroville, tapping on what already exists within Auroville.

Research highlights:

The work with online courses itself is a part of a larger research and a field of cutting-edge innovation – how do you design online learning? How does one make it transformative? How does one make it process-based, asynchronous, and yet have a high degree of transformation? How does one weave cohort-based learning journeys? How does one intelligently build online journeys that minimise screen time and maximise impact? How does one create subtle experiences when the mode of delivery is virtual?

This exploration is being taken forward via “Swadharma Online” launching in July 2021, in collaboration with Pupilfirst, a Learning Management System in partnership with the Government of India on delivery of the National Education Policy (NEP) in Indian schools and universities.

Reflections:

Most meaningful this year was discovering the possibility to develop high impact, low on logistics, high on transformation courses with a learners base spread across the world.

Zoom-fatigue was a challenge. One of our experiments this year was Prayoga, where we did not receive the kind of participants we were looking for and with paucity of funds and not getting high quality participants, we could not bring high-quality resource people on board. We learnt that
we need to be systematic in our outreach, and thus have started building a “Friends of ACI” mailing list.

Another big challenge this year was finances, which is a common challenge in the context of the Pandemic.

Conclusion:

Our intentions for next year are to:

1. Evolve “Savitri Painting” in scale and levels.
2. Bring Swadharma online in a high-quality, transformative way.
4. Offer self-designed learning journeys on the Auroville Campus Platform more proactively.
6. Continue to strengthen the alumni community, and their engagement in our works.
7. We sense that long-term programmes and courses are becoming redundant in this fast changing world; giving students the choice to weave a longer learning journey through plugging into several shorter journeys seems like the way forward. This has already started happening.
8. We also did a prototype of an online asynchronous course based on pre-recorded content. It was excellent for us to get feedback and is preparing us to evolve further in the direction of self-paced courses.
Disha Info Desk & Events

by Valentine

Many of the youth in Auroville are not necessarily aware of all the opportunities the city holds for them after they are done with school, nor are they aware of how Auroville functions. The aim of Disha is to provide personalised support to the youth that are seeking guidance for the next step of their lives.

Description of project:

Disha sought to provide support to the youth through two means:

1. First, as an “information desk” for individuals seeking guidance through connecting them to resource people, providing emotional and technical support and helping them navigate Aurovillian administration.
2. Second, as an event holder that held workshops that supplied participants with tools that would empower and enable them to choose their next steps in a manner that is more true to them.

14 youths reached out to us for support. During an initial meeting their needs would be identified and relevant support would be provided. This would come in the form of linking them with resource people within and outside of Auroville, helping with writing emails to relevant services of Auroville and in some cases providing psychological support through holding a safe space and providing guidance. Based on individual needs, follow up meetings would take place with some meeting almost every week.

A total of 6 workshops were held: 3 online and 3 in SAIER. About 35 people in total attended the workshops, including older Aurovillians, volunteers and registered guests. The topics of the workshop were Goal Setting, Vision Board, Core Values, Ikigai and Core Identity Model.

Some new initiatives emerged this year:

- **Unending Education group:** Disha joined the Unending Education group that also includes Savi, the Auroville Research Platform, Auroville Campus Initiative, Anveshan and YouthLink. This is an initiative that aims at vitalising and promoting the concept of unending education (post-school) in Auroville. Out of this the ‘myunendingeducation’ Instagram account was created and was managed by Disha.

- **Collaboration with Scholarship Fund:** The youth interested in applying for a scholarship through the Scholarship and Education Fund now need to meet with the Disha team for screening prior to approaching the Scholarship Fund. The screening includes understanding the individual's needs and motivations and exploring alternatives within and outside Auroville. This is to ensure that the individuals are well informed of their choices prior to seeking an educational loan. (This year Disha did not receive any requests from potential applicants).

- **Youth Survey:** A survey was created to understand the perspectives of those who either grew up or currently go to school in Auroville regarding the challenges and opportunities they encountered.
Outcomes:

- 14 people received individual support of different types – both Auroville youth and bioregion youth.
- 6 workshops were held, 3 online and 3 in person. 35 people including volunteers, Swadharma program participants and Aurovilians participated.

Reflections:

It is clear that the youth are uneducated when it comes to the administration and the working groups / governance of Auroville. There seems to be a fear of asking and a feeling of being disenfranchised.

In some cases it was apparent that there was a very severe lack of parental support which affected finances, housing, physical and mental health, and decision making. The role of Disha at times was that of a social worker but without the proper resources. An entity that could provide support to these vulnerable youth is sorely required.

During the workshops there was no participation by the Auroville youth. Giving workshops through the schools may have had more impact, but none of the schools responded to the introductory emails that we sent.

We appreciate the trust shown by the Scholarship Fund and feel that this collaboration makes sense.

There were many interesting insights and learnings from the Survey results. Our detailed reflection will be shared at a future date.

The collaboration within the Unending Education group has been energising and we are optimistic about what can be achieved in the future.

Conclusion:

Due to the lack of human resources, Disha will not be continuing. What has been observed while doing this work is that a systemic change regarding how we support the youth is needed. Much of the youth of Auroville requires assistance in the form of material, emotional and social support.

There is a real concern that our youth have to provide for themselves, which is not conducive to a healthy learning environment. They are too busy working for their basic needs to actually be able to pursue something that is both fulfilling and contributes to the community. The number of ‘apprentice maintenances’ is too low and the criteria to be eligible for them is very alienating.

Although the principle within Auroville is that we are here to dedicate our lives and give our energy to this project, it is not realistic to expect young people to connect with and embody this philosophy. Many of us that can connect to this philosophy have had the privilege of choosing this life and the youth should be given the same opportunity.

The schools have not used our service. This, in itself, is ok but if there is no centralised guidance-counselor service then the schools would need to assume this responsibility. As it stands, the schools provide minimal support to their own students when it comes to the next steps in their life and the youth that have dropped out of school for any reason do not even receive this minimal support.

To summarise, the youth would benefit greatly from the following services:

1) Social Services
2) Guidance Counseling
3) A maintenance that would allow the youth to support themselves while learning in Auroville.
Scholarship and Educational Fund (SEF)

by Vennila and Lucas

The Scholarship and Educational Fund (SEF) was established in 2008 to provide financial assistance to Aurovilians who seek educational opportunities outside Auroville. Financial support is provided in the form of interest-free loans, repayable as soon as possible and in installments feasible for the recipient.

Activities of the year:

During the financial year 2020-21, 56 Auroville students received financial support from or through the SEF.

The main sources of student-nonspecific contributions were from Ramco Cements Ltd. as CSR funds (Rs. 20 lakh), AVI Netherlands (Rs. 2.47 lakh) and the Auroville City Budget (Rs. 4.3 lakh).

The SEF team had fourteen meetings to interview new applicants and to make decisions on support.

In communication with the SAIIER executives, we updated and rephrased the conditions for SEF support and the procedures of decision-making. They are available for anybody interested, in particular to donors of the SEF.

We met with the Disha Info Desk team who offer guidance to Auroville youth in regard to their motivation and aptitude in their choices of study and learning, and decided to collaborate with the team. From January on, students who approach the SEF for the first time for financial support, will be asked to have at least one session with Disha.

Outcomes:

In total, 56 Aurovilian students received support from SEF in this fiscal year, out of which five received support exclusively from student-specific contributions made by Auroville units. In most cases the financial help provided by the SEF presented only in-part support.


Reflections:

We approached all past SEF beneficiaries asking for repayments of their loans and their financial contributions, but received only very few positive responses. As we have no assured sponsors and income for the subsequent fiscal year, the SEF will depend on a budget allocation from the City Budget / BCC and on repayments. The total available for distribution among applicants may represent one of the lowest annual budgets in the young history of the SEF’s existence.
Conclusion:

There seem to be two ways for the SEF to secure a somehow adequate annual budget for loans to students: one would be a large enough corpus fund that generates sufficient interest – something that would be possible only through generous help from donors; and the second, regular repayments from all earlier SEF beneficiaries amounting to at least 1 lakh per month, which, in our estimate, seems possible in consideration of the total amount paid as loans to Auroville students over the past twelve years. However, till date, moral support and goodwill of earlier beneficiaries towards repayment is insufficient, and our efforts towards this will need to be further intensified.
Dehashakti School of Physical Education
by Satyavan

The Dehashakti program is open to the students of the schools of Auroville. We currently have students from Deepanam, Transition and Last School. After requests from parents, we opened it to students of TLC (The Learning Community) and some more kids of Auroville who are not particularly attending an Auroville school for this academic year.

Our program is planned so as to develop all the components of fitness including cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition for the students. We also focus on the skill-related fitness factors such as agility, balance, coordination, power, reaction time and speed.

While physical fitness is an important aspect we also give importance in developing the qualities that the students would benefit from their entire lives through the medium of physical education: discipline, courage, team play, self-control, equal acceptance of defeat or victory, fair play/competition and hardiness.

All the above mentioned components and qualities are explored, worked upon and reinforced through a wide variety of sports activities – both individual and team sports.

Activities of the year:

The academic year 2020-21 with the Covid pandemic restrictions forced us to stop the regular sports program. Therefore we proposed an alternative program where we focused only on the physical activities which do not involve physical contact with each other. This started from the second week of September 2020, after a break of several months. These activities continued even during the school term break of September-October, and finally paused again in the third week of April 2021 with the new surge in Covid cases.

To allow a maximum number of students to have access to these activities and keep the groups smaller (6 children in each group), we changed our organization and schedule completely. We offered physical education from 9am to 12pm and 2 to 5pm, from Monday to Friday in contrast to the regular hours (2-5pm).

In September 2020, to begin with we started with Table Tennis and Badminton and then later at the beginning of November, we also started Basketball and some specific classes for 2nd graders. Eventually, from January 2021, we added more activities like Cycling and Futsal. Finally, at the beginning of March 2021, we offered some specific classes for 1st graders as well. About 170 students participated in one or more activities this year, from 1 to 8 times per week and from a few weeks to the full year.
Outcomes:

What was really unique this year was that each student had to choose the activity they would like to engage in. There was no obligation on any student and all who signed up did so because they were genuinely interested. Naturally, this attitude was very beneficial for progress in the activity and the skills of the students. Since the number of activities offered was reduced and sessions increased they had more time to learn, apply, memorize and integrate some basic skills. We noticed that during this Covid time, the students were more aware of their progress and were in general more motivated and inspired to learn and push their limits further. We organized one Badminton and two Table Tennis tournaments during this period and received a great participation from the students.

Reflections:

Given the circumstances, the biggest challenge was to organize the time tables as each student had a specific schedule with his/her school, and parents also organized specific activities for their children when most of the school classes were done online.

The lack of a school bus was a big hindrance since many parents are working and find it difficult to drop and pick up their kids on a regular basis.

After following this unique way of teaching during the Covid time, the team felt that when we work on a specific activity (game, individual or team sport) over a longer period of time, frequently and in smaller groups, it provides us (teachers) the space to work on innovative practice sessions and make them more intense and meaningful for the students. It also allows us to better evaluate our work and students’ respective progress, and give space to adapt our teaching at an individual level.

Conclusion:

We hope to restart our regular program in the new academic year with learnings from this year, with rich, renewed experiences and methods of conducting sports sessions.
Dehashakti Football tournament

by Ganesh

This project was to host a football tournament at Dehashatki School of Physical Education, allowing interaction between the football teams of Auroville, Pondicherry and the bioregion. Playing in tournament matches helps teams and individuals to better their skills and team dynamics.

Football has not been taken up as a major sport for quite some time in Auroville, though it has the potential and interest amongst the players. This tournament was for their encouragement and development as players and as a team.

Description of project:
The tournament was an event hosted over 2 days (27th and 28th March, 2021) at Dehashakti football ground. There were a total of 13 matches, taking place each day in the mornings and evenings. A total of 13 teams participated. 2 of the 13 were Auroville teams (Auroville & Dehashakti), 5 teams from the bio-region and 6 teams from Pondicherry/ surroundings. The teams which participated are as follows:

1. Dehashakti
2. Auroville
3. WOGA (Winner)
4. Playmakers (Runner-up)
5. Oulgaret
6. GEMS
7. Kittu Kickers
8. Thavalakupam
9. ULFC
10. PEC
11. Annai Nagar
12. Infinite
13. Error

The project setting and management was coordinated by the teachers’ team at Dehashakti, and on 28th March evening at 6pm a prize distribution ceremony was held for the winning and runner-up teams.

Outcomes:
During the tournament a lot of potential was seen in the Auroville teams and they benefited from the exchange and competition with better-trained teams from Pondicherry. The teams from Pondicherry and the bioregion extended a continued exchange with the Auroville teams for friendly matches. We will henceforth also request formally the teams to invite Auroville teams for tournaments at their ground. This will also open a channel for the Auroville teams to train harder and eventually register with Pondicherry Football Association.
Reflections:

The most meaningful part about this project was the discipline that tournament matches brings in the players. The challenges faced were a few, like we realized although Auroville teams have a lot of potential in the sport, they lacked in playing matches. The learning was that they need to play more and more friendly matches with tougher teams in order to grow and progress in their skills and team dynamics.

There were some other challenges, like the ground at Dehashakti is not a full ground but a smaller one, hence the matches were difficult with 11 players each in the teams. Furthermore, the weather was too hot and too many matches were held in two days, maybe in future we would like to have them divided in 3-4 days.

Conclusion:

The intention for the future is to focus more on the training for the Auroville/ Dehashakti football teams. We intend to continue building a network enabling us to open more doors and opportunities for exchange for tournaments and/or friendly matches in the future.
Physical Education training

by Vikram M.

I have been training Aurovilians, Newcomers, volunteers, workers in the field of physical education through fitness, gym, functional training, self defense, holistic physical training in the gym, in my house, in their homes, in the villages etc.

Reflections:

There is a significant increase in the interest and awareness to train the physical being and the realisation that it is crucial for the body (the vessel) to be well trained for everyday life, for integral health and integral yoga itself.

This year the Covid-19 pandemic was the challenge, especially early on as I was not able to open the gym or train individuals and/or group sessions. But it got better.

Research highlights:

I have come to realize through training many people all over the world that the ‘body’ is the final frontier, so to speak. It holds a crucial key to the well-being of the emotional, mental and vital parts of human beings. One needs to constantly train the body with discipline, through different methods to progress and get better with balance, strength, endurance, lightness etc.

I hope to continue to research more through my work on how to make the physical being aspire and move towards perfection, in everyday life (for some people) and in the journey of integral yoga.

Conclusion:

My intention is to be sincere and persevere to train myself and others more and raise more awareness in the field of physical education, for the people in Auroville, the bio-region and across the world.
New Creation Sports

by Savitri

New Creation Sports is a sports education sub-unit, focusing on teaching Aikiyam School children as well as targeting a larger sports population in Auroville and the surrounding bioregion.

The search to find new ways to impart knowledge to the children of Aikiyam School is an ongoing task. The research aspect leads us to focus on the individual as well as the team work for our students always, keeping in mind that sports should be fun. We try to make the children aware of their body’s capacities by exercising all body sections in relative detail so that the students can relate this to their sports.

For the individual development such as athletics, we focus on the practice of individual skills, such as leg drills, quick feet jumping drills, passing and hitting drills etc. For team development during our games competitive season, we sometimes mix older and younger students so that older will learn to look after younger for instance; or we put an older team playing with a younger team then revert back to same age playing. This also allows the students to not be so competitive.

Our newly built multi-purpose stadium allows longer playing times in all seasons and brings together more sports disciplines.

For the bio-region and Auroville at large, this sports ground is developing and becoming a vibrant place for all to play. We plan to develop the volleyball court by adding lights to play at night.

Unfortunately, during this Covid time in 2020-21, we were not able to fully access the school children at Aikiyam, but we are looking forward to a fresh start in July 2021, when the school opens for the new school year.
Auroville Sports Resource Center (AVSRC)

by AVSRC team

Auroville Sports Resource Centre (AVSRC) coordinates regular trainings, coaching camps, friendly matches and tournaments as part of on-going efforts towards human unity through sports. Strengthening the relation between Auroville and its surrounding villages is another aim, which we try to reach through a growing communication based on the bilateral interest in sports and culture.

AVSRC has also been trying to help develop sports facilities due to a severe lack of sports facilities in the bioregion: there is only one public sports stadium in the whole of Villupuram District, in the capital town of Villupuram, created and maintained by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT) that’s meant to cater to about 928 villages in Villupuram district.

Activities of the year:

1. AVSRC held weekly regular classes in basketball for children ages 8 to 16 from Auroville and the villages. Around 45 students both boys and girls underwent regular training. The Auroville women’s team and the senior men basketball players, about 150 persons, also came for weekly regular practices in the indoor stadium.

2. Volleyball training for the youth (boys and girls) and adults was provided to the 9 immediately surrounding villages of Auroville. About 320 persons benefit from this program coordinated through Senthil, our Volleyball coach.

3. This year we were able to work with differently-abled children and youth from the surrounding villages providing fitness and basketball training in the indoor stadium.

4. Through Senthil AVSRC also helped the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) with its annual sports activities and cultural programs for women. These events take place at the Village Action grounds at Irumbai.

5. A dismantable tennis court was created and set up in the indoor stadium for the use of the tennis players. This is an experiment to see how the space in the indoor stadium can be used for multiple sports.

Reflections:

Sports, games and cultural activities are very meaningful approaches towards our efforts in approaching human unity. The joy of sharing through sports activities and programs while teaching and learning is very enriching, especially in the context of the variety of people from different walks of life.

We had a big challenge in the form of the Coronavirus pandemic, dealing with a different approach to training and playing in accordance with government stipulations.

Conclusion:

We see sports and games as a meaningful exercise in the pursuit of Integral Yoga, involving physical and collective transformation.
CRIPA (Centre for Research in the Performing Arts)

by Christophe

CRIPA is a rehearsal hall, the first phase of a Performing Arts Centre in Kalabhumi, devoted to music, theatre and dance rehearsals, performances and classes. CRIPA provides space for these activities, and fosters, supports and encourages research into the Performing Arts in Auroville.

Activities of the year:

Obviously, events due to Covid-19 have altered the functioning of CRIPA. The first two months of lockdown were devoted to a big cleanup, necessary at the end of the season, but also to the reorganization of the technical parties and maintenance of the equipment.

From the third month we began to accept individuals (dance, piano) and small groups of Aurovilians of less than 5 people (theater, dance, music, singing) in accordance with the rules imposed by Auroville’s Covid Task Force, the Working Committee and the government of Tamil Nadu, with measures including distancing, sanitizer, chlorine, masks, etc.

Slowly we resumed an almost normal activity, welcoming larger groups and some performances, though with audience capacity limited to 50% as per the anti-Covid rules.

Grace (dance) produced a show at the end of April as well as the Auroville Theater Group with Jill (“EQUUS”), and the Auroville Youth Choir with Nuria.

Outcomes:

In terms of the outcome, we could call it a transition year. Lots of preparation work was done for the next season for all Auroville artists.

Some performances could be offered, but we especially had preparation workshops, especially in dance, a little in theater, but also in Medi-Clown from which the Aurovilians were able to benefit. The Aurovilian artists continued to work on both form and substance.

We hope that the work done this year will lead to performances next year in theater, contemporary or traditional dance and piano recital or song.

Reflections:

The most significant and at the same time difficult learning was to manage a place designed to receive the public with all the imposed restrictions and the human frustrations that this caused. So we learned more patience!

Conclusion:

Despite this difficult year CRIPA has not lost its place in the artistic landscape in Auroville.

We continue and will continue to participate in the development of Aurovilians in performing arts by making a place available for courses and workshops.

We support and will support the creation of shows by putting our resources at the service of creators: rehearsal rooms, boxes, technical facilities at CRIPA Hall but also for Kalabhhumi amphitheater for example – responding to the needs.
This year has been a challenging year for the work with the Choirs. Being essentially a group work we had to wait until the government allowed this type of activity to be able to start the season. This affected differently both Choirs: the Youth Choir had to wait till February to get started, while with the Adult Choir the work could start with individual practices at home. The Adult Choir members regularly received musical scores and recordings to study for when the collective in person rehearsals would be possible. For this season our pianist was Carel. I, Nuria, am the conductor.

The Youth Choir:

The Youth Choir performance in March 2020 was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The program was then carried on into the next season, which started only by February 2021.

After 10 months without rehearsals, being able to sing together again gave the children a great joy and a sense of belonging. This also brought togetherness and a sense of purpose to the group. We had a lovely season, enjoying every single practice. The fact that we were working on a program that children already knew, allowed them to experience more confidence and solidity in their singing. On April 17th and 18th, 2021 we finally were able to give the long-awaited concert in CRIPA, Auroville, which was a big success and we all were able to fully enjoy.

This season the Youth Choir consisted of 30 singers, from 11 different nationalities, in the age group of 9 to 18 years. We met once a week for rehearsals and performed the program 2 evenings. The repertoire was on popular, classical and film themes.

The Adult Choir:

This season we started working on an individual level, every singer learning the songs from home, with the help of a computer program that teaches the music.

When the government regulations again allowed gatherings, we started having rehearsals in small groups. Being a reduced number of singers at each practice not only ensured the required safety measures, but also allowed us to work more precisely and in more detail on the different aspects of the musical composition and on the technical part of the singing and putting the different voices together.

A few months later we finally could start having general rehearsals with all the members at the same time. After so many months, coming back together was a great joy, with a strong sense of belonging and togetherness. It was rewarding to see that when we put all the voices together, all the detailed work done in the small groups showed in a higher quality of singing and music making.

As the season started rather late this year we did not have enough time to complete the whole program and perform the usual annual concert. Nevertheless we decided to do an open rehearsal and present our work in progress to the community by the end of April. Unfortunately due to the Covid-19 pandemic pickup we had to cancel that presentation. Our plan now is to perform the complete program by September 2021.

This season The Adult Choir consisted of 36 singers, from 12 different nationalities, in the age group of 22 to 74. We met twice a week for rehearsals. The program this year was on intimate and spiritually uplifting choral works by Faure, Debussy, Mozart, Whitacre, Lauridssen, Gjeilo, Tallis and Jenkins.
One good thing that the lockdown provided was an amount of hours that I, with the help of Shanks, could dedicate to create a web site for each Choir. It was a long pending task to organize and share all the material I have been collecting during the 27 years of work with the choirs. Now both sites, although not fully finished, are up and open for everyone to enjoy.

Adult Choir: [https://aurovillechoir.wordpress.com/](https://aurovillechoir.wordpress.com/)
Youth Choir: [https://aurovilleyouthchoir.wordpress.com/](https://aurovilleyouthchoir.wordpress.com/)
Music teaching

by Shakti B.

