

Pudiyador Times

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Ultimate and Urapakkam...

“1... 2... 3... Ultimaaaaaaaate...”

Karthik's hoarse voice can be heard over the wind as I approach the Besant Nagar beach playground off the Bay of Bengal. It's 6 am on a Sunday, and I come across Karthik and a dozen other Pudiador kids, running and catching and diving after a frisbee disc in the sand: it's a spirited game of Ultimate Frisbee!

For the uninitiated, “Ultimate” is a no-contact, self-refereed, active team sport, that does not involve any costly equipment - just a disc and lots of energy! The sport's self-officiated nature demands a strong spirit of sportsmanship and respect among the players.

We, at Pudiador, have embarked on a program to develop a children's team to participate in Chennai's burgeoning ultimate frisbee league. At our last planning meeting, we decided to include regular sports/games as part of our weekend curriculum, and so far, it has been a blast!

Naturally, the kids take to sports and games with great enthusiasm, and it has been a wonderful experience for our staff as well. We hope to bring about a sense of camaraderie, self-esteem and leadership among our children.

In addition to ultimate, we have started play-sessions in the weekends to provide opportunities for our kids to learn and participate in other team sports such as volleyball, soccer and dodge ball.

However, it has not been all fun and games. I have some bad news as well... I am saddened to inform you that one of our centers at Urapakkam had to be closed down in August.



As a community empowerment organization, we are often faced with obstacles relating to local politics, and the incident at Urapakkam about which you will read in this edition, is not our first. We consider this to be a temporary setback, and our team is working hard behind the scenes to reach out to the children of Urapakkam. We will keep you posted as always, as the situation on the ground changes. Please read the first section for more about our Urapakkam experience.

However, I do hope you enjoy our report of the rest of the happenings in the Pudiador world. It would be nice to hear from you. Your opinions about the good things, and the bad... Please do write back and let us know your thoughts: info@pudiador.org

So, here we are... very excited to present the final edition of 2010!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manickam Narayanan".

Manickam Narayanan

Co-founder



Announcement: Update From Our Operations at Urappakkam

It's not hunky dory all the time in our centers. We would like to share with you our recent experience at the Urappakkam center, which unfortunately hasn't been a pleasant one.

It all started the last week of July - when our center facilitator was refused entry into our own center. She was told by three community members that they had decided to NOT allow Pudiyaador to take care of the kids anymore. For more details about the transformation of the Urappakkam center, let's jog our memory to the 'Impact Story' section of the March 2010 issue of Pudiyaador Times (see Page 7 in http://pudiyaador.org/PudiyaadorTimes_Issue2.pdf)

The following day, our ground team coordinator met with several community members and he learned that we were dealing with a complex situation that involved local politics and that the aforementioned three community members are apparently opposed to Pudiyaador's idea of community empowerment. We also found out that these three families were not poor and their children had already completed high school and were working or in college. Some other parents explained to our coordinator that these three dominant families were involved in most of the community's decision-making, and that while most other parents wanted Pudiyaador to continue, the "big three" did not.

At this juncture, our ground team came to a consensus of withdrawing from the center, and develop a strategy to re-engage the community's children. As of now, we have a couple of options that we are studying to re-establish our center within the community, avoiding any further unpleasantness and confrontation. With a heavy heart, we moved out of the Urappakkam community in the first week of August.



The funds earmarked for the Urappakkam center have been frozen as of now. On a case-by-case basis, our team will determine if these funds can be used for our other centers or for future projects. Needless to say, as our understanding of the Urappakkam situation becomes clear, we will update you. We hope to make you understand the circumstances under which we had to close down our operations at Urappakkam. We would like to reiterate that our Urappakkam experience does not undermine our mission in any way and we are even more committed to empower underprivileged children and their communities. We also hope that all of you will continue to stand with us, and provide your thoughts and support.

In the meantime, our other Pudiyaador community centers continue to function normally. Our children continue to be engaged in fun and exciting activities to enrich their childhood experience! Their parents and the rest of the communities are provided with services such as a weekly medical clinic and other awareness programs. For more on all that, please read on...



Featured Event—Teacher’s Day!

In India, Teacher’s Day is celebrated on September 5th of every year, in honor of the second President of India, academic philosopher Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. While it is not a national or even an academic holiday it is a day of celebration. Students and teachers report to school as usual however, the usual activities and classes are replaced by activities of celebration, thanks and remembrance.



This year it happened to be on a Sunday. And on this Teacher’s Day, the teachers, staff and volunteers at Pudiyaador, had a lot to smile about.

The Teacher’s Day festivities was completely organized by the Pudiyaador children. They had been planning the celebration for days. We all knew something was up when they refused to allow any staff, volunteers or teachers permission to enter the classroom upstairs for a whole week!

