



MDA Newsletter

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Madras Dyslexia Association

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Announcement

**An exclusive workshop on
parenting in December 2011.**

Look inside for details.

The Inclusive Set-up at K.D. Ambani Vidyamandir, Jamnagar

Resource persons from MDA had gone to Jamnagar to conduct a workshop for the teachers of KDAV. We had an opportunity to interact with the staff and management of KDAV and some parents of children with learning difficulties. It was amazing to see the kind of help being given in a remote corner of Gujarat. While interacting we noted some of the following things:

- We could see that they were dealing with children who are often first generation learners and from only Gujarathi speaking homes.
- Children with different kinds of difficulties were being helped within the school. There were children with autism, dyslexia, as well as slow learners and children with sensory issues.
- They had to admit their employees' children and at any time of the year.
- Children with different kinds of difficulties were being included in the classrooms.
- Pull outs and intensive remedial teaching facilities were also being provided.
- Initially, without really having any sophisticated training they were able to provide hands-on help and were seeing results.
- Even Occupational therapy was being provided in a limited way for children with sensory deficits.
- The philosophy of the Principal is very important and here we saw a dynamic person who was sensitive to the needs of children with difficulties. He took on the onus of providing well-rounded education to all the children there.
- With a team of dedicated teachers, this seemed possible.
- The fact that they had been sending their staff for our teacher-training programmes and that they now wanted to sensitise all their teachers was itself a testimony of their intent to provide inclusive education to all.
- Last, but not the least, all the special education services and Occupational therapy were being offered at no cost.

We were intrigued by what we observed there and thought it would be good to feature their school in our newsletter. If an inclusive set up like this can work in a rural set up, in a remote corner of the country, it surely can be tried in the city schools.

About the School

K.D.Ambani Vidyamandir was started in 1997 in Jamnagar City in Gujarat, to provide education to the children of employees who are working in, what has now become the world's largest single location oil refinery. The school shifted to its own premises in the Reliance Greens Township, near Jamnagar in September 1998. This co-education school now comprises of a
Pre-primary section - 800 students
Primary section - 1386 students
Middle school and Secondary school section - 900 students

Admission

Admission is open to children of all Reliance employees and there is no discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, gender, learning, mental or physical ability of the students. The inclusive set-up has always been a policy right from the beginning.

Admission is never denied to any child. There is no admission test for pre-primary. For standard I to XII admission tests are conducted to get an understanding of the academic strengths & weaknesses of a child. When it is felt necessary, the child is referred to the Special Learning Centre where standard tests are administered and the child is helped to better his academic competency. At present, this facility is mostly available for students from Std 1 to 5.

Policy towards academic backwardness

The school has always tried to help children weak in academics ever since 1998. Until 2006, a clinical psychologist was available for helping out tenth and twelfth standard students. In the previous years, special remedial classes were held after school hours in the evening for students who were weak in academics from Std I to IX.

This practice is still continued for the tenth and twelfth standard children. It is not possible to get specialists for this but they are helped by the teachers as the majority of the teachers and the children live near the school.

In 2010, two students were helped by the school to get certification for dyslexia and they were given special accommodation in the Board exams. Both of them cleared the exam.

Set-up in Primary

Over the years, it was noticed that a number of children failed to achieve academic goals despite extra help being given by the class teachers after class hours. With the advent of internet and general awareness of learning disabilities, the need for setting up a centre for diagnosis and remedial help was felt by the school. A screening and counselling session conducted by the well-known psychologist Dr.Harish Shetty was organised.

As a result of these efforts, the primary school coordinators took steps to sensitise the primary teachers about learning disabilities and asked the teachers to refer children, who according to them, were not performing as per their expectations and in accordance to their perceived intelligence. Data collection was started and around 120 children were identified from Std I to V. A visiting psychologist was appointed in July 2010 to carry out tests on the identified children. The testing brought out severe to mild cases of cerebral palsy, autism, late development disorders, mental retardation, ADD and ADHD.

Due to the remote location of the school, getting special educator help was difficult. Hence, it was decided that the problem would be tackled with whatever help could be obtained in the township itself. A feeler was sent out to educated ladies in the township to spare some time in school to help children during school hours. Ten ladies volunteered and they were given guidance on how to help the children by the psychologist. Slowly **Special Learning Centre** took roots in the Primary Section.

Special Learning Centre

- At present, there are 7 parent volunteers, 2 regular teachers and a special educator (recruited in Sept 2011) working in the SLC.
- There are 3 classrooms where the activities are conducted, one of which is also used for OT.

