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Heading to school every first Sunday

Old students of Thiru.Vi.Ka. Higher Secondary School in Shenoy Nagar follow an unshakeable routine

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Every first Sunday, a small group of 20-30 people gather at the campus of Thiru.Vi.Ka. Higher Secondary School in Shenoy Nagar around 10.30 a.m. They have no fixed agenda. They just shoot the breeze about the good old school days, new ideas to support the school and ways to connect with old classmates. Sometimes new members that join the group are introduced.

They are members of the Thiru-Vi-Ka Higher Secondary School (Chennai) Alumni.

When many educational institutions plan grand alumni meets on national holidays such as Republic Day, Independence Day and May Day, this group makes it a point to meet every first Sunday of the month at a fixed venue and time. The website <https://www.thiruvikaalumni.in> has this mentioned



At the general body meeting held on August 15, 2024. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

clearly with a contact number of an alumnus so that any old student could get connected.

"A majority of the members in the alumni group are senior citizens, so this becomes another forum to meet and do something for the benefit of the school," says S. Adhiappan, former president of the alumni association and retired headmaster of Motilal Fomra Sanatana Dharma Higher Secondary School.

He says even during the pan-

demical the meetings of the executive committee members of the association happen. "We currently have more than 200 life members across batches, from 1965 onwards," says Adhiappan.

Established in 1955, Thiru.Vi.Ka. Higher Secondary School caters to the underprivileged section of society and the alumni has been contributing to the school in many ways.

To name a few, the Chemistry lab is being renovated with the

funds of the alumni, and before the Board examinations begin, old students take up classes for students. Many students have found mentors in the alumni. The monthly meet-ups serve as a platform to give out financial help to the children of the school. At the September 2024 executive committee meeting, parents of two students were invited to hand out a scholarship amount.

The school management is grateful to the contribution of the old students that they have made it

a policy that an alumnus hoists the National flag on Republic Day and Independence Day. On January 26, the reunion meet, which is being held after three years, is expected to see close to 300 students come together at the school premises.

"This meetup is happening after three years and it also happens to be the 50th year of the 1972 batch, so we would have people outside Chennai also making it," says Adhiappan. For details, visit [thiruvikaalumni.in](https://www.thiruvikaalumni.in).

Driving on Noombal Road is a nightmare



Noombal Road in Velappanchavadi on January 23. PHOTOS: VELANKANNI RAJ B



It is a month since the rains stopped and the weather is dry. However, Noombal Road at Velappanchavadi in Thiruverkaadu has stagnant water lodged in deep and huge potholes.

Regulars complain of motorcyclists falling and sustaining injuries.

"I have fallen thrice from my motorcycle during the rainy season last month. Because the potholes are not visible. During night, it is riskier as the street lights are inadequate," says a passer-by.

It is an interior road linking the Iyyapanthangal stretch of Mount-Poonamallee High Road and Thiru-

verkaadu on Poonamallee High Road. Residents of Iyyapanthangal also use this road to go to Vanagar. But it is in a deplorable state.

"This road which comes under the purview of Thiruverkaadu Municipality is in this condition for the past four years. The road has many companies and godowns; many container lorries frequent this road. Hence, this road cannot be laid the way other interior lanes are. It should be fit enough to take heavy vehicles," says P. Senthil Kumar, a resident of Iyyapanthangal. Open manholes and cables also add to the risk.

Text by L. Kanthimathi

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‘Recently relaid road
battered again’



A stretch of Madhvaram High Road, called Lakshmi Amman Kovil Street, was relaid less than a year ago. However, the road was dug up and closed recently. Residents and regular users are upset that the dug-up section was not properly relaid, but just closed. The stretch is uneven, especially near the margins.

‘‘It must be six months since Greater Chennai Corporation relaid this road. But around 20 days ago, Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board dug up the road again. This shows there is no coordination among the government departments. This is a criminal waste of taxpayers’ money,’’ says Raghukumar Choodamani, a resident.



