

Annual Report 2021

LEARN FOR LIFE EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

General Information – Summary

The Learn For Life Empowerment Project (LFL) works through three interconnected paths:

1. Schooling –Early Childhood Development (ECD), primary and secondary schooling at Badi Asha School
2. Vocational Training – in bakery, tailoring and hospitality and tourism services
3. Connecting the two by offering training to students and young community members (computer skills, basic tailoring and English).

The year 2021 saw the following notable highlights:

- The first highlight is the inauguration of the new Badi Asha School, which has finally been shifted to the new building. This extra space allows us to be in compliance with the new COVID rules and at the same time, it allows all the students to physically attend their classes: in relocating the classrooms here, we are able to provide our students with bigger and better-ventilated classrooms as well as an improved teaching environment.
- Our collaboration with Rama Krishna Mission (RKM) goes on also on other fronts: The bakery in Varanasi keeps up the production of food for their distribution to malnourished women and children in Varanasi and surrounding areas, as well as the rural Telemedicine Project and online classes for which they were granted funds by the German Embassy. LFL has helped as a coordinator between the Embassy and RKM.
- About our Vocational Training Project, an important highlight is that we are now focused on fulfilling the requirements to be registered in India as an official Vocational Training Centre in Varanasi as well as in Delhi.
- In regards to our Tailoring Project, LFL is finally acknowledged in India as a Licensed Handicraft Producer and as a Registered Exporter.

Statistical Overview

The following number of beneficiaries has been reached in each field

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ECD and Schooling – The Badi Asha School						
Pre-school (for children 4-6 years old)	31	36	34	35	16 **	10***
Primary school (for children 6-14 years old)	89	99	102	98	93	92
Secondary school (for children 14-16 years old)				12	27	42
Post-primary support (for alumni)	3	31	22	25	25	25
	123	166	158	170	161	169
Vocational training for young adults						
Tailoring	8	10	16	15	11	12
Bakery	8	15	17	20	17	18
Cooking classes					7	7
Office work, administration training					4	4
	16	25	33	39	39	41
Practical training to students and community members*						
Computer	20	26	27	59	61	-****
Stitching	8	8	13	7	8	-****
	28	34	40	66	69	-
Total number of beneficiaries	167	225	231	275	269	210

****Stopped in March 2020 due to Lockdown **stopped new admission due to COVID19
*** restarted with playgroup at park ****going to restart in 2022***

1. ECD and Schooling in the Badi Asha School

Learn for Life offers schooling at three levels: Early Childhood Development (or pre-school), primary school for children between 6 and 14 years old, as well as secondary school for children between 14 and 16 years old.

The school follows the official NCERT English medium curriculum, and all textbooks are in line with that standard. Schooling approaches draw from a number of different philosophies and pedagogic theories, notably the Montessori method, Krishnamurti's teaching philosophy and the Waldorf / Steiner methodology. Teachers are encouraged to supplement the curriculum with creative activities and interactive lessons, also with the use of the smartboard, moving away from textbooks and toward learning-oriented lesson planning. Alternative teaching methods (e.g., drama activities, hands-on games and activities, educational movies, discussions, etc.) address concepts from a variety of different perspectives to be more inclusive of children with different learning needs. Students are given the chance to show their work, to feel proud of their accomplishments, to gain confidence speaking in front of large groups. This brings students and teachers together and creates a greater sense of self-esteem and camaraderie.

2021 has been very challenging for our school. Due to the repetitive waves of Covid19, we kept switching from online classes to in-classroom classes. In January 2021, Indian schools have returned to in-classroom schooling, but only for elder students (from 9th Grade onwards). In compliance with these national rules, Badi Asha School was not allowed to start in-classroom classes. However, it has been possible to take up again afternoon coaching for Badi Asha alumni (Grades 9 to 11) five times a week. At this stage, pupils from Grade 1 to 4 used to come to school once a week to get homework so as to keep their minds active and revise their subjects. For us, this was a good opportunity to keep an eye on their health and wellbeing in general; as our teachers were executing regular home surveys at the children's homes to monitor their family situation as well. In fact, throughout 2021, every student would come to the premises of the school, once a week, to collect the free food ration parcel for them and their family, distributed by LFL in order to guarantee the wellbeing of the students and their families during the pandemic.

