

VASANTHAM SUMMER CAMP 2023

“Life stories and memorable moments are being made at Summer Camp”

MADURAI SEED is where learning and fun always occur together. Summer Camp is conducted every year during May month as residential, day camps, and sometimes both. As residential camps, and tours during the camp children were taken to Chennai, Kanchipuram, Coorg hills, Tirunelveli Aathur, Kanyakumari, Kerala, Pondicherry, Kodaikanal, Sirumalai, Chinnamanoor, and Kambam to give them rich learning experiences.

Residential camps in CESCO, Sevaiyur CCD, Kambam, Sirumalai, Chennai Nandavanam, and day camps at Karumbalai centres, Karumbalai School, Karumbalai community hall and Gandhi Museum have given strong memories and intense learning contents.

Vasantham Camp 2023

Lots of discussions and changing of plans have occurred in terms of day camp or boarding camp, staying place, budget, camp contents, board exam results, school/college admissions, Chithirai festival, college semester exams. These things kicked the camp to the last weeks of May month.

After Covid, this year's Madurai Seed Vasantham camp was planned as residential for six days from 20.05.2023 to 26.05.2023 at Akkanapuram village, in the nearby district of Madurai. To beat this summer, hill areas are the right choice for camp.



There is a farm (Sathuragiri Vanam) under the foothills of western ghats run by Senthamizh Selvi, a social activist cum organic farmer. She has been given the responsibility of camp director. Exciting tempting *Sathuragiri vanam* welcomed us with its vast and beautiful nature.

Input sessions were planned. Resource persons were booked. Activities were scheduled. Food menu has its rich varieties like fish, chicken, egg, rice, and healthy breakfast varieties like millet upma, millet Pongal, and dinner recipes like chapati, dosa and idly.

Vasantham Camp – First day – 20.05.2023



Children and young people assembled with backpacks to see the big world out there. In the afternoon of 20th, we travelled by private bus and reached Akkanapuram in the evening. The bus ride led us to a feeling of utter joy, and celebration. The distant route has given us the exotic view of numerous villages, ponds, farms, agriculture lands, view of western ghats, etc. With short tea break in a highway motel the journey continued till the evening. Finally, we reached the place under the dark sky and silent night in the village. Camp director Senthamil Selvi welcomed us with her team.



with biriyani was served for all.

Children and young people liked the place so much. Dinner was ready but we were served cake first. It was the 75th birthday of Senthamil Selvi's mother Mrs. Dhanabakiam. We listened to her life story, greeted her and received her blessings. And we celebrated her birthday along with the very first day of camp. A sumptuous dinner – chicken gravy



Then, formal meeting with children about camp procedures, regulations, accommodation, water and toilet facilities, bed time and wake up time were announced. Three-quarters of children were completely new to the camp. All of them were divided into six teams with Tamil names – Kuthugalam, Kummalam, Aaravaram, Anandam,

Kondattam, and Urchagam synonyms of happiness.

The first day of Vasantham Camp was spent with camp arrangements, travel, team planning, accommodation arrangements, a birthday party and dinner. With lot of excitement for the next day, we went to bed with a big hug from the hills around us.

Vasantham Camp – Second day – 21.05.2023



From waking up to bed time at night, the second day brisked up everyone. Activities like campus cleaning, identity card making, time table preparation, responsibilities chart making went on in the early morning.

Everyone woke up around 5 am, the whole Sathuragiri hills was visible under the sun in the colour of round orange candy. The distant mountains, gardens, trees, vines and cattle, picturesque view of camp building in the middle of farm gave visual treat to the eyes.

After the morning tea, campers started to remove plastic and garbage from the premises. After shower, we had breakfast and assembled in the main hall for morning input sessions. Responsibilities and chores like cleaning, tea providing, food distribution, arrangement of drinking water, event management, stationary incharge were given to teams.



Mr. Pamayan, an organic farmer, writer, agricultural activist facilitated the input session. He discussed with children about seasons, organic farming, and importance of agriculture. He elaborated in western seasons and Tamil specific seasons. He explained about the Tamil concept of five landscapes in the ecological view. He also conducted some

games to cheer up the kids.



After lunch break, Our camp director Senthamil Selvi trained children some songs related to village life. With music and claps, the singing session ended with thanks note to the camp director. As three-quarters were new to Vasantham camp, we recalled all our old camp songs and gave it a life.

After two sessions, our volunteers Srinath, Bhuvaneswarn, and Mahalakshmi, physical education trainers gave coaching to all children to play volleyball, shuttle, and team sports.

Sunset. It was time to walk along the aisle of vines, fields, pond, cotton field, and banana plantation. Volunteer from Sathuragiri , Mr. Nava Jeevan led us for the walk. It refreshed our mind, and body with cool breeze and peaceful surrounding. Then we returned to campsite as it was getting dark.



Vasantham Camp – Third day – 22.05.2023

Getting up early in the morning has become a habit. After morning tea time, we all settled down in a circle for brainstorming activities. Rapid fire rounds of Proverbs and sayings, Thought for the day made everyone energetic and active to get into rest of the day.

Routine morning campus cleaning, breakfast and walk were followed by a planning meet. Usually, during Vasantham camp, a day is allotted for tour to nearby places. Likewise, we prepared for a fun outing that day. A mini-water park in a nearby village which is 20 kms away from the campsite was chosen and children were taken in two mini vans.





