

MINUTES OF CHILDREN CORE GROUP MEETING

Date: 06th January 2006, Friday
Time: 5 pm to 6:30 pm
Venue: NCRC Office, Collectorate, Nagapattinam

Agenda:

Mr. Gerald of NCRC greeted the members of the core group, which was formed during Children's Day Celebrations (CDC) and began the meeting by stating the key points to be discussed:

- Information about the joint account opened for the Children
- Plans about the future activities to be carried out for children
- Improving coordination among the NGOs
- Setting up of a three- tier forum to convert plans and decisions into action

Participants' List:

List of Organisations who attended Children Core Group/ Review Meeting on 06.01.2006 (Friday) at NCRC Office, Collectorate, Nagapattinam				
Sl. No	Organisation	Name of the Person/ Designation	Phone/Mobile	E-mail
1	SNEHA	N. Dhanalakshmi	94438-85119	
2	Good Shepherd	Sr. Mercy Joseph	98405-70122	
3	Karuna Karya Trust	Anandan	93809-54321	ranandan2004@rediffmail.com
4	Karuna Karya Trust	Arul Doss	98428-41152	arulkaram2005@yahoo.com
5	People's Development Association (PDA)	A. Poominathan	98435-64220	joepda@sancharnet.in
6	Every Child – Idhaya	R. karuppusamy	98420-90035	everychild.nagapattinam@everychildindia.org
7	Vanavil	Revathi. R	94440-30032	revathi.work@gmail.com , vanavil_nagai@yahoo.co.in

Key points discussed:

- The participants were informed about the joint account in the name of NCRC, Good Shepherd and Phoenix Federation that has been opened in Union Bank of India, Nagapattinam to carry out all the financial transactions related to children. The actual balance in the account is Rs. 68, 635 and the \$1700 contributed by Ms. Jeny's fiance has gone for currency conversion which will be nearly Rs. 74, 000. Hence, the total amount available for children is nearly Rs. 1.4 lacs.
- Mr. Gerald put forth the idea of setting up a forum that shall be a platform for all future activities for the benefits and development of the children. This forum shall have a three

level functioning – discussions and planning by the NGOs; secondly a general body meet between the core group and the relevant government officials where the proposals will be put forward; and thirdly implementation of the decisions by the relevant parties – NGOs or the government or jointly by both.

- Good Shepherd said that it was a good idea to set up such a forum so that effective planning and implementation of children related activities are carried out without any hindrances.
- Karuna Karya Trust, based on their experience, told that involving the government in few important meetings and activities will be useful as working in the district needs the government's approval and consent.
- SNEHA opined that at first we (the NGOs) should meet, discuss the issues faced at field level, the new activities that can be introduced, come up with plans that can be practically implemented and then the government's involvement is welcome. This will provide freeness to the NGOs to express their views and ideas as well as save the government's time.
- Ms. Revathi from Vanavil, the *Boom boom mattukara* team stated that they have identified many young kids who begging for having at least one meal per day. Unfortunately, majority of these children do not even have a community certificate – few are physically disabled also and hence are deprived from many provisions. The funds can be utilised to support these kids and improve their standards of living.
- It was also suggested that orphans and semi orphans who are still deprived of the main necessities and needs of childhood should be supported through the funds.
- It was stated that there are many exclusive schemes and plans declared by the government for such children. This issue shall be brought to the notice of the government so that the necessary aid and support is provided to the children.

Next, the issue of school dropouts during post tsunami period and the implementation of GO 33 was discussed. **It has been found out that the total number of school dropouts after tsunami is much higher than what is in the records. One of the reasons has been demand for school fee which was not affordable by the tsunami affected kids and therefore they discontinued.** Many NGOs tried to get their children back into the schools they studied before tsunami but faced only denial and disappointment.

- In certain cases the children have been re-admitted but they are being harassed so much that they themselves give up going to schools. The members stated that this is a very sensitive and serious issue which has to be tackled carefully with full support from the government.
- The school heads and teachers are doing lot of fraud in the records by showing full attendance for those children who have not even attended school once after tsunami. The main reasons identified behind all this are – shortage in student attendance will endanger the

staff's job and posting; the teaching staff find it difficult in making these children cope up with others and hence do not want to absorb them; the school's reputation is the main concern for the authorities than the lives of the children.

