

LeapForWord

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This document is a bi-monthly newsletter of LeapForWord.

(A) 1st Year of circulation (B) Academic Year: **2009 - 2010**
(C) Period: **October 1st - November 30th** (D) Newsletter Number: **2**

DISCLAIMER:

The information presented in this document is based on the data collected by LeapForWord during the course of its operations. This data is collected (*and will be collected in future*) **ONLY** for the following purposes:

- 1) To understand the Ground Realities thereby enable LeapForWord to customize its deliverable
- 2) Measurement of the Impact.

LeapForWord **DOES NOT** intend to present this data to point out deficiencies **if any** in the prevalent system.

Good teachers are costly, but bad teachers cost more.

Bob Talbert, American Journalist

From the LeapForWord^A Team,

Last 2 months witnessed the commencement of the activities related to the Youth Project (*Urban & Rural*). Parallel work on all the 3 projects ensured that the team was kept busy throughout. We have had our share of challenges in this period, but if we were to define the progress in 1 word, it would be ‘Encouraging’

In this document, we have tried to present the activities from the last 2 months. Inline with one of the core beliefs^B of The Effort, we have tried to keep this document objective oriented wherever possible.

A brief summary of the activities is as follows:

- New teacher is hired, taking the tally of paid teaching resources to 3
- Formal Teacher Training Program is initiated
- 1st school test is administered for BMC school students
- Comprehensive Screening test for Youth program participants is designed & administered
- Urban Youth project begins from December 12. A batch of 28 students is shortlisted.
- Corporate Volunteering offer is being considered.

The status of the various projects is as follows:

	PROJECT	STATUS
1	School	On Track
2	Urban Youth	On Track
3	Rural Youth	Behind schedule

We would definitely like to hear from you on ways of improving this communiqué.

^A : Also referred to as ‘The Effort’

^B : One of our 7 beliefs is “An action is effective only if its results can be measured”

PROJECT UPDATES

D) SCHOOL PROJECT:

New Hire:

The Effort has had a new hire since November. Thus the total number of paid resources adds upto 3 (2 in Mumbai for BMC schools and 1 in Shirpur). All these resources have been engaged for teaching purposes.

Teacher Training:

The Effort formally began its teacher training program in the month of November.

- Each of the 2 new Mumbai hires acclimatized with the school project by accompanying the regular school teachers^C in the initial weeks. They however did not undertake active teaching in this period.
- Between November 11 – 18^D, formal classroom training sessions were conducted for the new hires
- Post the classroom training sessions, the new hires have begun sharing the teaching work with the regular teachers
 - Revision of already taught concepts is done by the new hires, while the regular teachers teach the new topics^E
- Such classroom training sessions will be repeated during the course of the academic year

Personal Attention to weaker students:

Additional teaching bandwidth^F has allowed personal attention for the weaker students who otherwise would keep lagging

- The weaker students (*Around 5 in every class*) are separately attended to in each class.
- This activity is shared by the 2 teachers in each class (*Each teacher takes this up while the other addresses the remainder of the class*)

Assessment & Results:

The BMC school students took their first assessment^G of this academic year in the last month of November.

- Total of 316 students across 13 grades from 6 schools took this test.
- The test was administered over a period of 1 week
- The objective of this test was to assess the students on the following 2 parameters
 - Identification of alphabets
 - Reading of simple unbreakable words
- Four sets of question papers were prepared to eliminate the possibility of copying and ensure that results obtained are fair to the extent possible

^C: 2 Management team members are full time teachers in the school project

^D: On account of the 1st term examination in BMC schools, the Effort did not have any classes during this period

^E: Typically in every 1 hour class, ~20-25 minutes are spent in revising already taught topics

^F: Currently there are 2 teachers in each class (1 regular + 1 new hire)

^G: More such assessments would be conducted during the course of the year

Following is a snapshot of the results^H:

	Test Conducted in 1st / 2nd week of September	Test Conducted in last week of November	
	Beginning of the Academic Year	Post 2 months of teaching	
	Mapping Test Results	Test 1 results	Value Added
Total Number of students who took the test	346	316	NA
% of students who could identify alphabets	62%	75%	👍
% of students who could read simple unbreakable words	15%	50%	👍
% of students who could read simple breakable words	11%	To be tested	
% of students who could read complex words	4%	To be tested	

Grade V Students of Holy Family High School also showed improvement in their performance post ~2 months of teaching.

- 43% of the students could read simple unbreakable words in the Mapping Test. This number increased to 98% in Test 1^I.

Same test will be administered for our students in Shirpur next week

Potential Challenges:

Challenge:

The Effort interviewed quite a few candidates for the teaching role before settling on the current resources. Quality of the candidates who interviewed was extremely discouraging despite most of them being qualified teachers (B.Ed). Since the subject to be taught is English, the recruit is expected to demonstrate a basic spoken English level which apparently seems to be very sparse.

Intended Action:

The Effort believes that the solution to the above challenge has to be strategic in nature. Hence a dialogue will be initiated with the BMC to explore options whereby the effectiveness of the program could be retained without the need to recruit external teachers. We expect to see some developments on this front in the next few months.