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A kit for green businesses to stay evergreen

Small sustainable businesses might espouse a lofty philosophy, but that does not insulate them against the rough edges of the market, one largely driven by hyper consumerism and a throwaway culture. Here is a survival kit based on the experiences of a few green businesses in Chennai

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Sustainable businesses, no matter how small, are conscripted into climate action by default. Their contribution – through sustainable production processes and products that serve as eco-friendly alternatives – does chip away at the climate problem. While engaged in this larger battle, they are waging another at a personal level, a fight for survival. They need to stay afloat in a world that is largely at loggerheads with their ethos. As they slow down the process of production to be conscious in their choices of material, value craftsmanship and traditional artisans setting them high above the assembly line, and keep on eye on the waste being generated in the production process to make sure it is ploughed back into use and avoids the landfill, the larger world with its values of hyper consumption and fast fashion seem to pass them by. So, if you are a business that is small and green, how can you surmount the odds that are stacked up against you? How do you hold on to your green principles and still sustain your sustainable business? Here are pointers on how to do this, based on the experiences of a few small sustainable businesses in Chennai. Here are four principles that can shore up a small sustainable business.--

AI GENERATED
IMAGE:
M ARIVARASU

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Obviously, what applies in the larger business world, applies in the world of small green businesses too. Probably more so here.

Thendral Manimozhi, founder of Kamarkattu Ecostore, a Velachery-based micro enterprise that makes sustainable alternative skincare and homeware products, ensures she walks the brand's customers through its workaday realities through Insta reels, quickly crafted and free of frills. In this manner, the brand introduces its customers – even potential customers – to the invisible value that goes into the products through a stringently followed sustainability-driven production process. Over time, in her journey running Boutique Bougainvillea, Sherin realised that working value into her textiles would not suffice; she needed to speak value into them as well. She believes the road to sustaining a brand is paved with education and engagement. She extends an invitation to the boutique's customers to be participants in her brand's story. Sherin's boutique doubles as a "classroom", where customers are introduced to the intricacies of the weaving techniques in use and how the weft of sustainability is drawn through the process.

The customers also get to learn about the artisans behind each piece. "When people step into Boutique Bougainvillea, they step into a story. And once they know that story, it changes the way they see value," says Sherin, adding that her loyal client base is not drawn by the lowest price but by the highest intention. "The people who come to us are looking for something more. They want to feel good about their choices. It is about making a connection – once that bond is formed, it is hard to break."

LARGER COMMUNITY

A cause inevitably creates a community; birds of the same feather flocking together and swearing allegiance to the cause. Where sustainability is the cause, micro businesses espousing it should foster the community built around it. Small green businesses need to rally round one another. Through Boutique Bougainvillea, Sherin drives an initiative called The Handmade Story. It is a special event she holds every year to support smaller women-run sustainable businesses. "We offer our space for free," Sherin explains, "and we all pitch in for the marketing, so everyone benefits." The idea is simple: small businesses can come together, show off their work, and help one another grow. It is a perfect example of community support in action, all the while keeping sustainability at the core. Sherin also organises something called Kids Craft Carnival. "It is a fun event where we pick a few kids interested in crafts, mentor them for a month, and then help them showcase their products at an exhibition," she says. For Sherin, the objective is two-fold. It nurtures creativity in the next generation, and also swells the ranks of the green community.

RESIDENTS' CONNECT

Increasingly, residents' groups are pushing themselves to the front lines of the circular economy. Sustainable businesses can tap into the reach enjoyed by such associations. Ar. Sherin Joseph of Velachery-based Boutique Bougainvillea (which promotes slow fashion, valuing artisanal wisdom and selling handcrafted clothing) keeps a perennially active communication line with groups such as ROKA. Now, in Chennai, Residents of Kastubanagar Association (ROKA) is an exemplar of an association that has transcended the intrinsic hyperlocality of its green initiatives to create impact far and wide.. ROKA's dry waste drives (its latest scheduled for February 1-2) are usually pan-Chennai events. ROKA has become an inalienable part of Chennai's sustainability scene, being a compelling voice, one commanding attention from many other residents' associations in the metro, GCC and enterprises engaged in the circular economy. Through ROKA, Sherin's green circle got wider, particularly when she was introduced by the Adyar-based residents association to On Axis Green Consulting Pvt. Ltd., which has proved fruitful in terms of learning. In addition, Sherin is engaged in influencing residents in her own neighbourhood, Seva Nagar in Velachery to make eco-friendly choices. Sherin has taken steps to reduce waste in her local community, and as part of that, as recently as January 12, 2025, Boutique Bougainvillea hosted a composting workshop exclusively for Seva Nagar Welfare Association. "We are a small neighbourhood – about 80 households – and we are working on going zero waste," she says. Sherin launched an e-publication to raise awareness on waste management, helping her community live more sustainably.