- The SLC is adequately stocked with games, puzzles, activity worksheets and books to provide stimulated learning to the children.
- Lesson plans and worksheets of the respective classes are passed on to the SLC by the subject HODs through the primary coordinators.
- Plans are afoot to install 4 computers with Net access so that children can access the Net for animated concept learning.
- **34 identified and tested** students are being helped now.

Intervention, at present, starts at the Class 2 level. Identified children are given remediation in Math (1 period) and English (1 period). All the children (17 for English and 14 for Math) in Class 2 are being given remediation. A regular Class 2 teacher conducts the classes. The class is monitored by a teacher from the SLC. This teacher provides the remediation techniques to be deployed, to the teacher for the teaching period, in advance. There is a system where every teacher from Class 2 spends 10 days in the SLC observing and learning the techniques being used so that she can gain knowledge of the methods of teaching 'struggling' learners.

Pull outs

The SLC provides remediation and often concept relearning if needed in English and Math.

- The children come to the SLC in their English and Math periods.
- They are not pulled out during Games & Activity periods as is the case usually in schools.
- Children are given help starting from their comfort level.
- Remedial/concept learning is provided in groups or on an individual basis according to the child's needs.
- Very severe cases are given phonetic training and pre-math concepts.
- Others are helped to bridge to their grade level which is often difficult to achieve.
- Assessments and tests are given at the child's comfort level. SLC gives the grades, in the report card, for the subjects for which such help is being provided.
- Children attend all the 'soft subject' periods like games, clay modelling, music and art and craft classes with their classmates.

- Proper files are maintained for the tests done on the child, remediation given and worksheets provided.
- Parent counselling sessions are held periodically.

Children with mild autism and MR have been grouped together. They are given functional literacy and OT according to their capacity by a parent-volunteer who has undergone a parent-child intervention course. The children attend 'soft subject' periods with their regular classmates. It must be mentioned that daily interaction with the regular school children has helped these children immensely in their social behaviour and outlook. The school also provides special exercises through a PT master for the SLC children before school starts in the morning.

The work carried out by the SLC is supported by the Management, Principal and the Co-ordinators.

The school insists on each and every child participating in all the extra-curricular activities being conducted in school. Special children also take part in Independence Day and Republic Day drills and Annual Day Functions.

No child is excluded. In fact there is a class-wise cultural day for the pre-primary and primary sections where each and every child participates. There is section-wise assembly program everyday, where each child (including the special child) is given an opportunity to face the audience and say a poem or give a talk.

Role of Parent-Volunteers

The parent-volunteers work in the SLC for 3 to 4 periods from Monday to Friday. Saturday is reserved for sharing information and learning. After joining the SLC, they are given a briefing about the children they have to help. Each volunteer has an interaction with the psychologist. The psychologist conducts workshops in auditory and visual processing techniques for the parent-volunteers and SLC teachers. Whenever the psychologist visits the school, a follow-up of the children's progress is conducted to get her feedback.

Steps are being taken to involve more parent-volunteers and also provide more training sessions to existing volunteers so that quality work can be carried out efficiently. One teacher was sent to the 1-month training programme of Madras Dyslexia Association in July 2011 to gain expertise on teaching dyslexic children. The SLC completes one year in September 2011.

Since the SLC is still in its infancy, there are some teething troubles. Many parents feel that their children

are missing out on their regular lessons. Counselling is being done to make them realise that this does not matter as the children are way below the grade level and that it would be difficult for them to follow the grade-level academics being taught in class. The special educator has started working in this area.

Some children feel that they are being treated differently from the regular children. However, there have also been instances when a few children have come voluntarily to the centre and asked for remedial help. Hence, we feel that a lot of counselling and reassurance to the children, teachers and parents is necessary to make the activities of the SLC really successful.

Conclusion

The SLC has been possible due to the persistent support of the Principal and primary coordinators. The present Principal, Mr.S. Sundaram, who is also a Math educator, holds workshops for all the Math teachers in

the school in teaching Math concepts through activities. His workshops have tremendously improved the standard of Math in the school. To improve language teaching in school, all primary teachers are being given training in phonics by a specialist from Mumbai from 2009 onwards.

Future plans

1. Starting early intervention in pre-primary sections.
2. Extending the existing SLC services to the secondary wing.
3. Sensitising and motivating parents to get more involved in educating their special children.
4. Making parents aware of Board, Government and tax concessions so that they can provide better educational facilities to their special children.
5. Helping regular stream teachers to pursue higher studies related to learning disabilities.