During February and March 2021, the Government allowed schools to open for a small period of few weeks, so we restored classroom lessons for all the students from grade 1 to 7 by implementing a turn-system in order to avoid too many students in the building at the same time. Unfortunately, given the quickly rising level of infected people in India, by the end of March schools had been closed again and we shifted back to online classes for grade 5, 6 and 7. Class 7 only started this year and it was managed successfully although through online classes. In addition to the above, all of the Coaching classes we

undertake, have been successfully shifted online in March 2021, and from July 2021, also for class-8. In April, a government mandate forced the Badi Asha online classes to temporarily cease; no reasons were given, and the logic behind this ruling is unclear, but government orders in the time of health crises must be obeyed of course. However, we were able to maintain the online Yoga classes for the teachers themselves; this was critical to maintain the morale of the staff in these difficult times. Badi Asha School has then finally re-opened in October 2021, and students from classes 1 to 5 started to attend their lessons. All the kindergarten pupils have been admitted to class 1. As COVID rules demand classes with smaller numbers of students, we approached the transition gradually. That is why online classes were still going on for students of classes 6, 7 and 8, for their intensive coaching classes, at this stage.

In order to bring back to school all our students, on October 15th we finalised the rent agreement for the building next to our school. As mentioned in the highlights, The Badi Asha School has been shifted here and the students are now divided into more classrooms, in smaller groups, and following a turns system: class 1 to 5 attend in the morning and class 6 to 8 attend afternoon intensive coaching lessons. Their body temperature is monitored twice a day: upon reaching school, and when leaving.

In December 2021, the Project Directors, Nicole Seregni and Michael Schmid, have managed to reach Varanasi where they spent the entire month in order to re-organise the school in the new building, assess the work in progress and bring LFL outreach further. During their staying, a meeting with all the *Alumni* students of Badi Asha School was organised in order to meet in person with everyone after almost 2 years of global pandemic. Some of them are carrying on their studies with the support of LFL whereas others, for different reasons, needed work to support family. LFL offered to provide them with Stitching and Bakery Vocational Training, while receiving a monthly allowance in order to economically sustain themselves and their family, while completing their studies in the meantime. The real success of the meeting was to bring back 3 *Alumni* (previously school drop-outs) who were convinced to go back to school and finish their studies, while joining the vocational training program at the same time. These 3 girls have started the Vocational training in December, for a few hours a day, so to be able to balance studies and work.

Two new teachers have been hired in 2021 and one of them is one of our *Alumni* students: her name is Kashifa and she is doing a great job.

Nicole Seregni had the chance to implement the teachers' training with the support of a psychiatrist who will carry it on in Miss Seregni's absence, who will keep monitoring the progresses of the teachers' training from afar through regular online meetings.

Another psychiatrist has too brought his contribution by offering counselling to some of our students with difficult situations and he will follow up their treatment.

More School related highlights:

- A new Gender Related Issue Program has been designed in collaboration with Asian Bridge.
- A teachers' workshop about first aid, especially for children related emergencies, was implemented with the support of a French nurse.
- LFL is now in the process of applying for NIOS from class 6 to 10.

- An event for sensibilisation about autism and other disabilities was organised by the Association Taro Ke Bacche and we attended with the kids of class 6, 7, 8.
- A day out to Kiran village (in the countryside surrounding Varanasi) was organised with the teachers. Kiran is a specialised Centre for the cure and support of people with disabilities and children affected by Polio. A long-time supporter of LFL and in fact our Master Baker and other staff in Varanasi were previous beneficiaries of them.
- Online classes by RKM on communicative English language and Science are being followed by our class-8 students on a weekly basis.

2. Vocational Training for Young Adults

Bakery Vocational Training

The vocational training program follows the logic of the European dual training system, where apprentices are trained also within a company. The training is threefold: 1. Bakery and kitchen training, 2. Computer classes, and 3. Basic math, English and business training. This skillset prepares youths to support themselves, whether employed or self-employed. Many of the people involved come from difficult backgrounds, often with very little education. Some are ex-students or family members of students from the Badi Asha School, others come from the street or from shelters.

Varanasi

In the first half of 2021, the bakery in Varanasi mostly focused on keeping up the production of food for RKM distribution to malnourished women and children in Varanasi and surrounding areas.

In terms of relief work, food production and distribution from our bakeries has been ongoing in both Delhi and Varanasi for most of 2021, and LFL has actively reached out with concrete help and logistical support to as many people in need as possible.

