



Arunachala Village School Trust

"Illuminating the lives of children through education"



Annual Report

(April 2017 – March 2018)

Greetings from Arunachala Village School...

Dear Friends,

Hearty greetings from the children of AVS, our staff team and board!!!! Time flies and already another academic year with our wonderful children comes to an end. It has been a very active year, a year colored in green thanks to many new initiatives aimed at increasing awareness about environmental issues among the children and their families – it is in their hands, that our future lies, after all. I myself would like to cease this occasion once again to thank all our donors, supporters and well wishers for their continuous support, which enables us to do our work with enthusiasm and joy. So, may I invite you kindly to read on the following pages what has been going on at our school throughout this last year.



*With Love & Respect,
Madhan Mohan*

Mission

Arunachala Village School Trust (AVS) encourages the children from the nearby rural community to come to school by offering them a safe, loving and green environment. Our mission is to ensure that every underprivileged child enjoys the experience of learning, imbibes good habits and explores life beyond classroom studies. AVS strives to attain a society built on knowledge, empathy and harmony thereby creating a brighter future for the next generation.



Activities and Achievements:

On June 7th, after 6 weeks of summer vacation, our new academic year started for our children from 2nd to 5th standard with high spirit and energy. Two weeks later, on June 19th, 32 children (14 boys and 18 girls) were admitted to Lower Kindergarten. As always, priority was given to children that have lost a parent, to girl children and children from underprivileged families of the 13 surrounding villages of Tiruvannamalai. On this first, very special day the “Vidyarambam” function was conducted, which means “starting of education” in Sanskrit. During this function, the children start their educational life by writing the first letter of the Tamil alphabet on a rice paddy while sitting on the laps of their teachers. This is always an emotional moment for everyone involved.



The spaciousness of our new kindergarten facilities, inaugurated last year, permitted us to admit 2 more children to Lower Kindergarten than in previous years (32 instead of 30). This makes us very happy and I wish to express my special thanks to Professor Juch Dick, President of VZW Johanna Bode (Belgium) for their support in this. At time being there are 64 children frequenting kindergarten, with 4 teachers and 1 grandmother taking care of them.



There is a very special atmosphere pervading the kindergarten. In the morning all the children assembly to sing songs, then they go to their classrooms that are named after a flower. The teacher, whom they call “akka” (“elder sister” in Tamil), lets them choose an activity from the so called “activity basket”. This basket contains activities such as painting, singing, gardening, walking in the village etc., which then are executed for 45 minutes, followed by a 10 min. break and another 45 minutes lesson. Letting the children choose their activity

teaches them to think on their own and improves team spirit, since they have to decide together as a group, what they want to do.

Head of Kindergarten Revathi introduced furthermore a new task into the children's daily activities. In the morning after the prayer they hug trees. This helps building a close relationship to nature from early years onwards and is already showing results: kindergarten children started to collect trash in the early morning before coming to school on their own initiative.

Another focus of kindergarten education is teaching moral values in general, as well as important aspects of Tamil culture such as respecting one's parents. These values are transmitted to the children through theater and stories.

Our primary school has reached a „stably changing“ situation, comparable to previous years. In the course of the year 6 out of 13 teachers quit their jobs due to marriage, migration and difficult family situations. To replace them we acquainted 8 new teachers. Having 15 regular



teachers allows us to pay more attention to slow learners and to be prepared for future drop outs of teachers. Two more special teachers work part time, teaching the children wood carving and stone carving on Saturdays.

Besides our general school schedule, which consists of Tamil, English, Science, Social Science, Mathematics, moral education and Abacus from Monday to Friday, children learn pottery, drawing, wood carving, stone carving, classical dance, instrumental music (Veenai) and Sylambum (martial arts) on weekends. Throughout the year, many special academic events were conducted.

