



THE AUTISM NEWSLETTER

Centre for Autism and other Disabilities Rehabilitation Research and Education
July-August-September 2021 Volume 5, Issue 1

Director's Message

We are happy to connect with you again through our newsletters. The brief delay was due to the challenges that came with the pandemic.

CADRRE resumed its online academic sessions after the summer break on the 7th of July 2021. We are thankful to all the families who stood with us, through these unsettling times; your belief in us continue to spur us to deliver a continuum of services relevant to our children at CADRRE.

At CADRRE one of the guiding principles is the holistic development of those on the Autism Spectrum across their life-spans, to attain our eventual goal of mainstreaming and independent living as early as possible. In accordance with this vision, we are initiating an 'Employability Training Program for Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum'. The program will impart the skills required to be employable to young adults on the Autism spectrum. This initiative is supported by SBI Cards and the program will be free of cost to the trainees. Our team at CADRRE will actively be working towards recruiting candidates and developing the curriculum for this program and training for our first batch starting November 2021.

I would also like to thank our donor patrons UST Global and SunTec Business Solutions for their continued support even in these turbulent times. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the owners of our Sasthamangalam and PMG centers for the waiver and concessions on rent when we were unable to hold physical classes because of the pandemic.

I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you, whether you are a family member, or professional who we have worked with this year. Everyone had to learn how to adapt and find new ways to interact and we at CADRRE, appreciate your flexibility, kindness, and creativity that helped us shift to the new way of living that the pandemic has brought about.

- G. Vijaya Raghavan,
Hon. Director, CADRRE

CADRRE Onam 2021

Kerala during Onam is marked by happiness, excitement and enjoyment everywhere. Onam commemorates the return of a mythical, righteous king-King Mahabali and brings together communities across the landscape in unified revelry. Onam is also the harvest festival of Kerala, a time of plentitude and joy!

Inspite of the restrictions that come with the pandemic, the CADRRE family met online to celebrate Onam with our children!

It was a delight to watch the children and their parents prepare onam sadya, payasam, and pluck flowers and set up a beautiful pookalam; to see them sing, play and dance to onam songs.

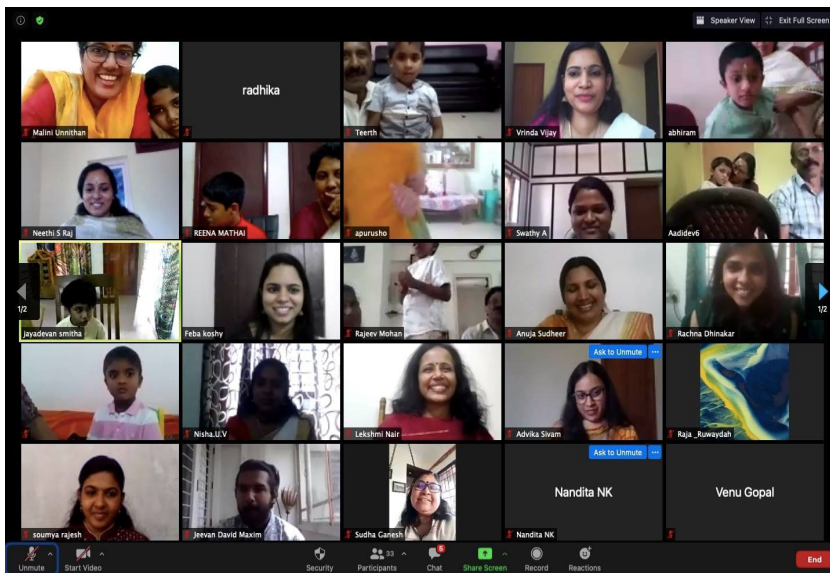
When we shared these videos and watched them together, the screen slowly melted away and we forgot for a while that it is a Zoom onam celebration, and we all sang along. Played tongue twisters. Saw our children in their Onam best attires!

Together, the parents, the CADRRE team and the children, heard the story behind Onam and played puzzles which took us to our childhood days.

Our hearts filled up and we parted hoping fervently that we get to celebrate the next Onam together at CADRRE. We closed for Onam break on the 13th of August 2021 and reopened on the 25th of August 2021.



