



*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 Project Site Visit Report

Date : 3rd June 2013
Site Visit Volunteer : Shivashankar Halan
Affiliation : Asha - UFlorida

Site Visit Report

- Compiled by Shivashankar Halan

FORWORD Background

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 13 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 and have the following goals to accomplish:

1. To motivate them to attend to school.
2. Promote nil-absence to regular school and promote continuity to higher education.
3. Ensure healthy children, in the deprived communities.
4. To bring academic efficiency in them.
5. To develop attitudinal change (positive thinking, creative action) and healthy interpersonal relationships.
6. To empower them with rights-based quality education with love for nature, fellow human beings, peaceful living and social justice.
7. To empower them with peoples politics and to develop participatory leadership in them.
8. To enable them to identify human rights violations, name them, challenge them and change them.
9. To sensitize the community on the issues of children and to organize them as child-rights protectors



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Site Visit Background

I have been the steward for project FORWARD since 2009. I have been in constant touch with the project coordinator Ms.Shiamala Baby since 2009 regarding progress with the project. I was visiting India after 2 years to visit friends and family and utilized this opportunity to visit the project. The previous site visit to the project was also conducted by me in June 2011 during my visit to India.

Report

As part of my site visit I was able to visit three FORWARD evening centers and also the FORWARD Head office at Tambaram in the Chennai city. I was able to meet with Ms.Shiamala Baby, founder of FORWARD and also other employees of FORWARD who are working with the education centers.

During the day I also took Ms.Shiamala Baby to visit another Asha project – Reward Trust that was also in the Kancheepuram district and being funded/stewarded by Asha Silicon Valley and NYC/NJ. Since this other project was in Kalpakkam which was quite some distance away from the other FORWARD centers we were able to only visit three of the FORWARD evening centers. But I was able to spend a lot more time with the FORWARD organizers during transit and discuss key issues and I feel that the exposure to the other project had a really good effect on Ms.Shiamala Baby.

At the head office I got the opportunity to meet and greet with Ms.Shiamala Baby and other office bearers of FORWARD. Specifically one of the main goals of my site visit was to streamline the flow of updates and information from the project to the volunteers at Asha UFlorida. Ms.Shiamala Baby has been very diligent in sending reports to the project stewards over the years about the functioning of the project. But these have been in the form of emails and attached photos and so additional effort is required to collate this information and is not readily available to volunteers as and when needed. To improve this I suggested to Ms.Shiamala baby that we can create google documents where she can update about the status of the project and also create web albums that will be easy to access and update.

To implement these suggestions I spent some time with Kalaiselvi, the office assistant at FORWARD's head office and taught her how to work with a google document and update the reports there in reverse chronological order and make it available for us volunteers to access. I also created a google picasa account where they can easily upload the photographs from the different activities being conducted at the project.



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Update : I am happy to say that since my site visit this format for updating the project's updates has been working very well and the FORWARD team has been updating the progress diligently through these documents.

FORWORD Education Center updates

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bBbzhI9qobt2oIK8J9ePOh4eFYzmBdkwUP6O9d1XRPo/edit>

Photographs:

<https://plus.google.com/u/0/photos/104506856730893341307/albums?cfem=1>

One of the other goals of my visit was to impress on the FORWARD team the necessity for keeping a record of the children and updating it regularly. Although the centers, teachers and the coordinators at the centers are very diligent in maintaining attendance registers for each of the centers, there are no official digital records for the students who attend the centers every year. So even though we have some numbers about students enrolled every year close to the budget approval time we do not have a current and updated system to track the students enrolled in the centers. More importantly we do not have any records with regards to the students who have passed out of the evening centers (or dropped out of) and what they are doing right now. So I tried talking to the FORWARD team and impressed upon them the necessity to maintain good records of the students enrolled in the evening centers. Also I believe that the visit to the Reward project and seeing first hand at how diligently the organizers at that project were keeping records of their students and their functioning and progress must have influenced Ms.Shiamala baby to maintain a better record of their own students.

Update :

Ms.Shiamala Baby has successfully compiled a list of all students who were enrolled at the 13 evening centers of FORWARD over the past 4 years. This list also has names of students who are currently not enrolled with the centers or have dropped out/ passed out over the past 4 years. The list is very comprehensive and ms.Shiamala Baby has promised to maintain this list henceforth and keep the list updated and current.

Database of students:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0AsPpwCH5n3lidG5OSmwtMUPEeHdRb1NtSI Fic1ZRMHc#gid=0>

Also we have received the numbers for students who are enrolled in classes 8th-12th specifically in the 13 centers.

8th- 12th Std students

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0AlIjGnYgfqlLdFl3R1hpVjRLN01zdDhHekpfUTRFSWc#g id=0>



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