



*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

FORWORD Conference Call Minutes

Date: 1st September 2013 (11:00 am IST)

Attendees:

- FORWORD - Ms.Shiamala Baby (Director - FORWORD),
- Asha UFlorida - Shivashankar Halan (project steward), Amey Bharde, Lokendra Bengani, Gowri Balasubramaniam, Namrata Gholve. Ravi Venkatraman, Girinath Pillai, Akshay Rajopadhye.

The agenda for this conference call was as follows:

1. Introduce the new Asha UFlorida team to the project team from India and conference calls in general.
2. To get updates about the day-to-day functioning of the project from the project partner.
3. Review budget items for the 2013-14 budget and also clarify questions about the budget that the volunteers had raised during discussions.

Background about FORWORD

Project FORWORD (FORum for WOMen's Rights and Development) was started in 1991 by Ms.Shiamala Baby to support women and educate them about their rights. Asha for Education has been supporting FORWORD's educational projects since 2001. Asha UFlorida has been supporting the project since 2007. FORWORD has been running 14 evening centers in Kanchipuram district of Tamilnadu to help children from the villages in the area improve their academic performance. These centers are in addition to the basic education that the children receive from the schools in the region. The evening centers function everyday between 5-8 pm and also during Saturdays.

Budget:

http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/263/FORWORD_Budget_2013-14.pdf

Conference Call Minutes

The conference call started with all the volunteers introducing themselves to Ms.Shiamala Baby and her introduction in return. Many of the volunteers were new to Asha UFlorida and were interacting with her for the first time although the chapter has had several conference calls with her in the past.

After the introductions, Ms.Shiamala Baby was requested to provide some background about the project and how it was started. Ms.Shiamala Baby recollected how she herself was a victim of domestic violence and how that motivated her to start the FORWORD



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organization in 2001 to provide support and raise awareness among the women in the villages in the Kanchipuram district. She also recollected the initial challenges she faces while starting the project and reaching out to the people from these different villages.

Ms. Shiamala Baby also provided updates with the project about what has been happening at the project since the site visit in June 2013. She mentioned that the schools have now re-opened and the students were very excited about starting a new academic year in school. She specifically mentioned that she and her team were paying special attention to the Madampakkam tribal colony center which was identified as a problematic center during the site visit and during followup discussions. She mentioned that they had replaced the teacher at the center with a new girl and are paying special attention to enrolling the students in schools and make sure they attend schools regularly.

Some other questions answered during the conference call:

The budget mentioned Rs.1,10,000. (Rs.25 X 11 months X 400 children) for nutritious food for the children at the evening center. Volunteers wanted to know what the nutritional food that was provided was and how often was it provided. The volunteers raised concerns that the budget set aside less than Rs.25 per student per child per month and this seemed very low for providing any kind of food.

Ms. Shiamala Baby clarified that the nutritional food was offered not every day but 1-2 days per week. The food was basically balls of grains and other nutritional material that was ground into flour and then mixed with jaggery (for taste) and rolled into balls and distributed to the children. The local term (in Tamil) for this kind of nutritional snack was Sathu Maavu Urundai and was aimed at increasing the protein and vitamin content available to the students. She said that they were able to provide this at such a low cost by buying all the grains and materials in wholesale (in bulk quantities from wholesale retailers). They also do the grinding of the flour at their main office in Tambaram and then distribute the flour to be rolled into balls and distributed to children at the different centers. They also distributed fruits and some biscuits from time to time and they bought these items also in large quantities from wholesale dealers and this allowed them to serve these items at such a small budget. The volunteers suggested beefing up this part of the budget and she agreed with it for future budgets.

The volunteers wanted to see if the budget for the annual excursion can be reduced from the budget.

To this, she clarified that the only cost for the excursion was the cost of travel and food and that since there were 400 children it was impossible to reduce the cost of the excursion activity. She also mentioned that students specifically look forward to the excursion throughout the year and it would be very heartbreaking to the kids to not have this activity every year.



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*Volunteers wanted the legend for the color codes for the excel sheet that had the details of very student attending **FORWORD** evening centers.*

Ms.Shiamala Baby has since sent the same to us.