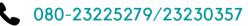
2020-21



Academy for Severe Handicaps and Autism (ASHA) Charitable Trust

ANNUAL REPORT

L76/A, Kirloskar Colony, HBCS 3rd Stage, 4th Block, Basaveshwarnagar, Bangalore 560079





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OUR MISSION

To render exceptional love, care, hope and educational assistance to children with special needs to help them develop and utilise their potential.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Mr. P.R. Mundewadi, Chairman Mr. J.R. Deshpande, Secretary Mr. S. Hari Prasad, Trustee Mr. A. Ravichandran, Trustee & Treasurer Ms. Jayashree Ramesh, Trustee & Director



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- Our Donors
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INTRODUCTION CTION

Academy for Severe Handicaps and Autism (ASHA) Charitable Trust provides education along with a comprehensive set of therapies to individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Starting with 3 children in a small rented building in 1995 today, 85 children are undergoing various intervention and therapies in the day school program. In over two decades, ASHA has evolved and developed capabilities and expertise to address the different needs of children of all age groups including adolescents. More than a thousand families have been supported in many different ways in over two decades.



EARLY INTERVENTION

The early intervention training sets the path for all future skill building in children with special needs. This forms one of the most important service areas in special education. We have twenty four children below six years in our early intervention program along with the mothers or primary caregivers. We believe that a parent helped is a family helped. Our program involves special education, physiotherapy, speech therapy, counselling and parent training. This is also supported by dance and arts based intervention.



PRIMARY EDUCATION

The program caters to the needs of children above the age of 6 years based on an individual education plan (IEP) that is created based on the child's needs, skills and parent expectations. It involves a mix of functional academics, communication, self help skills and life skills training. This is a full day program and a teacher-student ratio of 1:2 is maintained for a better learning experience.



PRE-VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Involves teaching skills that will help the child above 12 years to maximize productivity in a vocational or a work environment and put them on the path towards self sufficiency. Activities involve following a set routine, assembly line etc.



LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Life skills are what enables a child to function independently in the community. It can involve something as simple as tying shoe laces and more complex activities like shopping independently.



THERAPIES

Speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy bring significant difference in children with neurodevelopment disorders. Speech therapy improves communication, occupational therapy helps improve daily functioning skills and physiotherapy improves movement and motor skills.



YOGA

Yoga has been known to bring significant improvement in body movement, flexibility and strength. In children with autism, yoga brings a reduction in anxiety, builds communication skills and improves the overall health and well being.



MUSIC THERAPY

Music has been known to have therapeutic effects on children with special needs. It promotes communication, relaxation and activates parts of the brain that improves cognitive functioning. ASHA started music therapy this year and so far there has been marginal improvement in the children.



TECHNOLOGY AIDED INSTRUCTION

Technology can be used to teach a variety of skills including early intervention, developing communication, pre-academic skills and vocational skills. The commonly used forms of technology are computers and iPad at ASHA.



ASSESSMENT, TRAINING AND GUIDANCE CENTRE

The Assessment, Training and Guidance Centre is a part of ASHA. The centre was established in 2013 and provides screening for autism and learning disability, psycho educational assessments, early intervention, remedial sessions and counselling.

The centre is located in Mahalaxmi Layout and is easily accessible by the Bangalore Metro. In 6 years, the centre has helped more than a 100 children with remedial sessions and assessments. Families have been helped with counselling.

Since 2018-19, the centre conducts an early intervention program for children with learning and developmental difficulties below the age of 6 years.





ASSESSMENTS

To understand a child's strengths and areas of needs, conducting assessments is important. The centre provides screening tools to detect learning difficulties, hyperactivity and autism as well as psycho-educational assessments to identify areas of need to suggest an intervention.



REMEDIAL SESSIONS

The centre provides one on one remedial sessions for children with mild autism and learning difficulties. An individual education plan (IEP) is prepared for each child. These sessions address needs of children with autism and also support children with learning difficulties perform better in a mainstream school.



COUNSELLING

Parents of children with a developmental delay or any special needs may face significant stress trying to balance expenses, work and household tasks. Many children in mainstream schools also face difficulty due to bullying, teasing among other things. To address these problems and help in adjusting, the centre provides counselling services to parents and children.



