

Newsletter

Auroville Village Action Group

A summer of learning, sharing and spreading joy



AVAG's Summer Camp is a five-week initiative for students from the bio-region, and consists of supplementary education programs and a series of activities and exposure visits for overall development. This year 50 boys and girls participated in the program.

Highlights of the 2019 Summer Camp

- Exposure visits to Auroville and Pondicherry: Angela who helped with these visits says: "For me, this was a very beautiful experience. Their curiosity about what was happening around them, openness and excitement in wanting to share their thoughts and feelings brought me a lot of joy."
- Workshops in art, dance and creativity were also offered to the participants. What was appreciated the most was the daily practice of laughter yoga to reduce stress and aggressive behaviour among the students. Says Vijaylakshmi, the mother of Vinodhini, one of the participants: "I feel that my daughter is now able to stay calm and control her temper and I am happy I enrolled her in the program by AVAG."
- The closing ceremony was organised by the students themselves. The student's families attended this event. Along with cultural performances, there was a debate on "whether discrimination against children exists or not." Most of the children spoke from their personal experience and it was eye-opening for the parents to hear the true feelings of their children.

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About Us



Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) has been working in the region of Auroville since 1983 to promote village development and empowerment, by way of programmes in the areas of Community Development, Economic Development, Capacity Building, and Psychosocial Services, which are executed through an expanding network of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and its Federation, elected and traditional leaders of communities, teachers and sports associations. The emphasis is not on charity or service, but co-development with villagers to cultivate the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to build a better future for all.





Meet our young poet Kiruthica, from Kodur village:

She is a very quiet, but attentive girl who participated in our summer camp this year. During our discussion in knowing each other, when we asked the hobbies of the students many responded "watching television," but Kiruthica spoke about reading books and writing poetry as her hobby. At the closing ceremony of the summer camp, Kiruthica sang a song for which she had composed both the music and the lyrics. The words of the song and her sweet and melodious voice moved the audience to tears. Later in the year, Kiruthica was one of the three students who were honoured with the Vishendevi Award, an educational scholarship, instituted by AVAG supporter, Anju Makhija, in 2018. At a Women's Federation meeting in December 2019, Anju Makhija handed the award to Kiruthica and the other scholarship students.

Village Action Diaries

Meet Pénélope Grenot, one of our volunteers from France. She worked as a photographer and social media volunteer at AVAG. She shares her feelings about her experience:

"I have worked in AVAG for more than 6 months. It has been an incredible experience to work here as I got the chance to see the culture of the villages outside of Auroville, and that has made my overall experience in India very interesting.

I had a lot of fun in my role as I was able to attend several events taking place at AVAG or in the village. I was constantly interacting with the women at AVAG who came from neighbouring villages who always had a smile on their faces, while they were fighting with the patriarchal system every day.

I have always aspired to work with women and I am really happy that I got the opportunity to do so here. It is a beautiful organization and there is a lot of scope for the women. Like the Kabaddi game- it is really incredible that the women can get a chance to play a sport which has always been for men. They are having fun while they get trained and it's interesting to see the way they carry themselves in their uniforms- which are shorts- something they have never worn before! This is a very unique program in a place like India and I think it can only be offered by an organisation like AVAG."



Empowering women on Civil Rights



Due to political upheavals in the state, local village-level Panchayat elections have not happened since 2016, but it is due to happen this year for the most part of Tamil Nadu and for our working area at the beginning of 2020. AVAG offered 4 two-day workshops to different groups of women and men leaders from the villages in an attempt to politically empower people by creating awareness on Panchayat Raj Act, such as the roles and responsibilities of the elected leaders, sources of funding for such local bodies, the importance of ensuring proper Gram Sabha or village meetings. Ideally, the voters are expected to participate in the meetings and the resolutions passed have to be implemented in the Panchayat. The elected leaders are required to conduct such Gram Sabha meetings for the entire Panchayat minimum four times a year and the Panchayat has to ensure transparency in their decision-making, so AVAG empowers the people to be informed and actively participate at such meetings to hold Panchayat leaders accountable to their decisions. The workshops used participatory learning tools such as games, stories, drama to stimulate real-life situations and make the education meaningful.

