



THE AUTISM NEWSLETTER

Centre for Autism and other Disabilities Rehabilitation, Research & Education

June-September 2023, Volume 7, Issue 1

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

This September 2023, CADRRE celebrates six years of dedicated effort in serving the autism community. It is a significant milestone for us; and a testament to the commitment and hard work by the team at CADRRE and the autism community. I write this with immense gratitude to all of you who have been a part of CADRRE's journey, whether as beneficiaries, team members, donors, employers or organizations that have supported us. Your support and involvement have been the backbone of our organization. We couldn't have come this far without you.

At CADRRE, our mission is to transform the lives of individuals touched by Autism Spectrum Disorder. We do this through advocacy and provision of services in their education, therapy, holistic development and by empowering families, caregivers and professionals within the community.

We continue to make strides in many areas that impact lives, be it early intervention services, or services for school-going children who have challenges in communication and our day-long intervention services for children in the age group of 4-16. We are aware of the crucial need in supporting adults on the autism spectrum as they navigate the transition into adulthood, seeking meaningful employment and independence. The Artism Studio by CADRRE was born out of this very need and I am glad to see our Employability Training Program and Skills Training for young adults with Autism picking up pace. At the Employability Training Program, 24 young adults with Autism have been trained, 2 secured paid internships at EY at Trivandrum, 2 others got paid internships at Westside which is a Tata enterprise and 2 others at Taj Green Cove Resort and Spa Kovalam. On the skills training front, we delivered 5 corporate orders made by the trainees for some incredible organisations who chose to showcase the talents of these autistic individuals.

We will continue to learn and adopt best practices into our curriculum with the interests of the autism community at the forefront. Much remains to be done as we learn more about their needs in lifelong learning, employment, creating inclusive social spaces and to provide them assisted living services to ensure that they have the best support systems in place to lead productive and fulfilling lives.



G Vijaya Raghavan
Hon. Director,
CADRRE

Autism Awareness Session for Allianz Services

CADRRE conducted an Autism Awareness session at Allianz Services Technopark Trivandrum campus on the 27th of June 2023. The session titled “Understanding Autism” discussed about the Autism advantage at the workplace, what to expect when you meet an autistic individual, benefits of hiring neurodiverse talent, how to create accommodations and supportive strategies based on individual needs, what works and what doesn’t work for autistic individuals, about their areas of strength and much more. Attended by 50 plus employees it was a fruitful session followed by a Q & A session that saw an active participation from the attendees.



Music Therapy by Svarakshema

Svarakshema, an organization in Bangalore that works on designing and facilitating music therapy sessions for neurodivergent people, visited CADRRE on the 10th and 11th of July 2023 to assess our students and design music therapy sessions for them.

Music is healing for every soul, and listening to good music can lift your spirits instantly.

Music therapy is regarded as a way of promoting preverbal communication through the improvement of joint attention, motor imitation, and synchronous rhythm in autistic individuals. Music therapy has also been used to enhance some cognitive functions, such as attention or memory.

Sowmya Sanak and Sanak Kumar Atreya, certified music therapists and founders of Svarakshema, spent time with all our children, demonstrating the music therapy session that they designed specifically for children with Autism.

They will be working with Aswathy, Music Therapist at CADRRE, to facilitate the implementation of the sessions. They also conducted a session for our parents impressing upon them the guidelines to be followed at home with respect to music therapy.



Yet Another Trip To *Their Favourite Place* –Lulu Funtura

When we look back to our school days, we may not remember the day we learned about grammar or trigonometry, but we easily recall the fun times we shared with our friends and school trips. We wanted our students to have such memories and planned a day of fun and frolic for them at Funtura, Lulu Mall Trivandrum!

