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CPO Director – India Visit report

Please see below my report relating to my recent visit to Mayapura, Ujjain and Vrindavana.

GBC Meeting

Made a presentation to the GBC body outlining current position, aims going forward and challenges.

Mayapura

Provided training and support to the newly formed Child Protection Team (CPT). This team is headed by Pitambara Devi Dasi (PDD), who is full time. PDD is also appointed as Western India CP regional Director. PDD is a social worker by profession, therefore well suited to the role. PDD is assisted by Rasarani Radharani Devi Dasi. Both are full time and paid by the management of Mayapura. The team also has other members who are community members of Mayapura and parents. Mayapura management have also agreed to provide two investigators as a resource for the CPT.

The CPT team is under a number of pressures namely:

- Dealing with issues related to the different communities in Mayapura, namely the Bengali, Russian, Eastern European and American/Western.
- Dealing with school issues.
- Dealing social/bad parenting issues.
- Dealing with general child protection issues.

Communities
In order to deal with issues arising from different communities, I have advised that the CPT have representation from each of these communities within the team. This way understanding as to cultural background, thought process and practices can be better understood and consequently

communicated. Although exceptions of child abuse based on cultural background etc cannot be tolerated and our polices must be followed.

Schools
I visited and carried out an audit with the Principal and safeguarding teacher of each school. I also toured the school campuses. I did not meet parents during this visit but certainly plan to do so during my next visit in October 2017.

I applaud the choice each parent has for their children as to the educational establishment that best suits their child's needs and abilities.

Furthermore I fully appreciate that having three schools on the Temple campus, all with a different ethos of education can be challenging. Having said that all three schools must have the same polices as far as child protection is concerned based on the understanding that child protection is universal and not differentiated by educational ethos, culture or location. I have communicated this to each school in turn. It was accepted by all concerned.

There was some confusion on certain aspects, for example one school brought up the policy of male and female children not mixing freely together, they felt that if free mixing were allowed then illicit relations could potentially develop. I can appreciate the policy but the school management must ensure that any policies are enforced in the right way and not use them to make children feel degraded or humiliated which may be tantamount to abuse.

Additionally there is a lack of effective record keeping relating to child protection within the schools. I have given some guidance as to what should be in place such as incident logs etc.

One of the concurrent issues that I noted in each school was that children were not always supervised by an adult. This may lead to an opportunity for child abuse or possibly physical harm. I have discussed this with each school and have recommended that as a bare minimum no child under 14 years of age is ever left unsupervised.

In the spirit and understanding that "child protection is universal and not differentiated by educational ethos, culture or location" and "commonality/teamwork", I have set up a Child Protection School Board. This will consist of the Head of CPT, the Principal of each school, the respective Safeguarding teachers and a Mayapura management representative. This body will deal with developing and discussing child protection needs and practices. There first activities are to discuss and implement record keeping practices and practical supervision of children under 14 years of age. It should be noted that this body will not have any powers or responsibilities to investigate or get involved in any decisions relating to any child abuse cases.

It should also be noted that the previous Principal of the Boys Gurukula no longer has any input or responsibility at the school and resides off the school campus.

Social/Bad parenting issues

There are a number of instances that relate to social/bad parenting cases. These are namely cases of neglect. We as an organisation do not have facilities where children can be given shelter away from their homes. In the west we can refer these cases to the local authorities who have social care programmes to deal with these cases.

Therefore, although not directly connected to CPO, I have instituted a Devotee Care Team headed by PDD, consisting of a medical doctor, a psychologist, grahasta representatives from the three different communities and Mayapura management representative. This body will be able to counsel and advise parents as to the best way to care for their children.

General Child Protection

These are to be dealt with by the CPT in Mayapura in conjunction with the International office.

Each one of the above groups are chaired by the head of the CPT, PDD, who will file a report each quarter outlining the progress and activities of the groups to GBC EC, Global CPO Director, MAC, and ISKCON Indian Bureau.

Ujjain

We set up a Child Protection team in Ujjain consisting of five members. The team is headed by Dr Rupa Gaura Das, who is a paediatrician by profession. The team represents the cross section of the community and temple.

I carried out training for the team over two days and was well received. I feel that this team can now be able to carry out the function of child protection not only for Ujjain but also support surrounding areas such as Indore and Bopal.

I am also encouraged that the team will be putting in place the required child protection polices within the new Krishna Avanti School which has just opened.