In Dec 2019, AVAG invited district-level key facilitators from the State Institute of Rural Development to hold a seminar on different Government schemes, such as housing schemes and welfare schemes for marginalized people, i.e. women, girl students, old or widowed people. 250 women, all representatives from different self-help groups attended this seminar and learned the guidelines to apply for the schemes. The participants, however, on the basis of their experience, pointed out that there was a lot of unfairness in the actual implementation of the schemes. Anbu, AVAG Director once again recommended people to attend the Grama Sabha meetings so that their voices are heard schemes go to the real needy ones.

AVAG thanks all the facilitators from the State Institute of Rural Development, the People's Union of Civil Liberties (Tamil Nadu chapter), and the NGO Thanarchi (meaning self-governance) who have helped in these awareness programs on civil rights and liberties.



SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

AVAG has different initiatives implemented through its network of women, men and leaders to enhance enrolment of students in schools and colleges. AVAG with the financial support of World Dignity Inc. provides grants to students from economically marginalised families.

In 2019, WDI has agreed to support a new batch of 13 students to complete a 3 or 4-year college program. Almost all the students supported, upon graduation found meaningful employment which gives us great joy. To further enhance the skill set of these students, AVAG plans to conduct weekend classes in spoken English, computer literacy, communication, and leadership. We thank WDI for its support, and this year we were delighted that WDI founder Roger O. Parent, could visit us and interact with the leaders of the Women Federation.



The latest buzz from our Social Enterprise



In June, we started a sale for our products at the Anjali at Visitor Center, Auroville. This sale was to promote products handmade by the amazing women at AVAG, our social enterprise. We also partnered with Ethic Attic in Bangalore to increase our market base.

Currently, AVAG products are available at the following stores:

Anjali in Visitors Center, Auroville

CasaBlanca in Pondicherry

Ethic Attic in Bangalore

Dakshinachitra in Chennai

Jaya Emporium in Pondicherry

La Boutique in Auroville

Lively Boutique in Auroville.

Visit us or find our products on our catalogue

ABOUT AVAL

Meet our Team

The team at AVAG is ever evolving with diverse, dynamic and enthusiastic volunteers joining us from different parts of the world.

Last year, Pénélope a French volunteer, Aaron, a Welwarts volunteer from Germany, Konrad from Germany as well and Sveka from India helped us with different initiatives.

Apart from that, there is a long-term volunteer Shrimayee from India who has been with us since August 2018.

Anbu and Moris are co-directed of AVAG, supported in their work by a staff of 15 and an

advisory group of four Aurovilians.

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Our Social Media Presence

We recently redesigned our website: villageaction.in

We are now on the following social media platforms:

Facebook: @AurovilleVillageActionGroup

Instagram: aurovillevillageactiongroup

LinkedIn: Auroville Village Action Group

Follow us to be updated on all our activities!

How can you help?

- 1) Join us as volunteer for a minimum of 3 months: Drop
- a note about your skills and interests via
- email to avagoffice@auroville.org.in
- 2) Donations for our work are greatly appreciated! We
- are under a 12A registered Trust with
- section 80(G) exemption status for Indian donations,
- and we are eligible to receive foreign
- funding via the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act.
- You can donate via:
- CHEQUE
- Write a cheque to us in the name of “Auroville Unity
- Fund” specifying —Auroville Village Action
- Group” and send to:
- AUROVILLE VILLAGE ACTION GROUP
- Irumbai, Auroville - 605 111, Tamil Nadu, India
- DIRECT TRANSFER: You can wire transfer to the
- following account:
- Bank Name: State Bank of India
- Branch Name: Auroville International Township
- Branch Code: 03160
- Beneficiary A/c Name: Auroville Unity Fund
- Beneficiary A/c Number: 10237876508
- SWIFT CODE: SBININBB474

SPREAD THE WORD

Pass this newsletter to others who may enjoy reading about our activities.