A lot of learning happens outside of classrooms, learning to communicate, to respond, observing people around and understanding. Our students tried a lot of rides, overcame their fears and pushed themselves outside of their comfort zones. They enjoyed watching their friends take different rides too. There was also something exciting about the journey to Lulu Mall and back to school, as they rode on a double decker bus, watching the city from above, having an elaborate and wide view, feeling the wind in their hair and enjoying the ride with their friends. We thank the entire team at Funtura Trivandrum for making this a memorable experience for our students and helping them enjoy in the best way possible! You can get a glimpse to the beautiful day we had [here](http://surl.li/mirvc). (<http://surl.li/mirvc>)



Batch 2 ETP Felicitation Program

To celebrate the tenacity and perseverance our trainees of the Employability Training Program have shown in completing their yearlong training course, we organised a special celebration in July.

We are excited and happy to see our trainees get opportunities in India's most trusted organizations. Mukund is interning with Westside, a Tata Enterprise, and one of India's largest and fastest growing chains of retail stores. Abhilash and Adityan are interning at Taj Green Cove Resort & Spa Kovalam, a subsidiary of the India Hotels Company Limited. Aravind cleared the IRDA exam and is going to be an insurance advisor with Aditya Birla Group Insurance, a holding company for the financial services businesses of the Aditya Birla Group. Malavika is working as a teacher assistant to pre-schoolers at CADRRE. Also, our trainees from the previous batch, Rohit and Liya got their internships extended at EY.

People who are neurodivergent frequently have exceptional focus, attention to detail, and original problem-solving abilities. They do not get bored by repetitive tasks and are inclined towards routines; according to studies, their productivity can exceed that of their neurotypical colleagues. Furthermore, neurodiverse employees frequently demonstrate high levels of loyalty and job retention, which supports a steady and dedicated workforce. It is advantageous for both the employees individually and the organization to acknowledge the distinct capabilities and viewpoints of neurodiverse people.

We had a small function at The Artism Studio by CADRRE to celebrate and acknowledge not just our trainees, but also their families who are an integral part of this journey! The parents were excited and happy to hear their child talk about how the program benefitted them and about their work. A parent spoke of how the program gave a strong foothold to his son and irrespective of what opportunities await him, he is in a better position in terms of being independent.

We cannot thank Westside by Tata Group, Taj Hotels Taj Green Cove Resort & Spa Kovalam, and Aditya Birla Health Insurance, enough for realizing the benefits of a diverse work environment, driving the change and being in the forefront of creating neurodivergent workspaces, and most importantly, for being empathetic employers to our students as they step out into the world.

The Employability Training program at CADRRE equips young adults on the Autism spectrum who have finished higher secondary school education with the skills required to be employable which covers a lot of areas such as social skills, life skills, communication skills, motor skills, computer skills, culinary skills, workplace etiquette and more.

The program is totally free and open to young adults in the age group 18 to 25. The program is run out of CADRRE's Vazhuthacaud centre at TheArtismStudiobyCADRRE



Independence Day Celebrations

We celebrated the 77th Indian Independence Day with a series of exciting activities across our three centres. Our students came decked out in the colours of our national flag, in saffron, white and green. Highlights included children dressing up as famous freedom fighters Subash Chandra Bose, Gandhiji, Sarojini Naidu, Bhagat Singh.

Books on India's freedom struggle were shown to them to make them understand the theme and idea of Independence Day. The pre-schoolers at the PMG centre and the Teen & Pre-Teen students at the Sasthamangalam centre decorated the centres in Independence day theme with beautiful national flags and pictures of freedom fighters and their famous quotes. At the Artism Studio, the trainees performed a dance to a patriotic song, one of the trainees dressed up as Gandhiji and gave a speech on the journey of Indian Independence. Our students not only had a wonderful time but also gained a deeper appreciation of our shared national identity.

Through a variety of fun and engaging class activities, they learnt more about India's journey to independence and how we need to remain united and look out for one another!



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

Pre - Schoolers

Transitioning back to school was exciting for our pre-schoolers. This term, we had six new students which makes it fourteen children for the early intervention program. We had an exciting school reopening day with fun activities. It was a joy to see one of the students being quite independent in self-care activities. The parent-training program which was conducted right before the summer holidays was quite helpful for parents to practice activities at home. This term we had themes for each week and all the activities during the week were based on a multisensory approach related to that theme. The themes were farm animals, fruits and flowers and every subsequent week we repeat the theme so that the children get consistent exposure and learning. This year we introduced uniforms for them and that just added to the beauty and charm of our preschool. Our day begins with assembly, yoga, sensory circuit and then we move on to different classroom sessions. In between sessions we have movement breaks at the park, hideaway at the blue room and sometimes a walk on the sensory pathway or walk-in aviary. We also have music sessions twice a week and art therapy once a week.



