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| **Dear Friends, Greetings from all of us at Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust, Gudalur. We hope that this letter finds you in good health and spirits.All of us have learnt to live with the pandemic along with its uncertainties too. During this time, a lot of thinking and discussions are happening, especially around what the ‘normal’ is and what it could be for us and for the children. Despite various opinions, what all of us can agree on with is that we cannot continue believing that the way ahead is going to be the way it was in the past. Things have to change and be different for us to build back better.This holds true for children’s education too. We can use this time as an opportunity to rethink the core of our curriculum and pedagogy, instead of following what was in the past. So the big question for all of us working with children is:  Do we, like we always have, continue focusing only on literacy-numeracy information in a race to ‘catch-up’ and ‘plug’ the learning loss amongst children? Or do we acknowledge that children have learnt a lot from their experiences through the pandemic and build on that learning, focussing on their social-emotional-cognitive learning? It is upto us to imagine and create, this time differently though.** |

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| **Navigating the CoVid-19 second wave with focussed efforts on awareness and vaccination****We had a difficult time during the second wave as the spread of the infection was high among the villages here. We quickly swung to action by setting up a Crisis Management Team, along with ACCORD and ASHWINI, working on various relief strategies: health awareness, robust screening and testing, vaccination drives as well as upgrading hospital infrastructure for effective treatment. Instead of asking people to come to the PHC’s, we took healthcare to the people. We also had community members creating and sharing messages in adivasi languages for awareness campaigns. At the core of these approaches was empathy, respect and honest communication -- this continues to make all the difference. Such a coordinated and comprehensive response, along with a partnership with the Government, enabled us to vaccinate more than 95% of all adivasis above 18+ years of age while also ensuring a 99% recovery rate among the people infected.*In the pictures (from left to right): Doctors from ASHWINI conducting screening camps at the village; Vaccination camp being conducted at the village; Two Bettakurumba women sharing their experiences with vaccination for an awareness campaign*** |

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| **Staying connected with the children through the lockdown****Following the restrictions accompanying the second wave, we stopped operating the village classes with children. However, to continue to stay connected with the children and build on our previous engagement, we ran an audio learning program where, by leveraging the IVRS tech platform we sent across stories, riddles, quiz questions and songs, everyday. Through this process, it was also possible for us to engage with parents, asking them for their feedback as well as observations. This initiative came with its own challenges. We realized that irrespective of resources and materials that we make available, children had no mental space to engage meaningfully with these activities on their own. They need a supportive, encouraging space for their growth facilitated by committed adults.With restrictions easing out, we are now planning to re-start the village classes with children. Our approach is to build on what the children have learnt during this time and build on those experiences. Based on this, we are revisiting and strengthening our curriculum and resource materials.** |

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| **Teacher Professional Development: Sharing and building of perspectivesUsually, at the start of every academic year, we would spend time in person revisiting and planning for the curriculum, pedagogy and other aspects. During this lockdown, we began facilitating virtual spaces for teachers to come together, discuss these and also learn more about themes of interest. Based on what the teachers wanted to learn, we organized a series of professional development sessions. These sessions were on topics like origami, mandala art, child psychology, memory and learning, book readings on educational classics and fixed and growth mindset. The objective was for teachers to connect these themes to their practice and strengthen their classroom instruction.  The teachers also chose topics of interest to them and facilitated sessions for other teachers as well.*In the pictures (from left to right): Photo from one of our online sessions; Kamala Mukunda's book which we referred to for the session on Memory and Learning; Mandala Art created by one of our teachers*** |

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| **Strengthening village Learning centres led by community membersThe last few months have seen the slow yet steady establishment of community learning centres against all odds. These spaces, run by facilitators who themselves are from the community, are envisioned to be supportive and encouraging spaces where children engage with their learning in a fun and meaningful way. Currently, there are 6 facilitators working with 101 children across 10 villages. While some of the centers are in full swing, some of them are still finding their feet. However, across all the centres, we are witnessing a steady increase in the enrolment and attendance of the children. This goes to show that the children are interested in what’s happening in these spaces. This is a huge success for the facilitators, mainly. Given the emphasis is on learning by doing in these spaces, we are supporting the community facilitators by sharing video resources on various activities. You can find them** [**here**](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9XrCD8w2nsc9xi5wW9JCQZPHSON8xt0z)**.****When we first started, children used to run away at the sight of us. They thought we were ‘teachers’ coming there to force them to study. But now, because of the relationship we have developed with the children and also because of the activities we do at the centre, the children love coming. This is a huge positive change”says Prasad, community educator from Kottatu village“I like these classes because I do not fear to talk and to share. In school, I will fear my teacher. We will always sit at the back bench in school but here we all talk, do things together.”says Babu, 10 year old from Kadichankolly*In the pictures: A peek into the learning centres. Some children are conducting experiments on air; few others are doing paper folding activities while few others are creating art from leaves they find around them.*** |

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| **A New Beginning: Teacher Facilitator Education ProgramThrough the experiences that we have had with initiating learning and support spaces for children at the community level, we are realizing that having a cadre of young, adivasi facilitators who can work with and in the communities is essential. Apart from working at the community level, we also need sensitive and committed adivasi teachers in the public school system who work towards effecting change from within. It is in this context that we are initiating a Teacher-Facilitator Education Program for adivasi youth enabling them to work on education and with the communities. To begin with, we have enrolled 10 adivasi youth and we plan to begin this training in August 2021. Our hope is to build this into an on-going program for the next few years and engage with more young people from the community.** |

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| **Giving Circles: An opportunity to support VBVT through monthly contributionsOver the last year, we have seen various initiatives of the community take off. The resilience among children, teachers and among others from the community have given us the strength and hope to persevere through the various challenges. Now, we are building these initiatives steadily and for this, we need funding support. Till date, we have had the continued support from people like you and we want to keep this spirit of giving and sharing going on. If you are interested in being part of these monthly giving circles or if you know people who would be interested, please write to us at vbvtgudalur@gmail.com. We can get on a call and build this out together.** |

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| **Your continued support gives us the confidence and encouragement we need. We are grateful to all our donors and supporters, for the belief you place in us and for your generous contribution.Thank you and Take Care.** |

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