

Coordination Meeting

Friday 13th 2014

In attendance: Chintan (for FB/Web/promo section), Kriyatma, Rishi, Gurubhakta, Guruprem

Agenda

Grievance procedures

New Residents

Atma's visit

Grievance Discussions

YS - A man who was a teenage resident in the ashram in the 80's has posted a few negative comments on the Mangrove Facebook page. ([Copied below](#)) It has highlighted that we do not have a mechanism in place for dealing with complaints of this nature especially in relation to social media.

Bert Franzen was informed and asked for his opinion. He admits that this is new territory for him so is "flying by the seat of his pants" but also acknowledges that it is not a common situation so there are few people that would have experience with this. His feedback is [copied below](#).

In summary in Bert's opinion transparency and compassion are the best approach

CS – We cannot remove the post below, FB has been contacted asking them to remove it. Another woman has also added a comment referring to the 'sect'. For the future it is possible to not allow anyone to post to our FB page if we wish.

YS – Not in favour as it defeats the open nature of social media and does not create a transparent culture

Jayatma (via email) –

Just for clarity. In my past history we did have about 4 or 5 situations like this [referring to abuse perpetrated by Akhandananda], but not involving social media, mostly they were phone calls. The approach we always took was to respond compassionately and also explain that the ashram is a very different place now, run in a different way by a completely different management team. We usually offered a gift voucher so if they wanted to they could come and experience what it is like now. From memory only one person took up this offer and no one took their issues any further.

Rishi – The aim has always been not to fuel the fire by giving it air.

Kriya – agreed we don't want to fuel the fire however given the new situation of social media and the Royal Commission into child abuse in institutions we need to revisit our approach.

Suggested strategy/ACTIONS

ACTION: Contact Dharmadev for his input and to see if he is willing to be contacted by people with a grievance. – *YS Dharmadev has looked at the SYA grievance policy it is up to date with MYA P&P*

ACTION: Research Tim's background with anyone that may know him now – *YS – Tim's sister has since come to visit. Sumitra & Mukti had lunch with her. She told Mukti that she does not see Tim, he is not stable and the family doesn't see him much.*

ACTION: Web site to make visible the positive steps Mangrove takes for safety of people and transparency.

- Include timeline of Mangrove's history: (see Kripalu's website as example http://kripalu.org/about_us/491/)
- Consider Jayatma (semi-new resident) as person to take this on as a project including web

YS – After discussion with GB & Sumitra and input from Dharmadev this plan is

Dharmadev has converted SYA Grievance policy into MYA Grievance policy. These will go on the web and Mangrove Intranet (once we sort the IT)

Rishi to locate email between Vivek and Nityapuja discussing the outcomes of Akhandananda's trial and appeal. *Done see document Akhandananda trial outcomes.*

Haribhoda - YS to arrange meeting with him to get his perspective on the history *Done HB visited Mangrove to discuss history with Surya, GB & YS*

Jayatma O will work on developing the web page with documentation, WWC check, time line etc. She is not to be involved in dealing with grievance or counseling on this level until she has completed the Diploma *Timeline completed 18.04.14*

GB – to follow up Changes to the Code of ethics, are they up to date?

YS – check in with DD re changes to the code of ethics

YS – send GB SYA CoE

GB – Send to Bert aim to have new code of ethic by the end of Feb

Code of Ethics were OK as the Yama & Niyama as per SYTA CoE. The CoE sets the aspirations of the organization. Bert had already included a more specific Code of Conduct which clearly states behavior that is unacceptable and will lead to disciplinary action. YS

On going ACTIONS/ processes:

Training in 'Grievance procedure' to be continued for new and old residents and staff

Post to Social media sites will receive a public reply directing them to contact skillsandlifestyle@satyananda.net if they wish to discuss the matter with someone from the ashram or SYA.

Receptionists also to forward such calls to S&L

S&L i.e. GB, Sumitra & KY to document and follow up any calls and to involve YS if the matter involves an accredited teacher or SYA staff

GB to investigate training for relevant people about this with Bert & OD

No public mention to be made of offering counseling services however it will be up to the discretion of S&L as to whether they think a person would benefit from talking to a counselor and to arrange this with Dharmadev or potentially Mudittachitta or Agnimudra(?)

Dharmadev – Grievance policy & is he willing to receive calls

If so Chitan to make contact with Tim & new woman via FB giving them the option to connect.

Grievance folder – GB to document all in HR

Offer voucher to re-connect.

Finish e-message re Easter

Free for ex-residents, Personal retreat for everyone else

Send to

- Chintan
- Rishi
- Reception

Web site – Part of the restructuring: Flip the site around so Mangrove comes to the fore and the "Australasia" aspect placed in the background

New residents

- Gyani – Hut (3 huts)
- Jayatma – Arunachala
- Jason – Arunachala
- Chris – Arunachala
- Poornadhara – Hut (2 huts)
- Devarishi – Arunachala shared with DD
- Durgadevi – Arunachala shared with DR
- Bhakti – Arunachala
- Tyagi (6 week trial) – Arunachala
- Ester (6wk - 6 months) – Arunachala

Atmamuktananda

Kriya invited Atma to come and review Mangrove on a sustainability front and offer suggestions.