OUR WORK AND COVID 19

With the COVID 19 pandemic, ASHA ceased all on site activities for students starting 16th March 2020 as per the State Government directive to schools. The following measures were taken to safeguard the health and safety of our children, families as well as teachers:

We realized had to drastically modify the way we provide services to our students and their families from a centre based model to an online only approach. Technology came to our rescue in these times. The times were tough but in a couple of months and trying out different platforms, we were ready to conduct one on one and group sessions using Zoom and WhatsApp video in June 2020.

The students took to the online model well and the transition has been smooth. We are happy to announce that we are providing online sessions, including therapies such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, yoga, dance, music and art based therapy to all our students and counselling for the families. This has helped the students and families not miss out on valuable time.

The sessions were conducted by the teachers from their homes. From the last week of May 2020, teachers started coming to the organization to conduct online sessions after the lockdown restrictions were lifted.

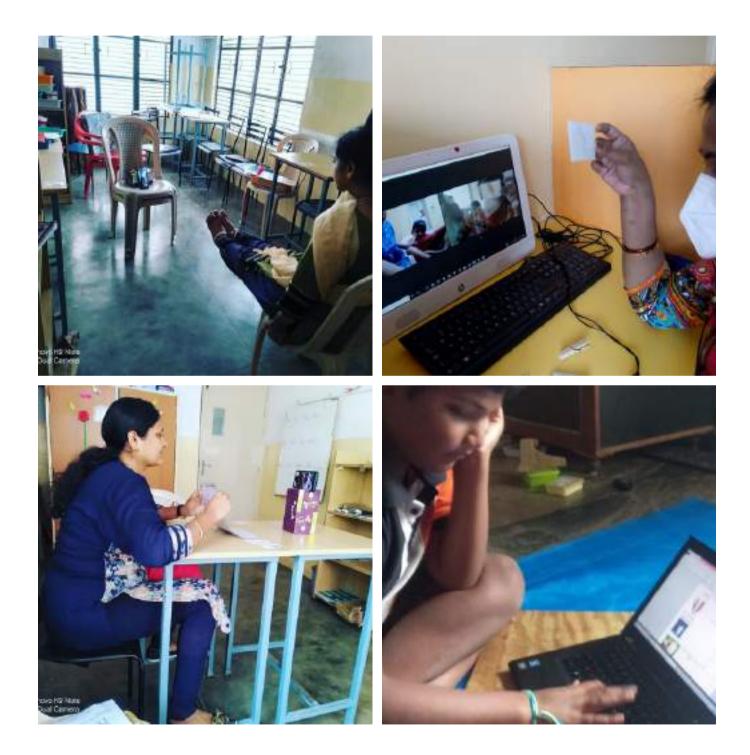
MIGRATING TO A NEW MODE OF LEARNING

The lockdown was a learning experience for all of us. Through the use of technology, we could reach out to more people and provide our services. With Zoom, we were able to conduct 2 major autism specific training programs for parents and professionals. Through the Autism Online English and Kannada versions, we were able to reach out to people from all over India and especially the tier 2 and 3 cities of Karnataka where autism services are meagre.



PRIMARY AND PRE-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

By June, intervention was provided online for all the students. The teachers who stayed in the neighboring areas of ASHA, came to the organization and conducted individual sessions for the students. These sessions were for 1 hour each and covered various topics including self help, academics, motor skills and pre-vocational skills. Again, there was a learning curve as the students and the parents had to get used to the online mode of learning and to focus on the screen. This took a couple of weeks to smoothen out.



CHALLENGES WITH COVID 19

Teaching individuals with autism requires building a rapport, holding attention, using reinforcements and visual information. With social distancing and wearing a mask being the only way to defeat COVID, all schools were shut for students. For most of us, technology has been a lifeline during COVID 19 but it is not easily accessed by all. A smartphone with internet access is essential for any online learning to be conducted and received.