This year I gave piano classes for 16 students including children and adults, and worked with students to develop their voice for performances.

The students and I gave 4 concerts in CRIPA for Christmas: 3 for all ages, and 1 especially for children with Santa Claus and presents.

I also organised a poetry event in Unity Pavilion in March, with music and poetry from Auroville poets and from different countries.

Reflections:

Most meaningful this year was to not give up the work I do, with all the mess around (uncertainty and lockdowns). We managed to pull the community together for Christmas, to feel again as a whole, with all our kids. Children were very happy to see Santa and get the presents, which Auroville units kindly donated.

There are still a lot of challenges to proceed. Usually my students give end-of-the-year progress performances in CRIPA. But it was not possible to perform this year, for the evident reason. This year many children left, because of COVID. I got new students.

Research highlights:

The model I use for teaching kids is a student and music oriented approach, not the classical way of teaching which is Solfeggio oriented. Musical grammar is very important, but it should not dominate as a technique.

Future direction:

I am going to go on, teach people what I know and love.
Music teaching

by Pushkar

Piano teaching:

This year I had 11 piano students, ages 7 years and above, in one-on-one sessions. The focus is mainly on two points:

- The technique, allowing the individual to understand and to control all the technical facets of playing the instrument. They learn how to use properly all the fingers in any combination and on any possible position on the keyboard, and are continually presented with new technical challenges.

- The understanding of how music is and was notated, either traditionally or in new forms; to see how to create new ones, and to be able to convey and interpret the written form accurately. Importance is placed on the intent behind the written form. This in all is finally a creative process, ultimately conveying the musical idea and inspiration of the composer/performer to the listener.

Improvisation is also part of the process of learning technique: the fingers become agile in translating a musical idea into sounds on the spot, allowing students to apply the skills in a more creative way.

Ensemble playing (12 trainees):

Most of the piano students require this skill and start developing it from the first year of playing, mainly by playing together on one piano, or on two pianos. This is a skill needed for playing in groups and bands (considering that the piano is such a commonly used instrument in groups as well as for accompanying). The students develop a set of skills which are very different from playing solo, the difficulty being to pay attention and listen to the other person while playing something different, often off-beat, and playing one’s individual part properly. This gets to be more complex, especially when one is playing with a very different sound or instrument, like flute, violin, or voice, or a group of them. Even though it doesn’t count as playing in ensemble, to play and sing at the same time is also an important skill that helps the student to listen to others.

Aural training (7 participants):

For all musicians aural training is a very important skill, that is too often neglected, and I can say from personal experience that it is a very needed and helpful skill that facilitates the learning of any music. It enables one to aurally understand the different rhythms as well as different melodic and musical combinations of sounds, and thus help to aurally understand how they interact to create a piece of music. One can do this either by just looking at the notation, or by translating a musical idea into notation, or even directly while playing the instrument and playing with others. This can get extremely complex when many instruments play together, as in an orchestra. It also allows a better grasp and prompt understanding of the rhythmic and melodic/harmonic as well as the compositional structure of music. When playing together from notated music it helps to know how the music of the other instrument unfolds by just looking at the score. The training also allows one to be able to notate the sounds one hears or imagines, as well as be able to hear the music directly from the score without the help of any instrument or any other means.

Many approaches can be taken to aural training, some traditional, some new ones, and the research is to find a combination or a new way that enables this skill to be learned efficiently and properly. We can take into consideration that each one of us might perceive sounds in different
ways, and thus have some flexibility. At the moment I am taking various different approaches simultaneously, and combining them with a few of my own.

**Music theory (7 participants):**

Every style of music is based on a language, a grammar, often with a set of rules, or combination of them. This course mainly concentrates on understanding the various melodic and rhythmic elements that create the different pieces of music, looking at different styles and eras, from the most simple to the most complex – giving a great importance to the complex combinations of sounds that flourished in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries (and counterpoint), which have now become the basis of most musical styles in the present day, including Pop, Jazz, and Film music. The approach we take is more creative than the way in which music theory is usually taught; we try and understand what was achieved and how, and we create our own examples, finding always new ways of approaching the subject, and looking at how it is applied in pieces of great art.

**Music composition (7 participants):**

This course is for those interested in creating their own piece of music, but also for those who want to understand better the creative processes utilised by other composers. Through analysis, and gradual and specific challenging and creative exercises, we observe the result of how successfully we are able to translate the given musical idea into a short piece of music. We look at the building blocks of sound, as well as the acoustic and psychoacoustic principles that govern music. This requires many skills which are gradually presented and developed. Ultimately we hope to see the creation of new works of art, of great quality.

**Performances, new compositions and concerts:**

Finally, an important part of all one’s effort comes when one is able to share and/or convey the highest art, here in musical form. One needs to constantly work at developing and perfecting these various musical skills, so that one may be ready to receive the highest inspirations, and translate them into music art. This requires regular practice and constant improvement, that is too often ignored by those that only see the end result. By basing myself on the Auroville Charter, I see how this can become a path of service, and self-discovery, of education, of research in bringing human unity, as well as a means to elevate one's consciousness and allow this form of art to express something higher. A constant training and development keeping this in mind is of utmost importance.

**Research highlights:**

Most of these courses are also developed in other parts of the world, but the unique opportunity we have here in Auroville (a place that does not push or impose on its children and adult residents to strive for recognition, success and/or diplomas, and free from financial remuneration) is a way to develop a learning and education method solely for personal development and the love of understanding and creating. One might say that the only pressure imposed on oneself is the one for self-perfection and self-discovery, and with this the direction given in the first paragraph of the Auroville Charter. To view things from this angle can be challenging, as most methods and approaches from around the world are created on a different criteria that imposes a prompt result and outward success and competition, or are based on an idea of healing or self-gratification. Some are just trying to do better what others have already done, without the need to break boundaries and/or discover new ways. These forms are often limited by a time-frame that generally does not
allow the individual to adapt to the system. In contrast our aim in Auroville is the transformation of the individual, as presented by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Reflections:

During the lockdown, some of the lessons and tutoring continued through WhatsApp. It was very difficult for some to share their work, and even though I was constantly checking the progress, the lack of being physically present was tough for some. But lessons continued nonetheless. This experience allowed me to see how such technology can be used to actually help and monitor the progress of the student on a more regular basis, and whenever needed, without having to wait to meet up days later.

Conclusion:

It is a wonderful opportunity in Auroville, that education and life are based on the principles given by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, of a never-ending education, of self-discovery, of a research that is inner as well as outer, free from utilitarian based system, titles, degrees, and financial remuneration. The lack of pressure allows each individual (especially children) to grow and develop in a supportive and embracing environment. This way of life should be protected and is of great importance. Many others like me, I believe, are aware of the unique opportunity we have here, that with everyone’s help and effort, makes this still possible.
The Auroville Theatre Group aims to create exciting, innovative opportunities for performing artists to engage with stories that challenge and inspire. This year, which was so challenging, my goal was simply to do the best we could with all the limitations we had, and to continue to create opportunities for our work.

Activities of the year:

Auroville Theatre Group started the year with an in-house version of an original play written by Jill Navarre called “A Place Called Home” with 15 actors from all over India. Unfortunately, last March, we had to stop work on this because of Covid19. Our work then went online, on Zoom, and we are now in the editing phase of presenting a totally new version of the play to a Zoom audience.

Our second play was “The Red Bike” by Caridad Svice, with original music by Shivan K. Joshi and directed by Jill. It is a one-man show, performed by Umair Ahrar, one of our actors from Lucknow who has been in Auroville for over a year now. We performed this play in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium on January 7th, 8th and 9th, 2021, and then took it to Bangalore to perform at Attakkalari Dance Studio on January 30th and 31st. We also offered a two-day workshop to actors at Attakkalari.

Our third play is “Equus” by Peter Shaffer, directed by Jill in association with Auroville Art Service. We performed “Equus” at CRIPA, Kalabhumi, on April 15th & 16th. The “Equus” cast was: Jill, Umair Ahrar, Abhay Srivastava, Shraddha N., Usha Aditya, Gokul Priyan, Dev Habibullah, Praveen, Karan Wilson, Wei. Lighting was done by Melodie and Nishant, and horse heads by Renana and Pranav. We were also scheduled to perform at Indianostrum Theatre in Pondicherry, but we had to cancel because of Covid restrictions. We are hoping to be able to stage it at Indianostrum in July.

Research highlights:

We learned how to take a stage play and put it online. Not an easy task!

Conclusion:

I am amazed at what we have been able to accomplish this year, in spite of all the Covid restrictions. Let’s hope it’s a better year ahead for all of us!
Kalabhumi Art Studio
by Nele and Sabrina

Kalabhumi Art Studio wants to offer quality art classes to students of all ages. The hybrid function of the place as artist studios and classrooms makes it possible to offer high-quality material and tools to the student. By seeing the artist at work the student gets an understanding of how life as an artist works and what are the possibilities and challenges in art.

During the last year we were happy to be able to offer activities to small groups, using the studios and the covered outside space. Having groups of maximum 4 students made it possible to respect social distancing and work in open spaces, respecting Covid guidelines.

Apart from the regular classes we also aim to advise emerging artists on how to write proposals for art shows and apply for projects and residencies. We also want to give space for individuals, who would like to dedicate more time and delve deeper in their research. This could either be useful to students who want to apply for art school and need mentoring for their portfolio, or for those who are exploring a possible shift in their activities and are looking for a creative outlet.

Activities of the year:

To express oneself through art was especially useful and important in this last year which involved at times a lot of emotional stress for many.

In the painting section we had five groups of 4 students each. Class duration varied from 2 to 3 hours. Since the groups were very small, we experimented having a mix of different ages. We encouraged students to work on their own projects and we would help, when needed. This turned out to be very inspiring, and we would like to go on in this direction. In these classes we offered drawing lessons, and painting with different materials. We worked on different projects in the various groups, for example:

- Drawing of the human body and portrait and shading.
- Use of mixed media, to achieve more texture and depth in the painting.
- Aquarelle, in the study of nature objects.
- Still life in different media.
- Collage mixed-media projects.

In the pottery we had Deepanam school kids coming in 4 small groups of 3 during the time the school was closed. Additionally we had 2 groups of adults, and one student who benefits from individual one-on-one classes. We also welcomed one first-year university intern for 2 months as part of her university requirement.

In pottery classes we focused on the preparation of clay and building a strong foundation in basic techniques such as coiling, pinching and slab work. The next step involved glazing and firing the work. A few students also chose to learn how to throw on a wheel. One student explored sculptural work in depth. For the intern we organized a program which
focused on the daily task involved in running a pottery studio, while also allowing time for exploration of one’s own ideas.

Outcomes:

The participants benefit in more than one way from the classes. Working creatively allows inner research to evolve, where the student may find a sense of focus and calmness. In the courses a lot of importance is given to the process of creating, it is as important as the finished artwork. The students are encouraged to try out new techniques, things one does not know, and to follow one’s curiosity.

We strive to create a space that nurtures different perspectives and freedom of expression. In this context, first, we work on the concept: What is art? What is beauty? What does art mean for society and the individual? Our students, being from different cultures, backgrounds and ages, bring a wide range of interpretation of the same topic. This opens our mind towards new ideas and encourages flexibility of interpretation and understanding.

We like to create a balance between intuitive freedom and organized concept. The students should feel free to explore and at the same time learn the technique and tools to realize their ideas. To enable the student to feel confident it is important to teach technique, and give a certain framework.

Sometimes the class can just be recreational. It can be very relaxing to play with paint and clay. For this it is important to create an atmosphere which is not judging, or competitive, in any way. It should be supportive and encourage curiosity. This is what art can offer; it can be a research by just letting go and enjoying to play. In the last year with its many new challenges this was a welcome sanctuary.

Another important aspect is that the students develop their own sense of beauty and set their own goals to achieve.

Research highlights:

The art classes focus on students individually, hence the research becomes very personal and varied. This is what makes the groups so interesting, because different perspectives are brought forward and are discussed.

Some new students have joined the young adults clay class; here the focus has been on harnessing an individual style and language in clay, while also building a sense of discipline and organization in the practice of art.

As teachers one of the main highlights this year has been on how to adapt to the students’ need to bring forward an authentic voice through their work. Not one size fits all and some need more guidance while as others need more space to individually explore.

We encouraged some interested students to do a more thorough research in form and material. Specifically, this includes: the quality of the line; textures and surfaces; how to bring alive the work; expressive brush strokes.

Reflections:

We think the main challenge this year was to offer a meaningful class adapting to the challenging situation. Due to constant changes and uncertainties a lot of flexibility and creative adaptation was needed to continue to function and be open to students.

Nevertheless, this academic year has also brought forward a lot of positives amidst the chaos of a global pandemic. The art studios became a place of focus and calmness, a place for inner research.
The pottery studio was ready just in time to host small groups of students with social distancing. Being an open space located centrally, older students were able to cycle and continue their classes.

The experiment to have different age groups at the same time turned out to be very inspiring for both students and teachers, and we want to explore this direction further.

**Conclusion:**

This year we faced many obstacles and uncertainties. All of us were affected in the same way and we could share and grow from it together, and find strength and confidence through that.

We were lucky to have a space like this which could safely offer a creative outlet and a space to continue working.

It became very clear that this space is much needed and appreciated by the students and us, and we hope to continue to evolve and grow.
Aurofilm

by Surya

Since the 1980s when it was created, Aurofilm’s aim has always been to offer to the community some regular film programs presenting the qualities and best potential that Cinema – as an Art form and in its best use – can bring to people. The Aurofilm team had also a long-standing dream: to create a film institute/school. With the opening of the “Auroville Film Institute” last year, which offers film workshops organised mostly by our partners Richa and Rrivu, we restarted a series of “Cine-master-classes” at our Kalabhoomi film studio, with presentations, screenings and discussions. We also continued our weekly film screenings for the community, when possible.

Description of project:

This 2020-21 financial year was very strange and chaotic due to the occurrence of the Coronavirus pandemic. From mid-March there have been long lockdown periods, and when things (services, shops, schools, cultural events, Matrimandir and so on) could re-open – partially – it was with many restrictions, and on on/off basis. Of course our activities have suffered but nevertheless we could restart in October with our first Cine-Master class, in the half-open, high ceiling and large studio in Kalabhoomi that we are fortunate and grateful to have.

The Friday film screenings at the Multi-Media Centre (MMC), Town Hall, could only restart at the end of December 2020 and with half capacity like in our Aurofilm studio.

Our “Mini Film Festival of Indian Cinema” could be held at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium on December 18-19, 2020. It had been originally planned for last March, just when the Corona crisis came about! (see following report)

Our dynamic partners at Auroville Film Institute, Richa and Rrivu, organised film workshops in full swing – mostly online this year. Some projects were canceled and others are now in preparation stage. C’est la vie!

With Gerard having stopped to work at Aurofilm, we were in need of a technical person. A very skilled Newcomer, now Aurovilian, Marko from Croatia, was helping us from time to time and finally we welcomed him into our team. He helps us produce our own documentaries or films: just in February he made a 14 min. production for Aurofilm: “Temple Tree”, about the latest artwork and exhibition of Birgitta Volz, at the request of this Aurovilian artist. (https://youtu.be/EnW5OSW29YE). Marko has also edited two of our Aurofilm documentaries to make them shorter, for us to be able to screen them in the future before our main “Friday film”. He also helps us with the equipment for the staging of our Cine-master-classes’ projections.

Outcomes:

Ultimately, during this year, within our regular programs we screened 12 films at MMC, 5 films at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium during our annual film festival, and organised 8 Cine-Master-Classes totally.

In parallel, during this year and taking advantage of the ‘lockdown’ periods, we did several things:

- We gathered all films produced by Aurofilm that were kept on DVDs and copied them on a dedicated hard drive for archiving purpose. Some of them will be screened prior to our regular Friday films if the duration allows.
We did a revamp (painted the walls of the big studio, the main doors and modernized the restrooms; all this with funds from our donations account) and prepared our film studio to receive the audience for our master-classes and the Film Institute workshops.

We also took care of the garden and had a large termite nest removed close to the entrance...

Reflections:

For us, after all these years of presenting films every week with not much possibility to share with the audience about our selection of films and program, or Cinema in general, the introduction of the “Cine-Master-Classes” was the best experience! We could also see our beautiful film studio in Kalabhoomi very alive and fulfilling its potential, receiving the curious and/or avid learners and film lovers.

With the ‘pandemic’ happening, with some degree of sadness we observed how quickly people (the writer of this report included!) changed their habit of watching films – or attending cultural events – together along with other like-minded people. We can easily imagine that all the film lovers were having their own film screenings at home on their computer or with an individual projection set up – so many home movie theaters, even ‘attending film festivals online’! And when our Kalabhoomi studio and the MMC did reopen, it took some time to see a rather ‘normal’ audience joining. The crowd is still reduced, seemingly reluctant… Yet, at the same time we cannot but notice – with joy this time – how the ones who felt rather suppressed came out as soon as it was possible! And it encourages us to focus on quality programs that can fully enrich our community on all levels.

Unfortunately our faithful Casio DLP video projector died after 9 years of regular use at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Visitor’s Centre Video room and Kalabhoomi/Aurofilm. It was at the beginning of a master-class (we ran to a friend’s house in Dehashakti to borrow his and complete the master-class and screening!) and we now borrow a small projector from SAIIER – for which we are grateful. Yet the quality is not sufficient for our large screen and proper film study and experience, and we will need to replace it as soon as funds are available.
Indian Film Festival in Auroville
a project of Aurofilm
by Surya

We wanted to present and share with the community, at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium and over a week-end, a few contemporary Indian films that we have liked over the years; films that have already been shown, so no big fanfare but a nice and cozy event for these troubled times of ‘pandemic’ where cultural events for all were rare.

Description of project:

This ‘mini film festival’ was planned for last year in March. It got cancelled as the first lockdown was coming in India. We had to stop the preparations and let it sleep until the next opportunity. After a vain trial in August, we saw a better opening in December 2020 and the auditorium was available for us.

We presented five films: 3 fiction feature films and two documentaries. The schedule and timing were as follows:

Friday December 18th:
- 5:30 pm “The World’s Most Famous Tiger” by Nallamuthu
- 8:00 pm “Ellipathyam / The Rat Trap”, a Malayalam masterpiece directed in 1982 by Adoor Gopalakrishan

Saturday December 19th:
- 4:00 pm “Clash of Tigers” also by Nallamuthu
- 5:00 pm “Kaadu Pookkuna Neram / When the Forest Blooms”, a 2016 Malayalam film by Dr. Biju
- 8:00 pm “Memories in March”, a 2010 Bengali film by Sanjoy Nag, written by Rituparno Ghosh

Outcomes:

The auditorium is large and can welcome a large audience. We knew this year would be different, with less participation as everyone is possibly in a different mood. But we did not expect that the turnout would be so low… Only about 12-25-30 people came for the different screenings. We know that the other film screenings elsewhere in Auroville are not faring much better; nevertheless, we were a bit disappointed. Of course we were happy to see children with their parents coming for the two ‘tiger movies’, some of them were really excited, interesting and asked questions.

With our annual film festivals, we aim at presenting and promoting quality cinema of India, by veteran or beginner filmmakers and films that usually the audience does not easily see for they are not big productions – rather niche films. We are happy to have them out of their closed cupboards and accessible for the discerning and curious ones.

Reflections:

We thought we would help our Auroville audience to come out of their walls after months of a mix of indoor learning, boredom and entertainment; it did not really happen at that time and with our program! We did our best and will not lose hope. We continue and propose screenings and study on a regular basis until the next possibility for a larger event…

89
Savitri Bhavan

by Shraddhavan and Dhanalakshmi

Savitri Bhavan has grown up since its inception in 1994 as an educational centre dedicated to fostering awareness and understanding of the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which are the underlying foundation of the aims and ideals of Auroville. Its purpose is to gather, create and make available to Aurovilians and members of the interested general public all kinds of materials and activities which will support this awareness and understanding.

Activities of the year:

Due to the COVID pandemic visits to Savitri Bhavan were restricted to a minimum this year. Nevertheless we estimate about 1,000 beneficiaries for all our programmes, including those held online.

Classes:

In order to complete the English of Savitri series, the classes were held online. Now the full sequence of one-hour videos, providing sentence-by-sentence explanations of passages from Sri Aurobindo’s epic Savitri, is available on Savitri Bhavan website as well as on YouTube. A total of 345 videos have been recorded, edited, checked and finally uploaded. This enormous work, extending over several years, has been successfully carried out by an enthusiastic group of 5 Aurovilians making use of Savitri Bhavan's newly established multi-media studio facilities.

At the request of Savitri lovers, the regular one-and-a-half-hour Sunday morning Savitri Study Circle was continued in the Sangam Hall while observing social distancing and other required anti-covid precautions, and the sessions were also broadcast live. Steps are being taken to make edited versions of these sessions available with sub-titles on the Savitri Bhavan website.

Exhibitions:

Despite lockdown restrictions two exhibitions were held on the Savitri Bhavan premises during the reporting period:

1. “Divine Flowers” exhibition from February 21-28, 2021 (see following report). During the exhibition period two talks were given on the subject of flowers and their spiritual significances: first, on February 22nd, Dr. Alok Pandey spoke on “The Yoga of Nature”; then on February 27th Loretta spoke on “The Mother’s Guidance with Flowers”.

2. CREEVA, an art forum of Auroville, presented an exhibition entitled “Out of Lockdown” featuring paintings created by 20 Aurovilian artists during the lockdown period, which was on display in the Square Hall from 9th to 28th March 2021.

Events:

- On 24th April 2020, to mark the centenary of the Mother’s final arrival in Pondicherry, a second edition of the “Savitri Around the World” parayan was shown live on YouTube. Several new readers participated in this latest version.
- By request, On 29th May 2020 Aurovillian Angad gave a reading at Savitri Bhavan of the famous Uttarpara speech given by Sri Aurobindo on that date after his release from Alipore Jail in 1908. Then on August 15, Angad’s reading was recorded and is now available on the

On 28th February 2021 to celebrate the Mother’s birthday, Her chair was put on display in the Sangam Hall for silent concentration. During this time her powerful recorded reading of the entire first Canto of Savitri was played.


On 18th March 2021 18 children and 3 teachers from Arulvazhi school visited Savitri Bhavan. An orientation session was given by Dhanalakshmi.

Under the frame of ‘Facing mental challenges on the spiritual path’, organized jointly by Santé and the ‘Let’s talk about Death’ group, Dr. Alok Pandey gave a talk on Death on 13th March 2021.