Top: Ruwi & family, Bottom: Joel & family



Clockwise: Evan, Theerth with his father, Madhav with his sister, Mahadevan, Sreehari, screen grab of zoom onam celebration

CADRRE 4-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

CADRRE entered its fourth year of operations on the 7th of September 2021. Our Director, Mr. G. Vijaya Raghavan, reminisces CADRRE's journey through the years.

"Four years ago, it was on the 7th of September 2017, that we started operations as a Centre.

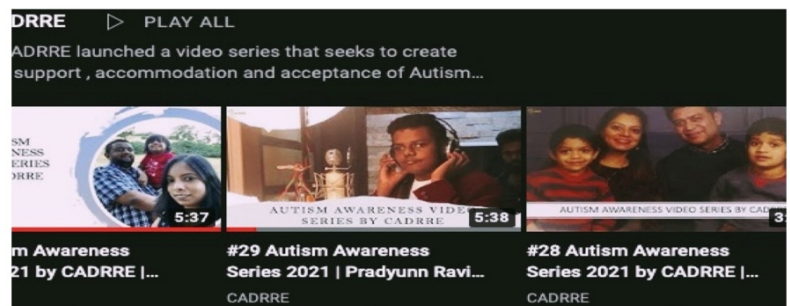
We were registered as a Not-for-Profit organization in December 2016, but a lot of the background work and planning happened before this. We also got a commitment for financial support from SunTec and UST by then.

The PMG center was where we would start from, and the first team of four was all set to travel to the United States for their training.

It has been a fulfilling but tough journey so far and I hope that we are able to continue on an accelerated path forward. I would like to thank all those who were part of this journey, some of you throughout, some of you joined in between and some recently, some left us in between. I am grateful to the parents who entrusted their children to us, and I am happy that they are all appreciative of the efforts put in by our team to support the children even in these difficult times.

It would be difficult to mention the names of everyone who has been part of this journey, but I must mention VSM Nair, Member, CADRRE Advisory Board, who has worked silently and patiently as we embarked on new projects, Malini Unnithan, Principal Coordinator and Lekshmi Nair, Principal Advisor & Member, CADRRE Advisory Board, who have worked very closely with me during this period. Their contribution has been indispensable and crucial for the growth of CADRRE.

We were able to carry out multiple initiatives like bringing out the Autism Awareness Card, [2 International Autism Conferences](#), Skills Training Initiative, 500 plus free Autism screening/assessments, activities directed towards de-stigmatizing Autism through thematic CADRRE calendars which highlight the strength and capabilities of individuals on the Autism spectrum, awareness videos from Autism families, Sign Language video tutorial series on our YouTube channel to help non-verbal children on the spectrum and many more such initiatives which we believe have made a profound positive impact in the lives of individuals on the spectrum and their families. More than 60 students joined us so far and we can say with conviction that their association with CADRRE has helped them immensely and we were able to bring about positive changes to all the families. We hope we continue to make a meaningful difference in many more lives by helping and supporting individuals on the spectrum thereby inspiring them to reach their potential.



Clockwise: Panel discussion IAC 2018, CADRRE calendar 2019, CADRRE team holding Autism Awareness cards, CADRRE Autism Awareness Video series on YouTube

Employability Training for Young Adults with Autism

Employment is a very crucial social normative exercise that gives financial independence and is key to our social and mental well-being. It is empowering to every individual and more so for individuals who are differently abled.

The lack of transitional care needs and support services for the youth on the spectrum is a cause of great concern for families. Studies show that most of the individuals on the spectrum are unable to find meaningful employment and the young adult autism population faces significant, additional challenges to employment beyond those faced by many other disability populations. Maintaining employment is also exceptionally difficult for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders because of deficits in soft skills, communication skills and life skills.

To address the issue, CADRRE plans to pilot a free Employability Training program that equips young adults on the Autism spectrum who have finished higher secondary school education with the skills required to be employable. The program will be supported by SBI cards. This comprises of Level 1 training of 4-6 months on Life skills, Communication skills and Social skills training followed by a Level 2 training of 3-6 months on job-specific skills, and Level 3 training of 3-4 months of onsite apprenticeship at a potential employer.

