

Shanti Ashram has successfully piloted the

Toolkit on ‘Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years’ in India.



This innovative toolkit is designed to nurture children's innate spiritual capacities and create supportive environments that counter the negative impacts of violence on children aged 0 to 8. Comprising seven booklets, the toolkit is tailored for organizations, spiritual leaders, educators, parents, and caregivers engaged in early childhood development.

The pilot implementation was undertaken through a partnership between Shanti Ashram and Arigatou International Geneva. The toolkit itself is an outcome of the four-year collaborative process undertaken by the International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence, convened by Arigatou International. Shanti Ashram is a member of the International Consortium.

Our pilot implementation of work in India:



As part of the collaboration with Arigatou International, Shanti Ashram fulfilled specific functions as the implementation partner in India. This included:

- Appointing independent Points of Contact for project implementation and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
- Contextualizing implementation to meet local cultural needs of the community, ensuring project sustainability
- Coordinating, organizing and delivering various training sessions – for trainers, facilitators, educators, and parents
- Co-defining and leading MEL process, spanning data collection, collation, analysis and reporting; further using learnings to ensure project sustainability and potential scale up
- Hosting Communities of Practice with facilitators and supporting joint advocacy efforts to strengthen implementation and promote importance of spiritual development of children

The dynamic process of piloting the toolkit in India through the Ashram’s 33-year-old Bala Shanti Programme :



The process of this pilot implementation involved multi-stakeholder interactions spanning trainings, observations and reflective diary entries. Below is a brief summary of the individual activities:

- **Training of Trainers:** A workshop was held from August 21st to 25th 2023, in Coimbatore by Shanti Ashram in collaboration with Arigatou International. Participants from 11 organisations were trained on the toolkit’s application.
- **Training of Educators:** In October 2023, nine educators participated in a 9-session training program focused on implementation plans, identifying challenges, and developing strategies to address them.
- **Piloting Activities in Classrooms** The pilot activities were seamlessly integrated into the Montessori curriculum, emphasising child-led learning. The initial activities—*This is Me*, *Diversity Cards*, *Bird Feeders*, and *Meditation spaces* were piloted with necessary materials provided to the classrooms. In March 2024, additional activities—*Tree of Me*, *Seed Pot*, *Free Drawing*, and *Touch & Feel*—were introduced. While challenges such as space constraints and contextualising materials to the local environment were encountered, educators reported positive changes in children’s expressions and behaviors, linking these to the development of spiritual capacities.
- **Sensitising Parents:** Four sessions were conducted for parents and caregivers across Bala Shanti Kendra’s between January and March 2024. These sessions aimed to enhance parental engagement and understanding of the toolkit. Conducting sessions across venues helped reduce logistical barriers and maximise participation.

As we look ahead :



The implementation of the toolkit has been a meaningful step in promoting holistic development and spiritual growth among children enrolled in our Bala Shanti Kendra's. The commitment of our early childhood educators and the enthusiasm of children have ensured the programme's initial success, deep learning, enrichment of the pioneering Bala Shanti Programme's impact. We have also built with careful attention a community of practice of early childhood educators.

The Bala Shanti Programme, led by Ms. Deepalakshmi, supported by international trainers Ms. Pavithra, Mr. G. Vijayaraghavan, Ms. Tamilvani, our MEL focal point Ms. Yashashvini, our field mentor's Ms. Jeeva & Ms. Eswari & our team of early childhood educators stand committed to take forward the integrated implementation of the Toolkit on 'Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years' in India.

*At Shanti Ashram Mahatma Gandhi's word provides the inspirational framework for our educational outreach amongst vulnerable children :
Education for Life, Education through Life, Education throughout life*