

Dhamma School Coordinator's Report

Mrs. Ramani Gunasekara

The year 2016 started well with everything going smoothly and according to plan. The Sil programme in March, the Vesak bhakthi gee and dansela all performed well. The Poson presentation too was greatly admired and appreciated by those who saw it.

In June, the old awasa where three classes were conducted was demolished to make way for the new building, and the Dhamma School has had to work under very trying circumstances. It is to the great credit of the children and teachers that they have been very accommodating and shared spaces in true Buddhist spirit. All these changes, difficulties and events not working out exactly the way we wanted, are a very good reminder of the Buddha's teachings of anicca, dukkha and anatma. It is impermanent, not satisfactory and we have no control over events.

As parents and teachers, we must equip our children with the wisdom and skills to cope with a world that is changing rapidly. Our children will be subject to far more anxiety, fear, stress and disappointment, as well as uncertainty in educational opportunities and in the job market. In short, they will be subject to more dukkha than you, their parents.

Over the last decade in our community, there have been two known suicides: one of a school boy, the death of a young man due to a drug overdose, two murders involving domestic violence and several deaths due to cancer. I personally know three young people who have attempted to take their lives.

While we have been spared so far, natural disasters affect the lives of tens of thousands in Australia itself. With changing ideology in the Western world, we don't know if or when mainstream politics becomes anti – immigrant here in Australia too.

What can we teach our children to help them cope?

The first thing is to believe that karma and vipaka shape and direct our lives – *sabbe satta kammassaka*. And then, teach them that those who live by the Dhamma are protected by the Dhamma: *Dhammo have rakkhati dhammacari*. Sila is our protection and the best "insurance policy".

DS Activities

All our teachers try our best to give our students the opportunity to practise what they've learnt. Learning by itself does not lead to peace and happiness, which is the goal of the Buddha's teaching.

We organise activities to develop their minds, to practise dana, sila and bhavana. We do our best to help them make good karma.

Sadly and very disappointingly, not all parents seem to see it that way.

Only a handful of students participated in the dana for the sil aththo. Less than half came for the sil programmes. Attendance is poor and irregular with social activities and other commitments taking priority.

As you know, the teachers are volunteers. Those teachers with young families make a huge sacrifice of their time and effort but they keep going despite all the disappointment as they love their work and know that this a Dhamma dana. The best "upahara" teachers can receive will be to see regular attendance.

It is not all doom and gloom however! There is much good to be appreciated.

Katina Pinkama 2017

Once every three years, the Dhamma School invites monks to spend the Vas season at the temple - the vas aaradhna - and looks after them for three months. We have already done so twice and it is our turn once more next year.

Groups of five families take charge for a week. One family at a time visits the temple daily and conducts a Buddha Puja. All five families sponsor a bana on Saturday.

Dhamma School Parent-Teacher Committee (DSPTC)

Our greatest support comes from the DSPTC who take care of all administrative matters. This leaves teachers free to concentrate on class work.

Our heartfelt thanks to the 2015-16 DSPTC committee led by Nandika Mirihana as VP Education. It was decided last year that a new committee should be elected after the SLSBS AGM and not at the beginning of the year, and most members served on committee for one and a half years.

Among **many** other things, they did an excellent job in arranging makeshift classrooms along the verandahs with blinds to keep out rain and heaters to keep us warm.

We'll be happy to move to new accommodation before the full blast of the summer sun is on us.

A warm welcome to the new committee led by Lalantha Seneviratne who is continuing the good work. Their first task was to revise the database retaining only names of students who re-enrolled, and with that, have got the Sunday classroom roster running smoothly. The DSPTC/PSS Finger food stall at the SLSBS Food Fair was popular as always with all food items selling out. A Dhamma School website is being planned.

We would also like to add that one of our past pupils, Janitha Kekulawala has become a committee member of the SLSBS.

Improvements and Upgrades

We now have a colour printer in addition to the black and white one. We wanted lessons for the younger students especially be attractive and inviting. Colourful and age appropriate text books are being planned as it is difficult to buy the kind of books we want. We will print them ourselves.

We look forward to new classrooms and vastly improved teaching conditions next year.

Books and teaching materials

We find that getting children to memorise gatha is easiest in the first three years, and the Gatha Potha has been a great asset.

When you see people with dementia and memory loss, you observe how they are finally left with childhood experiences and memories. Our children too will grow old one day and what better legacy than to know pirith and gatha to comfort them in their old age!

Venerable Sobhitha will be getting another impression of the Gatha Poth printed in Sri Lanka in time for next year.

Projects

Our dana project this year has been to make contributions to the Temple Building Fund. We want our children to feel part of it, that they too helped build it, for they are the greatest beneficiaries.

We plan to carry it on to next year as not enough has been collected. The tills feel too light!

DS Staff

Our staff have become an extended family who support and care for each other as teachers as well as in our personal lives. This makes Dhamma School something we all love and enjoy, and look forward to each week.

All teachers are committed Dhamma practitioners and five attended the December retreat at Jhana Grove last year. Two were expectant mothers.

L2 class teacher Malika Fernando went on maternity leave for 4 months and is back with her class. New relief teacher Kumudinee Dalugoda Herath filled in for her.

Dedunu Perera had twins and may not be able to return for a while. Parent Gayathri Jayawardena has started assisting Erandee in L1 and we're hoping she'll continue. With 50 children in the L1 class, the relief teachers will have to become full time teachers next year.

We are delighted to have past student Pinithi Siriwardena, now in Year 11, coming in whenever she can to assist with teaching.

Thank You!

On behalf of the DS Staff, I would like to thank Venerable Sobhitha our patron for his support and guidance and Venerable Visuddhawansa for conducting weekly Buddha Puja.

We especially thank Ven. Wilpita Sudharmalankara who served as abbot before Ven. Sobhitha for conducting two excellent atasil programmes. He spoke in simple Sinhala so that the children could understand him directly. We did some interpreting for those who are not fluent in Sinhala.

The children were very attentive and most interested in what he taught. He in turn praised the DS students and said he could always pick them out at public functions as they were well behaved and could sit quietly.

We look forward to 2017 and with your continued support make the Dhamma School shine even brighter!