LACK OF DEVICES

Some families were not able to access online classes due to lack of having a smartphone and a SIM card with data access. The cost of a smartphone is a burden for many families, and we did not want them to miss out on intervention. Thanks to our individual donors, we were able to provide new smartphones. This took the stress off the families and the students were able to learn without interruption.

UNFAMILIARITY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology and video-conferencing software such as Zoom and WhatsApp is complex for some families to use. But being essential for learning, the teachers supported the parents on how to use these apps and access learning.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

A few families with siblings could not manage time for the sessions as the siblings were using the available phones for their sessions. The teachers took a lot of effort to reschedule sessions for these families.

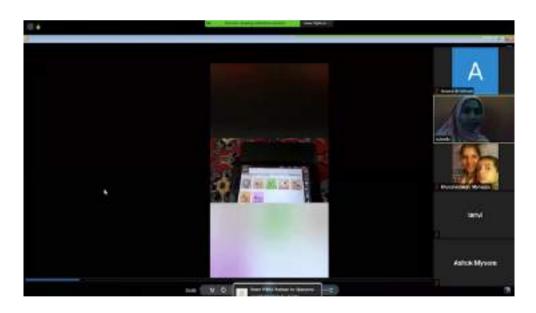


EMERGING FROM A CRISIS - OPENING UP DURING LOCKDOWN

The COVID 19 pandemic was tough for all of us. Academy for Severe Handicaps and Autism, along with a few professionals from St. John's Hospital CARE-ADD, Sunshine Autism and Spastics Society of Karnataka conducted a program to understand how parents are managing their children with autism during the lockdown on 13, 15 and 17 April.

The objective was to understand how individuals with autism are going about their day to day lives and how the families are coping. A group of 9 mothers shared their experiences of working with their children with autism. Each parent had 15 minutes to share their experiences and how they addressed challenges. The mothers had plenty of information to share and they made the most of it using PowerPoint presentations, pictures and videos.

The one hour sessions were moderated by Mrs. Jayashree Ramesh (Director, ASHA), Dr. Ashok (CARE-ADD), Dr. Vanitha Rao (Sunshine Autism) and Mrs. Suchita Somashekariah, (Director, Shristi Special Academy)



The sessions were attended by 70 parents on each day and was highly appreciated. There was a call for more such sessions and to create a parent support group. The participants found the practical advice given by the parents to be useful and was easy to implement with household items. One parent in particular had created an exercise area with furniture for the child to be physically active. Another parent involved her son in household activities to prevent boredom and to utilise time meaningfully. All the parents' efforts were appreciated by the participants and inspired other parents to implement them with their children.

PROJECTSECTS

Implementing Partner

EARLY INTERVENTION TRAINING PROGRAM

The Early Intervention Program is a continuing program from 2018. The program is designed to provide high quality training for children as well as parents by empowering the mothers.

The project helped the children and the parents immensely last year and we replicated the program again for 2020-21. This year we had 25 children and mothers in the program.

In April 2020, with the lockdown, the teachers adapted to provide intervention through video calls mainly through Zoom and WhatsApp. This took a couple of weeks to get used to; first for the parents as they had never used the video calling option. Secondly, the children found it difficult to concentrate and follow directions through video. With time and persistence, the children were able to adapt to the online sessions with their teachers supported by the parents.

The online sessions were provided by the teachers, speech therapist, counsellor and physio therapist so that no child misses out on therapy.

By June, the lockdown was eased, and mothers were asked to come to the centre to seek guidance and collect toys and learning materials for their child to learn with.

From August, art based therapy, yoga and dance sessions were provided online.