On 27th March 2021 an online presentation on Savitri was given by Shraddhavan at the request of Auroville International USA. Donations received from about 100 registered participants around the world raised approximately Rs. 4 lakhs for the benefit of the Auroville Central Fund.

We are happy and gratefully wish to mention that newcomer Matthias Pommerening has provided transcriptions of the Life Divine Sessions held at Savitri Bhavan some years ago. In this reporting year he transcribed 54 sessions up to Chapter XXII: “The Problem of Life”.

Alexander Pereverzev, a long-term volunteer with Savitri Bhavan presented 3 slide-shows with explanations on 4th February, 18th February and 4th March 2021 on the life and work of Nicholas Roerich, Russian visionary artist, thinker and philosopher. The presentations were well attended and appreciated, and each one was followed by a question-and-answer session.

Publications:

Two more volumes of The English of Savitri series of books were published recently: Volume Seven covers Book Two, Cantos 5 and 6, and Volume Eight covers Book Two, Cantos 7, 8 and 9.

It is intended that during the up-coming 150th anniversary year of Sri Aurobindo (August 15, 2021 to August 15, 2022), publication of four further volumes of The English of Savitri book series will provide complete coverage of Sri Aurobindo’s epic for the assistance of Savitri-lovers and students.

A booklet in English entitled ‘An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s Epic Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol’ was published and much appreciated. As a result, the original English version was translated, first into German, and then into Tamil. The second of these was issued as an English-Tamil bi-lingual publication, which has also been much appreciated. Publication of all these volumes was financed by donations received from well-wishers.

One issue of our English journal Invocation (No. 53) was published in November 2020 and sent to regular readers by post. Two issues of our Tamil journal Prarthana (Nos. 34 and 35) were published in August 2020 and February 2021.

Research highlights:

We would like to highlight the Online Encyclopedia of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri. This project was originally conceived and initiated by some ex-students of SAICE, who wanted to make more
widely available all the insights they had received from their wonderful teachers, such as Tehmi, Jhumur-di and others. Shraddhavan heard about their idea and was happy to encourage their efforts. Sebastian Nitzschke, a volunteer from Germany, joined the project to assist in website development and allied ways. Finally, Gopal Ahir joined them as main editor and is currently managing the project together with Sebastian Nitzschke. The Savitri Online Encyclopedia offers three important kinds of assistance to readers:

1) **Meaning of the words in the context of the poem**: For a lay reader, *Savitri* may not be easy reading. One comes across plenty of words which can be understood with the help of a dictionary, but the dictionary meaning of the words may not correspond with the significances given to them by Sri Aurobindo in composing his epic. Even with the help of a dictionary, sometimes it is not easy to understand the full meaning of a word because Sri Aurobindo may have used the word in the context of the unfolding spiritual and mystical narrative of the poem. One can visit the website of the Savitri Online Encyclopedia, move the cursor over a word and its meaning will pop up next to it. Thus, the need to search the printed or online dictionary is eliminated.

2) **Explanation of lines in Sri Aurobindo’s words**: Sri Aurobindo had an extensive correspondence with Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) about *Savitri*. The Savitri Online Encyclopedia offers his remarks on certain lines or passages. These are indicated by Sri Aurobindo’s symbol – clicking on the symbol shows what Sri Aurobindo wrote to Amal Kiran about those lines or passages.

3) **Research by Shraddhavan**: For a long time, Shraddhavan has been taking “English of Savitri” (EoS) classes. These have been transcribed and are in the process of being published in a series of books with the same title. Relevant passages from volumes which have already been published have also been integrated into the Online Encyclopedia. Clicking the EoS sign shows Shraddhavan’s explanation of the word or lines.

These three attributes of the Savitri Online Encyclopedia make reading and understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s epic easier and more profound. Meanwhile, the encyclopedia continues to grow. There is the vision to add more commentary on *Savitri* from different sources over the next years and new queries about the text will be integrated. The link to the Encyclopedia is: [https://encyclopedia.savitribhavan.org/](https://encyclopedia.savitribhavan.org/)

**Reflections:**

The main challenges which Savitri Bhavan and the Savitri Bhavan team had to face during the reporting period were connected with the covid-19 epidemic and the restrictions which had to be observed to protect the health of team-members, staff and students. Facing these challenges led us to experiment with on-line sessions, targeting both local and long-distance audiences, and developing new methods of spreading knowledge about the life, vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This involved innovative learning for the team as a whole, which will surely be put into practice over the coming months and developed further.

**Conclusion:**

The experience gained over the last year will certainly be built on and developed in the coming months, particularly in view of the approaching celebration of the 150th anniversary year of Sri Aurobindo, which is scheduled to be celebrated nationwide from August 15, 2021 to August 15 2022. The Savitri Bhavan team is currently engaged in preparations for playing our part in this significant celebration.
The Divine Flowers exhibition 2021 was a beautiful display of a variety of flowers with their spiritual significance which the Mother gave them, presented in aesthetic calligraphy at Savitri Bhavan. The purpose of the exhibition was to bring this aspect of beauty, sensitivity, delicacy, psychic atmosphere of the Mother’s work in Auroville.

Description of project:

This project was to create a learning environment for Aurovilians, visitors, guests, children, to enable them to connect to the flowers in a deeper way. The Mother gave spiritual significances to flowers according to their true nature. This exhibition was an attempt to create a vibrant atmosphere with real flowers, some of their photographs or paintings and the Mother’s given names, such that all those who connect to the exhibits feel the sensation of the presence in their heart space. The messages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with some history of how Mother named the flowers gave a richer experience. Specially designed wall vases for the orchids and bamboo vases for the flowers added beauty to the space.

New displays for flowers were designed. This year 3D models of the Mother’s symbol, Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, Auroville’s symbol and a peacock perched on a tree stump were created by volunteer Hrishi which were appreciated by all. The displays have evolved over the last few years; this year 3D was successfully attempted.

Live classical music of veena and flute offerings by two Aurovillians created an uplifting atmosphere.

Outcomes:

The Divine Flowers exhibition brought a lot of happiness and a special atmosphere of deep joy to all the participants and visitors. Many children and adults learnt the significance of flowers that they felt connected to, spontaneously.

An aspiration to manifest a flower garden permanently in Auroville which will house all 898 flowers to which the Mother has given spiritual significance to has taken concrete shape, and we are meeting groups to look for land for this flower garden. A pilot project for the garden is being considered at Udavi School.

We learnt to display with better aesthetic sense than before.

The children’s corners were not held this year due to the special circumstances of Covid and entry to the exhibition was monitored to see that the numbers were as per allowed.
Everybody who visited the exhibition came in touch with the beauty and vibration of the flowers.

**Reflections:**

A sense of working in a magical space was Mother’s gift to all who were working to manifest the Flower exhibition. The flowers were collected from many different places which sparked the aspiration in us to have the flowers permanently in Auroville. This gave birth to the idea of The Mother’s Flower Garden in Auroville.

So many of us discovered the marvels of Nature, the perfection, the sensitivity and beauty of the offering of the vegetal world to the Divine.

We are dependent on the availability of flowers and do not know which flowers will be available, and so the next step of having a theme for the exhibition has not been attempted till now.

**Conclusion:**

We aspire to have the Divine Flowers exhibition 2022 at Savitri Bhavan during the birthday week: 21st to 28th of February. We shall try to set a theme for the flower exhibition, for example “Flowers in the Vital plane”.

94
Unity Pavilion

by Jaya

Kireet Joshi named the Unity Pavilion in the context of the International Zone and CIRHU (Centre for International Research on Human Unity), as the Faculty of East-West and Human Unity. This has been and stays our aim. We aim to focus on activities and research for the understanding and realization of a true Human Unity, ‘Unity in Diversity’ in accordance with the ideals of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teachings. We work towards true and integral Peace.

This year has had much focus on internal work because of the Covid regulations and situation. This has been a gift in its own way.

Activities of the year:

With the Covid-19 situation with full and partial lockdown during large parts of 2020, the Unity Pavilion staff was to a large part focused on building maintenance, garden development and organizational work. During the lockdowns the building was offered extensively for Auroville’s Working Groups to use for meetings as we could provide social distancing and good ventilation in a pleasant environment, in the main Hall. This use of the Hall included not only our Town Hall working groups but also others, projects, Units etc. Our support for this work was much appreciated within the community and with groups like Thamarai and Exploring Prosperity group. Part of the Selection process to select new members for the Working Groups, in January, also took place in the Unity Pavilion.

When the lockdown was eased in the later part of 2020 we decided to go ahead with the ‘Art for Land’ project in a reduced form. This was much appreciated and successful.

The work on the Unity Pavilion caretaker’s unit has proceeded well and we look forward to possibly completing it this year. With Covid, fundraising has been a challenge and as we also could not raise funds through events, we are very grateful for the support we have received and the fact that we are managing.

Work is proceeding on getting both the Unity Pavilion and the ‘Art for Land’ websites updated, attractive and user friendly.

We also issued a very nice Newsletter.

Outcomes:

The ‘Art for Land’ exhibition and connected cultural events, as well as the large New Year online fundraiser for Auroville done in collaboration with Auroville International (AVI) and our Generosity Fair, were very welcome after a difficult year with less cultural activities.

Research highlights:

This year we put special attention on how to build people and relations in the workspace, fostering commitment and self-development, acceptance, discipline and flow. Unity Pavilion is one of the Auroville units with a core of long-term dedicated and hard-working executives who are now moving into new phases of activity, and a younger team is needed to take up the very active sides of the work and to bring in new development, staying aligned with the integrality of the founding ideals while widening and moving forward. We looked at how to work in non-linear hierarchical ways, where the leadership shifts according to the need rather than looking for fixity and extensive
networking. This refers to and is deeply inspired by the ‘constellation’ work brought forward in the ‘Stewardship for New Emergence’ workshops.

Reflections:

Working for the Land is always meaningful; serving Auroville in this way is a gift.

Working on the organization is a challenge with the well-known pattern of two steps forward, one step backwards, one step forward, two steps backward. Still, even in that, there is a solid progress and learning. We are treading an unknown path and simply walking it is in itself part of the building.

Perseverance, Aspiration, Trust… we just have to stay simple, keep going, find guidance in Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s writings, through the Matrimandir, trusting that this City with the Soul at its center is also building us. Have compassion with ourselves and others, trust in innate goodness while also putting a stop when something does not work even after tries.

This year gave us time to look more deeply at our yearly patterns that will have to change as Auroville is now changing. The work now more or less proceeds through the year without the old slowdown to almost a full stop in the summer months (March to September) – though our habit to see it like that is still there.

Conclusion:

We definitely see this time imposed on us as a time of preparation, of change, inner and outer. How do we keep and promote our activities in complete alignment with our ideals?

There is a radical change brought with Covid that is a very global connection, this includes a widening materially with technology as well as with an inclusivity that we are still only sensing, like the smell of wet earth in the wind from a still distant rain.

We hope that with the caretaker’s unit in place there will be a more comfortable situation for a couple or small family in charge of the general maintenance and upkeep of Unity Pavilion.
The Mother's Flower Garden

by Naren and Rabi

The Mother’s Flower Garden was created with an aspiration to permanently house all the flowers which The Mother had given significance to.

The sub-unit is still to be manifested on the ground because land is still awaited. This year the executives made efforts and learned about plants and flowers and about the workings of the Working Groups.

Activities of the year:

1. We presented proposals to the Town Development Council (TDC), Green Group, Farm Group and Forest Group for land allocation. All of them appreciate the project. We are under discussion with them for allotment of 5 acres of land.

2. We presented the concept in the Divine Flowers Exhibition (see separate report) and were able to collect donations from 10 Aurovilians. An outsider also donated and got an Auroville Foundation receipt to avail 100% tax benefit. The donation is sitting with the Unity Fund for future utilisation.

3. We were offered land through our own sources (up to April 2021) at 4 far-off places; one later became off-limits. We may consider one out of the remaining 3, if land is not made available by the above groups. TDC is actively considering allotting a piece of land in Mahalakshmi Park.

4. We made a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the project.

5. We will start work on the nursery as a pilot project of The Mother’s Flower Garden (if funds are provided) at the Udavi School campus.

Outcomes:

Most Aurovilians and groups have been made aware of the project and they appreciate and want it. Land and water are the main issues. The project received donations worth Rs. 36,000.

We studied plants, flowers, water requirement and other needs of the project through books, resource persons and the internet.

Reflections:

People’s enthusiasm for the project was inspiring to us. Getting an allocation of land is the biggest challenge.

Conclusion:

We will continue to make efforts to get the land allotted, then make serious efforts for fund-raising and manifesting the Garden.
The Auroville Library has existed since almost the beginning of Auroville: in Aspiration as “Aspiration Library”, and later here and there until it was established at Bharat Nivas. There the collection grew, and is now at its present location on the Crown Road since October 2011 – almost 10 years!

We have approximately 52,000 books, on a wide range of topics. There are sections for each of the ten languages we have at present: English, German, French, Tamil, Russian, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Hebrew and Korean. They are catalogued under the Dewey Decimal Classification System, with slight modifications from our side.

We get two daily newspapers, one in English and one in Tamil; the “News & Notes”; Auroville Today; and various periodicals and magazines.

We have around 60,000 eBooks in many languages, and around 2,800 good quality HD movies and documentaries, which can be browsed through a computer in the library.

**Activities of the year:**

After the long Lockdown was over last year in the beginning of May, we opened again. At first we let people only come in to return and borrow books; no studying in the library. We quarantined all returned books for 4 days, after which we cleaned them thoroughly with Dettol water. Masks and hand sanitizing was insisted upon, and we took extra care with keeping all tables and chairs clean, and sanitizing the washrooms.

The children’s story time had to be cancelled, because crowding is unavoidable during this. After a few months when it seemed to be safe to relax the strict SOP’s, we let people sit inside again for reading and studying, but continued to quarantine return books and their cleaning.

Since about June last year two volunteers, Doris from Angiras Garden, and Yangmi have been working on renewing all the old, fading and crumbling spine- and barcode labels on the books. While doing that they are also cleaning each book, and checking if it needs repair. This work is enormously helpful and we are grateful for their dedication. We are also in the process of changing and upgrading the shelf labels that show which category is on a particular shelf.

**Outcomes:**

Everyone can benefit from the Library: Aurovilians, Newcomers, volunteers, guests, workers of Auroville. In the year 2020-21 more books were borrowed than the year before, because due to the lockdown the schools were closed, and not many people travelled.

A lot of books were donated this year, and we have set up a “Please Take Some” shelf where we share extras.

**Conclusion:**

We hope to continue our service to the community despite the economic upheavals the coronavirus has brought to the country. There are some urgent repair and maintenance works that need to be done for the building, and we hope these will be possible in the coming year.
Laboratory of Evolution – Centre of Human Unity (LOE-CHU)

by Kalyani, Namah, Cyril, Irena, Bhaga

Laboratory of Evolution Library:

As the specialized Library of LOE-CHU, our main focus is to collect the books related to the latest scientific discoveries about Evolution in all the fields. At the same time, we present the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the pioneers of Evolution, in all languages, as their vision and what they have discovered is now verified by the present scientific discoveries.

This past year having been very special, our service was more oriented to the maintenance of the books themselves (classification and repair). Only Aurovilians and Auroville volunteers visited us, as outside guests were not present. Mostly researchers borrowed books on Near-Death Experiences (NDE), neurosciences, New Psychology and healing through Consciousness.

We are now in the process of creating a new section: ‘Breatharian’, as many people are interested in this new approach to life which protects the other degrees of Manifestation, and fits with the present crisis. Although we already had books related to this subject, they were included in other sections such as Nutrition or New Dimension. We intend to gather them together and get more of the new publications.

Our budget being drastically reduced by the crisis, it is the challenge for the coming year to enrich our choice in the books most requested, such as NDE also.

At the same time our beautiful collection of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s books, books by Ashram disciples, Aurovilians’ books and Auroville information is widely borrowed and appreciated.

Classes and research with Namah:

Due to the pandemic, I have had to adapt to the situation and to find a way to continue the teaching work. I started offering classes online on Sri Aurobindo’s The Life Divine, and other topics like the different planes of the being, rebirth, karma and integral psychology.

The Lîla-CIRHU group continued meeting weekly. Its focus is research work on inner development in Auroville and how we apply our inner growing as an individual to the collective ideal of Auroville. We studied Sri Aurobindo’s “The Supramental Manifestation”, a far away stage of our evolution, but we are on the way to make it, whatever happens. Then we did a research to understand better and see what we could do to dig deeper within ourselves to flow on the way, individually and collectively.

The time we are living right now – with global disturbances of all our systems of organization, economic, political, social and education – shows us that we are at the doorstep of a renewal for humanity.

Research by Cyril:

The ongoing research done since years for a new Calendar, truer to the cosmic reality the Earth is part of, came very nicely to fruition in a finalised form. This New Calendar was announced on Auronet by an introductory message explaining its inner and also practical significance as an aid on a literally daily basis towards the higher, vaster consciousness linking us also physically to the Divine Whole.
Research by Irena:

My work included giving Five Rhythms Dance classes and performances consistently last year and again this year, along with the showing of great documentaries on places and situations illustrating humanity’s struggle towards Peace and Unity.

Towards the end of this year it became possible to begin at last the kind of experimental dance and theater training and public performances which were my real dream activity. In collaboration with guest artists from Bengaluru, and with the participation of many more from Auroville itself, either beginners or already established in their art, a series of performances were given, with much appreciation from a full audience every time.

It is with joy and pride that this activity has now become officialised within the LOE-CHU as the Performing Arts Lab, or PAL, now duly registered as one more specific aspect of our Research work, done with the aim of developing Human Unity in Diversity.

Research by Bhaga:

In my own research this year – as always, mostly Applied Research in my own life from the ever deepening study of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teachings about the Integral Transformation of our being – it is the challenges presented directly to our physical body which has become my main focus, for two reasons:

1. The world crisis going on with the Covid19 virus threat, fanned into even much more of a deadly reality by the huge fear generated around it: how could the numerous and powerful advice from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother help reduce that fear, and so at the same time help increase again the natural immunity in our physical body?

2. The frequent presence right in Auroville of invited speakers teaching various approaches to whatever envisaged degree of Human Transformation, one of these approaches being the ‘unfooding’ process called ‘Breatharianism’... how to give – without disrupting those well-meaning and potentially useful workshops – how to give the additional, still wider and more complete information that would help all the participants understand why neither the Ashramites not the Aurovilians were ever meant to practice Breatharianism, or any similar method, in that way?

Those two very real and important questions, intensely present in me since months because of the current circumstances, led me to realise that the various relevant aspects of my own research since decades need to be more widely published and made available, at least in Auroville itself to start with. They would form a basic but broad information allowing everyone staying in Auroville, whether as an Aurovilian, Newcomer, Volunteer or Guest, to know and understand better the reasons of certain major choices on the part of Auroville’s own founders, regarding the method they themselves finally used for this very result, the transformation of the body ultimately into a divine body.

Since the end of March (as soon as I got again a well-working laptop) I have earnestly started to put down in writing all this information on my blog, in the form of successive articles gradually giving the full scope and meaning of those choices by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which have made possible all the more recent developments we can observe now in our bodies (here and elsewhere too), and which still influence and guide their further direction for the future results still to be obtained. (labofevolution.wordpress.com)

To put all that information out as an easily accessible and readable publication is my main concern and objective for the months (hopefully not years!) to come.
Agni Veda Research

by Nishtha

Agni Veda Research conducts research into Vedic Sanskrit literature, applying Sri Aurobindo’s keys to language and meaning of the Vedas. The work includes translations, publications, and interaction with scholars on Sri Aurobindo’s approach to the Vedas, as well as teaching of Vedic hymns along with the original Sanskrit text in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga.

Activities of the year:

Daily research in the hymns of the Veda (at the home office):

- Working on appropriate translations for the publication of a comprehensive book manuscript;
- For deepening my understanding of the Vedic language and the implications of many of its standing terms, in order to enable me to make new insights more explicit in my regular interactions;
- For finding suitable quotes to teach Vedic grammar at different levels of progress;
- For creating regular grammar lessons.

Each of the above three points also involves a comparative study of some Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita on a regular basis.

Due to the pandemic-related restrictions on physical meetings, the weekly study sessions “Meditation with hymns from the Rig Veda” at Savitri Bhavan were suspended. Instead, Vedic studies as online sessions (on Zoom or phone conference) increased to three times a week with five participants throughout 2020/21.

I gave weekly a three-hour session with four grammar students; and from January to March 2021 up to three sessions a week.

On request of some of my Indian Sanskrit & Veda students who visited Auroville, on Dec. 29th & 30th and Jan. 1st, I conducted a three-day Veda seminar at Centre Guesthouse. There were ten participants, including some additional guests on day one, and seven persons on each of the two succeeding days.

In December & January, a small group met for regular studies of Sri Aurobindo’s Secret of the Veda and Essays on the Gita at Vedasthana (my home in Agni community), with four to six participants.

In December 2020, January and March 2021 I worked on revisions of Sanskrit grammar with a student from Chandigarh at Vedasthana three times a week.

Outcomes:

- Creation of new grammar lessons nos. 22 to 37 (each with an average of 10-15 A4 pages) as an alternative method to learn Sanskrit (with a special focus on the Vedic grammar with many original samples).
- Revisions – some slight and some extensive – of almost all the earlier 21 lessons.
- Additions to a book manuscript on the Veda in the light of Sri Aurobindo, still in process (which will get a special focus during 2021/22).
Those who participated in the internet Veda and grammar sessions benefited a lot, not only in regard to learning Sanskrit but also in many other ways, which is highlighted well in their continuous feedback.

Research highlights:
A special highlight was the in-depth study and teaching of the Vedic ‘aorist’ system with all its seven forms (along with samples from the Rig Veda). The Vedas contain a way of handling and modifying word roots and developing the language that is much richer and more varied than in the later classical Sanskrit – a fact that no classical Sanskrit teacher nowadays seems to mention to the students. Even though this system survived into the classical period of Sanskrit, its usage became very rare and limited. E.g. whereas in a single Vedic hymn with a dozen verses one might find up to ten aorist instances, the 700 verses of the Bhagavad Gita contain only six in total.

Reflections:
Especially meaningful this year was, with the background of the Vedic and Sanskrit grammar in general, entering deeper into the phenomenon of human speech and discussing it with some of the students.
Challenging this year, and as well often very straining, was the continuous need to conduct teaching sessions and scholarly discussion via smartphone.