We announced the program in all leading dailies, and we received more than 200 enquires. We shortlisted 33 candidates, detailed multiple assessments are being carried out. Our team is also actively looking for new recruits to join us to form the training team.

Up To Speed

This section gives you the latest updates regarding various interventions, activities/progress shown by our students

Pre- Schoolers

Children from 3-6 years of age

Even as regular online sessions continued with a focus on social skills, communication, academics and occupational therapy along with music and art, new sessions were introduced. A session on sensory integration was introduced which was well appreciated by the parents and was found to be very effective. This was a half-an-hour session where the occupational therapist gave directions on improving the sensory skills of the child. Functional academics session was another new initiative, where the facilitator helped the parent in helping the child develop meal-time manners and use of the words –please, sorry, thank you. A few of them learnt to say, 'thank you' (using AVAZ app /verbally) whenever they received a verbal praise such as 'good job'. There was remarkable progress in their attention and sitting tolerance also. Writing skills which was a main concern for most of the children was also given focus during OT and literacy sessions.

Successful implementation of AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication) was another highlight for the period. A few students were able to give well-thought comments during the sessions using their SGD (speech generating device). Parents also gained an insight into the potential and possibilities of AAC. Almost all the students could express their likes and dislikes using the yes/no button, a few gained proficiency in using signs to greet and express yes/no. Some parents started taking the SGD device when going out with their children and this puts the child in a better place to handle any stress or tension that he/she may face in new surroundings. ***This way parents become role models by adapting to what works best for the child instead of insisting on what is considered as ideal.***

Juniors

Children from 6-10 years of age

Online learning comes with its share of challenges for both students and teachers, but it surely has motivated the teachers to experiment and implement strategies that makes online learning easier.

Parents became confident enablers as online sessions helped parents understand how to work with their children, how much prompting the child requires, what their strengths and weaknesses are. The classes begin with an assembly, yoga and sensory circuits followed by sessions, and parents came to understand the benefits of this regularity and routine. Parents started keeping records of these activities by taking photos and videos which aided them even during holidays or weekends to guide their children for the day's activities.

Most of the students showed progress in certain basic areas of attention such as toileting where they started showing indications in toileting, became independent in bathing. Many children have changed their sleep patterns and voluntarily ended co-sleeping and became accustomed to sleeping on their own.

Children now can use computers in a better way, when they see a Google Meet link, they have learned to click on the link and join a meeting and also to use microphone and camera. The sitting tolerance for the online sessions improved significantly with the help of social stories.

When it comes to children on the spectrum, the right environment and an understanding of their needs and challenges can go a long way in making things easier for them. With online interventions, along with parents, siblings/grandparents were also able to experience/participate and get an idea of how these sessions work and the intent behind these sessions. So, they are now better aware of the child's preferences and needs and can contribute in a better way.

Pre-Teens

Children from 9-12 years of age

The preteen group of students- boys between 9 and 13 years- were all settled after several months of online sessions. Anticipating the school reopening some time in November, the timetable was restructured so that each student attends the online assembly and then gets 3 back-to-back online sessions with a 15-minute break in between. Almost all the students were trained in Avaz during the summer break and have started using their voice generating devices for communication. The parents also got one-on-one sessions from the speech therapist in organizing the folders and learning how to navigate the folders and help their children with using the device. ***By the end of the first term of this academic year, all parents are now confident Avaz users and are guiding their children effortlessly- a couple of students have already reached the advanced stage.*** A different approach which was tried during this time was the use of custom made ppt games in social skills and executive functions sessions. As the students responded well to digital resources, games were done with pictures of individual students in it and words of praise were put in the game to help them respond positively to social praise

Teens

Children from 15-18 years of age

The online sessions for the teen group started focusing on skills training too, along with their other therapy, functional academics and ICT sessions. Initially it was a challenge for the team to plan on how to conduct the skills sessions online. But with a structured plan, it was well received, and the **children were soon working on different skills like decoupage and stitching without any hassles.**

A moment of pride during this season for all at CADRRE was when Ruwaydah (Ruwi) started her Facebook business page called "Thumbi by [Ruwi](#)" and she has been receiving many enquiries and orders for her decoupage products. Ruwi was also the first person to be featured in "[Everyone is good at something](#)" campaign started by the Indian Inclusion Foundation to celebrate 10 years of the inclusion movement. Though stitching was introduced to the teens during the online sessions, it was a sheer surprise to see how well Pooja and Ruwi picked up the skill and they are getting better at it with each lesson.

