In the last newsletter, we shared our online class on the phone and worksheets and at that time as COVID cases were absent in the bioregion and we started school with children in small numbers with the older children 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 had children come in for 3 days a week till before the elections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry when all the schools were closed down again. 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.

In addition, we have progressed with the lease of land next to the school, engaged with BYJUs for online learning and the school was showcased by the Directorate of Education as a practical model to implement the National Educational Policy (2020).

We were able to do small projects with the kids.

1. Auroville
2. Spinach
3. Vegetables
4. Pirandai (herbal plant)
5. Sparrow
6. Corn

**Auroville**

In February the children watched videos about Mother and Auroville. We celebrate 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 centre represents Unity, the inner circle represents Creation and the petal represents the power of expression and realisation.
Spinach

Fifth-grade children did a project on types of spinach that is available around them and in Auroville. They went to Krishna farm and interviewed Krishna about spinach grows in their garden. The children wrote as many questions before they go to the palace. They interacted with Krishna with their questions and brought a variety of spinach to the school.
Vegetables

Grade 1 and 2 studied the vegetables and their uses. They had fun activities like drawing, colouring, pasting seeds etc.

Pirandai

3rd-grade children learnt the uses of pirandi. They created a song about pirandai and practised it. They went around the school campus planted Miranda in the school campus and made pirandai pickle.
Sparrow

The children learned many new things about sparrows and how it is connected to human life and agriculture, particularly in organic farming. They made sparrow nest at their home and invited the sparrows by feeding grains. The parents also enjoyed by seeing their children’s activities.

Corn
The children planted corn, pumpkin and some creepers. They harvested some vegetables for their school kitchen garden.

Land lease

We are happy to share that we have leased the land next to the school to have better sports facilities as well as options for gardening. When the children come back they will have access to another ¾ acre of space.

BYJUs App

Given online learning is becoming a norm when we received the possibility of a partnership with BYJU through Asha of 100 licenses for apps for 3-years we engaged with BYJU.

It contains Maths, Science and Social science lessons. Children can choose their class and lessons and watch the videos and answer the task given.

NESS (our senior secondary school 9th to 12th grade) and Isai Ambalam School (Cheche to 8th grade) got the license for the children whose parents had a smart phone and were willing to give it a shot. 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.

Thus 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 through this App as it’s in English. Given 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 class 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 yrs and at Isai Ambalam for about 2 years now.

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). She called me after going through our blogs and informing 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 chat with a government official looking for alternatives and experiential learning. Attached is the presentation she created based on her understanding from the blogs you made at Isai Ambalam School and Udavi and made to the government. She also used the videos of our conference presentations.

Here is her final note:
*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 the 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. Thank you very much for prompt response.*

- Muthulakshmi.