

COVID-19 JANUARY REPORT

LEARN FOR LIFE EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

It has been almost one year since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and Learn for Life (LFL) has never stopped to secure the health and social protection for her workers and beneficiaries, while at the same time bringing substantial help to the larger public. But it has meant that we had to adapt our approaches: The core work area of providing children and youths with education and training had to be brought in line with regulations trying to curb infection rates. At the same time, Learn for Life started to provide relief to those people whose standards of living deteriorated significantly because of the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns.

Relief work in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

In terms of the relief work, food production and distribution from our bakery has continued, and LFL has actively reached out through concrete help and logistical support to as many people in need as possible. This help continues to reach the poor both directly through Learn for Life and in collaboration with other organizations.

Since March 2020, LFL has been implementing Covid-19 relief by providing medicine, hygienic products and food from small farmer and women cooperatives. Especially in the past few months, these provisions have been including also products to help them in the cold of winter, blankets, warm clothing and shoes. The basis of the relief work is the collaboration between Learn for Life and the Rama Krishna Mission, an NGO with many years of experience in providing relief work.

The following groups of people have received relief support:

- People related to the Badi Asha School in Varanasi – students and their families, in total around 740 people
- Approx. 1.000 homeless people living on the streets of Varanasi.
- Ca. 650 malnourished women and children in slum areas of Varanasi were provided with blankets (450) for the winter, as well as food rations.
- 500 poor families (approx. 2.500 people) from the rural areas surrounding Varanasi.
- 55 street kids in Delhi living in a shelter home managed by a partner NGO.

Migrant workers who had no other choice but to leave Delhi by foot (in some cases, thousands of kilometres) to return to their native villages received financial support for their journeys.

As an initial point of contact, Learn for Life has supported a school outside Varanasi (ca. 70 children). In a first step, this support has amounted to food rations, blankets, masks, stationary items (pens, note books etc.) as well as a grant to cover part of teacher salaries.

Providing children and youths with education and training

Schooling is being provided at the Badi Asha School. Online classes are going on as usual for students of Grades 5, 6 and 7. The generous support of our donors has allowed us to provide students and teachers with tablets and stable wi-fi connection to make this possible. The collaboration with the Rama Krishna Mission has brought LFL in contact with Swamiji, who has been training teachers on how to use the new digital teaching tools and software. This has helped us to improve our Maths and Science online classes and will continue to improve the quality of the schooling we provide also in the coming years.

In January, 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 is 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. Pupils from Grade 1 to 4 can come to school once a week to get homework so as to keep their minds active and revise their subjects. Of course, this provides also the excuse to give them the chance to socialise among each other, which is a very important aspect for the cognitive development of any child. For us, this is a good opportunity to keep an eye on their health and wellbeing in general. Moreover, our teachers are now executing regular home surveys at the children's homes to monitor their family situation.

Vocational training is being provided in combination with production units in bakery and in textile processing. The training initiatives follow the logic of the European dual training system, where apprentices are trained also within a company. In Varanasi, it has been able to continue vocational training in *bakery* and in November, the course could admit another 6 students. The cooking classes are managed by a female teacher three times a week and aim to provide the participants with marketable professional skills, while also providing them with a salary to cover their livelihood expenses. Apart from learning how to make healthy and cost-effective Indian recipes with mostly organic ingredients, trainees are also trained in methods of conservation of ingredients and stock as well as in maintaining professional hygienic standards in a kitchen.

The bakery in Delhi, which is currently our main source of income, is doing quite well with home delivery service and a bakery stall at the Sunder Nursery Market, which is becoming quite famous. Most of December was focused on promoting our Christmas Products Marketing Campaign. Like every year, the funds collected from the Christmas products sales have been used to purchase products to protect poor people from the cold and are distributed as part of the relief work described above.

The bakeries in Delhi and Varanasi started sourcing mostly organic raw ingredients for bakery production and food distribution from small scale farms, which are implementing sustainable and ecologically minded agrarian models.

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 months and which is now getting more and more structured. Indeed, they are implementing 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 November Learn for Life Italia was restructured and is now legally allowed to make retail e-commerce sales through the Online Shop. Throughout December, the main focus has been the Online Shop Christmas Campaign. Therefore, Learn for Life Italia has invested in social media management and marketing in order to promote sales during the holiday season. And the campaign has been successful.

All of this has been possible only with the help and support from all of you. Those of you who have supported Learn for Life over the past years to build up the education and training work in Varansi have helped to lay the foundations for a project that has continued to support children and youths from slum areas also during the Covid lockdown. And those of you who have supported us in the past year have helped to provide relief for the many thousands of people who we have supported with emergency aid when their basis of living collapsed.

Thank you so much for that.