Conclusion:
Plans for the immediate future are to keep teaching the grammar session on a weekly basis, continue creating lessons with relevant samples from different ancient spiritual texts, and try to complete the Veda book manuscript.
Kailash Youth Residency

by Kripa

Kailash is an educational residency. The general idea of Kailash is to have a shared living experience where the youth manage their community life, the duties that come along with it and the social outcome of it. This means that they will have to organize their own lives to keep the harmony of the residence. They will learn from the consequences of their acts and not because they blindly apply externally imposed rules.

We have 14 rooms, with 2 big rooms that can potentially be shared, so we have a regular hosting capacity of 14 that can go up to a maximum of 16 residents at a time. The minimum stay is 2 months and maximum is 6 years.

A few rules have been set up as a frame from the start, and are fixed:

○ Open to youth between 16 and 21 years old.
○ A daily activity such as school, work, apprenticeship, etc. is compulsory.
○ Active participation in the community life. (Weekly meetings, gardening, cooking shifts, maintenance of the building, and so on.)
○ Respect each other and the neighborhood.
○ No illegal drugs in the residency.

Activities of the year:

This year we hosted children of Aurovilians as well as children of foreign and Indian non-Aurovilians with volunteer or student statuses.

As we are a residency, we do not conduct activities as such. We deal with daily life. We have our traditional dinner with a Secret Santa around Christmas time, and we have our annual group photo taken that is a highlight.

Throughout the year, we have our weekly community meeting as well as monthly (or more if needed) collective clean-up and work for maintenance of the building and its grounds.

This year, we have all together painted a big room as well as the bathroom doors as part of our collective clean-up days.

Every day, 2 people shop, cook and clean up for the others. This way every evening everybody can eat dinner together, while cooking only once a week.

The situation of the pandemic and general stress linked with a sense of responsibility and who answers who, brought SAIIER to look at the organization of Kailash, asking us to have names of adult residents to be referred to as caretakers in addition to the caretaker’s team. In response to this, we have put in place that 2 Aurovillian young adults (above 18) living in Kailash are apprentice caretakers. We asked Bagirath, who moved out after having lived in Kailash for 4 years to join the caretaker’s team. He is very mature, poised and has an in depth understanding of Kailash’s organization in spirit and in practice. He is a great addition to the team.

Outcomes:

Kailash is a place that offers the space for youngsters to grow, develop and find themselves in a safe environment away from the family home. It is not simply a housing option. The space is created so the individuals learn from each other from the most basics of material responsibility of cooking, cleaning, and household chores to applied notions of respect, communication,
understanding of others, others’ needs, others’ growing and maturing process. Kailash is their home and the residents and caretakers become family.

As there is a regular turnover of residents, there is a natural passing on of information from the older residents to the newer ones. There is a transmission of identity and spirit of the place where the older ones act as elder brothers and sisters within the group.

Over the years, we can appreciate that former residents of Kailash having finished their studies and integrated actively in the Auroville adult work force want to give their energy and time to Kailash, and ask to join the caretakers team. This is the case of Fabien, Quentin, Inge, and now Bagirath.

Reflections:

This year was marked by the pandemic and lockdown. It has been a very interesting collective and community experience.

Kripa and Jean-Francois left for an extended period of 2 years from June 2018 to September 2020, leaving the care of the management of Kailash youth residency to Fabien, Safia and Quentin. Safia who had joined in 2018 did not stay long. Quentin left due to personal reasons at the beginning of the pandemics in 2019. Inge joined to back up Fabien, she stayed a year and left the team when Kripa followed by Jean-Francois returned (Sept 2020 and Jan 2021). Fabien is still after 10 years a constant regular stable presence and back up, and now hopefully as it seems to be the case, Bagirath is a new stable addition to the team.

In the early stages of the pandemic and just before the initial lockdown in March of 2020, there was an uneasy energy in the building. Some residents were strongly affected by the threat that the virus may pose. This was largely due to the environment of misinformation surrounding the virus, as the virus itself was just making its way into news headlines and hadn’t yet been extensively studied. During this lockdown, understandably, the routine and daily activities of all residents was forcefully changed. In response to this, the residents reshaped their routines to improve the community life which was temporarily affected. They did this by having meetings amongst themselves, adding a daily lunch to the task of the cooking teams, taking on more responsibility, playing games together, attempting to create a community vegetable garden and some residents even exercised together. The situation of life surrounding the initial lockdown was somewhat scary and very new. Even though there were minor conflicts, a sense of community prevailed bringing the residents together.

The residents had to at some point quarantine as some were identified as primary contacts. Parents took turns for the shopping and would drop the food at the front door of Kailash, so the residents could cook 3 meals a day on the spot without going out. The caretakers (at the time Fabien and Inge) were in contact with the residents only through phone and Whatsapp, so the residents were in full self management. A bonding sense of community settled in with a sense of shared responsibility.

After lockdown, while the schools and activities were still shut but people could go shopping and move around, was a more difficult phase. 14 teenagers living together with no outside activity to structure their day or release their energy drifted towards a more active night life and passive day life. The general atmosphere of being subjected to Covid protocols and regulations, living under pressure of vital fear and confusion on what was actually going on and the overall consequences on global life and future was putting a particular pressure and focus on our youth. A general lack of motivation and direction in life settled in.

At the end of this period, three of the older residents left Kailash, making it a very young group in age and in time. At the same time, Kripa returned after 2 years in France. While there was a list of youngsters waiting to move in, a time of pause and reflection was needed to work on the existing group and take care of the building making sure that the new residents would enter into a
space that was going in the right direction, offering a safe collective space for individual and collective growth. The existing residents needed guidance concerning their own engagements with school, work or day activities. The empty rooms needed a full repaint, the building needed repair and maintenance. An educational/social work was needed to create a sense of ownership integrating the notion of rights and duties in regard to Kailash as an educational residency, working on communication, mutual understanding and responsibility.

Once these consolidated, we could integrate three new residents, and soon after a fourth one. The collective life now is smooth and harmonious, with a good quality of communication and sense of responsibility.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we can appreciate the resilience of our youth who have managed to organize their collective life and pursue life in a very uncertain moment of our history. Each individual had to readjust, some stopped their schooling, some pursued their studies with their colleges online, some had to find a new interest and educational project. The teenage phase of life is already full of shapings and reshapings, full of uncertainties and questions about the future, and this pandemic situation brought in even more.
Citizens’ Assembly Pilot

by Suryamayi, Anshul and Lesley on behalf of the Auroville Citizens’ Assembly Exploration team
(Kathy, Suryamayi, Helen, Alan, David, Aditi, Martin, Sandyra, Nikethana, Anshul, Lesley)

The purpose of this project was to ascertain whether the Citizens’ Assembly model – already trialled in other parts of the world – could improve collective decision-making processes in Auroville. Under this overarching aim, we aimed to see if the model could:

● Engage a wider representation of community members than in current participatory governance processes (such as General Meetings and the Selection Process);
● Build capacity in people that would support them to participate more in such processes;
● Help realise Auroville’s ideals of human unity and unending education within such decision-making processes.

A secondary purpose, specific to this pilot project and its chosen topic of ‘water’, was to develop a Water Vision for Auroville. The pilot aimed to determine whether randomly selected participants could – with supportive capacity-building – consider a chosen topic from many angles, and develop recommendations as a group. The resulting Water Vision suggests this is possible.

Participants in this project included:

● 27 Aurovilians and Newcomers who were ‘randomly selected’ from Auroville’s Master List to be participants to consider the topic of water in Auroville;
● 30 water players/experts from Auroville;
● Facilitation team and organising team (an additional 15 Aurovilians).

Description of project:

Before embarking on the pilot, the Citizens Assembly team consulted the wider Auroville community, and after consideration of the many suggested topics against key criteria for a Citizens’ Assembly process, ultimately chose the topic of ‘water’. The team gained buy-in from all the ‘water players’ in Auroville, and a goal was set to create a water vision for the community.

The group of 27 randomly selected participants met for eight sessions over the three-month period Oct 2020 – Jan 2021. Supported by a well-planned facilitation process, they considered the ideas put forward by Auroville’s various water players in pre-recorded video presentations. (In-person presentations were avoided due to Covid restrictions.) The perspectives of 30 water players were presented, across different themes (i.e. integrated water management, water quality & water qualities, etc.). The participants also took part in facilitated discussions, Q&A sessions, panel discussions, small group interactions, and other activities. The sessions also aimed to develop their capacity-building around decision-making, including active listening, and recognition of one’s own personal biases and biased information.

Following in-depth consideration of all issues relating to water in Auroville, the participants developed a Water Vision for Auroville, with suggestions for implementation. These outcomes have subsequently been presented to the water players, various working groups in Auroville, and the wider Auroville community. They have been widely accepted and endorsed by all these groups, and an implementation team made up of Citizens’ Assembly participants, water players and organizers has been formed.
This entire process was undertaken as an action research project, guided by the key question: “To what extent can the Citizens’ Assembly model support capacity-building and participation in collective decision-making processes in Auroville, towards realising its ideals of human unity and unending education within these?” Our goal was to evaluate whether, how, and to what extent the key features of the Citizens’ Assembly model are facilitative of constructive collective decision-making in Auroville, and whether they could be applied in future in our community processes. To that end we evaluated the following key aspects of this collective decision-making process:

- **Participation** – Was there participation from a wide range of community members, representative of Auroville’s diversity? What were reasons/barriers for participation, and what insights can this offer for other community processes to be more inclusive and representative? Was the use of simultaneous translation feasible and effective in encouraging participation from non-native English speakers?
- **Capacity-building** – Did the Citizens’ Assembly model build capacity in participants for collectively and harmoniously addressing a community challenge? Did it build capacity to hold different viewpoints in a non-polarizing way? Did it build trust and understanding between a diverse grouping of community members? Did it build trust for collective processes in the community at large?
- **Education** – Was the presentation and deliberation of different perspectives effective in educating a random group of community members on a complex topic with the aim of making informed recommendations? Was the Citizens’ Assembly effective in increasing community awareness around the topic?
- **Process** – Was the process seen as valuable by participants, the broader community, and Working Groups? What elements of the process design were key to achieving this, where did it fall short and why?
- **Outcome** – Were participants satisfied with the outcome (a water vision for Auroville, and suggestions for its implementation)? Was the outcome perceived to be valid and implementable by the water players? Was the outcome perceived to be valid and implementable by Working Groups & the community at large?

To answer these questions we analysed data (60 responses) of the community members who were randomly selected – those who chose to attend or not, or dropped out, and their reasons. Participants completed questionnaires before, during and after the assembly, and presenters (water players) completed questionnaires after their presentations (video-recorded interviews) and interaction with the participants, and after being presented with the outcome. Observers (members of the organizing team) completed surveys at the end of each session, and the facilitation and advisory teams had focus group sessions after the completion of the process.

Five working groups (the Working Committee, Funds and Assets Management Committee, Town Development Council – l’Avenir d’Auroville, Budget Coordination Committee, and Entry Board) as well as the Resident’s Assembly Service (RAS) participated in focus group feedback sessions, in the format of a presentation followed by an open discussion held by CA team members, after which 10 members returned a questionnaire. Community members (42 responses) also filled out feedback forms after community presentations of the process and outcomes in different settings.

A documentary video was filmed with responses from participants before, during, and after the process and interviews with the Citizens’ Assembly team members.
Outcomes:

Two key outcomes were created:

- **A Water Vision for Auroville**, crafted by residents, which cuts through the division amongst water players. The vision lays out the common ground concerning water in Auroville, and offers a cohesive way forward with suggestions for implementation.

- **A pilot of a new model for collective decision-making processes in Auroville**. This model has been trialed elsewhere in the world and found to be particularly effective in helping communities come to a decision about highly contentious topics. Our pilot demonstrates that this model can transcend the crippling challenges within Auroville’s current collective decision-making culture and processes. The model gave residents a stake in shaping a water vision. The pilot illustrates that this model can more effectively engage a wider representation of community members than current participatory governance processes (such as General Meetings and the Selection Process).

There are three main groups who benefitted:

- **The participants**, who learnt capacity building and decision-making skills, and who were given a meaningful stake in a vital collective decision-making process.

- **The Water Players**, who were – at the end of the assembly process – presented with a vision (and suggestions for implementation) that charts a way forward in which all water players and their expertise can be included.

- **The whole of Auroville**. The success of this pilot demonstrates how the ideals of human unity and unending education can be realized through a supported and well-considered collective decision-making process. As the skills and capacities learnt by the participants disseminate through the community, we expect they will help build a more conscious and mature collective, something which we feel is essential to the project of Auroville, and urgent to address given the prevalence of dysfunctional and divisive dynamics in many of our collective forums.

Reflections:

Our goal was to trial an alternative model to get Aurovilians re-engaged in collective decision-making culture and processes. The long-standing problems regarding poor engagement of the majority of Auroville’s population include: lack of diversity in participants; lack of understanding of the challenges the community faces; and lack of constructive communication skills which often leads to hostile and polarized dynamics in deliberations. We also felt that this model also had good potential to support Auroville’s key ideals of human unity and unending education.

The topic of water was decided after consultation with the wider Auroville community. 27 topics were originally nominated and assessed with a particular criteria. Most of the participants were seldom active in community decision-making processes predominantly due to lack of time, but they also felt these other forums were not a safe space in which to interact, or they lacked trust in these processes.
27 participants agreed to move forward with the process after a hiatus due to Covid. Significant efforts were made to make the process fully accessible to Tamil speakers by providing dubbing and translations, and to support all participants as needed (for example, with child care).

Following extensive debriefing between the core team and facilitators, here are some of our core insights to make other community processes more inclusive and representative:

➔ Community processes should strive to be efficient in terms of time (a key barrier to participation was lack of time).
➔ Encourage community members’ places of work to grant them leave to participate.
➔ Provide budgeted child care for parents to be able to participate.
➔ Provide translation to those who need it.
➔ Favour small group discussions to enable a majority of participants to express themselves and be heard.
➔ Develop ‘ground rules’ for the Citizens’ Assembly that come from the participants for a safe and respectful process.

The Water Players themselves appreciated the fact that such a wide selection of perspectives were included in a video interview format that offered a low time-investment way for water players to participate (compared to having to prepare and present a whole presentation) and which supported less vocal players to engage.

**Capacity Building:**

Great effort was put into building the capacities and skills of participants. This included an array of learning exercises that enabled participants to become more conscious of the importance of listening, and aware of their biases (conscious and unconscious). Participants gave significant value to the building of their skills around bias and listening (an average score of 4.4/5 in their feedback). They believed these new skills/capacities would help them approach community challenges and participate in collective processes in Auroville differently. Participants also noted how this capacity-building, coupled with the small group discussion format, enabled them to consider other people’s points of view and grow in their understanding of others, and how this enabled them to connect closely with Auroville’s key values and allow polarities to dissolve.
“It’s our work to become aware of our bias and watch how it may influence our thinking, communication and decision-making.”

“I learnt that one has to shut off his/her mind to really truly listen.”

“It spotlighted in a very neutral/safe way our tendencies of how we react when faced with so many different opinions...”

**Education and learning:**

Participants noted that their knowledge about the water situation in Auroville significantly increased by the time the Citizens’ Assembly finished, from 2.6 (recorded at the beginning of the assembly) to 4.1 (recorded at the end of the assembly) out of a maximum score of 5. This demonstrates that the presentation of different perspectives and group discussions was effective in educating the group on the complex topic of water, and that they were, at the end of this process, able to make informed recommendations.

**Process:**

When asked what was the most rewarding part of the assembly, participants foregrounded the process, particularly the way in which the discussions enabled them to consider other people’s points of view, and as a consequence, how their understanding of others grew. Respondents often emphasised how this enabled them to connect closely with Auroville’s key values.

Participants were more specifically very positive about the small discussion group format (which averaged a 4.3 /5 rating), which they felt enabled a depth of exploration of the topic (4.1 /5), and which helped the process of making recommendations for the vision and its implementation (4.4 /5). Many noted the quality of facilitation, and how this supported their participation.

- “Excellent facilitation.”
- “The safe space/facilitation was great.”
- “[The most rewarding part was] To be able to change my mind, thanks to great facilitation.”

**What worked well in the sessions:**

After gathering all the feedback, the top three things that worked well are:

- The content put together by the team.
- The facilitation that guided the participants gently through this experience.
- The dynamics of the core team (diversity, sharing and collaboration) that motivated everyone to give their best and made the process enjoyable.

**Other things that worked well:**

- Support offered to the participants.
- Having multiple perspectives through video presentations.
- Trust and engagement of participants in the process, which was a result of the facilitation and support provided by the team.
Fig. 2: Core team feedback on “what worked well / the most rewarding parts of the CA pilot”

- “This engagement I feel is quite crucial for the success of future CAs. There was also a lot of expertise in the team that contributed to the successful planning and implementation of the pilot.” (core team member)
- “It was good to have multiple dedicated teams: advisory, facilitation, participant support, documentation, budget, evaluation. Also the balance struck between energisers, creative/visioning activities, and content to be delivered. I think the facilitation team should train other facilitators who wish to support CA processes in future.” (core team member)

Challenges of the process:

The core team observed the main challenge in the assembly was synthesising the final output in the last two sessions into a vision and recommendations. Since this process involved a mental approach of analysis, integration and prioritization of information, the core team felt that a few participants may have not been able to participate fully in this step. Their recommendations for future assemblies are to include other forms of expressing, sharing and recording ideas. Some of the core team felt uncomfortable with the voting and rating system at the end, as they felt that richness of information was lost. Some core team members thought that participants could have been encouraged more to suggest implementation ideas.

Other challenges expressed by the core team were: not having large whole group interactions (due to COVID constraints); no interactions between the water players and the participants (which were optional); and a dropout of Tamil participants despite translation efforts. The Water Players also expressed that they would have liked to have more time for interaction with the participants.
Outcomes:

Participants were generally positive or very positive about the vision and recommendations created by the assembly (6 people very positive; 8 positive; 3 neutral).

![Participant rating on the outcomes (vision & recommendations for implementation) of the assembly](image)

While all participants were very hopeful about the potential for the new water vision to create positive change in Auroville, almost ¾ of them expressed concern about its implementation – particularly regarding who would take responsibility for the vision’s implementation. In terms of what did not work well, participants gave diverse answers, the most common of which was a concern about the need to bring more concreteness to the vision and the ways in which it can be implemented.

The water players rated the usefulness of the process at 4.1 /5 and the usefulness of the outcomes at 3.3 /5. Many of the water players expressed their surprise at the extensive scope of both the vision and the suggestions for implementation considering that the participants were not ‘water experts’. While the water players appreciated the water vision outcome (rated 4.4 /5), they seemed to have wanted more specific suggestions in the implementation recommendations (2.2 /5) given by the participants. This may be due to a difference in expectations from the water players. (The objectives of the assembly were to come up with a vision and suggestions on steps for ensuring the vision could be implemented. It was not intended to provide a pathway for materialising the recommendations as it was felt this next step would need to be developed by the water players).

The lack of a clear body to take on this work was one of the main areas discussed by the assembly members and several suggestions were made on how this gap could be addressed.

- “I like how the vision has been clarified and think this is probably the most important outcome, although... I think implementation is the weak point because there is no clear ‘place’ for such information to go. I feel that someone/small group needs to be responsible for holding this vision…” (participant)

Community feedback:

The process drew a lot of attention and support from the community, and the outcomes were presented to them. We surveyed 42 community respondents (who attended the summary presentations and watched the final video “Making of the Citizens’ Assembly”). The community commended the process for bringing different perspectives to the table and crafting a vision after
careful deliberations. On other points, the community gave mixed feedback. The average rating from the community for Vision was 3.7/5, and for Implementation Guidelines was also 3.7/5. However, the community had expectations on implementing the outcomes (which was never the goal of the assembly). Many survey responses expressed that they would have liked to see more clarity of way forward in the implementation guidelines and that the outcomes seemed very broad.

The average rating on how much the respondents would like to see the outcomes of the assembly being carried further was 4.5/5, which demonstrates confidence in and support for the outcomes of the assembly.

- “The process and vision for CA was very clear (and inspiring!). However, the outcome of the process was less clear. Would be helpful to have a clearer sense of these, also clarity on what the next steps forward will be in terms of implementation.”
- “There is a need to show some good ‘real’ outcomes based on the recommendations suggested by the Citizens’ Assembly for the community to develop trust and legitimacy in this approach to decision making.”
- “I would have liked to see more clarity in the implementation points.”

Our research suggests that the CA did raise community awareness on the topic of water, especially through the videos (made accessible on YouTube) and through community screenings. Community members gave an average rating of 2.8/5, regarding how much they learnt about the water situation in Auroville.

The translation of all video interviews into Tamil has also created a vast resource for education on water within the Tamil speaking community in Auroville and the bioregion. Most water players expressed the usefulness of the process in creating a ‘community level’ vision on water, and the awareness it created for the participants and the community.

The Working Groups were largely positive about the process and outcomes of the CA. Working Group members rated the Citizens’ Assembly as a model for collective decision making 4.1/5 (on average). On average, Working Group members rated the usefulness of the process for follow-up by their respective groups 4/5. Working Group members rated the Water Vision outcome 4/5 and the suggestions for implementation 3.9/5, and the usefulness of these outcomes for follow-up by their respective groups 3.8/5. The outcomes can therefore be considered to be perceived as valid by Working Groups. However, there were concerns about implementation of collective decision-making processes in general in Auroville:

- “…very important for the decision-making process, could become key elements of the RAD in future.”
- “From the presentation it seems your pilot project went well. I think it could be a good alternative way to make decisions, give advice and work towards ‘unending education’.”
- “Implementation is always the most challenging part of a decision-making process in Auroville so it’s important to see if this actually happens this time.”

Conclusion:

The majority of participants said that they would participate again in a Citizens’ Assembly, if they were selected. (13 out of 17 respondents said ‘Yes’). The overwhelming majority of participants felt they would trust a Citizens’ Assembly process for dealing with other community issues in future. The primary reason given for this was the ‘random selection’ composition of the assembly, which participants felt removed potential conflict of interest and created a context where all people could
express themselves. Many suggested this could become a new model for decision-making in Auroville.

- “…definitely a way of developing a relevant and responsive community.”
- “I think this process could be recognised as ‘undiscussable’ because it is fair and free of conflict of interest.”
- “It is a much better tool than one or two Residents’ Assembly.”
- “YES! This random selection seemed to do the job! Random people, no personal agenda – ONE goal!”

Participants were largely very positive that aspects of the Citizens’ Assembly model could be integrated into other collective decision-making processes in Auroville. Some suggested that it could help with education on complex topics, while others foregrounded the small group discussions as a way to encourage people to speak or to dissolve polarities. A majority recommended using video presentations in future processes, for example, providing videos prior to a General Meeting.

