

Minutes of Chilla conference call

Nov 16, 2008, 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM CST

Attendees: In India: Anil and Roja. In the US: Aravind Alwan, Divya Chandrasekhar, Manoj Prabhakaran, Milu Cherian and Shankar Sadasivam. In China(!): Karl Dach-Gruschow

Financial situation: All the money we transferred to Sangama in August was subsequently transferred to a bank account in Thiruvananthapuram. The expenses will be audited as part of Sangama's accounts. This money had two components: the money we had approved for 2007-08 (but couldn't transfer because of no FCRA) and the first installment approved for 2008-09. The former component was used to repay all the loans. The latter has pretty much been depleted already, due to increased expenses and a reduced inflow of local funds. They plan to depend on interest free personal loans until the second installment from us reaches them.

We told them we plan to transfer the second installment after a site-visit in early Jan 2009. We have promised to do it without much delay beyond that.

Local fundraising has slowed down after TCS has become less involved (see below). Also Anil and Roja feel that there is a recent (and hopefully short-lived) negative sentiment in the society against institutions looking after children, after some recent high profile news of child abuse in certain *ashrams*.

Expenses are higher because of the larger rent; the educational expenses have also gone up a bit due to the new system in Kerala schools (activity based learning). Anil mentioned the figure Rs. 16,300 as the average monthly expenditure.

Anil gave the following as their current avenues and possible future avenues for funds:

- Support from us (Asha)
- Support from Kerala Partnership: Rs. 60,000 (Rs. 5000 per month). The funding cycle is Feb-Feb. They are hoping that next Feb, a similar amount will be given.
- Sangama is applying for a 5-year funding from HIVOS (?). Anil will send more details by e-mail.
- Chilla is trying to set up appointments with the various IT companies in Technopark, Thiruvananthapuram to make presentations to them about Chilla. (**CONFIRM WHETHER HELP IS NEEDED FOR PRESENTATION**)
- Possibly have an income generating business, involving women (possibly sex-workers) making designer ornaments. Chilla already has a teacher coming to train the children in this craft, so it may be possible to extend that into something profitable. An earlier plan for a business renting out paintings didn't work out as the group of artists who initiated the plan didn't pursue it.

FCRA: Last time ANANNIA applied for "prior approval" (one-time FCRA clearance) via the district collectorate, and it never materialized. Anil says they didn't know the right procedure then; applying online is the best way, and they plan to try it next time. During the application they will need just an e-mail from the donor (presumably us) stating the commitment for funding etc. (Similar to the letter we sent them last time.) Aravind suggested that we should start the process early to make sure the money reaches in time. Manoj said that maybe part of the next funding, if approved, should still go to Sangama, and the rest can go to ANANNIA.

TCS Setback: The first topic Anil brought up regarding developments in Chilla, was that recently the involvement from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), based in Technopark, Thiruvananthapuram, has pretty much ended. TCS used to have a social service component as part of the training for their new employees. For a few years now TCS trainees would visit Chilla every Saturday and interact with the children. Previously Anil and Roja told us that this has been very good for the children as they became more comfortable with speaking in English and in using a computer. Additionally, Anil said, it used to help them in reaching many individual donors (employees at TCS or their friends). But recently TCS has apparently been putting the trainees on a tighter schedule that doesn't leave room for the social service component. So for now, this very beneficial arrangement has come to a stop.

Children: There are 15 kids in Chilla (no change in some time), with the oldest 3 kids studying in the 9th standard. One girl (**VERIFY GENDER**) from last year is now staying with her mother, and a brother and sister also have moved over to their mother's place. In one case the mother has moved out of the city into a new house (which

several people including Anil/Roja help her build), has quit sex-work, runs a small scale scrap-paper business in her house, and is not recognized as a sex-worker in the new place. In the other case, the mother is still a sex-worker in the city, but the house is in the outskirts of the city, and her mother (grandmother) looks after the kid(s).

Academically the children are continuing to do well. But with a change in the teaching/evaluation methodology in Kerala, generally everyone (children, teachers) is struggling to come to terms with the new system. The new system is activity based, and the children are given points not just for their performance in the exams, but also for classroom activities. There are projects and presentations. Anil thinks this is generally a good system, but doesn't emphasize linguistic skills as much as the previous system (which placed much emphasis on written exams). The children (including Chilla's children) get good overall scores, over 80%, but their performance in the written exams is not very impressive.

