



# Asha for Education™

UFlorida Chapter

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

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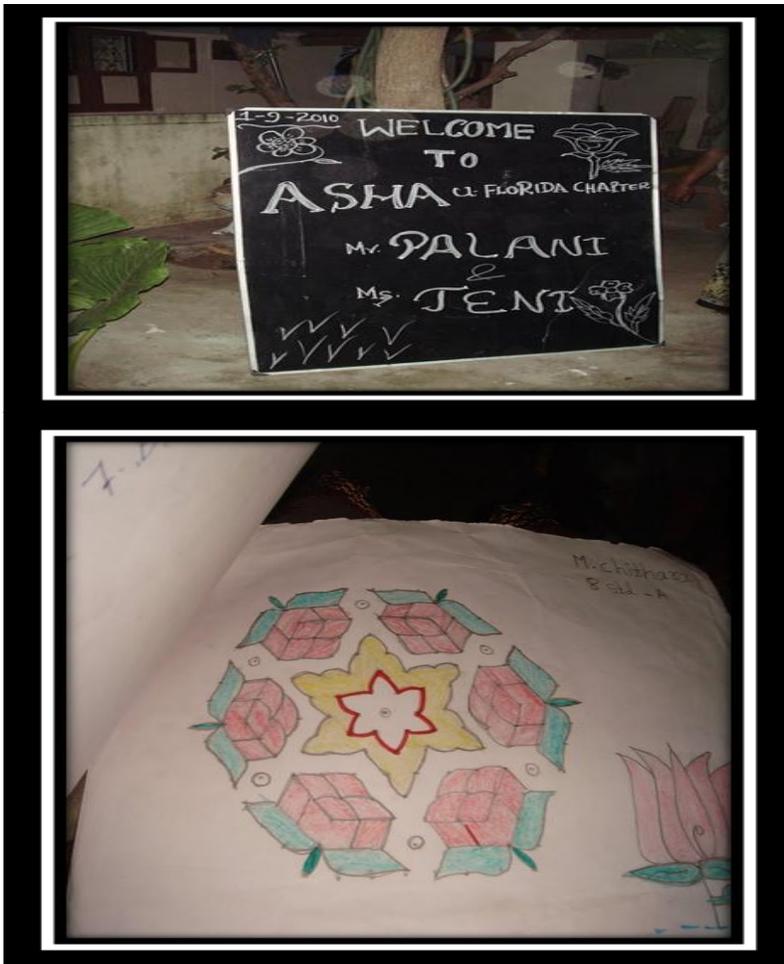
## FORWARD Site Visit Report

- Reported by Ms. Janani Priya Jayakumar

**Sep 1, 2010**

Myself and Pazhani decided to visit FORWARD and we scheduled a visit through Shyamala Baby. FORWARD supports 13 night schools which are located in the out skirts of Chennai. They work in clusters in few areas too.

Shyamala Baby picked us up from the Thambaram Railway station and we visited FORWARD's corporate office which is located in interior Thambaram. She showed us some photographs of the past events and art work done by the





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I had been to their corporate office once in 2009 for one of their staff meeting. I was informed that they conduct staff meeting on the first Saturday of every month. There were around 12 teachers present in the meeting and majority of them were young girls (I couldn't recollect their names thou'). I vividly remember Franklin, who works as a lab assistant in a private Engineering College. Looks like he has been with Forward for a long time now and he pretty much knows most of the details and he did all the talking ☺. The rest of them were extremely silent, may be they were hesitant because I was there. I did some ice braking and finally some of them opened up. One thing was very evident, the teachers are not stable, being young girls they either get married or they become pregnant which restricts them from being involved. There was one girl who had come with a just born for the meeting after a yearlong break. I was not able to get a clear answer as to what they do when the teachers drop out.

When I inquired about the teacher's qualification, most of them were 8<sup>th</sup> Std, 9<sup>th</sup> Std or 10<sup>th</sup> Std pass outs. My concern was, how do they manage to coach students in higher classes ?? I was told that they have training events but I am not sure how effective that could be and I did not see any evidence of it happening in the past too. This is my personal opinion and I may be wrong because my knowledge about the project is very limited.