While participants suggested many topics for a future Citizens’ Assembly, the most commonly suggested topic was that of the Master Plan / Galaxy plan / town planning. The second and third most commonly suggested topics were those of examining the ways in which the Working Groups make decisions in Auroville, and the topic of Education.

The working groups also suggested a number of topics for a future Citizens’ Assembly, the most commonly suggested being Economy in Auroville, Selection Process, and Housing.

In all, the feedback received from participants was very positive.

- “Thank you for letting me in this process. It really helped me in person to understand what I was doing in Auroville.”
- “Amazing job, don’t let it be forgotten.”
- “I felt very touched by the work, love and trust, time and energy put forward by the Citizens’ Assembly team.”
- “… it’s a wonderful way to depressurise the drive to manifest the city at the expense of human unity. We have the fortune of a relatively small community, an aspiration to govern peacefully and harmoniously, and a bureaucracy that is so far not so entrenched that it is not open to change.”

The Water Players were also enthusiastic about the CA process being used for other community issues (85% supported this idea). When asked which aspects of the CA process they would like to see integrated in the community processes in Auroville, 73% of the water players said ‘all’.

- “I hope you find a way to use this method in Auroville. I have given up on most General Meetings because they have become too political and don’t represent the diversity of experience and opinion here. From what I could see the Citizens Assembly does represent diversity.” (Water Player)
- “It felt like we touched or pointed to a next level of community interaction.” (Water Player)

The wider Auroville community was positive about the potential for the Citizens’ Assembly model in Auroville. Community members rated the Citizens’ Assembly as a model for collective decision making at 4.4 /5. 88% of them recommended that the CA model should be used in Auroville again. They rated the aspects of ‘Random selection’ and ‘Education’ as the most interesting and valuable parts of the model. Excerpts from the community feedback:
“This is a good way to build on the intuitive governance aspect and overcome the polarisation between participatory and hierarchical governance.”

“The Citizens’ Assembly model could be the answer to some of our structural governance problems in Auroville and help us bring out the best of all of us.”

“I like the educational part but I am still wondering how CA can help in collective decision making, on problems like economics, Master Plan, HT cable etc.”

“I feel the next step is that CA should be approved by the Residents’ Assembly as a decision making tool for the community.”

“I would be interested in seeing how the quality of Citizens’ Assembly be maintained (openness and creativity) and not flattened out for utility.”

Working Group and RAS members rated the Citizens’ Assembly as a model for collective decision making 4.1 /5 (on average). They identified (in the evaluation process) the potential of the educational and social aspects of this process for transforming the collective decision-making culture in Auroville to align with its ideals of human unity and unending education. The question “How much would you recommend / like to see a Citizens’ Assembly process used for topics that your group deals with?” was also rated on average 4.1 /5. However, it was suggested by 3 groups that one or more pilots should take place before incorporating it as an additional tool for decision-making by the RA:

“I see the CA model/process as a useful additional tool for decision-making of certain types of topics. I believe it needs a few more to be completed to build understanding and credibility in the community as well as for groups to gain clarity about how it can be put to best use.”

Based on this overall evaluation the CA team strongly recommends that the Citizens’ Assembly model can be utilised in Auroville for collective decision making and for deliberating on important community issues.
Increasing Water Literacy in Auroville

by Ing-Marie

The purpose of this project by the Water Group was to directly address the current water situation in Auroville by raising awareness of the issues through a series of interactive lectures, film showings, forest walks, public presentations, radio segments and more. Set against a background of dropping aquifers, players in the water sector not cooperating, and infrastructure projects that could further our water security not being funded, the Water Group aimed to increase the water literacy of the Auroville community, build connections with those working on water in the bioregion and throughout India, and promote steps to increase the water security of the township. Due to Covid uncertainties throughout the year, our project execution deviated slightly from the original proposal, however, the overall purpose of raising awareness on water issues remained constant.

Description of project:

This project supported Aditi Rosegger for two tasks. A former member of the Water Group herself, Aditi is currently pursuing a PhD in sustainable water governance in Auroville from the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney. During this period, she was taking a temporary leave from her studies and was present in Auroville.

Aditi’s first task was to engage in the collection, organization and documentation of all Auroville water studies. This involved consultation of L’avenir archives, CSR Geomatics, Gilles B., past and current water players, as well as others who have researched water topics in Auroville (i.e. Bogi), and then collecting all water studies from the sources above. In consultation with Water Group, Aditi then identified three institutions, including L’avenir, Water Group, and AuroRepo in which this information will be stored. One of these institutions, AuroRepo, is available to the public. (AuroRepo is the newest incarnation of the previous Research Auroville website, managed by the excellent Auroville Research Platform team – Dominique, Ravi, Henrike and Suryamayi.) Uploading all studies to the AuroRepo site not only ensures accessibility and continuity, but will strengthen Auroville’s reputation as a center of research to the wider global community.

Aditi then created an easy-to-navigate, backed-up database of water studies that helps connect Aurovilians, researchers and practitioners to the materials and work already conducted on the topic and shared it with identified institutions. Finally, she gave recommendations on how best to store data, give access, and share information between institutions in a coherent and organized way.

Aditi’s second task was to create water conservation signs to be posted at Auroville public places, including restaurants, auditoriums, guest houses, and more. She worked with a graphic designer to create a concept for innovative and creative water conservation messaging on different mediums for various venues. This process, including identification of the most sturdy and sustainable materials for signage, creation of one free water conservation signage option for all sites, and creation of pamphlets for more permanent signage in different mediums, continues on. Of all of the work produced, this project was the one that moved the most slowly, simply because the work of both Aditi and the graphic designer was focused on the Citizens’ Assembly (with its pilot project of ‘water’) and graphic display of its outcome, a ‘water vision’ for Auroville.
Water vision for Auroville

In the spirit of Auroville, we will:

- **Honour the sacredness of water** by recognising it as an eternal source of life, of healing and intelligence by conserving and protecting all water as our sacred inheritance.

- **Embrace unity in diversity** by using water as an opportunity to unite and collaborate within and beyond our boundaries; welcoming diverse, sustainable approaches to nurture our land and to sustain all life.

- **Create a water conscious society** by integrating local and global wisdom and acting boldly with openness toward new possibilities.

In addition to Aditi’s work, the Water Group’s original proposal planned for costs around March Water Talks (rental of the Multimedia Centre, MMC), as well as interactive presentations to the community and transportation to water-related site visits. While we had originally planned to spread these out throughout the year, we also dealt with Covid uncertainties and shifting regulations around public gatherings which made us hesitate to plan any events. While we did host our regular March Water Talks, we organized them in such a way that they were Covid-safe and were all outdoor walk/talks involving small groups of people, and therefore did not cost us any money. We also recognized that the culmination of the pilot Citizens’ Assembly project, which ended in March, needed further assistance in sharing its important outcome, the formulation of a water vision for Auroville, to the wider community.

In the end, the SAIER funds were spent in three ways, largely in collaboration with the Citizens’ Assembly team:

1. Seven showings of Citizens’ Assembly films at MMC throughout the months of February and March;
2. Printing of Water Vision posters and partial payment of their wood framing for distribution to all water players involved in the Citizens’ Assembly;
3. Printing of Water Vision cloth bags that were distributed to all water players, participants and organizers of the Citizens’ Assembly.

Outcomes:

- In total over 150 studies on water in Auroville or the Bioregion conducted by Auroville or affiliated organizations were collected and indexed into a Google Drive folder held by the Auroville Water Group. Of these, about 60 Aurovillian-produced studies, articles and presentations were uploaded to AuroRepo’s repository site. The others are pending due to the need to clarify copyright issues and permissions on the AuroRepo site.

- A concept for water awareness signage was created and brainstormed together with a graphic designer. This targets Auroville public spaces as well as eateries, tourist spots, guest houses, etc. Actually producing and then disseminating the signs is a next step and would require further funding.

- Unfortunately, attendance to the seven film showings of the Citizens’ Assembly films wasn’t as robust as we had been hoping. It was difficult to understand the reasons behind this – we suspected a combination of Covid concerns (sitting in a closed auditorium might not have been appealing to people) and the fact that the films had already been published online (so they could easily watch them from home). We tried to include interactive Q&A with some of the speakers of
the films for some of the showings, but they also weren’t well attended. The final screening happened on March 18, just after Covid positive cases emerged in Auroville, so was shifted to the outdoor theater at Anitya Community, where the turnout was much higher. Overall, the Citizens’ Assembly film showings were attended by a total of 93 people.

The Water Vision framed posters were distributed to all water players involved in the Citizens’ Assembly. This included roughly 30 people, most of whom will hang these beautiful posters in their public offices, further increasing the impact and visibility of the water vision.

Water Vision cloth bags were distributed to all water players, participants and organizers of the Citizens’ Assembly, a total of 102 people. Like the printed water visions, they contributed to a beautiful event on March 22nd, World Water Day.

Our third annual March Water Talks 2021 were executed in part because Ing-Marie, the main organizer of these events, could be supported through this project. Overall, the Water Talks attracted around 50 people spread out over three events: “Water Works in Darkali” (March 1), “An Odour-Free Visit to the Residential Zone Sewage Treatment Plant” (March 8), and “Whole Water in Buddha Garden” (March 29). Our event on March 15 fell through, so we encouraged the community to attend a presentation by the Citizens’ Assembly team the next day, March 16, which had a turnout of about 20 people.

Our culminating event planned for March 22nd, World Water Day, had to be cancelled for the public due to three Covid-positive cases being reported in Auroville the week before and extra precautions being taken after that. We did hold a smaller event, in collaboration with the Citizens’ Assembly team, on March 22nd, to honor the water players of Auroville in which 40 people attended. So overall, roughly 110 people attended these water-related events.

Reflections:

It was important for the Water Group to support and collaborate with the Citizens’ Assembly team to recognize the important work they did in the creation of the water vision and help to celebrate and share this work with the wider community.

Challenges included navigating the unknowns of Covid and the implications that shifting regulations might have on any planned events. Fortunately, with some flexibility and support of SAIIER, we adapted our budget accordingly with a positive outcome.

Conclusion:

Certainly, the work of increasing the water literacy of Auroville can continue on. Indeed, with the implementation group that emerged from the Citizens’ Assembly in full swing and the “Water Matters Mela” being planned for September, there is currently a lot of momentum around water and education within Auroville.
“Auroville, an Experiment in Spiritually Prefigurative Utopianism”

by Suryamayi

The purpose of this project was to communicate research findings of my PhD on Auroville (awarded in January 2020) – to a broad audience, both academic and non-academic, in Auroville and beyond.

Description of project:

Throughout the past year, I worked on the production of a number of manuscripts based on my PhD thesis, a professionally edited recording of my thesis, and delivered lectures based on my PhD research.

Academic publications:

As part of this SAIER publications project, I produced and submitted five academic publications (1 journal article and four book chapters of 6,000 – 10,000 words each) based on my PhD research and thesis to interested publishers, each of which have been reviewed and accepted. The first is already published, the others are forthcoming:


These will inform various academic audiences, as the above chapters and journal article are published within book projects and a special issue each in different fields: utopian studies, prefiguration, development studies, education, and intentional communities.

Book proposal:

As part of this SAIER publications project, I developed an initial book proposal to submit to interested publishers (three had already expressed interest): editors at Ralahine Utopian Studies and Bristol University Press with whom I have published/forthcoming book chapters based on my PhD.
research thesis on Auroville. I am currently awaiting feedback from these editors before proceeding further with development of the manuscript.

A book would significantly enhance the visibility and impact of my doctoral research on Auroville, with the potential to reach not only an academic, but also an activist and general interest audience. As such it will also be of benefit for the Auroville project as a whole, offering an in-depth and current insight into this experiment. Particularly as, to date, there has only been one academic monograph published on Auroville – Robert Minor’s *The Religious, The Spiritual and The Secular: Auroville and Secular India*, on the passing of the Auroville Foundation Act, published in 1999. Aurovilian Bindu Mohanty’s PhD thesis was published as a book by SAIIER in 2004 (over 15 years ago) but presumably with a limited readership already aware of and interested in Auroville and Integral Yoga. While there have been recent book publications by Aurovilians – Akash Kapur and Anu Majumdar – these both fall in the category of literary non-fiction.

**Presentations:**

I delivered two online conference presentations of my PhD research on Auroville during the course of this project, the first as part of an academic conference, the second an activist conference:

- July 2020 – “Auroville, the Utopian City – Documentary Screening and Discussion” as part of the Alternatives to Capitalism conference hosted within the *SASE Annual Conference*.

Beneficiaries included both international activist and academic audiences interested in alternatives. I also taught modules of a university course based on my PhD research:

- January 2021 – Convenor and facilitator of the University of Technology, Sydney’s Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation “Virtual Global Studio” in Auroville.

Beneficiaries were undergraduate students of a course whose director (Prof. Bem Le Hunte) regularly comes to Auroville for a month-long immersive ‘global studio’.

**PhD Thesis recordings:**

As part of this project, I recorded and produced an audio version of my doctoral thesis in collaboration with Auroville Radio. The purpose of this was for the thesis to reach beyond an audience of readership. Auroville Radio is currently broadcasting individual chapters as weekly podcasts, available to all on the Auroville Radio website.

**Reflections and conclusion:**

I was positively surprised to see so much interest from academic publishers for this content of my PhD research on Auroville. While I had in my project proposal intended to produce a total of 3 academic chapters/journals for publication in edited volumes/issues – and, time permitting, a possible fourth – I was reached out to by other editors during the first trimester of this SAIIER publications project and invited to participate in other book projects. As a result I produced a total of 5 academic chapters/journals during the course of the project. As each of these book chapter/journal article projects had submission timelines in the first two trimesters of this project timeline, I had to prioritize these over the other outputs during that time.

Initially, I had planned to submit a book proposal to interested publishers in the first part of the project timeline, hoping to receive feedback from editors in time to advance with the production of the book before the end of this reporting period. However, the book proposal submission was pushed back and while I have had positive interactions on it with the editors I have not yet received an official review based on which I could ascertain the direction in which to work in-depth on the
manuscript (i.e. agreement on structure and themes of each book chapter). That said, I have now completed the bulk of ongoing writing projects (minor revisions may still be required from editors on the forthcoming book chapters/journal article) and have both the availability and intention to continue pursuing the book project in the coming months.

I also intended to give live lectures in Auroville but the corona situation thwarted my plans for this, and I preferred to delay till an in-person interaction would be possible rather than delivering these online, as I plan to hold some reflection / collective understanding circles as part of this.
Auroville Research Platform
by Suryamayi, Henrike, Ravi M.

The Auroville Research Platform (1) helps initiate and catalyze research collaborations between external researchers and Aurovilians/Auroville units, and (2) raises the visibility of research outputs from or about Auroville through the online repository, AuroRepo (https://aurorepo.in).

Description of project:

There are 3 core team members of the Auroville Research Platform (AVRP): Suryamayi, Henrike and Ravi Murugesan. Each of us have research backgrounds which we bring to this work: Suryamayi recently completed a PhD on Auroville, Henrike is an anthropologist and professional editor of academic research, and Ravi has a background in communicating scientific research.

We set up an institutional research repository (AuroRepo: aurorepo.in), which has been online for more than a year and which we are continuously populating with high-quality research outputs, based on extensive database searches. We also follow up with researchers who have been to Auroville to keep the repository as complete as possible.

We have been continuing to act as a point of contact and guidance for external researchers interested in Auroville. During the course of this year, we supported 16 researchers, including 7 doctoral researchers and one large research project that has been registered under the Research Platform called “Exploring Auroville’s Capacity to Flourish”. This includes:

li>reviewing and discussing their proposed research project, and checking in as it develops;
li>finding appropriate ‘topic’ mentors for them in Auroville;
li>connecting them with relevant research participants in Auroville;
li>reviewing final drafts of research outputs for any corrections;
li>helping with questions related to visas and logistics of their stay.

We had another ~40 requests from all over the world.

Outcomes:

AuroRepo:

li>We traced and uploaded a variety of scholarly theses/dissertations done on Auroville.
li>We catalogued all the items in the old research database (research.auroville.org) and we identified the research outputs to be uploaded onto AuroRepo.
li>We introduced AuroRepo to the Auroville Water Group and they have taken charge of uploading water-related research on AuroRepo.
li>We publicized AuroRepo on Auronet and shared guidelines on how Aurovilians can upload research items to AuroRepo.

Informational website:

li>We developed an informational website (aurovilleresearchplatform.github.io) to advise external researchers on how to go about doing research in Auroville. We have written to the Auroville Foundation about linking the research.auroville domain to this website, and are waiting to hear from them.

Research projects:

li>Most of the research projects ongoing this year are long-term. The outputs of the 7 doctoral
research projects can be expected in the coming 1 - 4 years.

- We received outputs of previous research projects (6 in total), including ones we mentored:

Reflections:

- It was impressive to note that 5 high-level academic research projects (PhDs) were initiated in the last year, as to date only 12 have been undertaken, to our knowledge, since the beginning of Auroville. This means that there will be a significant spike in scholarly publications on Auroville as these get completed.
- We see that a significant amount of requests are clarified by us as we give a ‘reality check’ to the applicant by brainstorming together whether the project is academically viable and whether it makes sense in the context of Auroville. We truly believe this has improved the quality of projects that have happened here, and takes some burden from Auroville units which would have otherwise been approached directly.
- It was interesting to have a first experience of routing a funded research project via the Research Platform and SAIIER (the “Exploring Auroville’s Capacity to Flourish” project), opening the door for such projects to be welcomed again.
- AuroRepo has been online for more than a year, and we feel confident that it is a sustainable approach for an institutional repository.
- While we did our best to work with Savi to publicise research opportunities, this was not altogether successful given lag times and technical difficulties with uploading these in their website. We are currently working on improving this collaboration.
- We sought to obtain the domain research.auroville.org for the latter, which is occupied by an outdated research database. Currently we are not operating with an auroville.org IP and this would be preferable.

Conclusion:

We each find this project to be serving a valuable purpose for Auroville, filling a gap in the previous landscape around the archiving of research outputs, and an established point of contact and service for supporting visiting researchers, with a team qualified to do so.

So far we have been managing the project well at its current scope, with our limited time availability and resources. In future, if we would like its scope to widen (for example, into supporting and archiving non-formal research projects and outputs, assisting research projects in obtaining research grants, establishing research partnerships with other institutions, presenting research on Auroville beyond the Auroville context, etc.), we may need to have at least one person dedicated ½ time to the project.
Researching the immediate and long-term impacts of the ‘kNOw PLASTICS’ Educational Programme

by Divya Luciani, Chandrah and Ribhu

‘kNOw PLASTICS’ is a fun and easy to use educational programme that integrates the latest scientific research on plastics. Through experiential learning, children are empowered to become part of the solution to plastic pollution.

This year our project was to analyse and evaluate the immediate impacts of the ‘kNOw PLASTICS’ programme, develop research tools, and further explore researching and collecting data to determine the long-term impacts and behaviour change as a result of the programme. This included:

- The analysis of the social impact data from Phase 2 of the programme;
- The finalisation of social impact evaluation tools (questionnaires and interview) used to collect and analyse the social impact data for the long-term impacts of the programme;
- The collection of data using the social impact tools from a sample group of students from Auroville and Outreach schools.

Description of project:

Analysis and publication of the immediate impacts of the programme:

During Phase 2 of kNOw PLASTICS, WasteLess gathered an extensive database of social impact data from 9,574 students in schools that conducted the programme over the past 2 years (June 2018- March 2020). During this project Dr. Christopher Martens continued to clean the data and run a statistical analysis using software R for the targeted younger students (6-10 years of age) from different types of schools and the feedback from teachers who conducted the programme.

Research was conducted to look into possibilities for publishing both the immediate and the long-term impact of the programme. Different journals and magazines (with a focus on education and the environment) that are options for publishing the immediate and or long-term impact of the kNOw PLASTICS programme were shortlisted. Throughout the research process it became clear that publishing in academic journals is complex, takes a long time because of the peer reviewing process, sometimes incurs costs and often necessitates that an individual can only publish their research if they have already published something.

Sampling strategy and finalising the social impact tools:

Several experts (Dr. Bill Leon and Dr. Christopher Martens) were consulted to develop a sample strategy for evaluating the long-term impact of the kNOw PLASTICS Programme. Initially, the WasteLess team wanted to take a sample size (10%) of all the 9,574 students who participated in the kNOw PLASTICS programme. The baseline questionnaire and follow-up questionnaire at the end of the programme (Phase 2) were analysed according to schools (Government, Rajapalayam Government aided, Auroville/Outreach, CBSE, State Board and Overseas). The strategy was to take 10% applied across the age groups (6-10 and 11-15) and school type. However, due to COVID-19 with the closure of schools and no clarity as to when they would re-open it soon became clear that getting into contact with teachers and students who were no longer in school and or travelling in India were not feasible options.

Given the situation with COVID-19, travel restrictions, closed schools, the gap of time since students completed the programme (June 2018- March 2020) and the timeline of project/funding...
(end March 2021), the WasteLess team together with experts re-looked at what was realistically feasible with regards to researching the long-term impact of the kNOw PLASTICS Programme. Together with the guidance of experts it was decided that we would conduct a small-scale study that would focus only on Auroville and the bioregion (Outreach schools). The sample strategy involved first selecting a percentage of students from both age groups (6-10 and 11-15) to conduct the interview, then choosing the remaining students to fill in a follow up 3rd questionnaire as well as selecting all teachers to complete a questionnaire. Random sampling was conducted on the sample size to determine which students would be selected for either the interview or 3rd questionnaire.

Dr. Bill Leon (an expert in social impact monitoring and evaluation) guided the WasteLess team in developing the social impact tools for Phase 3 and finalising them. For both the teacher and student questionnaire Likert scale statements were developed to help in evaluating teachers and students’ attitudes, intentions and behaviour based on Fishbein and Azjen’s ‘theory of reasoned action’. The social impact tools (student questionnaire and student structured interview) were translated into Tamil and pilot tested in both English and Tamil with 2 different age groups (6-10 and 11-15). Two students (one from an AV and another from an Outreach School) were selected to pilot test both the questionnaires and interview questions. Students who conducted the questionnaires were asked to give their feedback in order to find out whether there were any misunderstandings and if so, how the questions could be improved so that they were as well-defined as possible. Two members from the WasteLess team conducted the interviews with students. With the permission of students, the interviews were recorded so that they could be referred to for analysis.