At the core of every activity or exercise we devise for our students, our goals are to enhance peer interactions, strengthening play skills, promoting social communication and sharing fun experience with their peers, while working on their individual challenges.

Juniors

We all are aware of the happiness we feel if our day goes according to the plan, we set for ourselves, achieving all big and minor tasks at hand. It helps us to feel in control of the day and things at hand and lets us accomplish more than we anticipated.

When it comes to autistic individuals, routine plays a much more important role as routine can be powerful in reinforcing a feeling of well-being and stability. When that sense of stability and wellness is fulfilled, then it can be easier for them to handle other changes. The visual schedule that we have prepared in every classroom also goes a long way in helping them to adapt to their daily activities and sessions and lets them know what to expect at every step of the way putting them in a calmer position.

Keeping this in mind, a mealtime routine was introduced during lunchtime wherein they are taught to do the entire process independently, first pick their bag, be seated on their seat to have food, and after having their meal they put all the food waste to the compost bin, and then keep their used plates in the washing area. Parents were also instructed to let the child do the same routine at home. Similarly, pack- up time has a similar routine that we had introduced earlier. Through this, the children are now able to identify their personal belongings arrange them in their own bags before getting ready to go home.

These simple routines go a long way in making them self-reliant in terms of achieving their daily activities. It gives them confidence and can act as a positive nudge in trying to be independent in all their daily chores and activities.



Pre- Teens & Teens

The preteen and teen group have a strength of 10 students this academic year. The youngest members of this group, who transitioned from the junior level to preteen this year, have adjusted to their new classes. In their daily schedule, along with the morning assembly and yoga session, the older children of the group have started receiving training in additional physical exercises under the supervision of the occupational therapist. Apart from their regular therapy and academic sessions, they also center their activities around a monthly theme, in which various planned activities take place every other afternoon. The children eagerly anticipate these sessions, and their creations are showcased for all to see. Furthermore, as part of our Independence Day celebration, we hosted an exhibition featuring artworks created by the children with the help of their parents. During this event, one of our preteen students, Vivekanand, personally presented his work at his station and explained the details to visitors. The "Functional Friday" activities continue to serve as opportunities for the children to receive training in essential daily living skills. The teen group focuses on functional academics and skills sessions and attends planned skills sessions every Friday at the Skill Centre in Vazhuthacaud.



The Artism Studio

With 2 more trainees joining the program this academic year, we added a few new skills to our existing set. In addition to candle making, beer bottle upcycling, decoupage work on MDF and culinary skills, we now have handmade soap making, beaded bracelets and handmade paper making to our repertoire. Each of these skills go through a detailed task analysis, breaking it down to simple steps and then training one step at a time. For example, handmade paper starts with tearing used printer paper and scrapbook paper into small pieces and the trainees do only that for a few days before getting into the next step of blending the soaked paper in a mixer. And the skills chosen must fit the criterion that the products are eco-friendly, nontoxic and chemical free like the handmade soaps which is a blend of natural oils and essential oils without any synthetic fragrances or chemicals.



At The Artism Studio, the effort put in by the trainees in creating products comes full circle when the appreciation comes from visitors who get back to us with corporate gift orders. We were glad to do 3 orders in this duration of 4 months- 50 custom made tote bags for KIMS HEALTH with an illustration by one of our previous ETP trainees, 500 mini wishing bottles in potli bags for Taj Green Cove Resort and Spa, Kovalam and personalised mini bottles for the 20th year celebration of Allianz. The trainees actively participated in creating and packing these gifts which gave more purpose to the training process, giving their parents more faith and confidence in their abilities.