There are three tutors -- two paid and one an occasional volunteer -- who help the children with the studies. One of the paid tutors is an ex-teacher in a CBSE school, and the other has an MA in sociology. In addition Anil and Roja try to help the kids with everything including finding projects and other activities.

Apart from things at school, the children are involved in several activities. Anil mentioned dance, music and occasional theater. (ANANNIA's chair person Raghothaman runs a theater troupe called Abhinaya and the children have got some opportunities there in the past; apparently Raghothaman is now very busy with a Macbeth adaptation and hasn't been able to spend a lot of time with the kids.) A recent addition is crafts, specifically making designer ornaments. One of the children, Reshma, won a prize at the sub-district level last year for this, so since then Anil and Roja have encouraged her and others to work on it. There is a teacher who comes to instruct the kids. All the kids, boys and girls, take part in all the activities, but in each activity, not surprisingly, some do better than the others.

The kids are generally healthy, but during the Onam break (September) two kids fell ill. Anil says one of them got the infection.. and by the time Anil/Roja noticed it, another kid also fell ill. The kids were treated in government hospitals. One of them is yet to recover fully.

When Dr. Jayashree used to be in the city (she was one of the founders of FIRM) there used to be free medical camps for children at Chilla. They haven't had that kind of camps in a while. But there are friendly doctors in some of the hospitals, and it helps when taking the children to those hospitals.

The teenagers need -- and are getting -- counselling. There are some programs available, including one by the government. Anil and Roja try to make sure the children get to participate frequently. Apart from the usual teenage issues, there are also issues as the children come to realize their identity as the child of a sex-worker. This is quite a delicate issue. Being in company of other children in a similar situation helps. Anil and Roja said that different kids cope with this issue differently, but said that some of them are in denial (or as Anil put it, are living in "a fantasy world of their own"). But Anil/Roja feel that it may be better to be in denial for now, than be constantly weighed down by the stigma, if it helps them do well at school and among friends.

The kids face don't seem to face any discrimination at school. This year the children have been getting more of their friends to visit their home (i.e., Chilla) more frequently than before. Anil and Roja are "uncle and aunty" for the kids at Chilla, and their visiting friends don't seem too concerned about this. Many of the parents are probably not aware of the background of the kids at Chilla. But some parents, especially the ones at the PTA, would know (Anil has been very involved with the school PTAs).

Organization: Chilla is now officially a project of Sangama. But ANANNIA board members still take a keen interest in Chilla, though they have been finding it difficult to spend much time lately. (Raghothaman is tied up with his theater, and the others are government employees.) Roja works on projects at the Centre of Developmental Studies, off and on. We didn't explicitly discuss this, but there seems to be no other changes (i.e., there is an ayah and a cook).

Shankar asked about Chilla's future plans. After separating from FIRM, Chilla/ANANNIA had started networking with a few NGOs related to sex-workers. In particular, they have been close to two Bangalore-based NGOs Sangama (who now officially owns Chilla) and Suraksha. Suraksha has a plan to set up several homes like Chilla,

accompanied by day-care centres for children of sex-workers. They are planning 4 in Bangalore and one in Kozhikode (aka Calicut) in north Kerala. Chilla will be in charge of getting the Kozhikode one up and running. They have identified a few potential people (may be paid, rather than volunteers) to run such a house. This is one way Chilla is "expanding." They could also expand the current home in Thiruvananthapuram a little bit beyond 15 kids if they move to a bigger house. The current house has 6 bedrooms and -- with 15 kids, and Anil/Roja and their child living there -- can accommodate more kids only for short-term emergencies.

Shankar also asked if Chilla knows how the need in the city has changed since Chilla started. As far as Anil and Roja know, there are no other similar homes in the city. The only other one in Kerala that they could think of is in Kottayam, where a couple looks after 20 kids of unwed tribal women (it's similar in spirit, but is not for children of professional sex-workers). They haven't done a need assessment study after the initial one before founding Chilla. But Suraksha's project in Kozhikode involves a preliminary study for all of Kerala. It might take place in December depending on when funding becomes available.

Site-visit: Milu and Karl will be visiting Chilla, tentatively on Sunday, Jan 4, 2009. Anil/Roja are looking forward to meeting them.

Co-ordinates: The Asha webpage for Chilla already has the correct address for the new house (which none of us have visited), but the phone number listed is Sangama's.