After the interview, students were asked whether there were any questions that they thought were unclear or they did not understand. The data gathered was analysed for key trends and the questionnaire and interview were adapted accordingly. The questionnaires for both age groups (6-10 and 11-15) and the interview questions and secondary researcher template (to record and code answers) were adapted and changes were translated into Tamil. These went through several rounds of proofreading before they were finalized.

Data collection of the long-term impacts of the programme:

Due to COVID-19 and the closure of schools the data collection was a slow and time-consuming process. Teachers who conducted the programme in the past two years (June 2018-March 2020) were approached so that we could find out how to contact students directly. As many of the teachers did not have the same students in their class, the WasteLess team had to track down and find out which school students were currently attending to get their latest contact details. Many students, especially from the higher grades (6th, 7th and 8th) had meanwhile graduated and were enrolled in different schools. The WasteLess team invested a lot of time, human resources and energy into getting as many of the students who did the kNOw PLASTICS Programme to participate in the study. Unfortunately, some students did not take part in the study as they were unreachable and/or had relocated and no longer lived in Auroville/the bioregion or had participated in pilot testing the 3rd questionnaire and interview. The majority of students were contacted and an interview or questionnaire was conducted. All the teachers were approached and gave their feedback through a follow-up questionnaire. A professional photographer documented the team conducting the interviews and questionnaires with students. Strict COVID-19 SOPs and protocols were adhered to during the data collection process.
The student interviews were documented through recording and a form was filled in with the main answers/responses of students. The interview form and student questionnaires that were conducted in Tamil were translated and the data was entered. Spreadsheets were created for each of the social impact tools (student questionnaires, student interviews and teacher questionnaires) so that the data gathered could be easily entered for analysis. Due to COVID there are delays in cleaning and analysing the data. This process takes time and will continue to be conducted in the coming months.

Outcomes:

Analysis and publication of the immediate impacts:

The analysis of the Phase 2 social impact data has shown that the programme has had positive immediate impacts on students who did the programme, teachers who conducted the programme, families of targeted students and school community. The programme has been successful in inspiring knowledge and positive behaviour change with regards to the use of plastics in students, teachers, families of students who did the programme and school community. From the analysis of data from student questionnaires it was found that the majority of students (80%) could identify the unsafe resin codes from the safer ones. Being able to identify the unsafe plastics and to avoid these especially for food and drink was an important aim of the programme. Almost every student (97%) aged 6-10 shared what they had learnt in the programme about plastics with their families. This was a significant aspect of the programme whereby we wanted to instill a social movement and inspire and empower students to bring home what they had learnt with their families. Importantly 86% of students aged 11-15 years who completed the programme said that they made changes to their use of plastics. Additionally, 67% of teachers reported numerous changes in students’ use of plastics. For example, in one Tamil Nadu Government school, all students changed their drinking water bottles from plastic to stainless steel.

92% of students thought the programme was very good. Furthermore, 97% of teachers thought the programme was enjoyable and 93% would recommend the programme to others.

We wrote an article about the kNOw PLASTICS Programme and immediate impacts and published this in the “Development and Cooperation International Journal” (www.dandc.eu), which has a print circulation of 18,000 and 75,000 visitors for the online version. Four years ago, we published an article in the same journal and the editor approached us again as he was very happy with our previous article and they were looking to publish an article focusing on the issue of chemicals and plastic. This was an amazing coincidence, as we were in the process of looking for possibilities to publish the impacts of the kNOw PLASTICS Programme in a magazine or journal. The journal issue for March 2021 in which they were interested in publishing our research on plastics focused on chemicals management.

The process of publishing an article in the “Development and Cooperation International Journal” was lengthy. We were initially contacted in early November, then we developed an outline for the article, received feedback and then set out to write the article. There was a lot of back-and-forth with edits and the final article was published in the March issue on chemicals management.

Case Study – Transition School:

Three grades (1st, 5th and 6th) in Transition School did the kNOw PLASTICS Programme in 2019. It was wonderful to see the positive impact of the programme on the school community. Previously in every classroom drinking water was stored in plastic containers that were considered to
fall under the ‘don’t know’ category of plastics, because they did not have a resin code on them. This meant that the plastic containers to store water could either be considered to be made from a ‘safer’ or an ‘unsafe’ plastic, however because there was no resin code there was no way of knowing which. The cups that were used in the classroom were also made from plastic (resin code #5 PP), which is considered a ‘safer’ plastic. However, the students and teachers who did the kNow PLASTICS programme wanted to stop using plastic for storing and drinking water and brought this to the attention of school management. School management wanted to find an alternative safe material to store drinking water in the classroom and public spaces in the school. They approached WasteLess and asked for advice on what to do. A member of the WasteLess team consulted with management and recommended switching to stainless steel, which is a safe alternative. The school changed all their plastic containers and cups to stainless steel ones.

Social impact tools:

The process of finalising the social impact tools (3rd student questionnaire and interview) was time-consuming and lengthy, as we had to conduct the second round of pilot testing outside the school environment due to COVID and also wanted to keep in continuous contact with an expert in the United States (Dr. Bill Leon) who guided us. We were grateful to parents of students who despite COVID were willing and open to us re-pilot testing the social impact tools. Valuable feedback through observations and discussions with students allowed us to adapt and improve the social impact tools. The re-pilot testing especially of 1) the teacher/student questionnaire Likert scale statements (to evaluate teachers and students’ attitudes, intentions and behaviour) and 2) the interview, brought new insights and important modifications to create a tool that would allow us to not only gather data for qualitative but also for quantitative analysis.

Fine-tuning the social impact tools through a participatory approach resulted in tools that resonate with the target group (children 6-10 and 11-15 years) and can best measure and track these changes.

Data collection of the long-term impacts of the programme:

Data collection for the long-term impacts of the programme was challenging and time-consuming. Despite all the hurdles we encountered, the WasteLess team persevered and were able to get 81 students to complete the 3rd questionnaire or an interview and all (10) teachers who conducted the programme filled in a feedback questionnaire. After conducting a preliminary analysis of the student/teacher questionnaires, it is already encouraging to see that there is a tangible positive behavioural change not only in the direct target group (students aged 10-15), but also in student families, the school communities and communities where students live.

As part of the research methodology, we integrated drawings into the verbal qualitative research interviews with students. We choose this so that we would mix different techniques to tap into students’ thoughts, feelings and experiences, which are often more easily accessible and therefore more likely to be shared verbally when students reflect on what they draw. Students were asked to create a drawing of what they remember or learned from the kNow PLASTICS programme. When students explained their drawings, it was impressive to see how learning about plastics has impacted their experiences, their passion for the issue of plastic pollution and them expressing a feeling of being empowered to become changemakers not only in their own lives but those of their families, friends and wider community.

All the teachers shared that they had changed their use of plastics, many of whom reduced their use of plastics through switching to reusable alternatives, avoiding unsafe plastics especially for food and drinks and brought these changes to their homes. All the teachers mentioned that after conducting the kNow PLASTICS programme, changes to the use of plastic in their school were initiated. These included avoiding plastics and switching to reusable safe alternatives, setting up proper waste separation infrastructure, avoiding unsafe resin codes (#3, #6 or #7- PC/ABS) whenever possible, etc.
Reflections:

The experience of developing the social impact tools has been very meaningful and rewarding. It gave us the opportunity to work with experts in the field who guided us and encouraged us to expand our knowledge on behaviour-change models and apply the theories to develop these tools. We are continuously inspired to improve our research methodology and perfect these tools so that they resonate with the target group and best measure and track changes in behaviour.

It is encouraging to see how the future generation (students 6-15 years) who took part in the kNOw PLASTICS programme have been deeply touched by the issues surrounding plastic pollution. Many of them shared experiences of changes that they felt responsible for making in their homes.

During these strange and confusing times with school closures due to COVID and uncertainty as to if or when they would resume, it was challenging to conduct research. Collecting the data took a long time because students completed the programme between June 2018 and March 2020 and it was difficult to contact them. All of them were in a different grade and had a new teacher and majority of them (especially the older students aged 11-15) had relocated to a new school. Scheduling and planning the sessions with students was often difficult. We are very appreciative and grateful to all the students and teachers who took part in the study and to everyone who made it possible for us to continue the long-term study throughout these difficult and challenging times.

Through this project we learned that publishing in a journal requires patience, negotiation skills and is a time-consuming process. Planning and having a clear strategy are key when it comes to publishing so that both parties (content writer and publisher) have a clear understanding of the aim and the process is as smooth and efficient as possible. We understand that in future projects a lot of time needs to be given for publishing research.

During this study, it became more apparent that we need to continuously engage and educate students on waste and plastics. The way WasteLess has received project funding has meant that it cannot constantly educate children in Auroville and Outreach schools. For the best learning outcomes, it would be recommended to regularly engage with students in these learnings throughout the academic year.

Conclusion:

The integration of education on sustainable consumption and plastic pollution into school curricula has an observable and long-term positive impact on the future generation. A continuous engagement with students throughout their education would create a more profound impact – similar to that of Awareness Through the Body (ATB) in Auroville and Outreach schools, but requires a larger dedicated team of teachers and more educational materials.

We are very grateful for the support from SAIIER for giving us the opportunity to continue researching the impact of our programme.

We plan to continue to conduct educational research on sustainable consumption, waste management and plastic pollution as well as in the future focusing on the field of water in Auroville and the bioregion.
This project aimed to increase awareness on the importance of learning Sanskrit and its relevance in realizing Auroville’s goal of human unity and transformation of consciousness. The proposed plan for this year was to organize various workshops and activities for learning Sanskrit language and collective study of important texts written in Sanskrit. The long-term plan is to make Sanskrit a living language in Auroville and also create a team that will focus on offering Sanskrit learning to children in Auroville schools and beyond.

Description of project:

More than 150 residents of Auroville and several more from Pondicherry and bioregion attended our workshops/activities organized between April 2020 and March 2021.

Bhagavad Gita online study circle:

After the lockdown started in March 2020, we organized two online study circles on the Bhagavad Gita which included chanting of all 700 Sanskrit Slokas and reading its interpretation in English based on Sri Aurobindo’s Essays on the Gita, followed by short reflections by the participants. There were around 15 participants in each of the circles and it was a deeply enriching experience for all. Many participants echoed the reflection that it was like a collective ‘yajna’ which gave a lot of strength and courage.

Due to lockdown, physical events in person were not possible, so till early October 2020 we experimented with various other short online learning sessions on Bhagavad Gita and some special sessions like Stithaprajnya Darshan on Janmashtami and Dhammapada on Buddha Jayanti. On 15 August 2020, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, we organised mantra chanting along with flag hoisting for India’s Independence Day at Bharat Nivas with a small number of people permitted within Covid guidelines and broadcasted the event live on YouTube.

Website – vidya.auroville.org:

We’ve started building an online learning website (vidya.auroville.org) and the work is in progress to create online courses on श्रीमद् भागवदगीता and स्तवधीन स्वास्थ्य महाविद्या.

Mundakopanishad:

The Bharat Nivas campus opened partially in October and we organized a session on मुन्दकोपनिषद् (Mundraopaniṣad) in the light of Integral Yoga by Dr. Sampadananda Mishra. This was a combination of online and an on-ground session.

Here are a couple verses from मुन्दकोपनिषद् / Mundakaopaniṣad in Sanskrit along with translation in English provided by Sri Aurobindo:

महाशाल: शौनक: है विधिवत् उपसन्नः अहंगिरसं प्रपक्षे नु भगवः
करिमनं नु भगवो विजाते सर्वमिदं विजातं भवतीति ॥

Shaunaka, the great house-lord, came to Angiras in the due way of the disciple and asked of him, “Lord, by knowing what does all this that is become known?”
To him thus spoke Angiras: Twofold is the knowledge that must be known of which the knowers of the Brahman tell, the higher and the lower knowledge.

A deeper dive into this aspect of Para Vidya (higher knowledge) and Apara Vidya (lower knowledge) was the key focus of this session.

We also made a presentation and had an interactive meeting to co-create Samskritam Auroville programs for 2020-21.

Scientific Heritage of India:

“The great mass of Sanskrit literature is a literature of human life” - Sri Aurobindo

We re-inaugurated the exhibition on ‘संविज्ञानम् – Scientific Heritage of India which had to be closed abruptly in March 2020 due to the lockdown. The significance of ancient Indian contributions in the field of science and technology remains relatively unknown, especially among the younger generation. With an intention to learn from the ancient wisdom and boldly spring towards future realisations, Samskritam Auroville and Bharat Nivas brought this exhibition (prepared by Sri Aurobindo Foundation for Indian Culture) to Auroville.

Along with the exhibition, we also organized Vedic chanting on the auspicious day of दीपावली (Deepavali).

A session on “Sanskrit as Yoga”:

We organized an interactive session with Dr. Anuradha Choudry on “Sanskrit as Yoga”. We all have an intimate engagement with language in our lives and yet we seldom pause to ask ourselves fundamental questions about it like, “What role does it play in formatting who we are, how we look at the world and relate to it?” “Is the sole purpose of language thought-expression or do different languages generate different thought-formations altogether?” “When a community like Auroville with people from 50+ countries succeeds in making Sanskrit a living language, how does that impact the world?” This session was an invitation for an open exploration of what Sanskrit is, what it offers as a method of yoga in itself and what is its importance for the world of yoga.

The session held on December 19, 2020 was very well attended and received and led to more engagement with Dr. Anuradha Choudry in Auroville. It included translation of “12 Qualities of the Mother” in Sanskrit and collaboration with Auroville Language Lab to learn Sanskrit language based on an online course conducted by her.

Full Bhagavad Gita chanting:


Explaining the meaning of Christmas Day, the Mother said: “Long before the Christian religion made December 25th the day of Christ’s birth, this day was the festival of the return of the sun, the Day of Light. It is this very ancient symbol of the rebirth of the Light that we wish to celebrate here.”

On this special day we organized a Bhagavad Gita chanting at Bharat Nivas and the newly renovated Harmony Hall (which was formerly known as CIC, Center of Indian Culture) was also inaugurated on that day.

This chanting of the full text of Bhagavad Gita (700 verses in 18 chapters) was a deeply inspiring and memorable experience for more than 50 Aurovilians, guests and friends who attended. About 20 participants had also taken part in the daily practice sessions during the 4 weeks prior to the Gita Jayanti day. The whole experience was deeply uniting and elevating for everyone.
After this we restarted weekly Bhagavad Gita chanting sessions from January 2021 and continued through the end of April when again we were faced with Covid restrictions/lockdown.

Nada Yoga workshop and regular sessions:

We organized a 2-day experiential workshop on नादयोग साधना Nada Yoga Sadhana and regular sessions (4 sessions a week for 3 months from January 2021 to April 2021) that were facilitated by Mandar Karanjkar and Dakshayani Athalye. They were groomed and steeped in one of the very deepest and most refined traditions of Indian Classical Music, in the direct lineage of the legendary Ma Annapurna Devi (who in turn was inwardly connected to Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram). They have also studied Indian Classical Music from Pandit Vijay Sardeshmukh.

Perhaps the most significant testimony for the musical and inner quality of the teaching transmitted, and the pedagogic skill and experience of the facilitators, was the steady and increasing attendance of the regular classes (even at 6.30am!) over the three months of their stay. Their unobtrusive presence and generosity in sharing their art and themselves also contributed positively to re-enlivening the Bharat Nivas campus where they were staying and nurtured its culturally and spiritually tuned atmosphere.

Due to the spike in Covid cases in April, Mandar and Dakshayani returned to Pune to support their families; but we are very happy about their intention to join the Auroville community as soon as the situation permits. In the meantime, their online accessibility, and the baithak.org website of their non-profit Baithak Foundation with its rich audio library dedicated to fostering a deep engagement with Indian Classical Music, are helping us to maintain the connection and to keep growing the seeds planted during their three months' stay in Auroville.

Indian Classical Music and Sanskrit in schools:

We organized a 3-month pilot program with weekly sessions on Indian Classical Music for children at Deepanam School. We also experimented with learning Sanskrit through songs. The group of 7 & 8 year olds learnt a song about the Sun in Sanskrit.

Dakshayani conducted weekly music lessons during the last term of the year. The joy of learning a classical art-form from a passionate teacher and singing together as a group is an experience that the children will cherish for a long time. The children also learnt to play the Tanpura, to listen and tune into the pitch and also explored how the harmonium works with the help of a professional. The curiosity and enthusiasm of the children to explore the musical instruments was heartening and motivating for the adults holding space.

She also facilitated short introductory sessions for teachers at Deepanam School and Nandanam Kindergarten which also led to a few sessions with the children at Nandanam which were also well appreciated by all.

स्वाधीन स्वास्थ्य महाविद्या (Swaadheena Swapsthy Mahavidya, Divine Science of Health or Nature Cure):

A half-day workshop on स्वाधीन स्वास्थ्य महाविद्या was organized in January 2021. It was facilitated by Dr. Arun Sharma, who has guided countless beings to live a healthy life (and cure all kinds of diseases) through simple and timeless laws of nature. You can know more about him and his work on imanah.com and akarma.life/inspiration/. He shared insights on Integral Health through key verses in Sanskrit (translated in English) along with suggestions on daily practices for healthy living.
Around 40 participants attended the camp and the experience was deeply enriching and there was an intention to go deeper. So we organized a 5-day Health Camp from 27th to 30th March 2021. About 38 Aurovilians and Newcomers participated from different backgrounds. The routine was composed of various physical exercises like yoga, pranayama, running with some therapies like sun gazing, sun basking, wet cloth wraps and theory sessions with the base readings of Sanskrit verses. The food prepared was based on the Nature Cure guidelines and the cooking team at Atithi Griha was guided by Jinal Radthod (often referred to as a Kitchen Doctor) who volunteered to come along with Arunji to serve at the camp.

This immersive camp inspired and transformed most of the participants’ lifestyles and health approach. There is beautiful organic dynamism flowing and a small support group has emerged, which includes 3 team members from Santé who attended the camp. We are also trying different ways to share this knowledge and practices with the larger Auroville community.

Outcomes:

One of the biggest shifts in outcome this year was a transformation from theory-based understanding to experience-based learning with collective practices. For instance the sessions on Nada Yoga had a wonderful commitment from participants attending twice a week for 3 months. In the Swaadheena Swaasthya Mahavidya (Nature Cure) health camp, 38 Aurovilians/Newcomers were together from 6 am to 6 pm for five days in a row learning and practicing together which created a deep bond. Even after the camp many participants are sharing and supporting each other. Through these practice-based engagements, the process of community building happened very naturally and beautifully.

Introducing Sanskrit learning through Indian Classical Music at Deepanam School and Nandanam Kindergarten was a wonderful experiment. Teachers and students would like to continue next year also.

Deepening in regular Bhagavad Gita chanting collectively is shifting the subtle energies. Our work is also helping in energizing the Bharat Nivas campus as our work is deeply aligned with the vision of the Indian Pavilion and we collaborate closely with the BN team. They have offered us a
space dedicated to learning Sanskrit and other programs rooted in Indic Wisdom.

Reflections:

We realised that the most important skill as project holders in the present time is to be able to adapt with rapidly changing and uncertain environments. We were able to flow with the emerging situation and were able to execute so many workshops, classes and a camp despite the Covid situation. Many participants from our programs are coming forward as volunteers and the harmony and joy with which the Samskritam Auroville team is working together and openly sharing and collaborating continues to be a deeply enriching experience.

The biggest challenge of course was uncertainty around Covid. For instance, we had planned the “Sanskrit Sammelanam” in March 2021 with a series of events for a much wider audience but due to Covid restrictions we had to restrict it to a 5-day camp for a smaller audience. At the same time, there were several events like Nada Yoga workshops, classes, sessions for children on Indian Classical Music and Sanskrit, classes with Prof. Anuradha Choudry etc. that were not planned earlier and they happened because certain conditions came together and the team could quickly adapt and make things happen.

With good community support we were also able to execute projects like a 5-day health camp which had several expenses like food, venue, facilitators travel, stay, honorarium etc. for which we had not budgeted as it was not planned. We are able to continue offering all the learning programs without a price-tag and that has led to a beautiful energy of mutual support and care.

Conclusion:

We are deeply committed to continue this Sanskrit learning यज्ञ in Auroville as willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness. We thank SAIER for the continued support.
Srivinti for the Golden Child – “The World Soul”  
a graphic novel for children and young adults  
by Emanuele and Yvelise

Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri is an epic poem which has inside countless treasures. However, they are sometimes not so easy to grasp for certain people. Emanuele has seen that children, young adults and even some adults understand it better/relate to it better when it is illustrated. This project involved the production of a graphic novel of 120 pages illustrating the canto of Savitri called “The World Soul”. The drawings are in aquarelle style, digitally produced, to be first published as a PDF.

This project is dedicated to all Savitri lovers, to all who are curious of a more ‘simple’ perspective on Savitri, to young adults and children who are yet to discover the world of Savitri and never dared.

Description of project:

July 2020 – April 2021: Emanuele executed 43 drawings and 5 maps on iPad in pencil, ink and then colors. He added the text in English, as he went along with the drawings. The text still needs to be revised. This will be done once all drawings are completed, by a professional translator.

February – March 2021: Writing by Emanuele and Yvelise of the introduction to the graphic novel, outlining the story so that the reader has an idea of what it is about, in order to make the graphic novel more attractive/understandable by a young public. An introduction has been added at the very beginning of the book and some text will probably be added later to several pages, so that the whole graphic novel flows better. This text has been written in French by Yvelise, has also been translated to English and still needs to be inserted (for some of it) and corrected by a proper translator.

March – April 2021: Creation of the initial PDF, slideshow with music, with the drawings created so far, in English.

February – April 2021: Creation of the website “Illustrating Savitri” by Yvelise on wix.com (lele997.wixsite.com/illustratingsavitri), featuring all the works of Emanuele on Savitri with a full page dedicated to the project “Savitri for the Golden Child – The World Soul” and another one dedicated to the maps and characters. For the creation of this website, Emanuele also had to dedicate time to adapt his drawings to the website, add graphic elements.

Outcomes:

- 43 pages of drawings and text illustrating the canto “The World Soul” were created, as well as 5 maps as a guide to the whole epic of Savitri and which situate the context of this particular canto. These are gathered in PDFs.
- A website for the larger project of “Illustrating Savitri” has been created, and will be continually added to.
Emanuele additionally explored the creation of a series “Trickles from the Sun”: short animations of Savitri sentences, like GIFs, which even if they were not part of this specific project, wanted to manifest and are in the same spirit. There are 2 pages dedicated to these illustrations and small animations on the website.

Until now, only select people have benefited, as their feedback was solicited / invited in order to adjust where needed as the project went along. All of them were very enthusiastic, apart from English mistakes still needing to be corrected.