This section is about efforts, small and big, that are being taken as part of climate action

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Get the business model right for your small sustainable business – the model that suits your business the best. Mamta Jain of Samposhan (@thesamposhan) seems to be on a mission to promote Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable and efficient use of natural resources and reducing waste). SDG12 pops along to define her, be it her Instagram page or LinkedIn profile. SDG5 too – which is about upholding gender equality and empowering women and girls. Her Adambakkam-based small business Samposhan prides itself on "saving 1615 plus kg of fabric scraps from Chennai's landfills and converting them into products of everyday use and decor." Here is a valuable insight from Mamta.

Sustainable small businesses often ignore a vital step, stakeholder mapping. In Mamta's words, "I first had a direct-to-consumer (B2C) approach in mind for my brand. The idea was to sell upcycled products directly to individual customers. However, after some time, I realised this model would take longer to yield results than anticipated. While there is a growing awareness of sustainability, convincing consumers to choose upcycled products over traditional ones was a slow process. The demand for these products simply was not as strong as I had hoped. This realisation prompted me to pivot my strategy from B2C to a business-to-business (B2B) and a business-to-government (B2G) model. By targeting corporations, businesses and government bodies, I could reach larger audiences and make a greater impact on sustainability. I saw an opportunity to work with businesses that could incorporate sustainable practices into their operations, as well as government bodies that could help implement policies supporting sustainability. Through these partnerships, I hoped to bring my products to a broader market while encouraging larger-scale environmental practices. The switch from B2C to B2B/B2G allowed me to scale the impact of my products and build relationships that could foster more substantial changes in the industry. This strategy was not only about expanding my customer base, but also about contributing to the larger goal of making sustainability a priority in businesses and government sectors."



A brand story

Micro enterprise Kamarkattu Ecostore has harnessed the power of authentic storytelling; its Insta reels might be a bit jagged around the edges but they inspire trust for their simplicity and unvarnished presentation

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Kamarkattu Ecostore is putting its digital foot impressively forward. Swipe through its Instagram page (@kamarkattu.ecostore) to see how. The micro enterprise puts out visual stories that revel not only in its finished products, but also in the mundane processes that bring those creations to a sustainability shelf.

Before anything else, an outline of this Velachery-based enterprise's place under a green sun. It fits the classic mould of a micro business. If you counted its workforce on your fingers, three fingers would remain unfolded: a seven-member, all-women production team. It offers skincare and homeware essentials with the circumflex accent placed firmly on top of sustainable alternatives. It notes it sources toxin-free, natural native ingredients.

Back to its Insta page, check out these posts. Titled "Plastic free & proud", a reel with visuals of orders being tucked into eco-friendly packaging presents this line: "Every time we get your orders ready, we smile with pride on how much plastic we avoided." And in a series of posts, it wove a visual story around the Yule season in December 2024, "embossing" recognisably Christmas motifs in its sustainable "soaplets (as it calls its small-sized soaps). So, there sat these eco-friendly soaps shaped like Santa, a Christmas tree and a train. This Insta story titled "Soapy's Christmas Story" was accompanied by catchy Yule music. A note that went with it read: "Our girls got so excited with all these cute Christmas soaps and made a little story out of it... we will post the

story one pic every day". And they went on to do just that in the days that followed, creating two characters Bubbles and Soapy made out of their soaplets who would take the narrative forward.

