

## **Conference call with Jeevan Gnanodaya**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2008

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### **On the call:**

Rekha, Karl, Aravind, Debapriya, Sarika and Shankar (from Asha-UC) and Mr. Devarajan from Jeevan Gnanodaya (JG)

### **Call summary:**

**Note:** All action items have been highlighted in blue!

### **Teacher recruitment at JG:**

Till date, JG has had only self-trained teachers, excepting three trained teachers. This year, they are attempting to bring in formally trained teachers in an attempt to better the quality of teaching at the school. For this purpose, Mr. Devarajan has been involved in efforts to bring new teachers from a university in Coimbatore (Ramakrishna Mission/Vivekananda University); the university specializes in training people for disability management (not restricted to deafness alone) and other special education as well. JG's plan is to hire five (or four?) teachers from this school (and have requested support for four of them from Asha-UC).

Mr. Devarajan told us that many teachers in the university expressed their desire to work for JG, upon hearing good recommendations from people. After conducting interviews, etc. he has now hired four teachers, three with a B.Ed degree and one with a diploma; three female and one male teacher. The male teacher, Jagdish will join JG on May 21<sup>st</sup>, and rest of them will come in June. JG has offered to provide accommodation for all the lady teachers so they can stay nearby. All these teachers are specially trained to teach in sign language and also through regular speech therapy, lip movements, etc., and will be asked to handle the ITI, middle and higher classes in the school.

In addition to the above four (or five?), he also plans to take in three teachers from another training institute in Kanyakumari, who are not trained to teach in sign language, but only in regular speech based techniques. These teachers will be assigned to primary classes (they are specially trained to handle younger children).

All of the above teachers (from Coimbatore and Kanyakumari) are fresh out of school and do not have any teaching experience. To address this, Mr. Devarajan is planning to get a person (who works for a Madras-based university, long-term personal contact of his) and conduct a ten day orientation-type of course for all of them (and the current teachers as well) before they begin to formally start teaching classes. This person will train the teachers in handling classes, i.e., the practical aspects of handling children, etc. (she will not be teaching sign language or anything like that). This course is mainly meant to orient them to handle hearing impaired students. This is the first time (in their 19 years of existence) that they're conducting such a course. All this is being done just as an attempt to change things a bit and see if there is any improvement in the quality of untrained teachers. This person who will be conducting the orientation course (he mentioned the details, I forgot) is widely acclaimed to be an expert in the field.

As a recap, 5 (or 4?) from Coimbatore based university – 2 for the ITI, 3 for teaching subjects. These teachers will also teach in English simultaneously using sign language (for the English part) and oral techniques for the tamil part. And three from the Kanyakumari training center as well.

He also mentioned that there will be at least one or two dropouts from the current batch of teachers this year, and it becomes therefore necessary to replace them with new recruits.

### **The next academic year at JG:**

Students begin to arrive in the hostel and prepare themselves between June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, after approximately a one month holiday (school had closed end of April). Classes will officially begin on June 6<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Devarajan informed us that the students do not really know about the inclusion of sign language into their

curriculum starting next year. They are however aware that they would be taught English, and that some new teachers may be coming in.

*What changes are expected at JG for next year?*

These are many. The introduction of sign language itself is quite a big change. And several changes will need to accompany that. For example, JG uses flash cards and other teaching aids to teach children. So far, Mr. Devarajan used to prepare them. But now, the trained teachers will make them in accordance to what they might have learnt in their training. He also believes they are better than him because they are trained specifically for this purpose (while he is only self trained).

*Did JG ask the university where they're hiring from as to what methods need to be used initially to introduce sign language and what changes to make?*

They can only tell as much. JG knows better than anyone else as to what is best for its students, rather what works best. So he will consult these teachers and design an appropriate curriculum.

*Changes to the class structure:*

Some changes are required here as well. Right now the seating arrangement is something like 4+4 (front+back). He plans to make it a long V-shaped 8-seater from which all students could see each other and also observe (in an identical manner) the sign and lip movements of the teacher and imitate them.

*Do you plan to use signs and oral-based teaching simultaneously, or otherwise?*

He is just starting to implement sign language. So he does not know immediately what works best, whether both can be done simultaneously or whether they have to be done one after the other. He had apparently asked the same question to the dean of the university where teachers were trained. He also feels it needs to be implemented for a month to know what works.

*Some clarifications on what he is using sign language for:*

To teach kids English, this has its own long list of advantages. So far he's been teaching kids (in Tamil) orally. Kids understand by reading lips. Given their disability, it would not be possible for them to understand and learn another language ALSO ORALLY, because, when you cannot hear, it becomes very confusing to even figure out whatever you say is in English or Tamil. So, he cannot teach English using oral techniques. This is where formal sign language comes in.

At this point, few of us had some questions or rather wondered if this was the best thing to do because, signs are a language by themselves, and not necessarily only to teach English. Usually, a sign language (American or Indian or Mexican sign language or whatever) is learnt first and then followed by the teaching of a second language (English or Latin or whatever). Here, we seem to be dealing with something in the middle. It was decided that we will have a chat about this with Dr. Vasishtha and give feedback to Mr. Devarajan later. Mr. Devarajan listed out a few questions that he had about sign language and wants us to ask these questions to Dr. Vasishtha. Shankar and Sarika will follow-up.

### **Parental involvement in children's development – home visits:**

*This was like a follow-up question from the previous conference call we had with them. The suggestion being made is this: parents need to get more involved in their children's learning process. This has been found to be rather important, and many experts in the area share this view. In the last call, JG had listed a bunch of reasons as to why such kind of involvement is missing in some of JG's kids' (mainly day scholars, because others never go home) parents. We were wondering if the idea of home visits, where in, someone from JG could go and visit their parents in their home, and interact with them on a regular basis, and thereby educate them about how they could get more involved, what to do, what not to do, etc.*

It might work and it might not. Some parents might take it in the right spirit and accept the suggestions that the teachers give. Some might not like teachers telling them what to do. Also, it may not be possible for the current teachers to take up these additional responsibilities. He may have to add additional workforce for this. He however accepted that this was a very good idea, and worth a shot, especially because they've not taken any significant steps in the direction of increasing parental involvement (mainly due to reasons like volunteer bandwidth, financial bandwidth, etc. Also, another option is to call the parents to the school and counsel them. He has promised to look into these possibilities and figure out if this is going to be useful. We will need to follow-up with him on this topic in future.

*Are there any questions from Mr. Devarajan to us?*

He is happy that out of interaction with us, he has decided to go ahead with sign language and English education. He hopes that he will be able to make other changes as well one by one. He would like us to contact Prof. Vasishta and figure out what (on his behalf) what logistics are involved in introducing signing in a school that has gone with oral-based teaching all this while. Also, any information regarding resources available for this purpose, and other available higher education opportunities would be of great help. We will need to get back to Mr. Devarajan on these questions.

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