The teen group students from the Sasthamangalam centre spend an entire day at The Artism Studio every Friday as part of their transitioning into skills training in a couple of years. It is a carefully planned meet-up where they bring in one ingredient from home, spend time cooking their favourite dishes, attending the skills session at ease in the gazebo with soft music in the background and ending with a tasting session of the dish they have put together.



The Employability Training Program (ETP)

A lot of hard work and grind went into the last three months of the ETP program. To stay relevant in the constantly changing demands of the job market, a new curriculum that included software development and testing was developed. The team looked for career avenues that individually played to the strength of every trainee rather than providing a uniform training module for all.

Mock PSC exams with customized questions were introduced for the trainees who were preparing for exams for government jobs. One of the trainees got selected into the final level of Staff Selection examination, and customised typing tests were provided daily to help him better. One of the trainees who really liked spending time with small children started working as a support teacher at the pre-school level and an orientation was given to help her work with the pre-schoolers in the best way she could.

We collaborated with the best organisations in the industry like UST Global to conduct mock interviews for the trainees who were preparing for job interviews. The trainees also engaged in some functional activities that will immensely help them in a social sphere like booking cabs and movie tickets, watching movie at the theatre, getting used to the sounds and lights and managing their sensory preferences.

To make sure that the schedule was not overwhelming for the trainees, the team ensured that they were also provided with a creative outlet wherein they prepared hand-drawn greeting cards for all students of CADRRE during Onam. They presented a skit, performed a dance number and a group song.



A Glimpse into the **Onam Grandeur** at CADRRE

Onam, a major harvest festival of Kerala celebrated with much fervour and enthusiasm, is not merely a festival but a grand spectacle that showcases the essence of Kerala's rich art, culture, and tradition.

This year's Onam at CADRRE was extravagant when it came to our efforts in making it full of fun and frolic for our students! The celebrations started a week in advance so that the students could enjoy it to the fullest and understand the traditions and idea behind the festival better. For students on the autism spectrum, a lot of unexpected changes in routine can be stressful and hence we had celebrations every day of the week with something to look forward to and relish every day at school.

The students and staff came dressed in zingy colours every day of the week and an activity awaited them, *pulikali* (children dressed up in cute tiger prints), dressing up as *maveli* (the royal king, popular character in Onam mythology), rowing an imaginary boat dressed in traditional *mundu*.

Trainees of the employability program made handwritten cards for all students. They played games, made *payasam* and when it came to the last day, all of them dressed in their traditional best, created a mighty big *pookalam* with flowers brought from every student's home, they posed for group photos, sang songs, there were group performances too.

The staff had a delicious *sadya* followed by fun games, performances, a treasure hunt that turned the centre upside down.

Sharing a small glimpse into our celebrations on the last day : <https://shorturl.at/GPTV7>



One Day Workshop by Department of Social Justice

The one-day workshop organized by Social Justice department, aimed at creating awareness of welfare and loan schemes implemented by the Kerala State Handicapped Persons Welfare Corporation Ltd. was attended by one of our team members.



The workshop delved into the diverse range of loans offered by the National Divyangjan Finance and Development Corporation, aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities. These loan categories encompass self-employment, vehicle acquisition, housing, and educational financing. The knowledge imparted during these sessions has subsequently been shared with the parents of trainees in the Employment Training Program (ETP), offering them insights that could potentially pave the way for the establishment of future business endeavors. Additionally, these sessions also delved into the various schemes introduced by the Kerala Social Security Mission, designed to provide substantial advantages to individuals with autism.

Parent Support Group

A parent support group can be a beautiful platform for parents to listen and to be heard, to make new friends and inspire each other by sharing their experiences. The primary goal of this support group was to provide a safe and non-judgmental platform for parents to exchange knowledge, share information, and freely express their emotions. Two parent support group meetings were held in August and September, and they were well received. In fact, some parents have expressed their desire to continue these meetings as monthly sessions. The initial session focused on building relationships between parents and therapists, as well as fostering connections among the parents themselves. The second session centered on encouraging parents to share the positive changes they have experienced in their roles as caregivers to autistic individuals.