^H: During the Mapping test in BMC schools, 215 students could read alphabets and 53 could read simple unbreakable words. During Test 1, these numbers were 236 & 159 respectively

^I: Of the 60 students who took the Mapping Test at Holy Family High School, 26 could read simple unbreakable words while of the 46 students who took Test 1, 45 could read simple unbreakable words

II) URBAN YOUTH PROJECT:

The Effort will start its urban youth program for second year night college students of St.Xavier's college, Mumbai

- Batch starts from 12th December
- The entire program is of ~90 hours and will be conducted on the college premises on weekends (~14 weekends)
- 28 students have been short listed for this program

Comprehensive Screening:

The Effort has designed a comprehensive screening test which will be needed to be taken by every youth program aspirant.

The screening test is a combination of written & oral assessments and checks the competence on following areas of English

- Grammar
- Comprehension (Reading & Listening)
- Reading, Conversation & Public speaking
- Essay writing

The objective of this screening test is to put each test taker in a band on the basis of his/her performance in the screening. This will help identify individual training needs and estimate the time required for an individual to reach the desired level in spoken English.

Results of the Screening:

In all 46 aspirants took the 4-hour long screening test. Analysis of their performance helped classify them into 9 distinct bands.

- Element of the screening test which required the aspirants to speak were audio/video recorded in order to facilitate thorough analysis

The list of shortlisted 28 candidates was then offered to St.Xavier's college authorities to check their financial status (*Since The Effort does not charge any fees from its participants, we ensure that those who avail of the services are the ones who cannot afford other privately available similar services*)

Way ahead:

The Effort will invest significant energies to improve the screening test. The objective is to make the screening test increasingly reliable as this will have a direct positive impact on the effectiveness of the whole program. Homogeneity of a batch will not only lead to effective training but will also assist in developing customized content for each band

III) RURAL YOUTH PROJECT:

The Effort conducted the screening test for 11 participants at Kalyan. As expected the performance of these participants was way below those in the Urban Youth Program.

Analysis of their test performance suggested that despite having only 11 participants, the batch had heterogeneous training needs. Maximum number of people with similar training needs was just 3.

Potential Challenges:

Challenge:

With homogeneous batch strength of just 3, The Effort will not conduct a program in Kalyan, however it will still try a workaround to see if any remote assistance could be offered.

Organizing a rural batch has always been difficult as the participants have varying profiles (*studying, drop outs, passed, failed, re-appearing etc*) and they come from different communities (*students, working, non-working etc*)

- Expected turnout for the screening test was 34^J, while only 11 turned up

The rural youth program is already 3 weeks behind schedule, and with each passing week delivering on our objective of conducting 2 rural youth batches in the current academic year seems difficult.

Intended Action:

An organization called REAP^K is assisting LeapForWord in organizing the rural batch. The REAP team has had encouraging responses from other locations in its network and it believes that a spoken English program in those areas could be arranged.

The Effort will wait to see the developments on this front for next 3-4 weeks and could accordingly be required to take one of the following actions

- Conduct only 1 rural batch and defer the 2nd to a later time
- Re-look at the rural youth program structure to address constraints (*if any*) that perhaps make the offering less attractive to the potential participants^L – *This has already begun*

^J: 34 participants from areas in and around Kalyan had expressed interest in attending the program

^K : <http://reapchild.org/>

^L : Importance of spoken English is known to each aspirant who expresses interest in the program and hence the relevance of the offering to the target audience will never be a dispute

Other Updates:

Corporate Volunteering:

LeapForWord team had a round 1 discussion with the senior management of Aramex^M. Aramex is interested in engaging its employees during part of their regular work hours in non-profit work. LeapForWord has prepared an engagement note detailing the role profile of volunteers and is currently awaiting the final response from the Aramex team.

Tax Exemption for donations:

The required documents to avail tax exemption for contributions had already been filed with the Income Tax Commissioner's office^N.

We had a hearing in this regard with the Tax authorities in last week of November. Going by suggested estimates, it might take another month or so to conclude the entire process

Financial Status:

Friends, family & well-wishers of the Effort have continued with their generosity in the last 2 months. It appears at this stage that The Effort should be able to deliver on its on-going commitments^O. However additional funds will be required to keep the rural youth project going once it begins.

Book Distribution^P:

School content which is available in form of books for our students of Grade V & VI has been distributed to all our students across Mumbai & Shirpur

NPO^Q partnership:

One of The Effort's ex-volunteer has started an initiative^R to teach English to under-served kids in his locality. The Effort has shared its content and has offered to train the teacher.

^M: <http://www.aramex.com>

^N: The process has been initiated in July

^O: School & Urban Youth Projects (*Accepted Commitments*) will not be dropped for want of funds

^P: Books are distributed free of cost (*No participant in any of our projects is charged any fee*)

^Q: Non Profit Organization. In this case it could even be individual initiatives

^R: We have not been able to personally visit this initiative, and hence do not have knowledge of its impact till date

LeapForWord

C-10, Yashodhan Society, Road No. 5, Jaiprakash Nagar, Goregaon East, Mumbai – 400 063

Telephone: + 91 9892810716, +91 9819749771

E-mail id: LeapForWord@LeapForWord.org

Website: <http://www.LeapForWord.org>