Thendral Manimozhi, founder and prime mover behind Kamarkattu Ecostore laughs at the recent memory: the idea for "Soapy's Christmas Story" came from someone interning with us, she reveals. The reels carry an endearingly personal touch which actually enables the viewer to gloss over the raggedness around the edges that they carry. The reels seem to have been created off the cuff with the staff themselves featuring in them with hurriedly readied scripts. But it is difficult to question their effectiveness, their dilettante quality being their strength as it inspires trust. This micro business' strong digital moorings makes sense when you check its date of origin. It was born in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. A civil engineer with 10 years of experience in sales and marketing, Thendral cranked it following an a-ha moment. It was a moment of truth one that led her to question the effects of using regular toothpaste and soaps. Within the framework of that questioning, she discovered the motivation to create toxin-free products, promote conscious consumerism and also make it an affordable

proposition. The brand set off on its business journey at a leisurely trot, restricting itself to a few products such as bath powder, virgin coconut oils, natural kajal and shampoo bars – the pandemic was looming large after all – and has expanded to deal in around 200 products now. Its product line would have expanded hugely, but in its core, it remains unchanged. Sustainability drives the business, with all the processes, ranging from sourcing to shipping being completely plastic-free. The packaging uses black and white paper, along with reusable or compostable cartons and newspapers as fillers. Even the packaging tape is plastic-free. Thendral underlines the fact that the brand avoids flashy packaging, opting for simple designs, which sometimes affects customer appeal but aligns with its vision of waste-free living.

The micro enterprise does not operate from a showroom, and is essentially a mail-order business and geography is out of the equation. Kamarkattu's production team consists of eight women with a five to six hour daily work schedule to enable them to attend to personal responsibilities without any great difficulty.

Popular products by the brand include shampoo bars, dishwash bars, "takeout dishwash powder", laundry powder and a face scrub made with 30 herbs and flowers in powder form. The brand also resells coir, neem and bamboo products from a cooperative society in Kanyakumari.

Thendral notes that they educate customers on sustainability by continuously reiterating the basics. She emphasises the brand's focus on long-lasting products, holding up as illustration a shaving bar used by a customer for over 1.5 years. The name "Kamarkattu" reflects this philosophy, inspired by the lingering sweetness of the candy and the concept of "naked" products, free of toxins and preservatives. Thendral observes that small sustainable brands often close down due to consumer scrutiny over cost and authenticity, while large brands engaging in greenwashing face less questioning. Despite the challenges, Kamarkattu continues to promote its values of sustainability and conscious consumerism, adds Thendral.



A lighter moment at Kamarkattu Ecostore.

Transforming hearts through arts

A winning team from the previous edition; (below) teams from Chennai Public School and NSN Memorial School. Photos: Special Arrangement



LIFFY THOMAS

On February 2, more than 200 children from various schools will attend the awards ceremony of 'Art to Connect 2.0' at Kalakshetra Foundation in Thiruvananthapuram.

The event marks the culmination of an initiative to connect children from mainstream schools with children who have special needs. In the run-up to this event, both have showcased their skills in music, dance, painting and singing.

More than 100 schools and 300 specially-abled peers, referred to as "buddies", across major cities participated in the second edition. Four teams (each comprising an able-bodied child and a buddy) were selected as the national winners of 'Art to Connect 2.0'. Besides, awards will be presented in other categories such as "Harmony and Diversity", "Transformative Connect" and "Inclusive Creativity".

Winning is not the ultimate aim of this initiative started by Nirmala Krishnan, who has worn various hats including as principal of Mahindra World School and Country Head Education for the Jindal Group.

The event meets one of the criteria of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 10.3 of reducing inequalities and offering equal opportunities to all. The collaboration is also aimed at fostering empathy, promoting art and culture and encouraging children to develop an emotional connection with society.

Shruti Malaar, a Class XI student

'Art to Connect' unites children from mainstream schools with children who have special needs in a special bond that is crowned by creative pursuits. In its second edition now, the initiative is bringing more schools on board



of Chennai Public School, took this initiative forward to get nine students to enrol for the event. With the help of two teacher coordinators their task was to figure out how to bond with the buddies and co-create a piece of art together.

Shruti was assigned the role of videographer-cum-editor where she had to shoot the work of teams to get the best out of them.

