



Asha for Education™

UFlorida Chapter

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

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

Site Visit Report- March 17th 2010

Pics available at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/palramu/FORWORDSiteVisitMarch2010?authkey=Gv1sRgCMKUiIfrq2f11twE&feat=directlink>

Finally I was able to pay a visit to FORWARD (FORum for WOMen Rights and Development) last Wednesday, the 17th of March. I was planning to leave IIT at around 3.30 pm and take a bus to Thambaran which is where the FORWARD office is located. However, unexpected delays lead me to drive my two-wheeler for 20 kms to Thambaran, the drive down wasn't bad – cruised through to FORWARD office in about 40 mins.

In order to save time, we started immediately from there in Shiamalababy's new Scorpio. It was about an hr's drive to the first school at Coodalur. En route, I was chatting with Shiamala ji about current course of action for FORWARD. Currently they are involved in campaign against GM seeds, land based fight (land grabbing and conversion of agri lands to plots), microfinance using revolving funds from the govt (For Dalits - about Rs10K is given free), livelihood projects, child marriage (the problem stems from the fact that the parents are migrating and they wish to get the kids married so its not their problem anymore), health projects (there is tie up with SRM hospital and Ma Foi foundation is also helping them).

We reached Coodalur to be received by about 30 kids, their teacher Ms. Jayanthi and FORWARD program co-ordinator Mr. Karthik (for youth and education related activities). Most of these students were 6th grade. There was a formal introduction session. The kids were enthusiastic and excited about a new person who has come to see them. They were eager to talk to me. I told them that I used to be with Asha and I have studied up to 20th grade and they too can, if they try. Asha evening school would allow them to do that. Their teacher Jeyanthi showed me the attendance register and FORWARDs equivalent of rank cards. She is educated up to 12th grade. She receives the training from FORWARD to help these kids in the evening schools. Also, I met a former student of the same school who is about to go to college next year. He does help Jeyanthi on and off when he gets a chance.

I spent about 20 mins there and had to leave. Just like this school, I couldn't spend much time with any school because I was time bound and had to return to Thambaran at the earliest. Next we visited another school in the same vicinity where about 15 kids were doing their HWs. These kids were 6th grade. Their teacher was Ms. Vijayalakshmi. The kids were very excited and demonstrated some of their talents in singing. Next, we pushed ourselves to another school at Mathur where about 25 kids were there along with Mr. Prabhu (Co-ordinator for health and land fight issues). The teacher here was Sivagami - she showed me the report cards and the attendance register. Kids were as usual enthusiastic and enquired about my whereabouts.



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Next, we hurried to Ramapuram. After initial intro sessions, the kids gave treated us with a dance. The teacher Mr. Ramesh Khanna showed me some paintings by the kids and I was impressed. I just repeated my same sermons on asking them to be honest in their attempts and study well. Next we visited the school at Elapakkam where the teacher is Ms.Gomathi. Here we spent slightly more time because Ms. Shiamalababy had something to do with the women sangh members. But the kids made sure that I was fully occupied when I am waiting. Most of them had individual performances on prayers, songs, poetry etc.

Next, we rushed to Vilangadu because not that we were getting late but the kids there were. So, it was 9.45 in the evening and the kids were asked to wait cos I was coming there. Again here, we had a group performance and introductions. Finally we wrapped up from here and headed back to Thambaram. We reached at 11.45 and I had to get back home which was 25 kms from thambaram - I made it at 1.00 am to my house.

Firstly, in the haste, I forgot to take something like sweets or chocolates to the kids. I shd've been there a little early which would have allowed me to spend more time with them and interact with them. Well, these are lessons for the next visit. I was thoroughly impressed with the level of the kids. They were not shy - most of them. They were ready to interact. They introduced themselves well. This is amazing because I have seen kids in villages. They refuse to interact with you or they do it with a sense of fear. I checked with them about the energy balls they get - they affirmed it. Putting apart the question on sustainability of these night schools and how it can be stitched together with the livelihood projects, **I think FORWARD is doing a neat and decent job with the kids education part. I am convinced. I hope this'll help you make a decision.** Now that they have two co-coordinators, they should be able to track the statistics of drop-outs, reasons and how well or bad are Asha educated kids doing. If you have specific questions, please shoot me an Email. If necessary, I don't mind being on a conf call.

Out of personal interest, I am planning to pay another visit. But that's not before my sem here get over (Apr end). But then kids too go on summer break then. So, I might end up going only in June.

Thanks,
Palani