- SNEHA quoted an incident where they had directly approached the collector with this issue. Collector held a meeting with the all school administrators and teachers and told them to re-admit the children and not to violate the GO 33. Otherwise, severe action shall be taken against the particular school. Some improvement was seen after that but after sometime the schools became reluctant leading to the same old pathetic situation.
- The education centers run by the government (ICDSW), exclusively for the school dropouts, also does not have efficient and regular teaching staff. On the other hand, the schools say that the children will be re-admitted if they are brought up to the standards of the regular school goes through training at NGO run tuition centers and similar sources.

At this point, it was suggested that first it should be decided what exactly can be done, what mechanism will be adopted to help the children with the available funds or will more funds be raised at regular intervals. Then it will be easier to come up with definite issues, implementations possible, whether it should be directly by NGOs or channelised through other organisations, etc.

- **The Prime Minister's Assistance Scheme** announced exclusively for tsunami affected school going children is also not being implemented effectively in the district. The basic idea is to raise a small savings for all the children, that can be utilised during emergencies but the District Education Office has eliminated matriculation school children stating that if they can afford to study in such a matriculation school, they should be well off!
- Vanavil stated that those children are also adversely affected by tsunami but their parents were keen on sending them to good educational institutions and hence taking lot of pains to do so. The collector was approached and he provided an letter stating that the particular number of children, studying in matriculation or private schools are also tsunami affected and the education office shall grant the scheme for them too.
- Thereby accounts in the banks for the left out children were opened by the NGOs but still the education officer is not approving the scheme for those children. Certificate from the VAO stating that the particular child be granted the scheme is being demanded, apart from the common certificate held for tsunami effected.
- All this is complicating the situation, creating unwanted chaos and hence few of the NGOs are planning to agitate against the education department to get the 'right to the scheme' to the left out children. Also, children who are enrolled and going to NGO run schools, because they were dropped out of their regular school, are also not able to avail this scheme.

- The NGOs feel that government needs to rework on GO 33 and ensure its strict implementation as the violation of this only has led to many dropouts. NCRC, along with all other NGOs, shall very soon have talks with the district administration to solve all the above discussed issues.
- In this context, the NGOs were instructed to do a careful survey in their respective areas of work and prepare a list of the left out children, which school does each one of them study in, since when are the children school dropouts and so on. This list will serve as a strong evidence as well as source to negotiate on the issues with the government.

The further discussion headed in the direction of planning activities for the children and their implementations in the near future. The NGOs immediately spoke about the two important problems prevailing in the district – child trafficking and child labour. The need to eradicate them through legal channels and with the help of government was suggested.

- Every child pointed out that there is a scheme called *sumangali thittam* through which adolescent girls are being migrated to textile mills in places like Coimbatore, Tirupur, etc and exploited. Even SNEHA has encountered such cases and states that the fishermen community which would never send its girls for job outside the district is now forced to do so because of poor living conditions.
- Special protection policies for adolescent girls (13 to 18 years old) have to be formulated and strictly implemented along with the laws against child marriage and child pregnancy. It was opined that further ignorance and lethargy on part of the government can not tolerated and necessary measures should be taken at by the NGOs.
- The toll free child helpline (1098) is also not effective in its operations and is not taking any strong action against the ones violating child rights and acts. The NGOs have identified parents who take loans and send their children to bonded labour kind of jobs. Awareness among parents is been created but to bring back those children repayment of the loans is not possible by the parents.

Key Decisions:

- In view of so many sensitive issues related children, it was decided that resource persons shall be invited for next meeting and a full day session can be conducted. It will help all NGOs get better awareness about the child protection acts, the various rules that prevail to stop child trafficking and the child rights. This in turn will help them in conducting awareness and knowledge sharing sessions for the children as well as the parents or guardians.
- It was also decided that in the first week of every month (mostly on the first Friday) a review cum planning meeting for all NGOs working with children shall be held.