"I volunteered for this event as I wanted to overcome my fears of interacting with children with special needs and this role got me to experience nine stories," says Shruti. Wielding a Nikon camera, she captured a variety of emotions as her schoolmates engaged with buddies from Apple Valley Special School.

Nehan, for instance, was paired with a student on the spectrum to work on a piece of art. But when the buddy saw other teams dancing he too wanted to dance. Harshini's buddy did not want to communicate in a certain way and she had to mellow down her conversational style to ensure she felt safe.

"I got to converse and cap-

The process

Schools are required to register with Art to Connect and agree with a set of rules and regulations for the event. There is no entry fee, and every participating team is required to send a one-minute video of their interaction and another one-minute video of their art.

Entries must also be uploaded with a 600-word write-up about their journey. For details, visit linkthedots.online or email linkthedots13@gmail.com

ture so many emotions of excitement, comfort, adaptation during this exercise," says the 17-year-old.

It took some doing for Varnika A., a Class XI student of NSN Memorial School, to teach the dance steps to her buddy Hemanya, who is dyslexic, but the end result was a beautiful bond. "I first made her comfortable asking about her likes and dislikes before we started to practise some steps. What I liked was she was open to learning and I just had to be patient till she got them right," says Varnika.

NSN Group of Schools had 15 students taking part in the event, where the school joined hands with Vatsalya Open Schooling. "We brought students from the Centre

to our campus. While the rapport was built on the same day, a few required more time and a different approach," says Shyamala V., coordinator for this event from the school.

Other noteworthy entries include a national winner from a school at Kamathipura, a neighbourhood with social fractures in Mumbai. "Some schools have told me that their students had an emotional transformation by bonding with a peer," says Nirmala.

There is also an international winner from Tajikistan, Zuhra, who danced with Amir, a boy with speech impairment.

Growing strong

The first edition of 'Art to Connect' was held in 2020 with 20 schools qualifying for the finals. This time, it has grown to more than double the number. Last year, Pune registered the maximum number of participants. This time, Tamil Nadu tops the list.

Nirmala says this is an event for mainstream schools and she expects them to do the ground work of locating a buddy.

"In Delhi, many schools have children with special needs across classes but that is not the case in the South," she says.

Nirmala says the larger goal of Art to Connect is to strengthen the bond and show children the need to cultivate patience, compassion, empathy and gratitude. The jury looks at the effort made by a participant to bond.

As part of the competition, participants also take a pledge that when they grow up and attain positions of power they will try to bring in policies that are inclusive.

"Transformation is what I am looking for and this is just the beginning," says Nirmala, who comes from the pharmaceutical industry and has authored books on education.

'Water stagnation at vacant plot on Perambur High Road'

A vacant plot on Perambur High Road - North is a breeding ground for mosquitoes. For most part of the year, it has stagnant water.

According to a long-time resident, Raghukumar Choodamani, the land once housed the staff quarters of Postal & Telegraph Department. "Provisions need to be made to prevent water stagnation. This poses a health hazard for people living in the vicinity. Further, the gate of this plot is open most of the time encouraging all kinds of illegal activities," says Raghukumar Choodamani.



Two retirement community projects launched

The GT Bharathi Urban Developers Private Limited has launched two retirement community projects - 'Elements Sattva' in Porur and 'Elements Kamalam.'

The Sattva project allows senior citizens to reside within the city. The other project has introduced an 'Independent Seniors' Leasing (ISL) scheme, which allows seniors to lease their homes at 50 percent of the purchase cost, offering investors good rental returns, said a release.

To offer seniors and their families a first-hand experience of retirement homes, the real estate housing firm is conducting an expo at Ethiraja Kalyana Mandapam on TTK Road in Alwarpet that ends on January 26.

Preschool in Anna Nagar follows American curriculum



Anna Nagar has got a new school: APJ International Preschool. Located in Shanthi Colony AH Block, Anna Nagar, this preschool has CIAA accreditation and follows the American curriculum.

The school caters to the diverse needs of young learners, with a host of amenities. According to a release, the school focuses on nurturing creativity and motor skills, providing a well-rounded experience.

