



CEDAR

Centre for Education Development Action and Research



Annual Report 2023-2024



CENTRE FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT ACTION AND RESEARCH (CEDAR)

Annual Report 2023–2024

Presented to the Board of Trustees

Executive Summary

The programme year 2023–2024 has been transformative for CEDAR. Working across 17 Community Resource Centres (CRCs) in the districts of Madurai and Thoothukudi, we reached over 1,000 children and their families. These children, often living in socially and economically vulnerable conditions—poor villages, dalit settlements, and urban deprived areas and urban fringes—were not simply passive recipients of learning. They were encouraged and enabled to become creators, civic agents, and socially minded thinkers.

This report captures our progress across 14 core thematic areas ranging from foundational education to visual and performing arts, from child protection to environmental advocacy. We deepened our commitment to building safe, expressive, and inclusive child spaces by working alongside community volunteers (Facilitators), parents, schoolteachers, government agencies and institutional partners.

Major achievements include the implementation of a Child Safety Audit covering over 300 children, the introduction of peer-led art and photography education models, and the production of powerful children-made films and exhibitions. Equally notable were the steps taken by parents who began to take ownership of their children's education, safety, and emotional development.

This report is not only a reflection on a year's activities but a record of change: change in how children see themselves, how communities understand childhood, and how learning can be reimagined in under-resourced environments.

1. Child Protection and Safeguarding



Safeguarding Expert Sarath

Child protection remained a cornerstone of CEDAR's engagement strategy. Our approach this year combined individual case support, systems-level advocacy, and proactive monitoring through audits and partnerships. Several significant cases demanded our attention and care.

Kanika's story (name changed) exemplifies our long-term engagement model. After dropping out of school due to some inexpressible emotional distress, she was gradually re-engaged through peer mentorship and family-based learning. By the end of the year, she had expressed readiness to return to formal schooling. In contrast, **Suresh** (name changed), a school dropout due to financial hardship, was successfully placed into a Government ITI vocational stream.

CEDAR collaborated with the NGO **Karpoam Karpippoam**, to conduct an extensive **Child Safety Audit** involving over 300 children. The results were sobering: 17% of the children showed signs of trauma, abuse, or psychosocial risk. Issues identified included bullying, domestic violence, neglect, digital addiction, and fear-based silence. This data is now being used to shape programmatic responses—including counselling, parent engagement, and facilitator training on mental health first aid.

Quarterly **Child Protection Committee (CPC)** meetings with DCPU, educators, and the police served as critical platforms for collaborative planning. In LKB Nagar, CPC attention led to the initiation of services for Sholiga tribal children much overlooked by government programmes.

Our child protection work extended to the family level. Parents in Kovilpatti and Madurai underwent gender-sensitisation and child rights workshops. They responded very positively. These shifts underscore the growing ecosystem of child safety around our CRCs

2. Community Ownership and Participation

CEDAR's belief in creating and strengthening child-supportive family-community- school space has made us place a bigger hope on **Parent Collectives (PCs)**. These forums grew from modest beginnings into proactive spaces for mutual learning, reflection, action and social accountability.

In Kovilpatti, male attendance in PCs grew significantly, breaking a cultural barrier where child-rearing is often relegated to mothers. Fathers began participating in discussions around schooling, internet safety, and emotional bonding.

In Madurai, while attendance remained irregular due to economic pressures, mothers took the lead.

PCs were also instrumental in facilitating civic interventions. In Pungavarnatham, a PC supported the children's campaign to convert a locked community hall into a CRC space.

In Kovilpatti, parents backed their children's complaints about unsafe school premises, leading to follow-up by Childline and regular police visits.

The biggest transformation was **in the language of parenting**. Parents shifted from control to communication, from reprimand to inquiry. Questions like "What did you enjoy today?" replaced "Did you finish your work?" This change nurtured greater emotional openness between children and caregivers, reinforcing the CRC as an extension of home.

Parental voices also began influencing CRC programming. Requests for spoken English classes, tailoring for mothers, and mental health support reflected rising aspirations. Parent Collectives are maturing into a **community leadership space**.

3. Children's Collectives and Civic Engagement

Children's Collectives across all centres became powerful hubs of civic learning and action. Children held regular meetings, discussed local issues, elected representatives, and engaged with Panchayats and local schools.

In Thomas Nagar, children petitioned local officials for road safety signage and lighting, backed by the Parent Collective.