The kids had taken ownership of the venue of the celebrations... the event-planning team of elementary-schoolers all took turns in setting up the space and they spent the whole preceding week cleaning up and it certainly showed: the room is neat and spruced up now. They had also decorated the venue with balloons and streamers to create a fun party atmosphere.

On the eve of the big day, the kids went about issuing personal invitations to all teachers, staff, and volunteers to join them in the celebrations that they had so artfully planned.

The event began with the Master of Ceremonies, Prem (6th grade) announcing that they will present an entertainment program for about half an hour.



The kids put on quite a show! They performed a comedy skit, an awe-inspiring yoga demonstration, and finally *silambattam*! Silambattam is a martial-arts-based Tamil folk dance traditionally performed with a bamboo staff, but our kids improvised with available household material :-)) The evening ended with all the kids getting together to sing Vande Maataram and after presenting awesome hand made greeting cards to the teachers, feasting on some seriously tasty cake! It was an enjoyable and stirring evening for each of us. Thanks to our wonderful children for making it a Teacher’s Day to remember!

Gadgets and Technology

Nisha Pillai at Pudiyador

For 7 weeks this past summer, I had the chance to spend my days interacting with the wonderful and enthusiastic children of Pudiyador.

The overall purpose of my visit was to get the centers better oriented with technology. Some of the younger children had their first experience using a mouse and keyboard, and we went over things like Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Those who already knew a thing or two about computers also got the chance to use the internet. I also taught basic computer skills to the center facilitators as well. In addition, spoken English sessions were held in the mornings, where we practiced some grammar skills, learned to use dictionaries, and played some interactive word games.

Language was a huge obstacle, as I am not very familiar with Tamil and many children are not very familiar with English. The

facilitators helped a lot with translation. In the end, though, the barrier turned into an opportunity to learn for all. Whenever I would explain something, the older children who had an easier time understanding my English would first practice the skill, and then eagerly help the younger ones do the same. A few took a special interest in teaching me some Tamil words, and would later quiz me by pointing to different things and asking, "What's this?" They were very impressed whenever I got one right.

I would have to say the most fun part, though, was the photography project. Thanks to a grant from the University of Michigan, several digital cameras were purchased for the centers. Everyone got very excited around the cameras and each child had the opportunity to take one home, where he or she could capture the different aspects of family life. While working with the cameras, they learned related skills like how to upload photos, work with folders, copy and paste, use pen drives, and use software to edit their photos and create stories.

The goal was for the children to use these photos to tell others about themselves. The end result was a Pudiyador scrapbook, where each child contributed his or her own page of photos with captions.

The centers now have some new equipment that will hopefully be used to allow the children to express their creativity. It is also my hope that they have learned some skills that have expanded their possibilities and



will help them become successful in their future endeavors. I know for certain that the knowledge and experience I have taken from my stay at the Pudiyador centers are invaluable and I will never forget my time there.

Nisha Pillai is an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan. She is pursuing a degree in Computer Science.



Third Quarter Highlights

JULY



New 'play-way' academic curriculum rolled out



Child-centric e-learning sessions

Gadgets and Technology workshop



Sitar and Tabla lessons re-started



AUGUST

Urapakkam operations closed temporarily

Independence Day celebrations



Individualized parent meetings



Lesson planning with local public schools



Parents begin teaching in Pudiyador

Henna workshop for kids and mothers

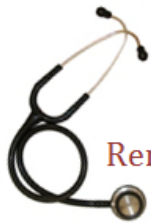


Home-made edible clay modeling



SEPTEMBER

Renewed weekly community health check-up



Teacher training for 'play-way' curriculum – Phase II



Teachers day celebrations!



Kids attend first classical music concert



Folk dance and theater workshops



OCTOBER



Meet JSM!

What if a non-profit organization adopted a “corporate” management style to achieve its goals? Our first Chief Operating Officer (COO) helped us do just that.

"A systematic approach to social work need not alter the organic nature of running a community-based child-centric organization. While it sounds really simple, JSM actually showed us how it's done" says Swapnaa, a member of the Pudiador Core team.

Mr. J. Sethumadhavan, or JSM as he is affectionately known, is a former professor and retired management consultant and at 66, is one of Pudiador's elder family members. As Pudiador's COO, he revamped our organizational structure, improved staff reporting, and established a transparent and effective financial process to track our spending.

He was not just a ‘manager’ though... his love of science and academic background resulted in many well-organized and exciting field trips for our kids. His genuine interactions with the kids endeared him to the parents. “I have seen him go to a center, play a game of Pictionary, just chat up with kids and put them completely at ease... thereby getting to know how the center was run without ever having to rely on staff reports” says Manickam.

