



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

FORWORD conference call minutes

Date : **30th September 2011 (8:00 am IST)**
Attendees : **Ms.Shiamala Baby (FORWORD), Shivashankar Halan (project steward), Shraddha Sundaram**

The agenda for this conference call was as follows:

1. To get first-hand updates about the day-to-day functioning of the project from the project partner.
2. Review any issues to be addressed before the disbursement of the second installment of funds for the year 2011-12.

Background about FORWORD

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 14 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.

Funding situation background

Asha UFlorida has been supporting the project for the past couple of years with a commitment of close to \$12000 per year (cycle runs from Nov to Oct). In 2011 the FORWORD project was nominated by Asha UFlorida to be a part of the Work an Hour (WAH) campaign conducted by Asha Central. The campaign helped raise \$8500 for the project and this amount was disbursed to the project in March 2012. Since we usually disburse around \$12000 to the project it was decided and voted to disburse another \$4000 from the Asha UFlorida chapter funds. This conference call was in order to get updates and clarify any questions the volunteers might have before the disbursement of this second installment to the project.



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Conference call minutes

The conference call started with the project director Ms. Shiamala Baby giving a brief overview about the FORWORD project in general and the education aspect in specific. The director recounted how the project has grown over the years and the special advantage that the education program is providing to both the children and the entire community as a whole.

In response to a question from Shraddha about how the project was started the director recounted the story of her own personal abuse and domestic violence at the hands of her husband that gave her the determination and will power to fight for the freedom and rights of women in the region. She recalled the early days of starting FORWORD and the challenges she had to face and how she was able to overcome them with perseverance and working closely with the womenfolk of the region.

How are the evening centers functioning?

The centers were working well and the students are busily preparing for the quarterly examinations that usually happen just before the Pooja holidays.

How often are the evening centers being visited by the administrative staff?

One common issue with these centers is that they are far apart and also quite distant from the city of Chennai where all the administrative staffs reside. The director visits the centers visit the centers as and when they get time and usually this is around twice a month. The coordinator of the education projects at these centers – Mr. Edwin visits at least a center a day and visits each evening center at least once a week. He is in-charge of maintaining the quality of education in these centers and deals with any higher level issues and requirements in these centers. Since he has a bike the travel to the center is a little easier and enables him visiting multiple centers on the same evening. He also coordinates the supply of resources and salary disbursements to the teaching staff at the centers.

The funding situation was explained to the director and that the remaining amount of \$4000 would be disbursed soon. The director mentioned that there was an issue with the FCRA for the project since the renewal of the project has been delayed due to some issues with change of working office address for the project. She mentioned that the relevant documents have been now sent to the HRD Ministry in Delhi and they are awaiting the successful renewal of their FCRA clearance.