In Pungavarnatham, their campaign to repurpose a defunct hall for CRC activities succeeded through persistence and partnership.

Children also took ownership of **Parent Collective meetings**, often inviting and reminding parents, facilitating logistics, and even presenting CRC learnings through theatre performances and speeches. These roles instilled confidence and sharpened leadership skills.

Through the **Mahasakthi Collective** and **FCMRP (Federation of Children's Movements for Right to Participation)**, CEDAR children interacted with peers from other organisations, gaining exposure to wider movements on child rights, education, and environmental justice.



Children Meeting Social Welfare Minister Geetha Jeevan

A new initiative, **Window to the World**, was conceptualised as a platform for cross-border peer conversations—connecting CEDAR children with those from other regions or countries. Thematic dialogues are being planned on language, climate, and childhood. This initiative represents the next frontier: local children entering global discourse with grounded clarity and creative force.

4. Children Making Children's Film



"English"-Documentary Film by Children

The filmmaking initiative continued to be a dynamic platform where children could explore, question, and articulate their lived realities. This year, the theme that organically emerged from multiple script workshops was "**English**"—as both aspiration and anxiety. Children voiced their confusion and struggle with a language they are expected to master. Yet, they often lack the environment and confidence to practice.

A team of 25 children worked on storyboarding, scripting, and enacting scenes for a five-episode series titled *Reading English*. Though only the first episode was filmed and rough-cut by year-end,



Climate Change, Children Documenting Flood.



the process itself was highly educational. Children engaged in role-switching—scriptwriters became actors, actors gave direction—ensuring ownership over the narrative and process.

Simultaneously, another group pursued **documentary film projects**, focusing on environmental degradation, civic negligence, and marginalised livelihoods. A short documentary on the December floods in Kovilpatti became a critical tool in advocacy efforts with local leaders.

The filmmaking initiative evolved this year into a **pedagogical mirror**—helping children examine their learning environments, challenge inequities, and tell untold stories with clarity and conviction.

5. Painting and Drawing



Painting



Sculpting by Children

For CEDAR, painting and drawing is not simply ‘extra-curricular’ but as a **core learning language**. Across all CRCs, painting and drawing was used to explore emotional health, storytelling, environmental themes, and cultural memory. Regular art sessions were held for all children, while 30 high-potential learners were selected for advanced training in traditional folk styles such as Warli, Gond, and Mandala.

A peer-led training model emerged as a breakthrough this year. Children trained in advanced

techniques began mentoring others, allowing CEDAR to decentralise learning and empower leadership from within the CRCs. These peer-artists were not only teaching strokes and patterns but also facilitating reflection: “What does your drawing say about your village?” became a common question in sessions.

The year also saw the introduction of **sculpture training**, where children worked with clay and recycled materials. This hands-on process helped develop spatial awareness, patience, and imagination.

Children’s works were displayed in exhibitions held in schools, public spaces, and during trustee visits. These exhibitions helped bridge the home–school–community gap, giving families a window into their children’s inner lives. More importantly, they became **affirmation spaces** where children could take pride in their identity, effort, and artistic voice.

6. Theatre



Children's Theatre

Theatre at CEDAR continued to evolve as a tool for **liberation, healing, and community voice**. Weekly sessions were held across both regions, combining traditional acting with mime, movement, and improvisation. Facilitators encourage children to develop their own scripts based on lived experiences, often beginning with themes like fear, courage, or silence.

This year, 25 children were shortlisted for intensive training under the *Theatre by Children and for Children* initiative. Their plays, still in development, address issues like child marriage, caste discrimination, and dreams of escape. The children do not merely perform these roles—they reflect on them, challenge them, and in doing so, grow.

A highlight of the year was the **Noa Theatre** workshop by **Gub Theatre Company** (Switzerland). Their session introduced a performance method centred on gesture and silence, offering both

facilitators and children new grammar for expression. The adult workshop sparked plans for a children's edition in January 2025, deepening our arts exchange vision.



Workshop for Adult Trainees



Theatre now functions as a mirror and megaphone- a space where the 'unspoken' becomes loudly audible, and the invisible child becomes a speaking subject. CEDAR's theatre is **a social transformation in action**.

7. Creative Photography

Creative photography remained one of the most sought-after and transformative programmes at CEDAR. It allowed children to see what they don't see, reflect on what they newly sense, make stories on what initially looked common place and claim authorship over their gaze—documenting what matters to them and framing their questions with visual precision.