Meet Mrs. Valli Srinivasan -

Mrs. Valli Srinivasan, the backbone of the special education initiative at KDAV, has been associated with the remedial education (Primary) in KDAV for many years, long before a formal special education set-up was established. In her own words:

“ I realised that there were always 8 to 10 students in each primary class who were unable to cope with their peers. These identified children were given remedial help after school hours for about 40 minutes in the subject that they needed help. This was usually done a month before the term exam. Special subject teachers were appointed for this purpose. It was about this time that I started to read books on special teaching techniques and got interested in this area. Soon the need to help these children was felt and I moved from mainstream teaching and started work with 2 boys in Std IV who could not recognise the English letters at all. I read from various sources and began to deploy these techniques which seemed to work with them. Requests soon poured in from teachers asking me to help children in their class.

Eventually, I gathered up enough courage to ask for leave to attend the one- week training programme of MDA in Chennai in April 2010 which I had come across through a friend’s recommendation. The programme gave me an insight into some teaching techniques that I began to use with our students in KDAV. We put up a request for a psychologist and a special educator and soon a visiting psychologist, was recruited. Then parents who were interested joined us. Children are happy to come and attendance is regular and parent cooperation is encouraging. In fact, to stop any stigma being attached to the students, we have put up the name board at the entrance as Activity Room. Teachers have reported better academic performance of the students sent to us.”

We are grateful to KDAV for letting us share their story of Inclusion with our readers.

New articles & books about Dyslexia

The dyslexie font

It is a typeface specially designed to help dyslexics read. It is designed by Christian Boer who is a dyslexic, a graphic designer who thinks in pictures. He started creating it in 2008 as a personal project. He is set to have followed his own instincts about the way the letters looked and then got 8 more dyslexics to help him refine the letter forms. One key feature is the extra visual weight it adds to the bottom halves of letters, as this helps pin the letters to the baseline and therefore makes them easier to read. He has put in hours to get a comma or a letter a right. He says the *dyslexie* isn't a cure but like a wheelchair, it can help cope with reading difficulties. It is reported when the dyslexics read with this font they make fewer errors. It makes reading easier and less cumbersome for them. Research studies have substantiated this as well.

Scientific American: The dyslexic advantage by Brock and Eide.

The authors talk about the different wiring of the brain which allows people to process information in unique ways. In the area of learning it is seen as a different style which needs to be fostered and not something that needs to be corrected. Dyslexics are good at big picture thinking though they may struggle with their basic skills. The authors believe that some of the elitists in the world struggled with early schooling before they put their unique skills into use and became very successful. They agree with early intervention they feel it is not to remediate the perceived weaknesses but to foster the strengths.

Dyslexia makes voices hard to discern.

Jennifer Carpenter Science reporter, BBC News reports that scientists now say that people with dyslexia struggle to recognise familiar voices and that they could have a degree of voice blindness. Very little is known about voice blindness, which is formally called phonagnosia.

Normally people rely on small sounds called phonemes to distinguish one person from another and also to master the ability to read. Later we become less reliant on them and stop noticing them but they still remain important for voice recognition. The tiny inflections in the way people pronounce phonemes gives a listener cues to tell one voice from another. Since people who suffer from dyslexia are known to struggle with phonemes when reading, a US-based team of scientists wondered whether they might also struggle hearing them in people's voices. In a study non-dyslexics outperformed people with a history of dyslexia by 40% when listening to English. However, this advantage disappeared when the groups were listening to Chinese probably because, it is a level playing field, as no one has learned to hear [Chinese] phonemes.

The researchers think that dyslexics don't have as comprehensive a phoneme sound library in their heads, and

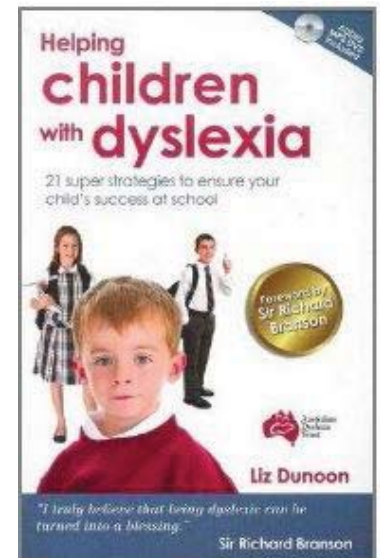
so they struggle when they hear phonemes spoken by unfamiliar voices because their "reference copy" isn't as well-defined.