A completely new initiative was a school stay night camp that we conducted in the course of August and September. Each class got the chance to spend one night at school, sleeping in tents. This was a long time dream of Madhan that finally came true, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers from Switzerland. The children took a walk together with their teacher,



watched the sunset, and spent the evening playing games and having fun. It is by our taking such efforts, that our children grow closer to school, understanding that school is much more than only sitting in the classroom.

During dengue fever period from August to December many people in Tamil Nadu were affected which is why the government enacted strict rules to avoid sources of stagnant water. At school these rules were implemented creatively: old tires were transformed into flowerpots and roadside decoration, and children and their families were informed about preventive measures to be taken at their homes.

In October we conducted our annual special craft skills week for the fourth time, with 310 children from 9 different schools participating, including AVS. Children were taught a variety of crafts such as making bags and wallets out of banana fiber, baskets out of palm leaves, Terracotta, wood and stone carving, origami, art work out of paper maché and Poikal (walking on sticks).

For the first time we were able to invite 39 children coming from 6 different schools in the Jawadhu hills, where children have no access to this kind of arts education. They stayed all week at our school, receiving delicious food and enjoying the new skills they learnt – it was a huge children's festival. Subsequently, the Jawadhu hills children participated in the annual district art competition and actually won the first price – what a big success.



We also finished the construction works of our new environmental friendly library, which was inaugurated in June by Jan Sundell, president of Aham (USA) and Mr. Adi Murugan. This special library holds over 2,800 books and is open to anyone 24/7 and whoever reads 20

books gets one book for free. This shall encourage children to have a library at home and stimulates their reading habit. The library is named after Res Frei, President of AVS, to honour his dedicated support to the school.

Besides reading, another important part of life education in our opinion is visiting and getting to know public institutions. Therefore we took our 4th and 5th grade students to the post office, bank and to the police station where they had the opportunity to speak to the respective employees and ask questions. The children also got to visit the Arunagiri children park once a month. This is a place created by The Forest Way, a local charity organization, oriented towards nature, where animals, birds and plants can be observed and information about fauna and flora is provided. After having had several history lessons on the subject, another trip took the children to the Gingee fort, a historical site from the 9th century, located near Tiruvannamalai.

In February children from 5th standard are taken to visit the historical chola temple in Tanjavor,, Marine Museum in Rameshwaram and to see the strom destroyed village in Dhanushkodi.

Throughout the last couple of years, we have been increasing gradually our environmental activities with the children, which has rarely been mentioned in our previous annual reports:

- For the last 2 years, each class has been cultivating a small piece of land behind the school, growing organic vegetables with much success.
- On their birthday the children and staff members always receive a tree that they plant at school, at their homes or in their neighbourhoods. This has been happening ever since 2003.
- This year we established a herbal garden with medicinal plants on the school campus, which is taken care of by the children.
- Regenboog India Foundation started a tree nursery, where tree seeds are grown by the kindergarten children, ca. 50 seeds per child. Within 2 years the saplings should be big enough so that they can be planted on the Arunachala mountain and taken to the neighbourhoods of the children. This project is set up by Regenboog Foundation with the goal to grow over 5000 saplings a year.

Another focal point this year was to involve parents more in school activities and raise awareness among them about their child's health and the importance of nutritional food. This was happening during parent's meetings, conducted 5 times a year. Also, parents were encouraged to come and ask questions during the monthly visits of our mobile clinic at school. In view of the water scarcity this summer, they were furthermore instructed to do rainwater harvesting and not to waste water unnecessarily.

This year's saddest incident was the loss of one of our girl children's father in a car accident. Additional to the emotional pain, such incidents often drive families of rural areas into deep financial problems, since they usually don't have an insurance. The fact, that AVS covers the children's insurances (2.5 francs/child/year) which include their family members as well, helped this particular family to not get into a financial disaster: they received 100'000 Rs from the insurance.