Another challenge was on how to conduct the Independent Living Skills (ILS) sessions online, but this also worked out successfully when implemented using a structured plan as a group session and it was a joy to see how happy Pooja and Ruwi were to meet each other during these sessions even if it was online. They practiced self-grooming, culinary skills and basic kitchen management in these sessions under the guidance of the therapist. But even as Pooja and Ruwi adapted well to the online sessions, they are even more eager to be back at school!



ruwaydah • raja , kerala

All



"I like doing marbling and watching Ice Age and Barney the Dinosaur"

There is a story hidden behind the pretty decoupage boxes and Thank-you cards on 'Thumbi by Ruwi', the Facebook page of Ruwaydah Raja (17). It is an ongoing story of living with moderate-to-severe autism in which her parents are prominent characters and her mother Sulekha plays a leading role.

A screen-grab of the article featured in 'Everyone is Good at Something' campaign by India Inclusion Summit
You can read the full article [here](#)

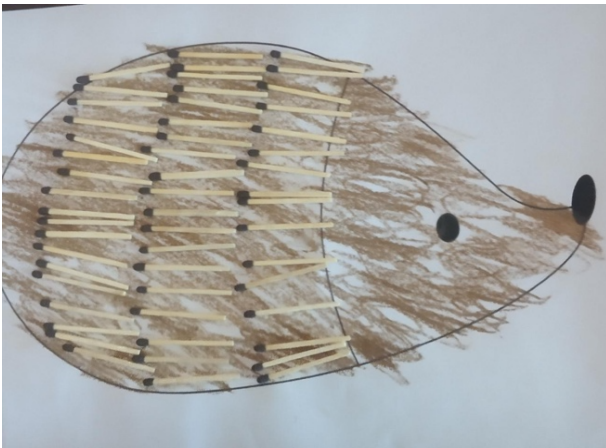


From left: Mobile holders with inspirational quotes crafted by Ruwi, Pooja's Independent Living Skills sessions

We spend so much time teaching autistic individuals how to communicate and interact with others. How much time do we spend teaching others how to communicate and interact with autistic individuals?

Art Corner

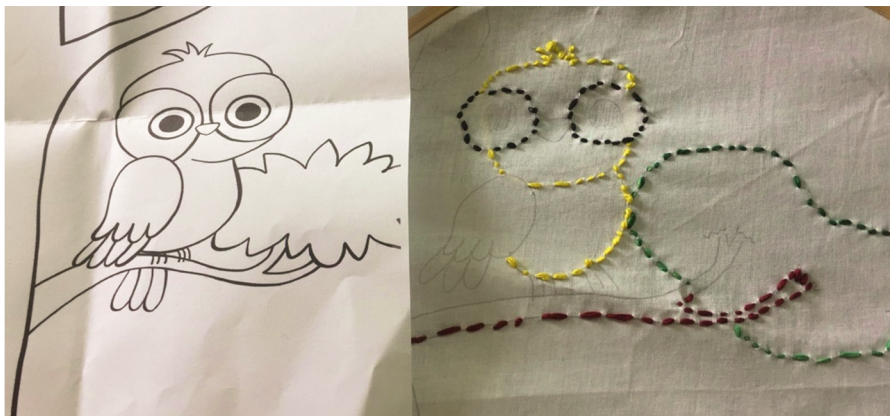
Each artwork is the expression of students from different grades. The children are guided by the teachers to imagine and explore different media through art.



Sreehari H, Junior group



Pooja Venugopal, Teen group



Evan Alex, Pre- Teen group

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