

## COVID-19 NOVEMBER REPORT

### LEARN FOR LIFE EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

Over the eight months since the global pandemic began, **Learn for Life Empowerment Project (LFL)** has taken many steps ahead in her work, though facing constant challenges. In this regard we would like to get the chance to deeply thank all the wonderful donors who have supported us in such difficult times. Only because of their support, we were able to carry on our projects as well as provide funds and support to other projects, such as Ramakrishna Mission's.

In terms of relief work, food production and distribution from our bakery keeps going, and LFL has actively reached out to as many people as possible through giving concrete help and logistical support. In specific, over the last few months, both independently and in collaboration with other organizations, LFL contributed to the distribution of:

1. Medicines to 10,000 people in villages around Varanasi.
2. As part of our sustainable COVID-19 Relief Program we have been providing food (mostly organic and natural ingredients sourced from small farmers and women cooperatives), medicine and hygienic products to:
  - 740 people who are the students of our Badi Asha School and their families in Varanasi.
  - 550 malnourished women and children in urban and rural areas in Varanasi.
  - 500 poor families (approx. 2500 people) in rural areas in surrounding areas of Varanasi.
  - 100 slum kids and their families in Varanasi.
  - 55 street kids in Delhi.
3. We transferred 40 grants in support of 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 at the beginning of the lockdown.

The biggest challenge to our relief work has been the loss of Ramakrishna Mission's Project Director, Swamiji Varishthananda, who passed away on September 10<sup>th</sup>. Besides being a long-



time friend, collaborator and well-wisher of LFL, he has been an important link in the collaboration of our two realities during the pandemic relief work. Fortunately, we were able to restart the food distribution in rural areas with little delay, and we now plan to further support The Ramakrishna Mission's project G.A.N.E.S.H. (General Movement Assessment in Neonates Early Identification and Intervention, Social Support and Health Awareness), which aims to provide assistance for early identification and intervention of neurological and developmental disorders and disabilities in village children.

In Varanasi, apart from the regular bakery vocational training and production (which is active as usual) we have just started a brand-new project on the premises of our guesthouse and restaurant. Since the global pandemic has cancelled this year's tourist season, we have decided to be resilient and reconvert the restaurant and guesthouse to become a new site for additional vocational training in professional cooking, which targets mostly women and young adults. The cooking classes are managed by a female teacher three times a week and aim to provide the participants with marketable professional skills, all while receiving a salary for their livelihood during these hard times. Apart from learning how to make healthy and cost-effective Indian recipes with mostly organic ingredients, the trainees are also trained on the methods of conservation of ingredients and stock as well as on the professional hygienic standards of a restaurant kitchen. At the moment this project is still at a pilot phase and currently only 5 trainees are taking the classes, but soon more trainees are expected to join and we hope to hire them once their training is completed. The final goal is to build a team of trained lady chefs who can prepare ready-meals to distribute to children and people in need on a daily basis in Varanasi.

Badi Asha School received as a donation 30 new tablets. Therefore, now also class-5 and class-6 students started online classes from home, beside the class-7 students who have been attending online classes since last April. Along with the tablet, each student is provided with a stable Wi-Fi connection in their homes which is paid for by LFL. Moreover, we have reopened the school library so that students can visit in turns and get books on a weekly basis.

The women tailors from our Tailoring Project keep working and producing garments, masks and other new products for our Online Shop, which has been set up in Italy and is developing very well. All fabric is natural, unbleached cotton with natural dye sourced from the Bindaas



*Empowerment Project*

Collective, with whom we started a crucial cooperation over these last months. They are helping us with the sourcing of materials and the design of our garments, and through calls and video classes they train the women to set up successful tailoring ateliers. There have been new collaborations with Italian and German shops interested in purchasing our facemasks in bulk. Also, a new partnership with SEZ, a German Fair Trade Organization is being developed.

Our bakery in Delhi is doing well with the home delivery service, which is currently its main source of income. Recently we consolidated the already-good connection with the Italian Embassy in Delhi, which is regularly sourcing cheese from us. At this stage, we are planning the Christmas Products Marketing Campaign directed at old and new costumers. Like every year, the funds collected from the Christmas products sales will be used to purchase and distribute blankets and warm clothes to the families of our students and other poor families living in the slum areas of Varanasi. In Delhi, two boys from the Rainbow Centre for Equity's shelter-homes joined our Bakery vocational training and are now receiving a salary, healthcare, food and lodging through LFL. Another two boys from Street Connection (a social enterprise organizing walking tours in Delhi), have been hired for our bakery stall at the Sunder Nursery Market, organized by The Earth Collective, and starting this coming weekend. And we hired another man to help with the market and back office in order to allow Naresh to focus on training and bakery production. To be able to create job opportunities even in this current employment scenario is an achievement that needs to be recognized as such.

Learn for Life Italia has been restructured and reorganized to be legally allowed to make retail e-commerce sales through the Online Shop. Moreover, Learn for Life Italia is supporting local NGOs in Italy that are committed to rescue missions of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and needy homeless people.

The steps ahead include a major Christmas campaign (apart the one for the bakery products in Delhi) through which we aim to reach our international partners (both private individuals and companies) through our newsletter updates. We worked out a concept on how people and companies can either send donations instead of Christmas presents, or can purchase products from our Online Shop for their Christmas present needs.

Learn for Life Empowerment Project is happy for the successes in the families she has helped in these times, and looks forward to the challenges that the future will bring.