

FORWARD Project Site Visit Report

Dates: 27th July and 3rd August 2019

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Report on the site visit of Asha for Education

FORWARD

Forum for women's rights and development (FORWARD) is a women's rights organization founded in 1992 based in Chennai headed by M Shyamala Baby. The director herself being a domestic violence survivor started work for creating awareness and helping women to raise their voices against sexual harassment, domestic violence and other injustices against women. Women's sangams (or groups) were organized across Tamil Nadu and were also given training to many women in sewing, artificial jewellery, food-processing etc. Many of them were made financially stable to start their own business set ups as well.

In order to address and reduce atrocities against women in future, M. Shyamala decided to develop a project called FORWARD with the aim of creating quality education for children. They joined hands with 'Asha for Education' in 2004-05 for providing quality education among children ranging from fourth standard to 12th standard. They aim for academic efficiency and attitude change through quality education. The initiative also work for creating awareness among students about the problems encountered in day to day life such as sexual harassment against women, deforestation, global warming etc. There are around 13 centers covering 425 first generation school going children and 150 higher education schools. The students are given classes from 6pm to 8pm after their normal school hours. Saturdays are filled with special classes such as giving them awareness classes about societal problems, gardening, parents meeting, dance, painting, music etc. The children are also given opportunities like summer camps, small excursions, annual day programs.

Site report

On 27th July 2019, we visited 4 centers such as Mathur, Thandarai pettai, Thandari Puthucheri and Thandarai. We interacted with students for 1 hour in Mathur, 30 minutes in Thandarai pettai and 10 minutes each in the remaining two places. Each center had around 25

students ranging from 4th standard to 12th standard. In all the centers, the classes were taken in front of the teacher's house. Among these four centers, three centers were run for the children belonging to Dalit community.

As soon as we reached the centers, we received warm greetings. They introduced themselves, recited songs and delivered speeches about APJ Abdul Kalam, shared their ambitions, some of them are really active and good artists who showed us the pictures drawn by them. We were amazed to hear that one student does research about Uthiramerur inscription and some of them are good in sports. We were given a hearty vote of thanks as well.

On the visit on 3rd August 2019 to Puthunemilikuppam, there were around 15 kids from classes 5 and below and 14 kids from classes 6 and above 14. The main livelihood of the community is fishing as the place is near to the sea. The place has also witnessed adverse circumstances when tsunami hit the Indian coast in 2004. The bunch of kids greeted us with warm welcome. Kids were seated on a tarpaulin laid on the ground on the street of the community area. The class usually starts by 5pm and can extend till 7:30pm or 8pm. Children were asked to give a brief introduction about them and then we interacted asking questions from different fields of academics. They showed great enthusiasm and provided answers to the questions. The group is assisted by a master (studied till tenth) with the help of a class leader. Some of them amazed us with their creativity as well. They showed us the pictures drawn by them, sang songs, delivered speech and mimicry. Children were also given health drink (Not sure if it is provided often). They also described the problems faced in society. Kids were fluent in reading English as well. The session wound off with a vote of thanks from the group leader and chanting national anthem together.

Observations and suggestions

Asha for Education has become a great source of education and lights in the lives of many underprivileged kids. It has been able to become a source of inspiration and encouragement for children from socially disadvantaged background.

- The children were able to pursue their education in spite of the unwelcoming circumstances that they encounter in their homes.
- The initiative has led to a decrease in the no of school drop outs, child marriages and child labour especially girls.
- The environment in FORWARD is different from a normal academic institution as it gives off a very positive environment to the children which motivates them to give a regular attendance to the school.
- During each Saturdays, they ensure that the children are given awareness about social aspects of their life moulding the kids to be grown with full capacity to live their lives more meaningfully with full rights of a human being.

- The children also find the center very comfortable as their friends are their neighbours.
- The centers have contributed in providing employment to some of its students. Some of them even work in Asha as teachers.
- They also get classes from the experts in the academic field once in a month
- Salary for the teachers is low (around 1500 per month).
- Appointing some well educated person, may help the students learn much better.
- The kids are given training in areas depending on the availability of space (like the house of the teacher, back area of a church etc.) Considering the fact that the classes are organised in very remote areas, the kids are constricted to the limited space
- The ambiguity about the reason behind the success of the children is the school or FORWARD.
- Also the teachers lack expertise to handle children of higher classes.
- The opportunities for higher education of the children are limited due to lack of money or their familial background.
- But the academic efficiency of the teachers is doubtful as they lack experience, knowledge and training in a normal institution.

FORWARD is an initiative that must be appreciated for its efforts to bring in children from various discriminated section of the society and provide them a different methodology of education. The aim is very motivating but considering the fact that the classes are taken in remote areas, the initiative confronts its own limitations which needs to be addressed technically, financially and academically for a better impact and great success.

Mathur



Thandarai pettai



Thandari puthucheri



Thandarai



Puthu Nemmeli Kuppam