Book Review

Helping children with dyslexia by Liz Dunoon

There is a DVD attached to the book for those of us who don't like to read but would prefer to listen. The author addresses the issues of the struggling child who can't read, write remember and learn. She shows the parent how to make sure their child succeeds at school. She tells them the ways to identify if a child is dyslexic and the action to be taken next.

Children often throw tantrums over school and homework and parents need to help their child to regain their confidence and self-esteem. She shares proven strategies to help children catch up when they have fallen behind at school; how to talk to teachers, choose the right school and get a support system in place. She shows how to access 100's of free learning aids and resources; why their child can 'overcome' dyslexia and look forward to a happy and successful future. She also shows how the parent can teach the child to read, write, do Maths and learn.



We would like to share with you our association with the author.

In her website <http://www.helpingchildrenwithdyslexia.com/> she has listed out where help is available for children with dyslexia all over the world. When she was in conversation with Tom Haynes, (a dyslexic himself from Australia who visited MDA), she realized she didn't have our organization listed and wrote to us on her own. After that she has been most helpful in providing us a copy of the book. We really appreciate her gesture. We would like more parents to visit this website and use the fund of knowledge she has shared with her readers.

Resource : Internet

Alumni Corner

Transformation Complete!

I am Harleen Kaur and I am a proud dyslexic! Proud, not sure if I was before I joined Ananya...

The symptoms of dyslexia were clear in me. My parents sensed and learnt about it when I was in my 1st standard. They were afraid to put me in a special school as they always felt it was only for those who are physically challenged. They dropped the idea of admitting me to a dyslexia special training school.

Just as any other kid in the neighborhood, I started going to a normal school. For almost 8 years I had to go through the pressure and embarrassment in school, I could never handle. I had no friends as everybody felt I was too different from them to be their friend. It didn't end here. I would be punished almost every other day for something or the other; from not doing my home work to incomplete project work, leaving me with unbearable bad remarks. Soon, my parents saw the pain and struggle I was going through and realized that their little angel is someone off the normal. She needed special care.

Finally, they decided to put me in MDA. I was in my 9th standard when I joined Ananya. My reading was of the 3rd standard level. I was very slow in reading and writing. I used to forget everything taught in school. I could hardly concentrate and could never memorize anything. The kind of guidance and care I got there and the level of personal attention I got from the teachers there, I possibly could have never got in an otherwise normal school.

I loved going to Ananya. I always made sure that I missed not a single day of school. This was less a school and more a home to me. We got so much of love, care and advice from our teachers that school was actually fun. A place where we used to study and play games at the same time.

We were taught various techniques to learn and understand lessons. From flow charts to mind maps, everything was taught to us that could help us understand better. I finished my 10th Board exam completing 2 years with Ananya and was sent back to normal schooling, believing I was ready to face the normal world.

I was then put in a usual school to pursue my education. With the usual 30 to 35 students in a class room with a pace of teaching and learning that fast, was a little tough to cope with initially. However, executing the techniques I had learnt in Ananya, made my 11th and 12th fly smooth

just like my 9th and 10th did. The words of encouragement from my parents were always an add-on. I still remember them saying "Just another couple of years of education and you'll find what you are and what you wish to do in life". They were the pillars always standing behind, making sure I never fell.



I now knew what I wanted to do in life and what to take up as my career. It was fashion designing. I always wanted to be a fashion designer but it was only since a while that this became a realization. All thanks to MDA, I could now read faster and understand way better. MDA helped me discover the talent in me and my parents gave complete support in polishing my inner skill that was designing. I was now in pace with all my class mates, sometimes even ahead, but I was no more inferior. My parents could never imagine me working towards my passion like any other growing child would. It was a miracle for them that their daughter could now read, write and understand like any other child.

With their help and support, I completed my course in fashion designing and it soon became my profession. It was like I was introduced to myself!

I have finished my B.Sc. in Fashion Designing and I am happily married now, put up in the city of Amritsar in Punjab. By His grace, I am a Fashion Designer running my own designer studio. Today, whatever I am, it's only because one day I had closed my eyes and surrendered myself to Ananya and today I see my life happy and independent, as a normal wife, a normal daughter-in-law and a normal professional.



I owe my life to MDA and my parents for this day. There is no price for the rebirth I have been given by MDA.