“Award City” mini water park gave children a greater sensation of reality of falling into water from top of a slide, standing under waterfall from top of mountains, fun ride under not so deep swimming pool. Children and young people enjoyed the whole four hours in the water escaping from the scorching summer. Snacks, drinking water and brunch was

provided in between water plays. Despite being a small water park area, it was nice to see children ran around, jump into water from slides, dancing in mini waterfall and swimming.

Then, we returned to the campsite and had fish fry and fish gravy for lunch. Water sports and tasty food made us nap for some time.



After evening tea time, there was a folk-dance training. Few of the children and young people have already learned “Oyilattam” – Dance of Beauty, from previous camps. Volunteers Satish, Jeeva, Bhavani, and Mahalakshmi pitched into teaching Oyilattam for children. In two groups, they practiced many difficult steps within two hours in the evening. Till dinner

time, camp ground echoed dance steps and beats.

Dinner was provided to all and after a brief planning meeting for the next day, everyone went to sleep.

Vasantham Camp – fourth day - 23.05.2023



In the morning brainstorming session, campers in circle shared their known and favourite Thirukkural (classic Tamil couplets). It was different and interesting to know the meaning and the reason they had liked it.



A morning walk like other days but it was planned to explore the garden and lands around. Nava Jeevan, a volunteer from Sathuragiri showed us the garden and introduced us different trees, plants and herbs. He also explained about drip irrigation and solar panels. It was refreshing for the body and great learning for the mind to know about the organic farm land surrounded by guava, mango, jasmine, coconut, castor, chilli, sesame, wild flowers, wild plants, green vegetables, various grasses, expensive sandalwood and teak trees. On their way children tasted fresh mangoes and guavas from the trees. Children collected leaves, vegetable and took pictures of some rare plants and collected information about it from Nava Jeevan. For them, it was the best field experience rather finding information from textbooks and internet.



A day trip was scheduled for the day after a long walk. Lunch and snacks with backpacks were taken. Passing through villages, ponds, and lakes we approached a mountain. Our carts landed in a small stream. Wow! What a scenery! No words then. Only wow! Wow!! That we heard from our Seed campers.

A temple located narrated us different stories and festivals the locals celebrate. Before that, we went up and reached the house and garden of Sathuragiri camp volunteer Ms. Palaniyammal's cousin. Various plantations like mango, jackfruit, banana and papaya all along the way made us mouth-watering. Trees are more in number compared to the number of people and it surprised our children.



Then, we went to a check-dam amidst the forest, overflowed with water. It was not just a bath; it was a chilling and daring bath which gave us an unforgettable experience. Young people dived into it, children tried diving with support of volunteers and the not so deep stream held us to enjoy the beautiful view around us like we were daughters and sons of

mother nature. We spent there for four hours and came down the hills to have lunch.

Thalimalayan temple, a peaceful place to get oneself lost in prayer or conversation to God. We thanked and honoured Palaniammal for showing us the stream and temple.



In the evening, we returned to the campsite Sathuragiri. Tea and snacks provided for all to stay active for the “Cultural Night”. There are six teams, each team has to present four shows and finally there were 24 shows to be staged for the Cultural Night. It was the last night, so we arranged “Camp Fire”. We sat around the campfire and shared favourite camp moments, happy times, teasing, jokes, and cooked up ghost stories. The performances began on stage. Teams showcased their talents in dance, songs, poems and storytelling.

It was the right time to thank and honour everyone behind this successful residential camp of Madurai Seed. Senthamil Selvi, Dhanabakyam amma, Palaniammal, Muthumari, Navjeevan, and chefs who made delicious food were called upon the stage and honoured by our Volunteers.

It was the last night in the campsite and we would sure miss the place. We sat talking for hours till midnight as we could not sleep thinking about missing the place that we spent on for five days.

Vasantham Camp – Fifth day – 24.05.2023



The last day at the campsite and we got ready with our belongings.

To honour the Camp director and her team, volunteers and team leaders started making crowns, garlands and bouquets with jasmine, wild and colourful flowers and leaves. Team leaders honoured the camp directors and everyone who made our accommodation and trips safe and cheerful. We thanked them with claps and few words about the pleasant camp experiences. We said a big thanks to the team and left by bus with wonderful lush green memories. Madurai under hot sun reminded us how much we missed the camp place, Sathuragiri.



The residential camp was over but not the whole camp. To end the fifth day well, all children and young people came to Vandugal Arangam in the evening. They planned for the valedictory day and presentations about the camp.

Vasantham Camp – Sixth day – 25.05.2023



At 10 am, everyone who attended the residential camp gathered at Vandugal Arangam for the valedictory day. Teams were given topics about the camp to give presentations. They were asked to present using colourful drawings, cartoons, comic strips, and collage. They came up very creative presentations. Everyone in the teams

spoke about what they liked and learned new from the camp. They presented it as songs, stories of chain events, drama and using pictures. Few parents attended the event. Camp photos were screened.

At last, best team from the Camp – Anandam team was selected and they were awarded. Vasantham camp 2023 ended with mutton gravy, fried rice and idly served hot for the dinner.



We say many thanks to our trustees, volunteer team, donors, especially Friends of Madurai Seed (FMS) for giving our children and young people such opportunities to learn, to have fun, and explore new things. Thank you so much.