

# DON BOSCO Ashalayam

158/18, Belilious Road, Howrah

**Newsletter  
September 2020**

## Director's Message

Dear Friends,

Since the advent of the pandemic last March we have been updating you on the ground level situation and with each newsletter my belief was that in the next newsletter I shall have good news for our donors and well wishers but the turning point remains yet elusive and invisible. The lockdowns with all its restrictions seems ineffective and has failed to check the spread of infection as the pandemic continues to rampage across the nation with disastrous consequences especially for the poor and marginalised. As a prominent industrialist pointed out the other day; we have successfully flattened the GDP curve instead of the covid-19 curve. Despairingly more and more people are getting pushed below poverty line. Unemployment combined with rising food prices have dealt a lethal

blow to the poor and the middle class. In DBA itself we have pared down or closed a few projects to conserve our resources. The pandemic has thrown up unforeseen issues and challenges and we are trying our best to adapt and cope with the new situation. Our responses are outlined on page 4 of this issue. With your generous support we are continuing our relief activities reaching out to the poorest and the most vulnerable families with food rations and hygiene materials. DBA children and their families are being given financial support in addition to the food rations. The children staying with us have a regular routine of study, play and recreation besides attending functional English and computer classes. We live in hope and belief that things will improve and our children will inherit a cleaner and greener world. Thank You dear friends for your valuable and consistent support. God bless you all.

**Fr. Mathew Parakonath**



## RELIEF & CHILD SUPPORT ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

Food rations distributed	Nos
To needy families	1602
Families of NCLP children	250
Total families helped	1857

Masks & other items distributed	Nos
Masks	5500
Special masks for hospitals	120
Hygiene materials for adolescents	450
Soaps & Sanitizers	3500

Cash & food rations	Estimated	Given so far
For DBA Children's families	200	128
For Past Pupils	100	59
Total families helped	300	187

## Covid-19 Relief Activities

DBA continues to provide food rations to needy families so far the food distribution program has helped more than 1800 families. As the workers and families who had migrated to other states like Maharashtra, Delhi and Tamil Nadu for their livelihood returned back having lost their jobs there. The return of the migrants has added to the community distress, with no job and no savings the families are in deep distress therefore we shall be covering an additional 2000 families under the emergency food aid program till the end of September. It has also been decided to provide 1600 cooked meals to children till end September. Preventive and hygiene materials like masks, soaps and sanitary pads for adolescent girls shall also be distributed. Our Outreach activities continue to respond to children in distress in collaboration with the local administration and police stations.

Railway Childline & District Childline	
Data during Lockdown (April to August 2020 )	
Child Marriages prevented	29
Abuse cases attended	21
Referrals to CCI	27
Psychosocial support	204
Follow up Call/Linkages (Medical & Nutrition)	108
Awareness Programs	12



*Railway Childline Coordinator Rajib Goswami hands over food rations to a child in Howrah Station*

*Below: Children's meeting in Howrah Station*





## Status of DBA Children

Home visits are being made to assist the children and their families. Food rations and cash support is being disbursed during the home visits made by our staff. Many families have come to Ashalayam for financial support and to collect the food ration but in the absence of trains and public transport facilities many others are unable to make it. Hiring a vehicle to come to DBA is prohibitively expensive and out of question for the struggling families, therefore we decided to reach out to them. We plan out in advance the places to visit and inform the families living in and around that area of the date and time of meeting. For instance eight families living in Sonarpur area of South 24 Parganas District were informed to meet us at a designated place in Sonarpur at 12:00 noon on 25 August 2020. The DBA team met the children and their guardians and handed over the food rations and cash of Rs. 2000 to each family. The parents and children are counseled to stay positive. Our staff members are facilitating the completion of school assignments by collecting the given assignments from school conveying it to the children and assisting them in completing the assigned lessons and then submitting it back to the school.