In brief: in 2021, LFL continued to distribute food and medicines to families in Varanasi and some surrounding villages. As part of the sustainable COVID-19 Relief Program, LFL continued to source food, medicine, hygienic products and cotton masks (which are produced in our Tailoring Project atelier), and distributed the same to:

- 740 people: students of our Badi Asha School and their families in Varanasi collected their daily rations of food, medicine and hygienic products from the premises of our school till December 2021, as after finally re-opening the school we were able to re-start the lunch for our students at school.
- 550 malnourished women and children in urban and rural areas in Varanasi (additionally, we provided sanitary pads and condoms in order to improve their reproductive health).
- 500 poor families: (approx. 2500 people) in rural areas surrounding Varanasi.
- 100 slum kids and their families in Varanasi.
- 300 individuals in 60 families, via a collaboration with Bindass Collective.

In Varanasi, the bakery vocational training and production never stopped. In February 2021, we have started purchasing raw materials for production from small-scale tribal farmers near Varanasi. Moreover, in the same month we completed the training of two women who joined our administration team to help

with office work. Despite these limitations, we maintained giving as much assistance to our staff and their families as we could. We helped them in getting their vaccinations, and we provided regular constant Covid tests for them throughout this period.

The vocational training in professional cooking on the premises of our guesthouse and restaurant is going on very well with the same 6 trainees who showed a great level of interest and participation. The cooking classes are managed by a female teacher three times a week and aims to provide the participants with marketable professional skills, all while receiving a salary for their livelihood during these hard times. The cooking classes' syllabus includes: healthy and cost-effective Indian recipes made with mostly organic ingredients, methods of conservation of ingredients and stock and the professional hygienic standards of a restaurant kitchen. The final goal is to build a team of trained woman chefs who can prepare ready-made meals to distribute to children and people in need on a daily basis in Varanasi, as well as able to work in our or others' restaurants. The teacher takes weekly tests to assess skill improvements of the trainees and updates us on their progress through weekly reports.

Moreover, LFL started to support financially any staff who would like to pursue further education. Currently, one of our Trainees in Varanasi, Umar, is working at the bakery part-time and is receiving his stipend along with extra funds to pay his university fee. We believe this is a good investment in the future.

In the last two months of 2021, we re-opened our Guesthouse and Restaurant although we are aware that it will take time to generate the same amount of income as in a pre-COVID scenario.

In Varanasi we started taking part to the Surya Hotel Sunday Market every Sunday. Here our shop girls sell our bakery products, cheese and the LFL garments produced in the tailoring atelier.

About our Vocational Training Project, an important highlight is that we are now focused on fulfilling the requirements to be registered in India as an official Vocational Training Centre in Varanasi as well as in Delhi.

With the School shifting to the new building in October 2021, also our Varanasi bakery was reorganised and expanded within the building which now has more space for bakery and storage room.

Delhi

Our bakery in Delhi represented the main source of income for most of 2021. Thanks to our solid base of Delhi clientele who avails our products through home-delivery service and some stores who regularly supply stock for their clients from us. Since 2021, Once every two weeks we have a stall at the German Embassy where we sell our products to the Embassy staff, and every weekend we take part to the Sunder Nursery Market alongside (mostly) organic farmers and other small Delhi vendors. We started again our cooperation with the Nuernberger Messe and the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, for whom we provided staff and catering at the upcoming Trade Fair in Delhi ("Bio Fach"), which took place at the end of October 2021; as

well as we managed the catering service also for the 14th International Railway Equipment Exhibition (IREE 2021) held in Delhi in December 2021.

In 2021, two girls had joined our Bakery vocational training and they are now receiving salary and healthcare. One of these two girls comes from a shelter home. She was a previous drop-out from the training due to the lockdown. We are very happy about the return of the girls from shelter homes, who had been part of our programmes but were not allowed to attend for some time due to Lockdown; for now, this situation is alleviated, and this restriction no longer applies.

We are in the process of reopening our Delhi Restaurant as a Vocational Training Centre in order to welcome more new trainees, especially girls who, after getting out of the shelter homes (having come of age), have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

As every year, in the month of December we organized our Christmas Campaign: The profits from the Delhi Bakery sales of our Christmas cookies are utilized to purchase blankets and winter cloths to be donated to the families of our students as well as to homeless people and people in the slums of Varanasi.

This year the campaign went well and we were able to distribute around 1000 blankets in Varanasi.

The biggest challenge continues to be the fact that much of our management staff has been working remotely all these months; our staff has risen to the occasion admirably. Our Head Baker, Mr. Naresh, returned to Darjeeling for a brief visit to help his family in April – but with the worsening situation he found himself unable to return to Delhi for the next 2 months. He managed all the kitchen production online from his family home, with incredible results, till he was able to come back.