Field visits were made to neighborhoods, village outskirts markets, riversides, and public spaces. Children produced **photo essays** exploring topics such as "The Life of a Street Vendor,"

"My Grandmother's Hands," and "After the Rain." Photography became not just documentation but interpretation—a way to ask: "What do I see that others overlook?"

Twenty-five children were trained as **photo mentors**, creating a decentralised model of skill-sharing. These mentors conducted peer-shoots, helped curate exhibitions, and initiated discussions about ethical representation, light, and meaning. Their maturity was evident in the work exhibited during *Children for Green Tomorrow* events.

Two CEDAR children- Kamalesh and Karthika won top honours at the Neithal Festival and were awarded Rs. 1,00,000/- and 50,000/- prize money respectively. But they chose to donate half of their prize toward the expansion of photography project. This gesture seemed to shift: the camera was no longer a borrowed tool, but a **symbol of trust, authorship, and responsibility**. With the



Children Winning Prizes at Neithal



matching grant from CEDAR, children designed their choice field photography project. From this was born **Green Action Project**.

8. Exhibitions, Campaigns, and Festivals

Public exhibitions and campaigns were woven throughout the year to enable visibility, advocacy, and celebration. These events functioned as **platforms for community engagement**, where children's voices could be seen, heard, and affirmed.

Art exhibitions were held in Palanganatham School (April), Tamil Baptist School (April), and across CRCs. Each exhibition was curated with a clear theme—identity, environment, child safety—and accompanied by performances, installations, and dialogue spaces.

In LKB Nagar, an exhibition attended by over 100 LKB Nagar Community—many for the first time—marked a turning point in local engagement. Trustee Deborah was present.



Children's Art Exhibition at LKB Nagar



Campaigns emerged organically from Children's Collective work. The most prominent was **Children for Green Tomorrow**, where children used photography, drawings, and performances

to raise awareness on environmental degradation. These campaigns were no single-day events but ongoing narratives, culminating in petitions, exhibitions, and community mapping.

These public events did not stop just by showcasing children's creative work—they **reframed the public's idea of the child**: from passive learner to the creator of the 'new'.

9. School Collaboration Work



School Collaboration



CEDAR's partnerships with government and aided schools focused on bridging the gap between formal education and child-centred learning. Our work in schools—particularly at LKB Nagar, Palanganatham Corporation School, and Tamil Baptist School—offered not just supplementary education, but a model for **integrated, creative learning ecosystems**.

In LKB Nagar, where dropout rates were alarmingly high, our sustained presence led to an increase in regular attendance, especially among girls. Art, photography, and foundational learning conducted at the CRCs helped re-engage disinterested students. Teachers reported improved attentiveness and participation in class.

School heads increasingly recognised CEDAR's alternative pedagogies as effective complements to textbook learning. Art exhibitions hosted in school premises drew parents. Teachers began inviting CEDAR Leads to organise more activities. These collaborations signify a shift in perception—where CEDAR's Alternative Pedagogy is no more seen as; extra-curricular.'

10. Strengthening of Foundational Skills

This year, a major focus was the standardisation of our foundational skills programme. Manuals were developed particularly for Tamil and Mathematics each designed in two progressive levels to accommodate children with varying learning needs. These were piloted in multiple CRCs, with feedback loops from facilitators, children, and academic partners.

An impact study conducted with postgraduate student interns from Lady Doak College and Madurai Institute of Social Sciences showed **measurable improvement in Tamil literacy**,

especially in phonemic awareness and reading fluency. Math, however, remained a concern.

Children struggled with comprehension and problem-solving despite effort-intensive sessions. This gap prompted the design of a remedial module and additional facilitator training.

An experimental English manual, developed with special attention to orality, phonics, and multilingual contexts, was developed by Lady Doak College interns.

This foundational skills initiative has now evolved into a **research-backed, community-tested framework**, poised for larger implementation and institutional sharing.

11. Training and Capacity Building for Facilitators

Facilitators remained the frontline agents of transformation at CEDAR. This year, their role was reinforced through structured, thematic training sessions: CRC operations, child safety, creative arts pedagogy, mental health support, and foundational skills methodology. Over 10 workshops were held across both regions.

A major highlight was the **Spoken English course**, launched in response to facilitators' own aspirations and the needs of school engagement. Facilitators reported improved communication skills and began confidently delivering parts of the English curriculum without external support.