COMPUTER EDUCATION PROGRAM & STUDENT EDUCATION SUPPORT

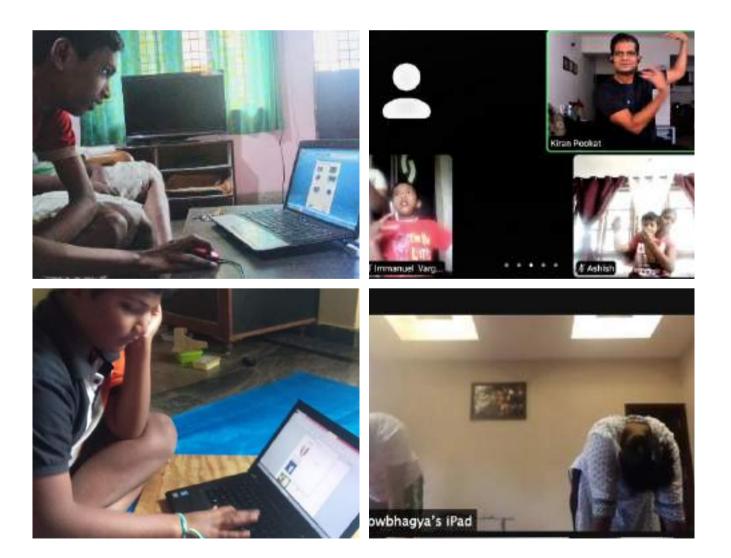


The computer education program was a structured program to help build computer skills in 60 students with autism. Out of the 60, 12 students were trained in higher computer skills.

The project also supported the intervention of 15 students with autism which covered the cost of academic intervention, therapies such as yoga, language and communication, dance, art based therapy and music.

There has been significant improvement in the development of skills especially in the domains of computer skills, cognition, language and communication skills. The dance and art based therapy sessions helped in building some play and social skills to a certain extent.

With the Student Education Support Program, we were able to ensure that no child missed out on intervention because of their economic/financial situation.



WOMEN'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND DONATION OF LEARNING MATERIALS



A skill development program was conducted for 6 women in the community. The program consisted of training in:

- a. Block Printing
- b. Embroidery

The training was conducted by resource persons from Nav Prabhuthi Trust, a non-profit that provides vocational skills training to individuals with developmental disabilities over 18 years of age.



We also acquired 20 hand block printed cotton computer covers for all our computers at our organization to protect from dust and humidity. We were also able to equip our classrooms with schedule boards. Individuals with autism are visual learners and are comfortable in a predictable environment. A visual schedule board helps the student see what activities are going to be done for that day and they are prepared for the transition. We procured 100 schedule boards for all the classrooms.





Supported by

WOMEN'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND DONATION OF LEARNING MATERIALS







For the welfare of our teachers during COVID 19, we procured 100 sanitizer bags – a sling bag with pouches to hold pens, a small note pad and a bottle of sanitizer. We also procured 60 each of lunch bags and pouches made of hand block printed cotton fabric.

With the start of the pandemic, students spent a lot of time at home. To ease their boredom and promoting learning, with the support of UST, we were able to provide an assortment of toys for all 87 students of our organization. The materials were distributed to the students and their families at a small gathering in March 2021. The students and their families were thrilled with the new toys and materials and were excited to start playing with them!





Supported by XLHealth Corporation India Pvt. Ltd.

PARENT TRAINING

The COVID-19 pandemic restricted on site parent training workshops. To minimise contact and travel for our parents, we moved our training program online. With the support of XLHealth Corporation India Pvt. Ltd., we conducted 14 individual workshops and 3 training programs with multiple sessions from April 2020 to March 2021.

AUTISM @NLINE

Autism Online was a 12 session online course to enable parents and special educators to learn and work effectively with children with autism from 16th May to 21st June. Each session lasted for 2 hours and was conducted on Saturdays and Sundays over the online platform – Zoom.

The Autism Online program had a total of 28 participants comprising 11 parents and 17 professionals. The Autism Online team consisted of 5 resource persons with extensive experience in teaching as well as working with individuals with autism.



All the sessions were highly appreciated by the participants. They found it useful, resourceful and easily understandable. There were requests for more sessions as some topics were vast.

ADOLESCENCE, HYGIENE AND SEXUALITY

Individuals with autism as with mainstream children need to be educated on puberty, sex, maintaining personal hygiene and managing menstruation. There is also a need to inform parents on their growing children's sexual health, managing menstruation as well as to identify and protect the child from sexual abuse and harm.

Dr. Gifty Joel is a specialist in human development and sexual health in individuals with autism. She is a consultant with ASHA and has conducted many sessions on hygiene and sexual health in individuals with autism.

In the months of June, July, August, September and October, Dr. Gifty conducted a series of online consultations with parents to understand their concerns and suggested measures and ways to help the child and the family.

