

Meeting Minutes for Asha Chennai on 27th August 2023

Minutes of the meeting held in person and via GoogleMeet on Sunday 27 August 2023 at 9.30 AM

Following were present

- Kalyan
- Kasturi
- Komalavalli
- Paripoornam
- Rajaraman
- Shiva
- Sriram
- Sundaram
- Usha Rao
- Venkat
- Vidhya Arun

0. Ratification of the minutes of the meeting held on Sunday, 28th June 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2023 were ratified unanimously.

1. Staff Loans

Sriram sought approval for a loan of Rs 50,000 to a teacher working in Poorna Vidhya for education in a professional college for her husband. After consideration it was agreed to unanimously.

Rajaraman stated that two teachers from Sangamam sought loans of Rs 50,000 each for house construction/repairs. Grant of these two loans were approved unanimously.

Paripoornam said one teacher from Thulasi also sought a loan of Rs 50,000 for house construction/repair expenses. This was also approved unanimously.

2. Asha Participation in NEP Akhil Bhartiya Sikhsha Samagam on 29,30 July 2023

Rajaraman and Venkat stated that Asha Chennai participated in this exhibition by putting up a stall in the IIT Madras Pavilion. We displayed Asha Kanini and computer games and tools we use in our curriculum; Maze and Bird activities from Blockly games, Treasure hunts and [Code.org](https://code.org) unplugged activities. There was a very good response among school children. More than 200 children got certificates from us.

3. Update on MOU with TN State Government and permission in various districts

Rajaraman stated that he had a productive meeting with the Ms Arthi IAS Director Samagra Sikhsha. After Rajaraman presented what Asha Chennai was doing in Digital Literacy and Computer education to school children, Ms Arthi suggested that it would be worthwhile to include these too in the MOU. Rajaraman stated that the revised draft has also been submitted and we hope to close this out soon.

4. Asha Coordinator Interview under ZEE Naya Bharath Sunhera Amrit kal

Rajaraman described his experience both personal and official while being interviewed at the Zee TV Studios in Mumbai. Others present in the meeting congratulated Rajaraman for getting an opportunity to be in the media glare and stated that they looked forward to its telecast date and time.

5. Update on Stationery, Uniform Distribution

It was informed that the programmes were going smoothly. It was observed that the stationery prices had skyrocketed even beyond the provision made in the budget. There was a brief discussion on uniforms for male teachers. There was consensus, in the case of male teachers, on providing T-shirts with Asha Logo and stitching of trousers by themselves.

6. RTC Impressions

This time around, competitions were conducted in the swanky IC & SR Auditorium in IIT M with two halls given. 4 RTCs from Thiruvallur and 2 from Thoothukudi participated. Competitions were held showcasing Presentation (Basic Digital Literacy students), Simple Programs (Basic Programming students), and Advanced Projects (Web Development, Physical Programming, and Javascript Animations students).

There was a panel of judges with rich experience in the tech field. Quality of presentations was very good as was acknowledged by the judges.

7. Updates Asha worldwide calls

The checklists submitted by Asha Chennai for fund transfer from US to India were discussed in an Asha wide call. This was a routine call and all the checklists were approved and funds have been transferred to India.

Asha wide coordination team reached out to Rajaram to find out ways for Asha Worldwide and Asha India to engage more closely with each other. Rajaram then organised a call with various key people in Asha India. It is making a slow start and we hope that there will be greater opportunities for both organizations to learn and grow from each other's experiences.

8. Updates on Sugatharam Arogyam and Office Building in Tiruvallur

Toilet construction is continuing and a toilet at Gangavaram in Thulasi consisting of 3 Toilets and 6 Urinals with an overhead tank for water built at a fast pace is nearing completion. Rajaraman mentioned that there are a couple of volunteers who have come forward to donate towards the construction of toilets.

Arogyam provision of nutrition is being continued to children in very poor villages who are also attending schools supported by Asha. However, in light of the government's breakfast scheme which just started, we are reevaluating that and will probably discontinue in many of the schools.

While what was planned and proposed was only about 300 sq ft of storage space and 2 30 sq ft toilets, what has been constructed has far exceeded that. The storage room is about 500 sq ft and the two toilets are each about 45 sq ft. Further, the first floor is also being built which provides a good 600 sq ft space that can be used for training, meetings etc. Expenditure on construction has significantly exceeded the earlier estimates. Rajaraman will come up with final estimates for approval in the course of the next few months.

9. Updates and approvals from projects

Mirzapur – Komalavalli stated that the selection of suitable teachers and schools is still continuing. The first teacher who was selected and who was very good unfortunately did not work out as he was far from the main project area.

Semmancheri – Sujata stated that she and Shiva had visited 4 schools and are planning to proceed with two of the schools. They are scouting for teachers in that area.

10. Review of our Admin and Staff policies

Rajaraman mentioned that he had circulated updated guidelines applicable to Volunteers and also Staff policy and rules governing leave entitlements, severance salary etc. Discussing this was moved to a later meeting after volunteers had the opportunity to review and may suggest changes.

11. Looking ahead

Rajaraman drew the attention of the meeting to his email on some changes that have occurred. Namely.

- Introduction of Breakfast scheme of the TN govt
- Reduction in enrollment because of the return of students to the Private school system.
- Greater reporting requirement and need for meaningful assessment of our computer science programs that are coming up due to the MOU with the govt as well as from Amazon.

These raised some important issues like if we should continue the nutrition project the Arogyam It was felt that this could be continued in very poor hamlets adjoining the schools we support in the evenings subject to the availability of willing participating teachers.

Enrollment at government schools has dropped significantly at all projects. Further government and even other NGOs have appointed teachers to the schools we are supporting. This reduces our scope for deploying regular teachers. As we need to continue working for improvement in Maths, English and other subjects, how do we achieve that? In this context, a thought occurs if we should have well designed subject wise programmes to augment primary school education. In this direction we already have Karadi Path Education for English and so also for Computer Digital Literacy et al. The moot point is if we should develop similar systems for training in Maths and science.

Rajaraman also dealt with the subject of measuring and reporting progress in detail and stated that we should design and put in place systems as early as possible for ourselves to know how effective our efforts are.