YS to return email to Atma with proposed dates for the visit. Timed to coincide with WYC meeting with IYTA.

Facebook post from Santosh

"All I can say is be verry verry careful of your children at this place. It troubles me to see this starting again with kids here, I grew up here in the early 80's and you do not want to trust these people however well intentioned with your children. Or do none of you remember Akhandanand and Shishy and what they were responsible for. I guess you had to be a kid to really get it. Drove Satyananda to his grave IMO, he was never the same after what those violent pedophiles did to us."

"This is the place where as a child I was beaten and abused by Swami Akhandananda whom also abused teenage girls sexually whom were also in the care of Satyananda Ashram. This place was built on a dark past of eliciting all of the possessions / money of people like my parents whom were devoted followers, telling them how good the place was for me then beating me and treating me like an animal. I really hope you enjoy this place that "holds the candle of true yoga" because a lot of good people were misled, abused and had everything swindled from them in order that you have a holiday camp. I thank Satyananda though for feeding me when they almost starved me to death during one of his visits. They locked me in a room because I was sick and didn't feed me for a week. I was 13/14. This was the place where as a child I was forced to work like a slave building all of those beautiful gardens. The tires they are built out of I carried up that hill 12+ hrs a day by myself. Semi trailer loads full, that was my "sadhana" and I was beaten with a lump of wood (6 x 4) if I was late, that by the way was the "sadhana" of the Swami whom beat me. I could go on but I won't. The scary thing here is that I recognise the mania that drove the adult population at the time. I told people the horrible things that were going on and the devotees made excuses for not helping kids in need. When children were being abused their blind devotion stopped them from

protecting those that were in trouble, they let a paedophile get away with absolute atrocities against us. At least these animals could acknowledge the wrong that was done, instead they have denied anything happened, systematically buried all history of what these animals did and relaunched the place as a spiritual home. This place will be rotten to the core till the end because it is built on terrible foundations. Some of the people still in residence today as Swami's were there during this time and they know of the dark past of Satyananda Ashram. Built by tricking honest people out of their life savings, built on paedophilia and child abuse. And that's when it all came crashing down. This is not the ""spiritual home of yoga" [this was a comment left by someone else on the FB page] it is a system that failed to help its own children (yes the ashram was my legal guardian) and failed its disciples miserably. I can never forget the harm that was done to me there nor the evil that was done to my friends either. My advice - You do not need to lock yourself away in an Ashram to learn and understand Yoga, you do not need to give everything to a cause, never ever take abuse from anyone."

Comments from Bert Franzen

Big Picture:

The big picture objective is to protect the work and legacy of Satyananda. If these matters are handled poorly then the backlash could do immeasurable damage to the brand. Protecting the brand must take priority over legal expediency.

Immediate Approach

Strategy for Protection of Students

I suggest that we develop a policy which states that any student who leverages an accusation of inappropriate sexual behaviour, harassment or bullying will be given access to the Ashram's Grievance Policy to lodge a complaint, have complete confidentiality, the ashram will investigate and advise as to outcome. That if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome that they can take further action in relevant legal jurisdiction.

The strength of this approach is that if they do go legal, the process can be used as a defence.

Public Communication

I suggest that we consider placing a tab on our Website that leads to a statement of the Ashram's Transparency in Dealings, This page should contain statements to the effect of:

- A policy of zero tolerance
- willingness and history of referring offenders to the police
- Compassionate dealings with and support for victims.
- Current measures in place to protect individuals from risk
- 100% compliance with child protection guidelines.
- other

Dealings with Historic Victims and new Complainants

New complainants are dealt with on the basis that their issues are taken serious, confidentially and in according with the Grievance Policy.

Historic Complainants must be approached head-on and be treated with compassion irrespective of whether the experience was real or not. From the victim's perspective the experience is 'real' and we are not in a position to judge.

The goal is to genuinely provide a forum for these individuals to be heard, for the ashram to recognise and acknowledge their suffering. In so doing the negative social media statements may be minimised. The 'victim' should be offered to have a support person present, have no legal caveats imposed and have no confidentiality consideration imposed. I suspect that there are no residual legal issues that are relevant anymore anyway.

The advantage of this approach is twofold, a) it offers the victim support and caring; b) it protects the Ashram in this approach can be used to defend ourselves because we 'did the right thing'.

Legal options

I have not spoken to my legal associate but am very confident that the ashram has a right to issue a 'cease and desist' order and also take legal action for defamation and damaging the brand.

This is not a preferred option in that, even though legally appropriate, could be a PR disaster and damage the brand.

hopes this makes sense.

Cheers

Bert