Emanuele wants through this project to pass to the reader the concrete feeling and experience of the poem itself, which is so often deemed as aloof and mysterious. The poem is in fact intimately related to our life. This reversal of view and attitude towards Savitri has the potential to give us an immense certitude of a Luminous Something Else.

Reflections:

- Feedbacks of people were very encouraging and Emanuele is really enjoying illustrating Savitri in this way. The feedback confirmed that this is mostly what he wants to offer the world, as an Open Source project (for the digital part).
- The specific project is in itself taking longer than planned, partly because the time to execute each drawing takes longer than planned, partly because creating the PDFs, slide-show, website consumed time and partly because of the situation last year that required Emanuele to be present on many fronts. In fact, 15 more months are needed to complete the project, and it will altogether take 24 months in total.
- We decided along the way to create a website in order for more people to have access to the work done and to follow the ongoing project. This will also help attract funds in the future.

Conclusion:

Emanuele wants to finish “The World Soul”, end product estimated at March 2022, funds permitting.

This project helped Emanuele realize this is what he wants to offer to the world: “illustrating Savitri for the Golden Child”. So again a big Thank You to SAIER for financing this project!
This project was to write and illustrate a children’s book, *The Miracle Forest*. This story for children has been with me for a while now, waiting for me to get to work and write it down, which I did finally last year in 2019. It’s a story from the heart.

I wanted to tell the story of Auroville and the great Adventure it is, like I would tell it to very small children who understand BIG things. And so, I began by plunging into my own memories of childhood here, in Auroville. Like a treasure box always accessible, there it was; the source, the strength and determination to overcome all difficulties. The joy and absolute faith and the sense of the great Adventure that Mother has for us! I was inspired by the flower Mother named ‘Miracle’ and the significance Mother gave to it: “Air of Auroville: Marvelous, strange, unexpected”. Earlier with the Auroville Press we made a short version of this story into a colouring book titled “The Miracle”, with the understanding that the full version of this story would be published later in colour with new illustrations. The full version is this book, *The Miracle Forest*.

**Outcomes:**

So far, the writing and illustrations have been done. When published, hopefully this book will touch the hearts of children and parents and the young at heart. The hope is to pass on to the little Auroville children of today, some of that magic we were blessed to experience when Mother was in her physical body.

**Reflections:**

Creating a book is always a challenge. It’s been a wonderful learning experience as I’ve been following online tutorials that helped me tons to shift from using rather poor materials in the past and invest in professional watercolours and brushes I did not have for my previous books. I invested my own money for this as these materials are incredibly expensive, something I did not know at the time I wrote the project. But I’m very glad for it as I will now be using beautiful, transparent and luminous colours that make all the difference!

Also important was allowing myself to take the needed time to learn, accept to redo again and again illustrations whenever I felt I could have done better.

I love this book with all my heart.
Ashwagandha Horses
bringing Natural Horsemanship to the AV youth

by Daniela and Maya

The purpose of the Ashwagandha Horses project was to provide a safe and progressive environment for children of Auroville to learn the theory and practice of Natural Horsemanship. Weekly classes were conducted by the four project holders (Daniela, Divya, Inge, Maya) over the period from June 2020 – March 2021, in which children could develop the key skills to interact and play with horses ‘naturally’ both on the ground and learn the basics of riding. Natural Horsemanship focuses on love, language and leadership vs. normal horsemanship that uses intimidation, force and fear. The skills and knowledge gained during the classes provided an expanding knowledge on horse psychology and how to communicate with their horses using a Natural, positive and progressive attitude without fear and intimidation. These skills extend beyond the children’s interaction with horses, enhancing their confidence, communication, leadership and physical motor skills, all of which are applicable to their daily life.

Description of project:

The goal of Ashwagandha Horses is to create a safe environment where equine activities can take place for the betterment of humans and horses. Our years of experience working with horses has taught us to be responsible from a young age, connect to our inner being and be receptive and open to change. Natural Horsemanship has provided us with the valuable skills of communication, trust and respect. Our aim is to share our passion and knowledge with the younger generation of Auroville, so that ultimately this space can be an inter-generational unending learning experience platform and physical space for personal growth. We see that the physical living space of the horses also becomes a safe, vital and living social place where valuable life lessons occur, and where children and young adults can explore different aspects of their being in a flexible and supportive environment.

The 4 (now 5) project holders conducted weekly classes of Natural Horsemanship and horse interaction activities for children of Auroville from June 2020 – March 2021 (classes are still ongoing post project). Our classes are based on the Parelli Natural Horsemanship method – a globally widespread school of Natural Horsemanship.

8 children of Auroville aged 8-12 participated in the weekly class. These classes included basic theory and regular practice of Natural Horsemanship techniques with the horses of Ashwagandha. With the help of SAIIER support we were able to provide these classes at a subsidised half cost.

Our classes focused on providing the children with an understanding of the six keys of Parelli Natural Horsemanship and giving them simple tools to communicate with horses, namely the 7 games. The 7 games form the basis of a non-verbal communication that builds up the partnership between horse and human. In our classes the students learned a basic level of theory (simplified for this target age group) of the 7 games and practiced the games with the horses on the ground.
The classes are organised according to the levels system in the Parelli Natural Horsemanship. Theory and practice build from learning basic ground skills (developing the start of communication with horses and establishing safety) in Level 1 to more advanced skills in ground training and riding in Level 4. This past year focused on establishing the basic ground skills in the first level.

In addition to the Natural Horsemanship classes which was only for children aged 8 and up, we provided an opportunity for the younger children aged 3-7 to establish contact with horses. As this age group would be too young to fully understand the theory concepts as well as handle big horses, we still wanted to provide them with the opportunity to gain a basic connection and learning with horses. We organised weekly interactions for children to be able to go on forest walks led by the project team members and groom and feed the horses. This allowed younger children to already form a bond with the horses and gain confidence from a young age. Approximately 30 children joined these activities on a flexible basis.

Outcomes:

Weekly Natural Horsemanship classes were provided for 8 children of Auroville aged 8-12. In these classes the children gained:

- An understanding of the 6 keys of Natural Horsemanship
- Knowledge and practice on how to use the tools of Natural Horsemanship (ropes of different lengths, carrot sticks and other props)
- Knowledge on the theory and practice of the 7 games with the horses
- Knowledge on horse care (grooming and feeding)

We have seen a large progress in the children who took part in the classes both in their physical and mental abilities. Not only did the children become more confident in their physical capacities of handling ropes, carrot sticks and the horses themselves, but we saw a growth in the children’s development in terms of their communication skills, patience, determination, knowledge and confidence in working with the horses and also in themselves. This progress and growth in the children over the past year has been beautiful to see and really showed us how interacting with horses stimulates a really important part of education that translates into their daily life.

For the younger children participating in weekly horse interaction, we have observed that children who are often shy, or others who have a lot of energy become fully focused on the horses when they are on their ride or feeding or brushing. Horses have been used worldwide in therapy and are known to bring a sense of quiet, focus, and self-reflection. We saw that children gained increasing knowledge and skills such as improved communication, leadership, confidence, physical motor skills, and improved memory.

Feedback from Stephan and Anusha (Ananya’s parents):

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for your support of the Horsemanship classes at Ashwagandha!

Our daughter, Ananya, has been attending the classes since July 2020 and not only enjoys her teachers and the horses tremendously, she has been deeply nourished in valuable ways through them.

The most evident shift has been in her confidence around animals. After a traumatic dog bite a year ago, Ananya has been nervous around big dogs. By working with the horses, learning to love and respect them while being assertive with them, her love for and trust in animals has been restored. Instead of feeling threatened by them she is learning to communicate with them from a fearless space. For us this is an extremely precious outcome!

We deeply value how Daniela and Maya work with the students. They combine gentleness and love with commitment and rigour, as such, are inspiring role models. It’s been a treat to
watch Ananya develop not only her love for horses but also these beautiful qualities through her teachers, which will serve her in all areas of her life.

Most importantly, these classes provide Ananya with a model of relating with horses with deep respect, partnership and compassion. She learns to communicate with them with awareness and understanding rather than with saddles and whips. Developing in children a sense of care and responsibility for the planet and deep love for its creatures is, we believe, education in the truest sense of the word. It is the foundation to building a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Feedback from Aneeka (12 years old):

When I go to Ashwagandha to learn natural horsemanship, I am happy to meet the horses. I have learnt to put a harness, brushing and grooming them including tidying their nails, combing their mane, etc. I have also learnt something called the ‘friendly game’. At times, I feed the horses and also take smaller kids for rides. The horses also seem to be comfortable around me. Now that they are used to seeing me around, they respond to me. All of it feels very friendly and warm. I think they like me when they lick my hand. But they seem to like younger kids even more. They are warm, welcoming and have their own horse(person)ality.

I usually ride Kayla. She is the calmest among all the horses and walks slowly whenever her tummy is full. I help clean Kadin's hooves and brush him but since he is small, he likes licking a lot.

Natural horsemanship has been a good experience and I really like riding horses. To think that initially I was scared of horses and now I feel completely at ease on and around them.

Reflections:

Natural Horsemanship is a continuous process of learning and self-development. It provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on our physical and emotional state, build our confidence and leadership, and enhance our imagination. It has been wonderful to watch the children mature and grow in their confidence around the horses and become calm and focused leaders during the classes. They are progressing largely in overcoming the challenges of shyness, fear, frustration and impatience. These are valuable skills that the children can take with them and use in their life.

We encountered several challenges during the project duration:

- COVID-19 caused classes to be halted numerous times during the project months. Fortunately, we schedule our classes of no more than 2-3 students per teacher and our classes are outdoors following safety protocols, thereby allowing us to recommence earlier than some activities.
- A second challenge has been to cater to every child’s needs. Natural Horsemanship goes hand in hand with our own personal development, making us face our inner emotional challenges and every individual grows and progresses at a different pace. This challenges us team leaders to cater the classes for every child’s need, not to progress too quickly for those who need more time, yet not too slow for those who want to challenge themselves. We constantly adapt our class content and learning according to the needs of the children and for this we also keep our class sizes small so we can really cater for every individual’s needs.
- A third challenge is scheduling the classes for the children. The children have very busy schedules with other extracurricular activities, and thus finding common timings was difficult. We had a change in some of the students during the project period as some had to drop out and new children joined the classes.
- A fourth challenge we faced in Ashwagandha Horses is the horses’ health. As we have a small herd of horses all our horses are involved in the classes. Occasionally horses fell ill
during the project phase, which made us have to reschedule, cancel or adapt the classes with fewer horses.

- A fifth ongoing challenge is to generate enough funds to run the project efficiently. Horses have a significant cost in terms of food, stabling, and medical expenses. At the current time the horse project is largely funded by personal funds of the project team members, SAIIER’s grant as well as charging students to attend the horse interaction and classes. Our aim is to keep the costs as minimal as possible so that the classes are accessible. However, this is difficult as we need to balance low cost with the same needing to generate enough to have the project run for the well-being of the horses and team.

**Conclusion:**

The project with the funds from SAIIER allowed us to provide a safe and progressive educational space for students to learn and practice Natural Horsemanship over the past months from July 2020 – March 2021. We are currently ongoing with the classes and would like to continue to provide this opportunity for the children of Auroville. The students so far have covered the basics of Natural Horsemanship in ground training skills, and we would like to allow them to progress into more advanced ground training skills as well as introduce the riding component. We would also like to continue to provide the weekly horse interactions for the younger children.
Awareness Through the Body (ATB)

by Aloka

This year my work included:

- Ongoing Yoga Nidra sessions for Aurovilians and Newcomers once a week from October 2020.
- ‘Kinhin’ (walking meditation) around the pond under Matrimandir with interested participants once a month.
- One intensive workshop in February 2021 with Joan. Because of Covid the planned workshop of September 2020 had to be cancelled.
- A workshop of three hours for the Wasteful team in November 2020.
- A workshop of 3 hours for the group “Let’s talk about death” in March 2021.
- An online workshop of 2hrs 30min for AVI-USA in April 2021.
- Translation into Spanish of the above mentioned book from August 2020 to December 2020. Pablo Cuesta helped me with the translation, now Joan has to go through it and then we need to correct it before publishing.
- Ongoing Spanish translation with Pablo of Our Many Selves, a compilation of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother texts about the planes of the being done by A. Dalal. We consider this a very important book for the people who facilitate ATB. Many of the Spanish facilitators are not fluent in English, thus the need of translating it. We work on this with Pablo 3 times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:30/9 to 12:30.
- Correction of the French translation with Sebastien of the Kindergarten book (done online as Sebastien is in Paris).
- Maintaining the ATB websites.
- Keeping the correspondence of ATB.

Reflections:

Most meaningful this year was the coming out of the Kindergarten book, the republication of the French translation of the Awareness Through the Body book and some of the Yoga Nidra sessions that had a deep impact on the participants and on myself.

Challenging was the online workshop because I doubted it could be done, but to my surprise it went very well.

Conclusion:

With Joan we have the intention to bring out two videos on ATB. In the coming year I plan to finish the translation of the book I am doing now, finish the correction of the French translation, keep doing the regular workshops and the sporadic ones when I am asked, and keep going with the Yoga Nidra and kinhin.
Creative Movement
by Mrinalini

This was a project to facilitate Creative Movement sessions with students and teachers. Creatively designed movement activities use the physical to access other parts of the being: emotional, mental, intellectual, psychological, social etc. Through simple body movements participants learn to explore the self and interaction with others. The practice enhances skills needed by the children and encourages deeper awareness.

Description of project:
I worked with the children of the primary section of Udavi School (classes 4, 5 & 6). Regular weekly sessions were conducted for the children with a duration of 1.5 hrs for each session. This duration and frequency enabled deepening for the children and allowed the facilitator the freedom to be sensitive to the needs of the group & individuals as it emerged.

We could take the session outside, under the trees, away from the buildings, so we could run around freely, make noise without disturbing others, be with the natural space around us and use what it provided e.g. sticks, stones, leaves, flowers, rocks, soil, for our activities.

Areas of focus were emotional expression, group dynamics, helping each other, attention spans, concentration, powers of observation and learning to draw from inner reserves of self-awareness.

Some of our activities were:
- Building things together.
- Using their bodies to collectively make a bridge, a car that moves etc.
- Using materials found on the ground, making a house with different rules/conditions/constraints each time.
- Seeing how behavior is affected by the conditions imposed, especially when a time constraint is introduced.
- Small groups standing in small circles balance a leaf on the shoulder (keep changing the body part on which they balance for varying levels of difficulty and fun) while passing a stone around with their feet.

I also began monthly sessions for the teachers. Sessions for the children of kindergarten, classes 1, 2, 3 and parents were planned but could not happen because of the Covid situation.

Outcomes:
Transformation in the children’s individual behaviour and in the group’s behaviour patterns were significant. The noticeable ones were:
● Channeling emotions and expressing them in a non harmful way. E.g. When taunted, children who earlier might retort in an angry manner, found ways to ignore or answer calmly.
● Creating different solutions themselves to be able to work together.
● Realizing they have the power of choice to react or not.
● Ability to stay focused for longer periods.
● Ability to observe keenly external and internal changes.
● Seeing that silence and calm is needed to become more self-aware.
● Better able to work with others, even with children they don’t usually get along with.

Reflections:

Most meaningful was watching the children’s individuality shine through as they navigated working with the collective, visibly being able to appreciate their awakening to their own powers within were special delights. I hold many special memories in my heart of teaching and being taught.

Disciplining was a challenge. When the children were given the freedom to be loud, to run around, the tendency was to go wild and forget the task at hand. It was difficult to find the balance between giving them the freedom to create from their own choices and ensuring that they stay within a framework. I realized that my clarity, both inner and in giving external directives made a big difference in the outcome of their behaviour.

Conclusion:

Due to the Covid situation, there was little opportunity to work with large groups of children as before. Some small group work and individual work was proposed. Some sessions with the teachers were conducted, to enhance their awareness of their behaviour, conditioning and motivations in the teacher role.

Regular sessions with children can resume only when the Covid situation passes.
Auroville Rainbow Child

by Gala

The aim of this program is to help Auroville children to learn to be more focused and concentrated; for the children to be able to go in depth to learn a vast area in Yoga and Arts & Crafts to self discover themselves.

Description of project:

Around 16 children from different schools and kindergartens, ages 5 to 13, participated regularly in Rainbow Child classes. The classes were held by Gala and included activities in Hatha Yoga, Energetic Games and Arts & Crafts. Classes were held in Pitanga on Saturdays.

This year due to Covid-19 restrictions the children’s classes started later than usual and the number of children was restricted (our classes had the maximum allowed).

In yoga class we continued to work with Asanas and Pranayama. We added more new Asanas and Pranayama for children to learn and develop themselves.

In Energetic Games we mostly focused on development of memory and learned how to deeply concentrate on specific aspects. This helps the children in life and study.

We played various games such as “Rhythm game” (concentration and learning about rhythm), “Spy Game” (training memory and expanding thinking capacity), “Upside Down” (children learned to transform negative thoughts to positive thoughts) and working with crystals (learning how to feel energy and working with oneself).

We decided this year to continue to work deeper on the aspect of emotions, especially impatience, anger and frustration. We also added one more emotion – fear – as I felt these feelings were important to work on to manage in life especially this year.

In Arts & Crafts all children (mostly smaller aged boys) worked with Looming. They worked with Loom Bands in various colors and designs. By using small fine motor skills work, mathematics calculations and working with color each child managed to calm their nervous system.

This year I invited Karin, who is a designer of soft toys. She worked in small groups and managed to work with all the children who wanted throughout the year to complete a toy or a few soft toys. The children manage to gain patience and be cautious while working with a needle and color traits. They learned about different tastes in designing and how to use different materials to stitch soft toys with the help of Karin.

We also continued to use glue guns and various flower decorations for older students to make hair clip designs (for parents and friends), for them to develop ideas and learn to be more creative. By using the glue gun they learned to be responsible with equipment.

This year I developed a new technique using watercolor pencils and watercolor in tubes to paint on canvas boards. I adjusted this technique so that even small children can learn this technique with ease, and the final paintings look like professional artist paintings. Additionally we discovered a new technique using fluid acrylic in combination with watercolor pencil, sticking a drawing or photo on center of the board and filling around the picture with fluid paint in various ways (blowing and floating) to overlap the picture and make a depth illusion of the picture. Completing this new project, children started to easily orientate and feel the close-by space around them much better, and not fearing to mess up their work. We find this work very meditative and children really liked to work with fluid colors in different ways.
Outcomes:

With adding the new techniques, games and working with additional emotions the children managed to direct themselves in the direction of understating themselves, communicating without being negative and coping with life in general.

This reflected children being more positive, kinder to themselves and each other and by overcoming fear it made them more joyful and happy in life.

While working with Karin the children learned new skills and understood that with simple material they learned the feeling of creation and that they can achieve more than they thought they could in life.

Reflections:

This year was successful even though the classes started later, therefore we requested a reduced budget from SAIER for the second half of the year. This year was especially successful with working with emotions and overcoming fear in life. I was glad that children were still interested in arts and crafts. They have enjoyed working with the new helper Karin.

Conclusion:

In the beginning of the next school year in July 2021 hopefully, we will together with the children decide with which emotions and aspects of arts and through which various ways of working with energy through games, we will work throughout the new school year.

Our last year’s aim to add more classes throughout the week has sadly not worked out for various factors, and we continue only with Saturday classes.

We will be working with a small group of children during summer (2 times per week, 2 hours extra during the month of May 2021) who want to learn specific areas in arts.

If Covid-19 restrictions continue and there is a limit in the number of children sharing the space, we will keep the classes small. We still would like to request help for expanding and adding new classes for the full year. With this we will be able to divide the older and younger kids in different classes, as with that we will be able to work on a deeper level and develop children’s needs depending on their age.
This project was based on my 5 years experience as a martial art instructor in Auroville. I wanted to analyse the effect of constant work and practice of Shou Dao based martial arts on the body and on the mindset of the trainees of all ages.

**Description of project:**

The project started as continuation of my teaching, around July 2020. I trained kids in the Transformation community, at African Pavilion, at Solitude Farm, and finally at Terrasoul. The absence of appropriate space was sometimes an issue and it destabilized the continuity of my program. In full respect of COVID-19 guidelines we trained respecting distances, basing our exercise more on proprioception, posture, mimicry, breathing, playful games at distance.

Between November and December Dehashakti gave us a space and the work could proceed with more stability, with more than 20 students focused on understanding the relation between breathing, mindset and control of the body. One of the advanced students participated in the Tamil Nadu MMA Federation State Tournament of MMA, and it was a great honour to be part of that.

**Outcomes:**

The beneficiaries were mainly Aurovilians, Newcomers and Volunteers, splitted in 3 groups: kids from 7 to 13, adults from 15, advanced students.

Material for collective practice has been purchased, in order to give access to pre-training and also to students who can’t afford to buy their own gear.

As an instructor, I restructured my protocols and my programs after this experience in order to make the best out of the breathing and posture exercises. Students of all ages are still regular and they would like to continue more. Other Aurovilians showed interest in making this thing grow and be regular. The parents of the kids were overall happy about the practice.

**Reflections:**

We explored especially the effect of special techniques of breathing on the mental state and on the hormonal activities that dictate the posture. We noticed changes in the posture of the students. All this is linked to martial art because of the level of stress that martial exercises implies to the psychological system of the trainees. In this way we noticed that with the improvement of the posture, also the mental and emotional states of the trainee got stronger and their health improved.

Meanwhile, I’ve been chosen as responsible for the district of Villupuram for the Tamil Nadu Mixed Martial Art Federation, and a student of our school (Auroville Mixed Martial Arts) fought an official MMA fight at the last State official tournament. In this context we received a lot of compliments and many students and coaches expressed their will to collaborate with us. This could be a very interesting improvement for Auroville Mixed Martial Arts. The Federation expressed its interest to host the next tournament 2022 in Auroville instead of Chennai.

In spite of the beautiful and fruitful experience, it is hard to express the full potential of the practice without a proper space and proper materials. Even in Dehashakti space and materials have to be shared and the mat we were using is in very bad condition. At least 2 students quit the practice because the condition of the mat was triggering a skin disease.
Conclusion:

When Master Francesco Collesano, founder of Shou Wu, a martial art recognized internationally, saw the level of our work here, he offered me to become an official instructor of Shou Wu, abilitated to teach in India and to open Shou Wu gyms. Shou Wu is a complete system of martial art, based on Chinese and Russian martial arts, which compensates the mixed martial arts aspect with mental work and breathing work typical of the internal styles of Kung Fu. This would be not only an honor but also a big opportunity for Auroville to start something unique in India.
Kalarippayattu is a traditional martial art form which originated in the southern part of India. Though it has a long history, there is not much documentation available. As a traditional martial art it has been transmitted through physical practice with oral instructions. Today there is growing interest in learning Kalarippayattu, and this project was to create a guide book as a supportive material for new learners of this art.