The parents found the individual consultations comfortable and highly effective as they had privacy and could openly share their issues with Dr. Gifty. The specialist could understand the issues clearly as it was a one on one interaction and suggested ways to manage the child during puberty. The sessions were highly appreciated by the parents as with the COVID 19 lockdown, it is difficult to seek outside help and there is a certain amount of frustration in the children as well as the families.

Autism Online Kannada aims to train parents and professionals to work effectively with individuals with autism. Autism Online Kannada conducted from 17th August to 30th October is one of the very few autism specific training programs for parents and teachers to be conducted online exclusively in Kannada. To reach out to more people, ASHA Charitable Trust partnered with Rotary Bangalore West, Inner Wheel Club of Bangalore West, Disability NGOs Alliance, Nav Prabhuthi Trust and Information and Resource Centre. The 20 session program was conducted every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for 1 hour per session. The program is being coordinated by Ms. Vani Nagaraj, Director – Aarohan Center for Special Education along with a resource team of doctors and professionals from various institutions. The topics being addressed can be vastly categorized as a) Diagnosis and Medical Intervention b) Skills, Training and Teaching methods c) Understanding Behaviour and its Management d) Home Management e) Government Laws and Schemes.

Autism Online Kannada had 110 participants of which 37 are parents and teachers from ASHA.

The sessions were well received by the participants and the response was overwhelming. There is a demand for a second edition of Autism Online Kannada. The participants found the sessions easy to understand as it was in Kannada and are eagerly waiting for the future sessions. The wealth of knowledge delivered in a succinct, simple manner was appreciated by the participants. The resource persons too provided feedback that the whole program was well managed by the team and the execution was faultless.



BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Ms. Anupama, consultant behaviour therapist at ASHA is conducting sessions at ASHA for parents. The sessions are to address any behaviour management problems that the parents are facing at home. Some of the common problems faced by parents are:

- · Attention seeking behaviours
- · Behaviours during an activity escaping from a task.
- Difficulty in transitioning from one activity to another.

Ms. Anupama addressed these behaviour problems by suggesting:

- Use of visual cards/materials to prepare for the transition to a new task.
- Use of reinforcement to do an activity.
- To follow the ABC method to document what happened before the behaviour the nature of the behaviour and what happens after the behaviour.

Feedback

The sessions have helped the families understand their child's needs better as behaviour is a form of communication used by many children without autism too. The families are less stressed, they can use reinforcers effectively to complete tasks as well as reduce unwanted/harmful behaviours. The child is happier as they are understood and their needs are met.

YOGA FOR PARENTS

Ms. Sumasree conducted 18 yoga sessions for 19 parents of our students with autism in December, January and February.

Yoga is an excellent practice for the parents. Yoga can help in the following ways:

- 1. Help parents manage the physical body building strength, stamina, flexibility etc.
- 2. Help them release physical tension/ aches and pains
- 3. Improving physiological functioning
- 4. Helps them manage their stress levels
- 5. Helps them be aware of their emotions and helps regulate
- 6. Overall, it would help them be more present for their children and for themselves



The parents reported that the yoga sessions are enjoyable as well as full of learning. Most of them feel a lightness in the body and experience calmness in the mind after each session. They felt lesser stress and improved ability to cope with day to day chores.

CARERS WORLDWIDE - LIFE STORIES AND IMPACT

On 27th December, Mr. Natesh from Carer's Worldwide, an UK based non profit organization working to understand and improve the lives of carers all over the world. The objective of the session was to inform the parents on the –

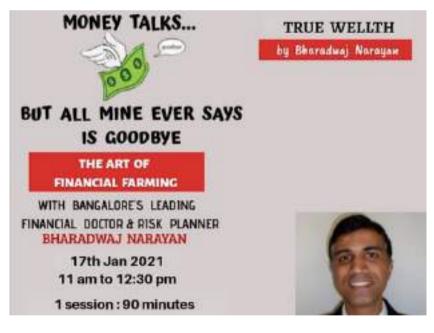
- · Importance of a support group
- Process of setting up a support group
- · Action that can be taken from the group

The session was highly informative and set the foundation for creating a support group of parents of individuals with disabilities. The parents face many issues over a lifespan when caring for their child with a disability that includes financial, emotional, loneliness and many more. A support group can address many of these issues effectively.



