



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

K4 Conference call minutes

Date: March 21st 2010

Attendees:

From K4: Mr.Natarajan

From Asha-UFlorida: Sanketh Bhat, Ajoy Saha, Lokendra Bengani, Shubhendu Bhasin & Shivashankar Halan

Background of project: The project was referred to us by Asha-Seattle since they did not have enough funding to support this project. Asha-Seattle has been involved with other projects of CCD (Covenant Center for Development). Kanyakumari Kalai Koodam's (K4) proposal has been under discussion for the past 6 months in the UFlorida chapter.

Concerns were raised initially about supporting this project as it was non-educational project and the UFlorida chapter had not been involved with a non-educational project before (other than R&R projects associated with cyclone Aila and the Tsunami). A vote was taken online about whether such non-educational projects should be taken up and 7/8 votes went in support of "Considering each project on a case by case basis".

Following that Asha UFlorida had a first conference call with Mr.Natarajan where the volunteers were introduced to the project and questions were answered regarding the working of K4. This conference call was a follow up call to answer further questions that were raised by volunteers at meetings and through e-mails.

Minutes:

The conference call started off with a brief overview of CCD and K4.

CCD: Covenant Center for Development. Started in 1989 at Madurai and concentrated mainly on the southern Tamilnadu districts. It focused mainly on helping the rural people learn new income-derivation techniques that were conducive to their specific environments. It has reached out to several different villages (approx 135 villages) and also works in states like Chattisgarh, Orissa and UP.

K4: It was started by CCD is Kanyakumari in 2005. It was a part of the Relief and Rehabilitation work that followed the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. K4 was a part of the CCD movement until very recently and in 2006 it has grown to become an independent organization. In K4 the focus is basically on crafts and arts. The income-generating activities are split up into two areas- Palm leaves crafts and Sea Shells. K4 activities in Kanyakumari district reaches out to 7-8 villages and around 2000 people as of now.

Website: <http://www.ccd.org.in>



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Could you please explain about the structure of K4?

There are two federations that have been formed. One of them focuses on palm leaves crafts and other on sea shells. These are business-oriented organizations that handle the business aspects of the arts and crafts work. They are registered federations and the bank loans and other business activities are handled through the federation.

K4 on the other hand is associated with improving the quality of these crafts work and making sure that these traditional arts and crafts skills do not die away and are preserved for posterity. It works to improve the design of the work, spread the word and also teach other people these crafts. A learning center is handled by K4 to further these causes.

Please tell us about the learning center.

The learning center is basically a place for students who want to come and work with the palm leaves craftwork. There are basically two types of students who come to the learning center.

- 1.) Students who want to learn the craft for their own benefit and as a hobby
- 2.) Students and designers who want to contribute to K4's work.

Continual development is a key to the success of K4 and also the learning center. K4 tries to generate as much revenue as possible through the sales.

The learning center is fully residential with hostels for the students who come there to learn the crafts.

What kind of students visits the learning center? Rural or Urban?

We have both kinds of students. Last week we had 30 students from Auroville who came over to learn the palm leaves craft work. They were taught by 5 different artisans. The artisans were each paid Rs.750 INR honorarium for teaching the crafts.

Ajoy: How do students come to know about the learning center?

- 1.) Through other students who have come to the learning center before
- 2.) Most of the publicity is through word of mouth. We spread the word at exhibitions and meetings to get new people to come.
- 3.) The crafts work that we sell is a good publicity. People who see the work are impressed and want to learn how to create it on their own.

Does everybody who comes to the learning center pay the same amount?

We try to give some considerations to students who come from poor backgrounds and cannot afford the fees. We reduced the fees of the Auroville students mentioned above since most of them were poor rural students. They had to pay only the Rs.750 teacher honorarium.



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How do the students benefit from the learning center?

They are given 4-hr training sessions where they learn how to create art. By the end of the classes they are able to create their own crafts. Additional motivation is their understanding and appreciation of the art.

For example when the Asha Chennai volunteer Sivasankar came here for the site visit, he identified himself a lot with the people and was impressed by the art and work we do.

Ajoy: Have any of the K4 trained people developed their own business?

It is too soon to predict that. As of now the people are content with working for and through the federations.

How does CCD help?

The name of CCD helps since it itself is a valuable brand name and is easy to appeal to people through the CCD name. CCD does not offer any financial support to K4 since K4 is an independent organization now. There was financial support until 2008 but stopped since 2009.

What is the age of the people who come to learn the crafts at the learning center?

The age group of the students is 9 to 13.

What are the things that the money requested from Asha UFlorida will be used for?

- 1.) An endowment can be created to support the poor students who come to the learning center and who cannot afford the training fees. This endowment can be really helpful to the students who want to learn the crafts.
- 2.) Both the rural and the urban youth can be brought to the learning center. The rural youth are the people who will be involved with the actual creation of these crafts and the urban youth will be sensitized to the importance of the crafts work and need to preserve it.

Ajoy: Is it possible that students from other Asha projects can come and study at the learning center as a part of the sustainable initiative of the Asha group?

Yes definitely. Other projects can collaborate with us and something can be worked out to help each other.

How is the funding scenario for the Valampuri Kootamaippu (Sea shells organization functioning parallel to K4)?

The Valampuri Kootamaippu was lucky to get a 15 lakh funding rotated amount. Out of these 15 lakhs 12 lakhs is used as a rotation amount to fund the buying of raw materials and 3 lakh is used to produce new articles and improve design. The initial funding was obtained from a European non-profit organization.