In August, JSM retired from the COO duties to focus on family commitments. Saranya Rajendar is our new Program Manager who will be spearheading Pudiador's efforts. JSM will always be part of the Pudiador family and we wish him well in his other endeavors. A few parting words from JSM...

Why did you join Pudiador?

To contribute in the transformation of an underprivileged child to an ‘empowered child’ in a cost effective way without losing the personal touch.

Your most memorable experience with Pudiador?

I have been enthralled by the sheer expanse of creativity of our kids. The joy of discovering their artistic talents... be it a piece of origami artwork or their murals all over our center walls, it is simply unparalleled. God knows what drives their self-motivation levels. If only we adults cared enough to understand their secret!

One thing you would change about Pudiador?

Pudiador can help alter the attitude of its staff towards self empowerment. We need to enhance our staff training and provide more opportunities and avenues for them to grow.



Your vision for Pudiador?

I hope that it develops into a highly effective learning centre that will bring out the best in each child.

Anything else you want to share with our readers?

Pudiador is a great teacher for the teachers too!

Dr. Edel Devanesan, a volunteer at Pudiador, sums up JSM's impact: “He's got a child-like heart that's open to many new ideas, while still being grounded in the core values of Pudiador. Seriously, how does he manage that? He listens. Not just hears what you have to say ... he actually listens. One of the nicest people I've met”.

Thanks for everything... we will miss you, JSM!



How can you help?

As you were getting acquainted with the various Pudiador activities and our progress this quarter, have you been wondering what *you* can do to help? If so, you are at the right spot and we are very excited to have you on board. You can get more involved with Pudiador and our activities in a variety of ways by volunteering your time or by donating money and resources.



If you live in or are visiting the Chennai-area, we would love it if you can volunteer your time with our children. You can help them with their school work, coordinate and/or participate in a field trip or hold one or more sports, art, cultural or individual development sessions. Your interactions can be regular daily, weekly or monthly events (like providing academic help, teaching them spoken English or taking them on field trips) or you can schedule stand-alone events depending on your availability. Our volunteers typically come up with fantastic ideas to enrich the children's lives through fun and educational activities. You are also more than welcome if you would like to interact with the parents and share your knowledge and/or experiences with them.



If you are unable to make a time commitment and instead you are looking for other avenues to be engaged with Pudiador's efforts, we welcome your donations. You can make a one-time donation or pledge a fixed amount every month. We are set up on [Paypal](#) and we also accept all other forms of donation -

cash, cheque, cashier's cheque, etc. Pudiador is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations are tax-exempt.



One way to easily multiply your monetary contributions to Pudiador -or any other charitable organization that you support, for that matter- is to contact your HR department to see if your place of employment sponsors a corporate matching grants program. If your company has such a program, all you would have to do is, fill out the appropriate form and forward it on to us along with your contribution. We will then fill out our details and other requested information and send the form back to your HR. This is a simple, yet effective way to augment and even double your donations and we thank you for looking into it.

At Pudiador, we are completely driven and sustained by our volunteers and donors. Without your commitment of time, money and other resources, our activities, our goals and even our organization, will be but a dream. We sincerely thank you for all your support and generosity.

Thank you for helping!

We are extremely grateful to the following organizations and individuals:

Ann Arbor Ultimate (www.a2ultimate.org): for providing 10 discs and cones for our kids

Chennai Ultimate Frisbee (www.chennaiultimatefrisbee.com): for providing contacts and networking to get our kids started with Ultimate

Blitz Ultimate Janani Rangarajan and her awesome "pasanga" from KRMMC for inspiring our kids to play and organizing teaching workshops. We hope that they will be great role models for our kids!

If you are looking for specific needs you would like to help with, we are planning to:

Extend regular medical services at centers.

We need medical professionals to volunteer their time, services and supplies to our children. We can use your help whether you are able to make a regular or single time or resource commitment.

Enable our children to hone musical abilities.

There is a need for **2 Veenas, 2 Sitar, 2 Guitars and 2 Tablas** to help with our music classes and for the kids to practice.

Revamp computers that are over 8 years old and are riddled with hardware issues. Please think of us if you are looking to replace your older laptops or have the resources to donate new ones.

Expand our Audio/Video library.

We are always on the lookout for good audio/video materials for example, National Geographic/Discovery/History Channel features on DVD/Video CD to supplement the children's educational and extra-curricular needs

Increase our collection of educational kits.

We are looking for new or used educational aids that would foster the imagination of our children— anything from abacus to microscopes, word games to complex science kits..

If you are able to help out in any of the ways detailed above, please contact us at:

pudiador-newsletter@googlegroups.com