## **Day 1:**

Our first visit was to the evening school at **Jothi Nagar** (Semi Urban, Dalit population). Myself, Pazhani, Shyamala Baby, another elderly lady who works as a helper started around 6 30 PM. The journey took us about 2 hours. FORWARD employees Mathew and Madurai Veeran were already there to make arrangements. This place as mentioned is a semi urban kinda region, so the roads were fine. This class is run by Franklin and there were about 17 kids. They had decorated welcome boards at every center☺. I remember that this particular school had a higher proportion of students who were doing their 9<sup>th</sup> std and up. The kids introduced themselves and few of them said how this evening school set up helped them academically. I was gladder to hear a majority of them say that their overall behavior had undergone a lot of changes. There was one little guy who was like, "You have no idea about the number of bad words I used to speak earlier". Everyone said that they have become more cultured, disciplined, CLEAN and that they manage time better. These classes are held at Franklin's place, it was well lit, they had a plastic sheet to sit on and we distributed school bags and biscuits that day.



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*Pic 1: Franklin at Jothi Nagar*

We then went to **Pulikoradu**. This region is full of quarry and bushes. There were literally no roads, no lights and our driver had a tough time. It was a nightmare to even think of how people commute each day. Pulikoradu evening school is run by Alamelu. There were about 30 of them. I remember, there were lots of little ones compared to other places. This center definitely lacked lighting. Guess they are working on it.



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*Pic 2: Pazhani at Pulikoradu*



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*Pic 3: Pulikoradu. The woman in pink and blue saree is Alamelu.*

## **Day 2:**

We decided to leave early the second day because these places were a little far off. It took us about 3 hours to reach **Mohalwadi** (Rural, Dalit). This center is run by Jebamalar, a middle aged women. Here again there were about 25 kids. They introduced themselves and described how the class helps them in several ways. We got to meet few of the parents and they were also extremely pleased with the initiative. It was great to hear them say that their kids were all well-behaved☺. There were 2 girls who showed us some medals that they received in School. FORWARD has given them one tube light and a plastic sheet but I am sure they need at least another tube light to ensure proper lighting. These kids were wonderful; they just didn't want us to leave.



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*Pic 4: Mohalwadi. Happy Kids with their school bags 😊*

Next in the list was **Ramapuram** (Rural) run by Rajesh Kanna. He is a polytechnic student and manages to conduct these classes in the evening. We were told that he is very committed. We were shocked to see such a huge crowd in the class. There were easily 45+ students. Since we had very little time in hand, we had to rush through the roll call. The kids danced and sang for us. There was one kid who had undergone a surgery through FORWARD and is doing great now. They were also planning on a hospital visit for 2 more students.



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*Pic 5: Ramapuram. The one holding the book is Rajesh Kanna.*

The last visit was to **Elappakkam** (Rural) which was run by Kanchana, a young girl. This place was well lit with a limited set of students. Most of them were 9<sup>th</sup> Std plus. Each of them introduced and told the ranks(grades) they used to get before attending these classes and what they get now. It was a remarkable improvement. Kanchana also teaches them hand craft from waste products and poetry. They even gave us a handmade bouquet☺ Kanchana seemed very organized and capable. I enjoyed being there but we had another 3 hour journey back home so we had to part ways. We reached home around 1 AM and Shyamala Baby had to go back to Tambaram after dropping us.



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*Pic 6: Elappakkam. Display of their hand craft.*

To sum it all, visiting these places were such a gratifying experience. I would have loved to spend more time with them but they are available only in the evenings and these places are pretty far. It would be unfair if I don't appreciate their efforts to even commute to these centers. It is an extremely difficult task. I am sure the team visits them quite often and caters to their needs. Shyamala Baby is well educated and bold women. I am sure it takes a lot of guts to manage all of this. My thanks and wishes to the team!!!



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*Pic 7: Mrs. Shyamala Baby and Kanchana at Elappakkam*

Here is the link for the complete set of photos

<http://picasaweb.google.com/jans86.janani/FORWORDSiteVisit2010#>