Spoken English for Facilitators

Peer-learning sessions across clusters allowed experienced facilitators to mentor newer ones—particularly in implementing drawing, storytelling, and behaviour management. Easwari from LKB Nagar, a local community recruit, emerged as a model of transformation. She progressed from trainee to lead facilitator within the year, effectively managing parent relationships, CRC programming, and child casework.



With LKB Nagar Children

These investments in facilitators—viewed not as employees, but as **local pedagogical leaders**—were crucial to the success and sustainability of CEDAR's learning spaces.

12. Networking and Collaboration



Green Action: With ATREE Scientists

CEDAR's partnerships this year significantly extended our intellectual, technical, and civic reach. With **ATREE**, we co-designed ecology education sessions, field visits, and biodiversity documentation exercises. Children learned not only about species and habitats, but about **ecological interdependence**, sustainability, and advocacy.

Our partnership with **Karpoam Karpippoam** for the Child Safety training and Audit brought professionalism, psychological depth, ethical rigour, and follow-up capacity. Their involvement also ensured children received individual attention, diagnosis and referrals where necessary. The Facilitators gained deeper insights into childhood traumas support.



Lady Doak College Interns



Lady Doak College and Madurai Institute of Social Sciences continued to serve as academic allies. They provided student interns, participated in assessment design, and validated our teaching tools. These institutional relationships lend credibility to our models and open doors for future scale-up.

Together, these collaborations made it possible to keep our work **community-rooted, evidence-based, and institutionally credible**.

13. LKB Nagar Community Project and CRC



Livelihood Training: LKB Nagar

Perhaps no single project captured the spirit of CEDAR's mission more than the transformation of LKB Nagar. This footloose tribal community, initially wary of outsiders, has become home to one of our most vibrant CRCs. The shift was made possible through sustained presence, respectful engagement, and the deep commitment of Easwari—a community woman trained by CEDAR.

Children who previously roamed the streets or worked alongside their parents began attending the centre regularly. There are more than 80 children enrolled. CRC activities like parai drumming,

storytelling, tailoring for mothers, and child-led exhibitions drew in not just children but also families and elders. The Parent Collective is slowly evolving into a space of empowerment.

Dropout children were re-enrolled. A tailoring programme was launched, and a health camp has been planned in collaboration with the Family Planning Association of India.

14. Children for Green Tomorrow

Emerging organically from the photography programme and deepened through collaboration with ATREE, *Children for Green Tomorrow* has grown into a **child-led environmental campaign**. Children studied local rivers, trees, and animals, and documented ecological changes across seasons.

They conducted green walks, mapped local biodiversity, and created campaigns on waste management. Their work resulted in a series of mini-documentaries and photo exhibits, which were shared in exhibitions and even presented to Trustee Deborah during her field visit.

More than just an environmental project, *Children for Green Tomorrow* represents a **new kind of civic education**—where science, advocacy, art, and local knowledge converge. The campaign is now being expanded with more structured modules, community links, and peer-led clubs.



At Perungulam Bird Sanctuary

15. Conclusion

The year 2023–2024 is yet another significant moment for CEDAR—not because of one singular innovation, but because of the consistent, layered, and interconnected work carried out across different social terrains, themes, and communities.

Children have stepped into leadership—as photographers, actors, civic petitioners, and educators.

Parents are taking increasing ownership especially in Kovilpatti-Ettayapuram clusters.

Facilitators have grown into mentors and advocates, capable of navigating both pedagogy and community dynamics. Institutions have recognised the value of our work and offered to collaborate, share, and scale.

We recognise that challenges remain—particularly in strengthening foundational skills in children especially in English and Mathematics, finding access to mental health support, and capacity gaps in arts integration. But we have the vision, relationships, and community will, to address them.

We take this opportunity to place on record our deep sense of gratitude to the Board of Trustees of Paper Boat Charity UK not only for their liberal funding but also for their very professional handholding, consistent sharing of vision and intellectual resources and above all their willingness to walk that extra mile to support CEDAR's cause.

We present this report to you, the Board of Trustees of CEDAR, with immense pride and deep gratitude. Your trust in us, the chief executive and the staff, has made this possible.

As we move forward, we carry the hope that every child we reach becomes not just a learner or beneficiary—but a **participant in shaping a more just, creative, and caring world**.

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CEO & Managing Trustee

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