TRUE WELLTH - THE ART OF FINANCIAL FARMING

Mr. Bharadwaj Narayan, Bangalore's leading financial doctor and risk planner conducted a session on the art of financial farming for parents of individuals with special needs. The session was conducted on 17th January on Zoom and was attended by 30 parents.



Mr. Bharadwaj explained how to plan for the future, how to save a part of the income and invest in relatively safe funds for any future contingencies. The session covered aspects such as how much and what percentage of the income should be invested, the risks of not planning, investing in insurance and mutual funds.

The session helped parents understand ways to make money grow and how to safely invest money. The explanation on how to analyse risk based on age and income helped the parents plan for the future.

ACTIVITY DEMONSTRATION

Dr. Venkat Lakshmi H. and the students of Smt. VHD Central Institute of Home Science College demonstrated simple activities to aid learning that can be easily done by the parents at home. The session was conducted on the 13th of February.

The activities were presented by the students and consisted of paper folding, sorting, matching, put in activities and many more. The activities were meant for students of all age groups and nearly 40 parents attended the session.

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. Bharadwaj Narayan conducted a session on the importance of health insurance on 14th February for parents of ASHA.

Mr. Narayan is Bangalore's leading financial doctor and risk planner and has conducted several sessions on financial planning. This time, he spoke on what is health insurance, its importance, how to plan for coverage, how to select a suitable policy and assessing risks such as pre existing conditions and rising health care expenses.



TEACHER TRAINING SAMAGRA - COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES TO AUTISM

Samagra is a 20 session program to explore the complementary approaches to autism which are important as no single approach to autism works with all individuals. The program is being conducted by Information and Resource Centre for parents and professionals. As part of professional development, one teacher from ASHA attended this online workshop.



The Samagra program had 2 hour sessions each on music therapy, art therapy, play therapy, drama, sensory integration therapy and many more. All the sessions are facilitated by experts with many years of experience.

The special educator from ASHA, Ms. Sowmya found the sessions to be engaging and interactive. The hands on approach and demonstration was extremely useful in learning how to apply these complementary approaches to individuals with autism. The resource persons also shared their experiences and cleared doubts of the participants.

4 parents and special educators and from ASHA, Ms. Anupama, Ms. Bhuvana, Ms. Kavitha Manjunath, Ms. Rashmi found the sessions to be highly useful, especially the session on PECS on how to build communication in children who are non verbal. The hands on approach and demonstration was extremely useful in learning how to apply these complementary approaches to individuals with autism. Functional skills on perception session was also useful and gave the teachers many ideas in preparing activities and worksheets.

TEACHER TRAINING NEWSPAPER RECYCLING WORKSHOP

Our teachers attended a unique newspaper recycling workshop conducted by The Information and Resource Centre, Bangalore on the 23rd and 24th December. The session was conducted by Ms. Chitra Nandan. The workshop was deeply nested in the idea of recycling and reducing waste instead of buying items from a shop.

Ms. Chitra taught the participants to make beautiful items by just folding newspapers and made things like bags, a phone holder and dust bins.



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Teachers from ASHA attended a State level CRE Programme on Vocational Rehabilitation – Concept and Execution conducted by Information and Resource Centre and National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities on the 28th and 29th December.

The program explored the concept of vocational rehabilitation, its scope, importance and how to implement it. With the wide range of experts from different organizations, the view on vocational rehabilitation was different and refreshing. It displayed many types of vocational activities, settings and environments and the possibilities are seemingly endless.



TEACHER TRAINING TEACHER TRAINING ON SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

An intensive teacher training course to teach primary school students with specific learning disabilities course was conducted by Asha Kiran Teachers Training Academy. The course was conducted from 5th to 7th January by Dr. Rita James, the principal of Asha Kiran Special School, Bangalore via Zoom. 21 teachers of ASHA completed the course.