For our teachers we conducted several special trainings:

- In August several representatives of the fire and safety department visited our school and trained our staff on first aid and fire accidents.
- In November the district child protection officer conducted a child care and protection class for teachers, sensibilizing them for signs of domestic violence, abuse etc in children.
- Teachers have been motivated to make use of the new library, equipped with more than 1500 new storybooks. Reading these books shall improve their own story telling skills.

Several volunteers supported us throughout the year. Nora Ammann and Wilma Felix stayed with us for 3 months, training our teachers in basic computer science and photography. They also organized the night camps mentioned above, teaching our staff how to conduct these camps in the future, and painted charts, for example of the human body, that are useful for teaching. Agatha and Irina from Poland conducted classes for origami paper works. Leonard Flach and Rahel Hammer from Switzerland set up a newspaper with the children and since Rahel is a dental nurse they conducted classes on proper dental care.

As every year, we celebrated all important functions such as Independence Day, Republic Day, Diwali, Pongal, Christmas, Sarasvathi Pooja, Krishna Jayanthi and Children's Day. These are always great occasions for the children to gain confidence in performing their talents and artistic skills in public.



One failure of this year's plans - we were not able to fulfill our plan of dividing class 4 into two. This was due to a shortage of teachers as well as to a tremendous increase of construction costs due to increased prices of sand, forcing us to postpone this task.

Otherwise, the challenges we were facing throughout this year were mainly due to climate change. In fact, the whole state of Tamil Nadu has suffered from a historical draught, unsurpassed for the last 142 years. This forced us to temporarily stop our organic gardening in March 17 due to water scarcity. Still, we were lucky: the school's bore well continued to provide enough water not only for our children but also for the people of the surrounding villages, who's wells had dried out completely, as well as for the children and teachers of 2 nearby government schools. It made us very happy to be of help for all these people throughout summer, until the monsoon in August 17 finally brought relief.



In May 17 a short but very strong storm damaged several old trees on our campus. Many big branches were broken due to which we lost almost 50% of the shade they had provided. The

roofs of our kindergarten buildings were damaged as well. Cleaning up and repairing the damage took us almost 2 weeks but one good thing we got out of it: 3 months' firewood for our children's village.

Now we would like to share with you one of the success story, which keep us going despite all difficulties:

Naveena, The Nurse

Naveena comes from Devanandal village near Tiruvannamalai, from a so-called low caste family, her father is working as an auto rikshaw driver, her mother is a daily laborer in the agriculture field. After having studied at AVS from 3 years of age onwards, she was supported by us throughout her entire secondary school education. She was admitted to a private nursing college in Kanyakumari where she finished the bachelor degree in nursing in August 2017. Now she is working in Chennai in one of the biggest hospitals where she stays for a year, planning then to join our team in the mobile clinic.

Furthermore we are happy that by the end of this academic year 30 students completed successfully Class 5 and left AVS for higher education.

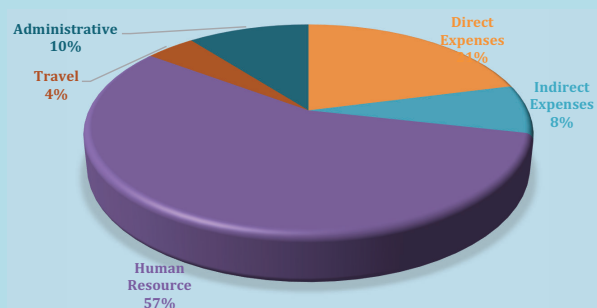
Educational Sponsorship Program:

The educational sponsorship program provides moral and financial support to students who leave AVS after 5th standard and do not have the means to finance their high school studies and university education by themselves. It is a program that guarantees the sustainability of our work, so that children do not stop their education after primary school but keep going, paving the road for a better future. In 2017 - 18 we have supported 4 students under this program, all of them attending high school.