Description of project:

We (Maneesh & Jules Morel) started this project to support the Kshetra Kalari practice, with the idea of creating a training manual for the beginners. Later the project widened and the material that we collected was shaped as a small book. With the support of SAIER the Kalarippayattu Guide Book was printed and published on February 11th 2021.

We distributed copies of the book to practitioners of Kshetra Kalari (Aurovilians and people from the Auroville bio-region) who now have a reference book to clear their doubts in their beginning stage.

Reflections:

We found out that this is just a beginning and that there is a long way in front of us to cover. We are preparing and collecting materials for a second part of the book. We also think that the reprinting of the publication would reach more practitioners and Kalarippayattu enthusiasts throughout the world.
Scuba Diving Training

by Jonah

This was a project to teach Auroville children the basics of Scuba Diving in theory and practice.

Description of project:
My aim was to teach 20 kids, but in the end due to Covid and other restrictions we only managed 11 kids.
This project subsidized the participants’ costs for becoming PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) certified open water divers.
The kids were taught Scuba Diving and the skills associated with that. They learned about physics, physiology and the environment as well as practical water skills.

Reflections:
What was most meaningful about this project was seeing the children discover the underwater world.
We hope to continue with this work in the future.
This is an Artist camp with artist residency taking place in Auroville. This Art Camp focuses on Indian national artists collaborating with Aurovilians artists and working on a specific theme during one week. Art students are also invited to participate as this is a great platform for exchange and learning.

Description of project:

The art camp took place from March 21st till March 27th, 2021. Participants were 19 artists and 3 students (9 Indian nationals, 10 Auroville artists, 1 Indian national student, 2 Auroville students). Artists were selected after a two month long call for artists published on social media and in the News & Notes. We tried to achieve a diversity of art practices and works in our selection of artists. We wished for our selection to be diverse so that established artists, emerging artists and others could work together. We selected only professional artists, whether they have followed an academic path or are self-taught.

We provided the artists a time and a space of creation in an atmosphere that encourages concentration and quality. They were provided in-kind support: travel, food, accommodation and art materials.

The artists prepared a collective art installation in a public space in Auroville during their stay. This year it was a mural that is now a permanent installation on the path going from the Visitors’ Centre to the Matrimandir viewing point. Creating art in public space is a platform to bring art to people and is an effective way of creating an interaction with the community, bringing in an audience that otherwise may not have the opportunity to experience and engage with art.

Schools and Aurovilians visited the artists while they were working during the open hours. We organised some visits of artist studios and art & craft units of Auroville, engaging resourceful interactions (collaborations, workshops).

The art camp also ended with an exhibition where all the artworks created during the art camp were displayed.

Outcomes:

A concentrated space for artists was provided where they could explore their artistic research within Auroville, experiencing the uniqueness of Auroville.

The diversity of the artists enabled the exchange of ideas and practices for emerging artists, established artists and students alike. There were many exchanges between the artists at different levels: artistic level, skills, practices, art communities, etc. They are able to form a network of support, for example to get in contact with galleries, and being informed of opportunities to display their art.

The invited artists created 23 artworks which were donated to Auroville. These were displayed in Centre d’Art, Citadines so as to share the outcome with the community. The collaborative mural is now an integral part of that public space.
Reflections:
Most meaningful about this project was the concentration and the quality of the artwork created during this week.

The organizing team learned how to collaborate and to create links with Aurovilians by manifesting into matter.

This second edition was more intimate as we selected fewer artists than for the first edition. We think this is the appropriate formula. For the coming editions, we will keep numbers not more than 20 participants.

This year exceptionally we selected students from Last School (usually we select art students who have already finished high school). Before the art camp along with the teachers we determined a specific frame. It was challenging for the teachers and for the students. We met the teachers after the art camp for an assessment and to see if and how we could renew the experience for next year.

Conclusion:
The art camp and the exhibition were a success; artists, the organizing team, and Aurovilians were very happy with how the art camp was conducted and its outcomes. We would like this to happen every year.
This project is based on an Indian story from the Katha Upanishad; it is about a boy whose name was Nachiketas. The exploration was on how to give dramatic form to an ancient teaching.

The story of Nachiketas is about Death and Immortality, about questions and answers to that eternal question, to that eternal search. The sources for the script were: Nachiketas, from the "Value-Oriented Education Series", Kireet Joshi General Editor; Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the Katha Upanishad from his Kena and other Upanishads, and Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri.

Description of project:
25 people were involved in this project:

- Actors: Anandamayi, Aravind, Giacomo, Kushmita, Megha, Nidish, Otto, Sheetal, Srimoyi, Vivekan
- Concept and direction: Aryamani
- Sound design: Aurelio and Varun
- Lighting: Jean, Ashwin and other members of the team
- Costumes: Angela and Carla
- Voice preparation: Patricia
- General assistance: Pala
- 4 Volunteers

The participants mentioned above performed at the small amphitheatre in the Matrimandir Gardens, on the evenings of March 11th to 13th 2021.

Outcomes:

The intention of the Nachiketas performance was to evoke the feeling of ancient times in India, through acting, sounds, lights, costumes, fire and mantras. The venue being Matrimandir Gardens in the late evening created a unique atmosphere. The story of Nachiketas represents the spirit of learning and the search for Truth in Vedantic times. The viewers could have a moment of reflection and understand a story from the Upanishads in a dramatic and symbolic form.

The participants who went through the process of making it happen were exposed and touched by the richness and depth of the story of Nachiketas.

Reflections:

This project gave me a chance and possibility to dive into time, when the Upanishads were part of life and society. It was an opportunity as well as a challenge to explore ways of giving new shapes to an ancient teaching. Introducing Savitri lines into the story of Nachiketas was one of the elements in the search for new forms.

It is a new field of exploration and I plan to work more in depth along the same lines in 2022.
Environmental education in Auroville bioregion

by Muthukumar

Environmental education is an educational methodology and an overall approach to involve the young generation and the general public to maintain a sustainable and eco-friendly environment. Environmental education encourages the public to take responsible actions for bringing back the earth’s balance. Today more than ever society needs high quality environmental education programs that succeed in moving values and changing behavior in the direction of sustainability and environmental conservation. The Auroville Botanical Gardens (AVBG) with a passion for the environment and a gift for interpreting nature to students has eleven years’ experience in providing quality environmental education to the students and general public of the Auroville bioregion.

Description of project:

The Environmental Education Centre of the Auroville Botanical Gardens aims at providing education through observing & exploring the environment. Each and every part of the Botanical Gardens has something to expose which would enrich the knowledge of the students or visitors. Our eco-education programs mainly include school visits, Eco Club and Self-Help Group visits, awareness programs and summer camps. We assure that every visitor would have something to remember and to implement inspired by their visit to AVBG.

In past years we focused on schools, but this year with the pandemic in place, we shifted our priority towards Youth clubs and eco clubs of the Auroville bio region. Our main aim was to make the participants understand the local ecosystem and their interrelationship, to develop ability, identify and analyze information relating to Environmental problems. Around 500 participants from 25 Youth and Eco Clubs participated in the programs this year.

Outcomes:

Our educational package for the participants included conservation of indigenous forests, wildlife conservation and waste management. We arranged field trips, seminars and workshops to realize the importance of maintaining a sustainable environment. These programs motivated them to plant tree saplings, consider segregation of wastes and maintain a clean area in and around their living premises. Our educational programs had a positive impact on participants’ self-esteem, motivation and engagement.

The self-help group members had packages that explained the values of herbal plants and plastic awareness. Our educational package guided them to be equipped to improve the conditions of their family and villages.

Reflections:

The country’s main environmental problems can be grouped under three heads: 1) degradation of forests, 2) land degradation, and 3) pollution of soil, water and air. And it is only through arousing awareness that it will be possible to overcome these problems. Hence there is a need to channelize environmental education for all ages of people. Any initiative will only be successful when there is wholehearted participation of the participants. It is a reality that we should design our education programs in such a way that the participants enjoy themselves in the process of learning. The Auroville Botanical Gardens had this in mind while designing the educational package for the participants.
Printing “Native Trees of Auroville” booklet

by Marie

This project was to create a book for tree identification of 186 native trees (part of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest) with basic information for each tree and color pictures for easy identification on site.

From my experience in Auroville Botanical Gardens, more and more people would like to know about native species adapted to the Auroville bio-region, how to find them, to recognize them and to plant them. This book wanted to be more easy to read and learn from than the specific scientific literature which exists today.

Description of project:

This project started in June 2019. SAIIER funded first the Research part, then in 2020-21 the Printing part for 30 copies.

The work of last year was to gather information (technical data and pictures) from our team at Auroville Botanical Gardens (AVBG) and our foresters in Auroville. Here, I can name and thank the main persons who helped: Paul, Santo, Neil, Walter, Jaap, Shivashankar and Shivaganesh.

The layout was created and this year the book was printed, with pictures illustrating each species, taken in AVBG for better accuracy, and with practical information collected from experience of several decades on land.

Outcomes:

This book now summarizes what we know about native plants in Auroville. It will help in public education which can lead to an important shift in our plantation behavior and in our community’s adaptation to climate change.

We have distributed the 30 copies to the main public areas in Auroville: Library, Visitors’ Centre, l’Avenir d’Auroville, Auroville Herbarium, Pitchandikulam; to some groups related to the topic: Youth group, Forest Group, Treehouse Community, Treecare; and to our schools: Deepanam, Future School, TLC, Transition, Udavi. We are collecting feedbacks to have the best version of the book.

Reflections:

We realised that a lot of practical information was laying in personal archives, hard drives or simply individual brains that require time, energy and detailed attention before comprehensive public sharing. Bringing together the knowledge of several people, specialists in their own fields, was very meaningful to build the full picture of afforestation.

Conclusion:

We have been contacted by a publisher which may lead to a commercial and vaster publication. We will be happy that this effort to learn about native species can be shared to maximum people interested in a greener future.
The Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI) aims to create a space of constructive dialogue, action research, innovation, publications and ultimately to provide a platform for knowledge and skill dissemination. It also works to develop and set up a depository of resources for future generations. As a part of its initiatives, SLI makes valuable resource materials available in Tamil and promotes sustainable ideas and practices among the farming community.

Seeds are one of the most important challenges in Organic farming and seed sovereignty has been described as one of the key areas of conflict in the agrarian crisis across the world for indigenous communities. Over the last 3 years SLI has organized Auroville Seed Festivals through which it brings together farmers from the bioregion as well as other areas to exchange seeds among themselves. This is a traditional practice that has been revived in the bioregion for the benefit of farmers.

Auroville for long has been a repository of traditional varieties of local seeds. The purpose of this project was to translate a book on traditional seed saving techniques: *Reviving Vegetable Diversity – A Seed Saver’s Guide* by Deepika Kundaji of Pebble Garden. The intent is to promote the idea of conserving and promoting our traditional native vegetables among seed savers, farmers and urban gardeners.

**Description of project:**

The book *Reviving Vegetable Diversity* was published in English in 2015 and gained lot of attention among the network of organic farmers across India. The book was written based on Deepika and Bernard’s experience on reviving traditional seeds at Pebble Garden which are more appropriate to our agro-climatic conditions.

Centre for Excellence in Sustainable Agriculture (CESA), promoted under SLI, translated and published this book with the funding support of SAIIER.

We held a release function at Pebble Garden where the book was introduced by Deepika and Bernard, and this function was telecast at the National Online Seed Diversity Festival 2020 on 25th October 2020.

This book translation and release was part of a larger movement. After the book release, SLI took various initiatives with the support of organizations across the state. CESA spearheaded the Tamil Nadu Traditional Seed Savers Network along with Nammalvar Ecological Research Centre. This network has been created to support the native seed savers across the state to promote and conserve traditional seeds of their region.

**Outcomes:**

This book gained momentum in the seed saving circles as it was released in the National level Seed Diversity Festival held online on 25th October 2020. It opened many doors to our efforts as an Institute and provided an opportunity to set up a state level network to traditional seed savers and promote conservation of traditional seeds in the state.

Conserving and promoting traditional seed conservation is not only a noble service but also a good livelihood enhancement opportunity for the small-scale farmers and urban gardeners. SLI has promoted this book to farmers and seed savers across Tamil Nadu and used it as a training material
for various sustainable agriculture programmes, especially among women farmers, since SLI provides training to women farming community members across the state.

Reflections:

Due to Covid-19 and related restrictions, many seed festivals were cancelled which made us change our plans about how the book was to be promoted. Only through known networks and through postal services, we are distributing this book. But we started webinars on seed conservation after releasing this book, which helped a lot to reach a greater number of farmers and farming enthusiasts and created awareness on our seed heritage.

Conclusion:

As part of our regular programmes, we are working on conducting a series of workshops for seed savers this year. It will be an opportunity to promote this book and encourage many farmers to save their seeds and ultimately, it would be an additional income generation for the farmers’ families.

As the response for this book is quite high and encouraging, SLI plans to bring out a second edition of this book with more updated inputs from the author. We have further plans to translate and release a book on Organic farming practices for different crops and plants, especially highlighting cashew cultivation, along with this second edition.
Payanam Cycling Team
by Sivaoli

We, Payanam work with the Auroville schools, Auroville bioregion and Auroville Outreach schools organizing cycle trips and students’ camps where we learn the culture, wealth and resources of the Auroville bioregion. Students study and learn the past historical monuments, stories of the place, culture and geographical changes. During this program the students get to live a natural and a practical life without using plastics and commercial products. This builds unity and harmony in them. They learn to work in community and together for the betterment of the goal. This program gives them a living education and good health practices and brings a change in their consciousness.

Activities of the year:

This year due to the Covid pandemic situation our activities were reduced. We did 12 trips in total, from December to March. Participants were from Morattandi night school, Edayananchavadi government school, Thamarai (Annainagar), Aikiyam School, Udavi School and Kuilai Cultural Centre.

We took three groups to Perumukal, where we made and broadcast seed balls to help restore the environment.

We took three groups to the Shatru Malleswaralayam Rock Cut Temple in Thalavanur. It tells that the rock was locally known as ‘Pancha Pandava Malai’ as it was believed that the Pandavas visited the place during their wanderings. The inscription was deciphered and assigned to the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (580 to 630 AD). Behind the temple, a set of narrow steps leads to a little natural terrace where are cut some geometrical figures usually used in the game of ‘the fifteenth tiger’. A little further north, about half way up, is a cleft in the rock, filled with water, supposedly the source of supply after the rains. These temples were the first ones where the artists and artisans of the time experimented with rock cut cave temples that was later to reach its peak in Mamallapuram.

We took three groups to Sokuppam. After cycling there we walked from the foothill of Sokuppam to the top where there is Vishnudurga temple, and stayed the night on top.

These trips are mostly taken on village roads, so first we brief the children about road rules. We halt at around 10-12 places for water, snacks and other things.

We noticed many children lost their stamina due to lack of physical activities during the lockdown time; they got addicted to video games and television. The cycle trips challenged and helped them physically and mentally. The trips let the children come out of their comfort zones.
The purpose of the project was to continue the ongoing work of the Auroville Cleanup Group round the year with regular Sunday cleanups and other joint cleanup activity on some specific days. The aim of Auroville Cleanup group is to create awareness of keeping the Auroville and its surroundings clean by running a regular demonstration through the activity. We aim to restore a beautiful, non-polluted environment. We aim to sensitize people to the beauty they are losing and to encourage them to protect and enhance that beauty by communal clean-ups, tree and shrub-planting, etc.

**Description of project:**

After the Covid pandemic lockdown, the regular Sunday cleanups resumed in September 2020, and on an average 20 people participate in this activity regularly.

There were several specific cleanup activities organized, other than the regular cleanup:

- World Environment Day (5 June 2020) - 30 people (approx.)
- World Cleanup Day (15 September 2020) - 50 people (approx.)
- Tree Planting with the Auroville Forest Group - November 2020 (around 30 people)
- Auroville Birthday week cleanup activity (21 February 2021) - 60 people (approx.)
- Cleanup at the Kali Temple (specifically to create awareness in the village, this was supported by Auroville village people)

The participants in these cleanups were Aurovilians, students of Auroville/ youth of Auroville and several young students from the bio-region. Auroville volunteers also got inspired and joined in several of the cleanup activities. The tree planting activity was done in association with the Forest Group, in Samriddhi community.

**Outcomes:**

The idea was to create awareness and bring together the community to work collectively towards a litter free Auroville. We feel that the benefit was for the community as a whole, and in specific to all the participants who did their part in keeping the community area and surrounding spaces clean. The demonstration through the activity was a major aspect which has inspired and made several other guests, workers/employees motivated to keep the spaces clean.

**Reflections:**

The most meaningful part about the project was the participation and the enthusiasm from varied people to the cause.

There are several ongoing challenges related to this activity: even though we have been
trying for about 20 years, still the community members and villages around are throwing waste on the roads, in the empty land etc. The villages around need much more awareness and attention as we move forward.

The major learning from the project is that as we move forward and continue this activity it is important to include more people from the villages, who in turn can assist creating this awareness around. We would also like to do more campaigns to keep the community and surroundings informed about waste management.

**Conclusion:**

We would like to continue this activity for many more years, and see how we can grow our group so that we can increase the reach and not be limited to Auroville places.
# Projects supported in 2020-21

## Projects of SAIER sub-units:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' Center</td>
<td>Supportive Learning Satellite</td>
<td>₹ 1,75,410</td>
<td>p.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilaignarkal Education Centre</td>
<td>Joyful Learning</td>
<td>₹ 1,50,000</td>
<td>p.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auroville Campus Initiative</td>
<td>Disha Info Desk &amp; Events</td>
<td>₹ 1,07,715</td>
<td>p.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuilai Creative Centre (KCC)</td>
<td>Regular activities at Kuilai Creative Centre</td>
<td>₹ 1,00,000</td>
<td>p.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Education Centre (LEC)</td>
<td>Life Education Centre activities</td>
<td>₹ 1,00,000</td>
<td>p.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition School</td>
<td>Auroville, Our Home</td>
<td>₹ 1,00,000</td>
<td>p.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isai Ambalam School</td>
<td>Efficient and effective (English) language learning system based on contemporary research in Natural Language Acquisition</td>
<td>₹ 87,500</td>
<td>p.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehashakti School of Physical Education</td>
<td>Dehashakti Football tournament</td>
<td>₹ 63,700</td>
<td>p.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilaignarkal Education Centre</td>
<td>“Auroville Seythidmadal”</td>
<td>₹ 60,000</td>
<td>p.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savitri Bhavan</td>
<td>Divine Flowers exhibition</td>
<td>₹ 54,000</td>
<td>p.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalabhumi Art Studio</td>
<td>Kalabhumi Art Studio activities</td>
<td>₹ 45,000</td>
<td>p.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arulvazhi Education Centre</td>
<td>Yoga training</td>
<td>₹ 30,000</td>
<td>p.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira Cultural Group</td>
<td>Mira Cultural Group activities</td>
<td>₹ 21,000</td>
<td>p.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurofilm</td>
<td>Indian Film Festival in Auroville</td>
<td>₹ 10,000</td>
<td>p.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Auroville community projects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divya, Maya, Chandrah</td>
<td>Researching the immediate and long-term impacts of the <em>kNOw PLASTICS</em> Educational Programme</td>
<td>₹ 2,99,860</td>
<td>p.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aravinda, Deven, Radhika</td>
<td>Samskritam Auroville</td>
<td>₹ 2,25,410</td>
<td>p.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Environmental education in Auroville bioregion</td>
<td>₹ 2,00,000</td>
<td>p.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion, Honor, Bridget</td>
<td>Auroville Safeguarding and Child Protection (AVCP)</td>
<td>₹ 1,88,970</td>
<td>p.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sivaoli</td>
<td>Payanam Cycling Team</td>
<td>₹ 1,80,000</td>
<td>p.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuele</td>
<td>“Savitri for the Golden Child”</td>
<td>₹ 1,75,410</td>
<td>p.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrinalini</td>
<td>Creative Movement</td>
<td>₹ 1,75,410</td>
<td>p.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suryamayi</td>
<td>Auroville, An Experiment in Spiritually Prefigurative Utopianism</td>
<td>₹ 1,75,410</td>
<td>p.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ing-Marie</td>
<td>Increasing Water Literacy in Auroville</td>
<td>₹ 1,60,125</td>
<td>p.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giacomo</td>
<td>Auroville Mixed Martial Arts (MMA)</td>
<td>₹ 1,51,207</td>
<td>p.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hervé, Claire</td>
<td>Auroville Art Camp 2021</td>
<td>₹ 1,50,000</td>
<td>p.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Cost (₹)</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>Scuba Diving Training</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen, Kathy, Suryamai</td>
<td>Citizens’ Assembly Pilot</td>
<td>1,09,900</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela, Divya, Inge, Maya</td>
<td>Ashwagandha Horses</td>
<td>96,000</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathalie</td>
<td>“The Miracle Forest”</td>
<td>89,328</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravi, Suryamayi, Henrike</td>
<td>Auroville Research Platform</td>
<td>71,505</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Printing “Native Trees of Auroville” booklet</td>
<td>70,560</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raja Ganesh M. (SRI)</td>
<td>Translating “Reviving Vegetable Diversity” into Tamil</td>
<td>63,725</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aryamani</td>
<td>“Nachiketas”</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshmanan, Balaji</td>
<td>Auroville Cleanup Group</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senthilkumar</td>
<td>Leading towards awareness action for Environment Conservation and reducing the usage of plastic bags</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maneesh</td>
<td>Kalarippayattu Guide Book</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gala</td>
<td>Auroville Rainbow Child</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAIER-supported researchers and artists:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aloka</td>
<td>Awareness Through the Body (ATB) teacher</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Ceramics teacher – White Peacock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Drama teacher – Auroville Theatre Group</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leela</td>
<td>Acrobatics teacher – Eluciole Circus School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Music teacher – Transition School</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nele</td>
<td>Art teacher – Kalabhumi Art Studio</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuria</td>
<td>Music teacher – Auroville Choirs</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushkar</td>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati</td>
<td>Ceramics teacher – White Peacock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakti B.</td>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suresh</td>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikram M.</td>
<td>Physical Education trainer</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virya</td>
<td>Basketball teacher – Certitude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>