The teachers who attended the sessions found the sessions to help them understand how to personalise the lessons for each child, use of repetition, usage of rewards and motivators and understanding the pre-requisites of the child. The assignment at the end of the training program helped the teachers write a lesson plan for a child.

TEACHER PRESENTATIONS

From 4th February to 31st March, 45 special educators, assistant teachers and therapists presented on various topics to their colleagues. These sessions were for 2 hours and conducted over Zoom. The objective of this training was to share knowledge among each other and learn new skills related to teaching and special education.

The topics that have been covered were related to academics and special education such as cognition, maths, language, reading and writing.

The teachers also covered other skill areas such as play skills, motor skills, activities of daily living art and more.

There were also sessions on positive thinking, soft skills, stress management and meditation to manage stress and for a healthier living.

Sessions on child rights, human resources, work etiquette, computer skills and technology and being professional helped teachers get a view to the background of the organization, laws and legislations and how to be organized at the workplace.

TEACHER TRAINING



The teacher training sessions have been a revelation. The teachers have taken a lot of effort in researching the topic, finding appropriate videos which supported learning. All the sessions have been recorded and will be used for future teacher training programs.

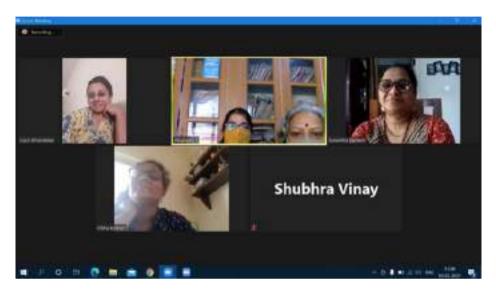
PARTNERSHIP GLOBAL AUTISM PROJECT



AUTISM KNOWS NO BORDERS;

FORTUNATELY NEITHER DO WE.

Global Autism Project is a not for profit organization based in the USA that conducts autism specific training programs and helps us with planning our programs and intervention. This year, from 25th February to 8thMarch, they conducted a leadership training program and 6 of the staff from ASHA participated in this online initiative. The program helped the staff invest in themselves and bring out their talents and abilities to help the organization develop.



COMPETITIONS KALAANGANA 2020



Kalaangana is an inter school talents festival conducted by Information and Resource Centre, Bangalore. The event was held virtually from the 19th to 22nd January. The various events included art, yoga, dance, music among others.





Our students won prizes in costume - fancy dress and yoga.

VOLUNTEERING AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES

VIRTUAL FUN EVENT

During pandemic times, families were going through immense stress and many behavioral changes were noticed in the children. Volunteers from TCS organized a musical event on 30th May for children and families where the volunteers sang and played musical instruments. Children and their siblings displayed art and fun activity, music too.



RIDE FOR HRISHI - FUNDRAISER

In September, Anand Krishnan, an employee at ASHA created a fund raising event titled Ride for Hrishi to raise funds to cover the academic fees of Hrishikesh, a student of ASHA. Hrishikesh lost his father earlier this year and the mother, a teacher was not receiving a regular salary and was finding it difficult to pay the fees. Anand cycled more than 600 kms over 10 days and raised enough to cover the full educational fees for 1 year.

TEACHERS DAY VIRTUAL CELEBRATION

On 5th September, teachers day was celebrated virtually through Zoom. A Musical event was conducted by volunteers from TCS.

The students, their siblings and volunteers entertained teachers with songs and fun activities.

Mrs. Jayashree Ramesh extended her heartfelt thanks to all children, families and volunteers on behalf of staff and thanked all the teachers for their diligence, sincerity, effort and hard work.

FUN VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING EVENT 1

On 19th September, volunteers from conducted a session with art and craft, origami and music and dance.

Students from ASHA sang and danced along with the volunteers.



FUN VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING EVENT 2

On 26th September, volunteers conducted a session with art and craft, music and dance with students of ASHA below the age of 6 years.



GROCERY DISTRIBUTION

On 7th October, team members from UST, visited ASHA and distributed groceries to the families of our students and support staff.



RECOGNITION

We have been ranked 3rd among special schools in India and 1st in Karnataka by EducationWorld magazine and Brainfeed.