The situation has also given rise to new opportunities for some workers. One of our former Badi Asha students from Varanasi had relocated to Delhi; this person is now in charge of all our Quality Control for food. We are proud of their achievements. In any event, the staff keeps getting their salary even during an isolation period.

Moreover, regular weekly video meetings about hygiene and safety measures continued to be held, throughout the year, between the Project Managers and Coordinators. We believe this help us work with a higher level of safety for everyone.

Also, our collaboration with the Delhi-based Bindaas NGO has been quite fruitful. Their in-charge Ms. Meeta reports that, in 2021, they have distributed dry food packages and cloth masks to over 60 families, over 300 individuals total. All are daily wage labourers who have lost their jobs due to the lockdown; among them are house maids, ice cream vendors, chaiwallahs (tea sellers), auto and rickshaw drivers, guards, plumbers and electricians. Many of these families have also lost members from Covid, and all are in need of assistance.

Tailoring Project

Our Tailoring Project has been established in Varanasi in 2016 and it is committed to Community and Women's Empowerment. The all-woman staff is trained to design and produce tailored goods which are

sold under the "LEARN for LIFE" brand, as well as to manage the physical storefronts and the online shop. All products are hand-made, the fabrics used are hand-printed and many are hand-woven; only natural dyes are used according the traditional techniques.

In Indian traditional society, women are usually restricted to domestic work and do not enjoy economical independence. That is why it is important to create job opportunities for them. Moreover, professional tailoring is normally considered as a 'man's job' in India and therefore to acquire professional tailoring skills for a woman becomes truly empowering.

The syllabus includes an introductory part (embroidery, stitching and tapestry), followed by the main stitching course (sewing skills and pattern design making). The purpose is to train them on textiles and fashion design in order to increase their prospects for future employment and income generating capacities. The trainees have continued to work on collaborative projects and skills. They learn to reproduce and make new designs with both sewing machines and using hand-stitching techniques. Another big component of the training is basic business skills and math. This includes learning how to measure and calculate the amount of cloth needed for a piece of clothing, the costs of materials and learning to price their work. Weekly English and computer lessons complement training.

Training in textile processing is implemented mainly through women tailors who produce garments, masks and other products for local distribution as well as for the Online Shop set up in Italy. All fabric is natural, unbleached cotton with natural dye sourced from the Bindaas Collective, with whom we started a crucial cooperation over the past few years and which got more and more structured over the past one year. Indeed, in 2021, they implemented weekly video classes for our lady tailors in tailoring techniques, quality check and techniques of how to set up a successful atelier. They also provide support in sourcing materials and the design of our garments.

In December 2021, LFL started the process of obtaining the Fair-Trade Certificate as this will increase our products' outreach, allowing us to become a potential supplier to European Fair-Trade vendors. Moreover, LFL is finally acknowledged in India as a Licensed Handicraft Producer and as a Registered Exporter and we are now waiting to be recognized by the EU institutions as well.

The Tailoring Project training kept going on as usual and, apart from the production of organic cotton masks, it has also focused on both stitching new uniforms for our students as well as on production of men and women's garments for export and sale in Europe. In 2021, we restructured the Online Shop with several new products which can be availed in exchange of a donation from the visitors.

The Tailoring atelier has been shifted in the old school building along with the Bakery, therefore we left the building where we used to have our atelier and this helped us reducing cost of rent and utilities.

3. Practical training to students and community members

Learn for Life also provides very basic computer classes and vocational training to adult members of the community. Computer courses are offered to community members, mainly women, to learn about the



technology, to have access to the internet, to be able to improve their income generating options. This has been taken up by an impressive 61 people in only the first two months of 2020. This activity completely stopped after March 2020 and we plan to restart it in 2022.

For our beneficiaries of Vocational training, English classes were held Online in the first half of 2021 and since September the classes were attended in presence.

Looking forwards

The financial impact of the last 2 years pandemic has been very strong on our activities. For this reason, we decided to soon close the shop. The shop' sales are just a fraction of what used to be and to keep it open is no more sustainable. International Tourism in India will be near to zero for one more year, at the very least, and that is why we have to decrease our cost without compromising on the quality of the service we provide to our beneficiaries, especially the school students. For this reason, we are now in the process to reach out for funds and support.

Now, more than before we would like to thank you for your support to our Project!