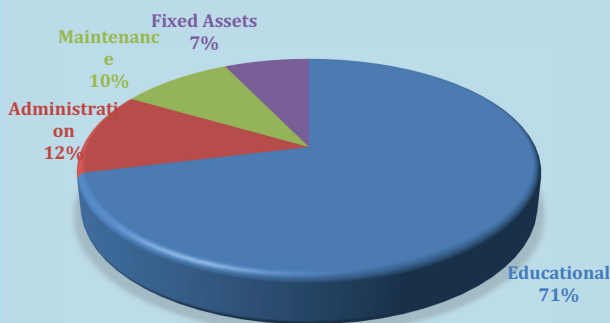
Finances:

Financially 2017-18 was another successful year. Rs.39,08,292 was estimated for the 2017-18 financial year with an increase of 9% compared to the previous year. As before, the budget was prepared by the staff in a team effort, taking into consideration all the important aspects.

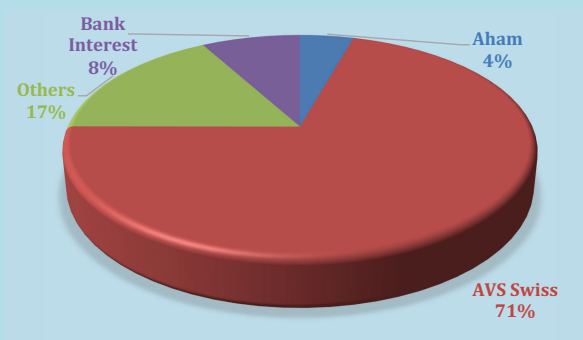
Budget of 2017-18



Expenses of 2017-18



This sum was mainly raised by Verein Arunachala Village School (Switzerland) and partially by Aham Foundation (USA) and local donors who contributed to our budget as illustrated:



As always, many steps were taken to bring down the cost of operation. This was achieved by negotiations, finding the right vendor and service providers. Hereby we managed to spend ... Rs, which is .. % below the budget.

Lookout

We have several plans for the next academic year. During the upcoming summer vacation (March-May 18) two temporary classrooms will be built, which will allow us to finally divide classes 4 and 5 into four classes of 15 students each. We wish to further expand our herbal and nursery plantation work involving the children as much as possible in these activities, including seed collection. Within two years enough plants should be grown so that children can start taking them to their homes. Third, we wish to provide more training to our teachers for kindergarten and primary school. An idea would be to bring experienced Steiner teachers to our school to train our teachers for three months or more. Financially we would like to strengthen and increase local support, which should cover 10-15% of our annual budget.

Conclusion

As another successful year comes to its end, I am happy to find myself repeating the same words once again: thank you from the bottom of my heart to all our donors and well wishers from the other side of the globe as well as from India itself who contribute in an important manner to the accomplishment of our goals, providing a good primary education to now 216 children and supporting 4 students to obtain higher education. My sincere thanks to all the teachers, parents and all the non-teaching staff for their most valuable contribution in making our dream come true. May the next academic year be as fruitful as this one, our motivation and dedication at least, is as vivid as ever!



“Illuminating the lives of children through education...”

Legal Information

Board of Trustees of Arunachala Village School is as follow:

G. Madhan Mohan	- President / Managing Trustee
R. Shyam Raaj	- Vice President
R. Sridharan	- Trustee
T. Rakesh	- Trustee
R. Muthukumaran	- Trustee

Organization's income is exempted under Income Tax Act 12AA and all the donations to the organization also exempted under Income Tax Act 80G.

AVS is registered to receive foreign donations under FCRA and the approval is valid until 30.04.2021.

School approval is valid till 31.05.2020.

Income Tax Returns and the FCRA returns are filed within the given time by the Government to the respective departments.

Receipts of foreign contribution is informed to the Government through the FCRA website.

Provident Fund implemented for all fulltime staff members.

No trustees are paid by Arunachala Village School Trust.



Arunachala Village School Trust
371/1 Vedyappanur Village, Adiannamalai Post 606604, Tiruvannamalai,
Tamilnadu, India
+91 94433 08373 | president@avstrust.org
www.avstrust.org | <https://www.facebook.com>