As in Mayapura we have set up a Devotee Care Team to help parents and children. This team will be headed by Dr Rupa Gaura Prabhu. This team also will have a psychologist, grahasta representatives from the community and a management representative.

Vrindavana

Set up a new Child Protection Team (CPT). I carried a two day training session and provided support to the newly formed CPT. This team consists of senior devotees and parents. They have not decided upon a head but will do so soon.

The general situation and challenges are very similar to Mayapura. Therefore the solutions/plans are similar to Mayapura.

The CPT team is under a number of pressures namely:

- Dealing with issues related to the different communities in Vrindavana, namely the Bengali, Russian, Eastern European and American/Western.
- Dealing with school issues.
- Dealing social/bad parenting issues.
- Dealing with general child protection issues.

Community

The template put in place for Mayapura has been put in place for Vrindavana.

Schools

I visited and carried out an audit with the Principal, vice principal and safeguarding teacher of the school. I also toured the school campus. I did not meet parents during this visit but certainly plan to do so during my next visit in October 2017.

The new Principal Harikeshwar Prabhu, was very positive, accommodating and attended the two day training for the CPT. He is residing in Vrindavana and engaged full time in at the Gurukula. He is at present half way through his Bachelor of Education course.

Seva Murti Radika Devi Dasi (SMRDD), a teacher at the Gurukula has been appointed as the Child Protection Safeguarding officer. SMRDD will not teach but will be fully dedicated to her role for child protection full time.

SMRDD will be responsible for all child protection matters at the Gurukula. She will report to the International Child Protection office as well as the Gurukula administration.

From the discussions and the audit the main points of action for the Gurukula are as follows:

- Audit and confirmation of teacher's credentials. The Gurukula to forward to International CPO, teachers information (name, subject taught, Education levels, numbers of years teaching as a whole and at present school, any child protection concerns or previous warnings)
- Set up individual teacher Continual Personal Development plans. These are to include professional, internal and external training plans according to their individual needs)
- School governing board to have the head of Vrindavana CPT as full a member
- Inform parents of the school child protection policy in a clear and positive manner (new article in the school prospectus, via parent orientation, annual parents consultation ETC)
- Setup log for all Child Protection incidents and any children referred for treatment such as counselling, copy forwarded to International CPO
- All child protection incidents to be reported to Sevamurti DD and not the principle
- Sevamurti DD to hold all child protection files
- Leaving records for all teachers and students for the last five years to be forwarded to International CPO
- No children to visit any member of staff's home

- At least two adults present when children are taken out of the school. Additional adult for every 10 children
- All children under 16 are to be supervised by an adult at all times. This is especially applicable for outside the school.

As a note of progress, whilst visiting the school it was reported to me that a teacher has applied "light corporal punishment". The Gurukula dismissed the teacher under zero tolerance policy.

Social/Bad parenting issues

As in Mayapura, there are a number of instances that relate to social/bad parenting cases. These are namely cases of neglect. A similar template is being followed with one difference, in that a devotee physician is not going to be heading this team, as we cannot engage one at present. Rather we will be using an outside counselling agency based in Delhi to carry out this function.
The Devotee Care Team headed by the head of the Vrindavana CPT, consisting of grahasta representatives from the three different communities and Vrindavana management representative. This body will be able to refer parents and or children to the counselling clinic as and when needed and additionally advise parents as to the best way to care for their children.

This is already working, as an example one family with two children who were being neglected were helped in terms of counselling and intervention. This has resulted in finding gainful employment for the father and better understanding of parental and marital responsibilities/understanding.

General Child Protection

These are to be dealt with by the CPT in Vrindavana in conjunction with the International office.

Each one of the above groups are chaired by the head of the CPT, who will file a report each quarter outlining the progress and activities of the groups to GBC EC, Global CPO Director, MAC, and ISKCON Indian Bureau.

Summary

We have been able to set up and train Child Protection teams for the two main Temples, Mayapura and Vrindavana as well as Ujjain. There is also significant progress made with the schools in regards to structures put in place to support, train and monitor effective child protection.

Additionally we have set up Devotees care groups in the three locations, to give support and aid to parents and children.

We are at present working towards setting up/strengthening similar teams in other major centres in India, namely Mumbai and Chennai.

At present we have Pitambara DD as the Eastern Regional Director. We are looking to identify, train and appoint regional Directors for the Northern, Southern and Western regions.

Your servant,

Kamalesh Krishna Das

Global CPO Director