With a child-to-teacher ratio of 6:1, each child will receive personalised attention, added the release.

The school offers various after-school activities. Admissions are open for play group, pre-kg, junior and senior kg.

The school has been founded and managed by its founder Devaki Balaji, adds the note.

For details, call 93635 73986 / 9884051654.

Perambur school student excels in Meteorological Olympiad

Kishore Sudhakar, a Class XI student of KRM Public School in Perambur, has secured first place at the State level in the recently held National Level MET-Olympiad. The exam was conducted to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the India Meteorological Department, New Delhi (HQ) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India. Kishore was awarded by scientists at a special ceremony held in Delhi, said a press release.

CMDA launches mobile app for KCBT

Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority has launched a mobile app to enhance the travel experience of commuters from Kalaikar Centenary Bus Terminus (KCBT) in Kilambakkam. Available in Tamil and English, it can be downloaded free on Android and iOS platforms. In the app journey planner section, a commuter can reach the terminus using the map, check the availability of buses and find city public transport buses from KCBT to regions across the city (Chennai Bus app).

The app has sections for grievances, feedback, helpline numbers, notice boards, and frequently asked questions. The app helpline number is 78457 00557.

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A mini dump yard on Maduravoyal Bypass Road



Garbage dumped on Maduravoyal Bypass Road in Maduravoyal. K.V. Ramesh from Agaram shared this picture with us. He points out that this stretch has been turned into a mini dump yard.

Address issues at narrow subway near Nemilicherry railway station



The subway near the Nemilicherry railway station is narrow, full of stones and has stagnant water. Vehicle users face significant challenges while navigating the subway due to the pitted surface. Both two- and four-wheelers struggle to navigate this narrow space, often leading to traffic congestion and accidents.

The subway needs to be expanded to accommodate the increasing traffic. The drainage facility needs to be checked to prevent water stagnation, and the road surface needs to be improved.

D. Suresh
Thirumullaivoyal



You can be our volunteer-writer

Dear readers, you can be our volunteer-writer by writing to us about issues and events in your neighbourhood. You should send the write-ups to downtownfeedback@thehindu.co.in. Letters must carry the postal address and contact number.

Miyawaki forest in Thiru-Vi-Ka Nagar plagued by garbage woes

R AISHWARYAA

Once a thriving Miyawaki forest, a green space in Ward 68 of Thiru-Vi-Ka Zone of the Greater Chennai Corporation has now turned into a hub of illegal activities, open defecation and garbage dumping.

Located opposite a fish and vegetable market – which Corporation officials say is being run without authorisation – the Miyawaki forest, now reduced to just a guava tree and a papaya tree, is littered with dry leaves, broken signage, rusted equipment, plastic and glass bottles.

G. Saranya, a resident, said the forest, which was created after illegal tenements were removed four years ago, was thriving until two years ago. “Now, when the parks department cleans the area, we are allowed to pick some fruits from there,” she said, adding that they would not enter the forest otherwise.

Safety concerns

According to the residents, consumption of inebriants allegedly occurs at the space after 8 p.m., despite the police warning those involved on multiple occasions. This raises safety concerns for women in the locality, and the lack of CCTV cameras on that side of the road is one of the reasons why this happens, said a vegetable vendor.

Sridhar, another resident,



Squalid conditions outside the premises of the Miyawaki forest.
PHOTOS: R. AISHWARYAA

noted that stray dogs often chase motorists late at night. Conservancy workers said that despite placing 10 dustbins – three for biodegradable waste and seven for mixed waste – in the area, garbage piles remain, with blood leaking from improperly discarded meat waste from shops nearby. Vendors continue to dump waste openly when bins overflow, despite repeated warnings.

A GCC toilet near the forest remains unused due to broken doors and lack of water.

Rampant open defecation behind abandoned carts and auto-rickshaws persists, alleged residents, adding to the unhygienic conditions.

A zonal official acknowledged these issues and said the fish and vegetable market was unauthorised. “Abandoned vehicles were recently removed, and garbage dumped in the open is being cleared daily. The parks department will be instructed to address these problems, and repairs to the toilet will be undertaken,” he said.

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