"I love you MDA" for making me a "proud dyslexic"!
- Harlene Kaur

NEWS AT MDA/ ANANYA

State Resource Group for Dyslexia

The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) State wing formed a State Resource Group (SRG) for dyslexia and autism. It has chosen a few NGOs to work towards this endeavour of bringing awareness and training to all the State Government teachers. Madras Dyslexia Association has been chosen as one of the NGOs working in the State Resource Group for dyslexia. Its resource persons have been working on compiling a handbook for master-trainers and teachers. While the official launch of this programme is yet to be announced, a pilot training programme was run for 3 days for a group of teachers, NGOs and special educators. Kudos to the State Government for starting an initiative of this kind. It is going to be very beneficial to their teachers in identifying and helping children with such difficulties.

Sportsday

XII Annual Sports day was held at our usual venue, Ramakrishna Mission playground at T.Nagar in September. Akash, Agni, Prithvi and Vayu, the four houses competed to get the Rolling Cup which was won by Prithvi house. The chief guest, Mr. Gautama, *Director, The Chennai Education Centre (KFI)* took the salute and gave an inspiring speech. Mrs. Sumitra Gautama distributed the medals and the certificates to the children.

Visitor from Iceland

Mrs. Mallika Swaminathan, a research scholar, working on inclusive education, living in Iceland visited Ananya. She interacted with teachers and students to record their views on inclusive education. She spoke about the geo-thermal energy to a group of students who thoroughly enjoyed her talk.



Poo Kolam Competition

Board Exam results

12 students appeared for SSLC examinations of which 10 have gone back to mainstream to do their Plus1 and remaining 2 are doing NIOS at Ananya. One student completed his XII through NIOS and joined college.

Soroptimist International competitions

Students of Ananya took part in oratorical, art, skit & music competitions held by the Soroptimist International in August. Nivethitha, Janani, Shamsheer, Joe Pinto, Abhishek, Renuka, Dharani, Steffy Grace and Amrutha won prizes in the various events.



Prize - winning painting

A proud moment for Ananya

S.Ashwin, an alumna of Ananya (2002 - 2003) contributed Rs 5000 to MDA from his earnings. Thank you Ashwin!

He has completed mechanical engineering and joined his father's business. It was indeed a proud moment for all the teachers when he addressed the students of Ananya in the Assembly.

Upcoming events:

Alumni Meet on 12th November 2011 at RKM Infosys Hall. The special guest for the day will be Mr.Kalyanaraman, our Math Sir.

Parenting workshop

MDA is organizing a parenting workshop for parents of students of Ananya and MDA Remedial Centre on December 3rd at IIT. Dr.Jayanthini and Mrs.Usha Ramakrishnan will be conducting the workshop. Contact MDA office for more information.

MDA News Snippets

- 02.06.11 Teachers' orientation: "Spiritual gym" , by J.Krishnan, Vice President, MDA
to
06.06.11 Talk on Behavioural issues and discipline by Lakshmi Radhakrishnan
Karadi path workshop conducted by Mr.Vishwanath, CEO Karadi Tales
- 04.06.11 Workshop conducted for senior teachers of Kavi Bharathi Vidyalaya, Tiruvottriyur by Vilasini.D
and Harini.M
- 24.06.11 Awareness Programme for Teachers of Don Bosco group of schools conducted by Vilasini.D
and Geetha.R
- 25.06.11 Awareness Programme for Salesian Headmasters of Chennai Province conducted by Vilasini.D
and Geetha.R
- 01.07.11 Opening of the OT centre at MDA, Sambasivam street, T.Nagar
- 12.07.11 & 14.07.11 Module on Dyslexia for Kindergarten Teacher Training programme for PSBB
Schools conducted by Subha.V
- 18.07.11 Commencement of one month intensive teacher training course conducted by MDA
- 29.07.11 Module on Dyslexia for Kindergarten Teacher Training programme for PonVidyashram school
conducted by Vilasini.D
- 30.07.11 Awareness Programme for Teachers of Don Bosco Matriculation HSS, Egmore conducted by
Geetha.R
- 07.08.11 Students of Ananya participate in the Soroptimist International competitions
- 21.08.11 Awareness for the Principals of Don Bosco schools from all over India conducted by Subha.V
and Geetha.R
- 08.09.11 to 10.09.11 Awareness and workshop for teachers at K.D.Ambani Vidyamandir, Jam Nagar, Gujarat
conducted by Subha.V and Sujatha.R
- 09.09.11 Some teachers from MDA attend one day Math workshop conducted by JodoGyan of New Delhi
organized by Sadiya Saleh of "Learning with a difference"
- 24.09.11 Junior school teachers visit Rani Meiyammai Primary school, Adyar to observe Activity Based
Learning methodology
- 24.09.11 Presentation of a case study by Lakshmi.LN at the "Kids Ink Conference", Bangalore

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BOOK POST

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