*Food rations and financial support to our children & families in various locations in Howrah, Kolkata, South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal*



## Challenges faced by DBA

### Education

Government of India's hype over online education has turned out to be mere fluff. A Hindustan Times report dated 25 May 2020 says that a majority of students remain excluded from the online classes because their parents cannot afford a smart phone and even those who do have smart phones cannot participate in the online classes due to poor internet connectivity in suburban and rural areas. It's only the urban elite who are benefitting from online classes. With no training in conducting online classes teachers are struggling to keep the students engaged in virtual classrooms, together with poor connectivity and irregular power supply in rural areas online classes have turned into a nightmare for most teachers. Security issues like outsiders intruding into the virtual classrooms and displaying obscene content is a traumatic experience for both children and teachers. It's not just the loss of education or studies but a disruption of a whole way of life. Children get restless; being confined within their homes that are usually cramped and very basic. **They are missing out on more than just studies. Going to school meant walking or cycling to school, meeting friends there, interacting with teachers, playing and a lot more; in fact their entire social life has gone for a toss leading to psychological issues like depression and anxiety.**

### How DBA is coping with the education and training challenges

1. DBA staffs have been assigned to mentor small groups of children to help them keep up with their studies. Wherever possible this is being done over phone.
2. The children who are still with us have a daily study routine and they are assisted by the staff during study time.
3. Functional English classes are being held in Kalyani for 60 plus children staying there.
4. Agriculture and poultry training for senior boys in Kalyani.
5. Computer classes, functional English, vocational training, sports training and life skills training for 41 students pursuing higher education in our Bakrahat Hostel.



*Children are assisted in studies in DBA.*

*Below: Rahul tends to the kitchen garden in DBA*





## Psychosocial Issues

There has been a spike in child abuse cases during the lockdown. Distress calls to 1098 have increased by 50%. The response to distress calls is to inform the police station nearest to the distressed caller and simultaneously informing the District Child Protection Office and the Child Welfare Committee to take action to remove the child from the abusive environment and move him/her to a child care institution. Trafficking has also increased to alarming levels. Families living on the margins of poverty during normal times have been pushed into deep destitution. Taking advantage of the situation traffickers are offering cash to the parents in exchange for their minor daughters. Left with no choice the parents readily acquiesce to the deal and force their daughter to go with the traffickers. Human traffickers are coming up with novel ways of tracking eligible victims. One such method is bribing the owner of mobile recharge centres to reveal the names and mobile numbers of their clients and from this list they call up young girls with promise of a lucrative job in a metro city or with an offer for marriage. During the last two months of lockdown, **DBA's outreach staff foiled 29 child marriages** (not Ashalayam children) in collaboration with the police and local administration. Cases were filed against the traffickers who had attempted to trap the young girls through marriage proposals. We also provided psychosocial counseling to 204 children in distress. A major concern is that we may not get back some of our children as they may be lured away with offers of job or marriage. As most of our children come from impoverished backgrounds their parents/guardians are helpless in face of such offers. Awareness Programs on child mental health issues, trafficking and preventing Covid infection are being conducted across various outreach points in Howrah and Kolkata.



*Awareness programs in ASSP's Bahirgangarampur and Premchand Centres*

### **DBA initiatives**

With the help of our sponsors we are providing direct cash assistance to distressed families as well as food rations so that they may have the basic necessities for the entire family. Most of the families have lost their livelihoods and struggling for survival. The families/children living in and around Howrah and Kolkata are able to come to Ashalayam and collect the cash and the food rations, the concern is for those living in the remote areas. We are in constant touch with them through our counselors and key staff members (a few cannot be accessed due to poor or no network). We encourage them to stay positive and maintain all the necessary precautions to prevent infection, keep children safe and immediately report any attempt to lure children away. The children have also been sensitized to the various methods that traffickers employ to lure children and tempt parents. They must report any such attempt to the emergency toll free child helpline number 1098.

### **Conclusion**

We are using all possible means to protect our children currently staying with their parents. We are in touch with all of them on a weekly basis except for the few who cannot be easily reached over phone. Children staying with us are staying within the premises and are under the care of the Father's, Sister's and Residential Staff. A select few staff members come to work for 2 to 3 days a week. Their temperature is checked at the gate by the security guard and then they have to sanitise their hands before entering their respective offices. Visitors unless for a specific purpose like repairs etc., are totally barred from entering the campus and even they are restricted to the area of work and cannot interact with children.



*Food distribution in ASSP's Sijberia Centre*



Amit and Rahul attend an online meeting called by the **West Bengal Commission for Protection of Children's Rights (WBCPCR)** on 28 August 2020. The Commission had convened this meeting to enquire about children staying in Children's Institutions and also elicit their views on the challenges being faced by them with regard to education, health and other issues. The boys informed the Commission about life in Ashalayam, their daily routine and also the fact that they are missing school life, friends and sports tournaments. They are also concerned for the safety of some of their friends living under dire conditions.



Finally the Government has given permission to schools and colleges to go ahead with the admission process. Our boys and girls are busy with the admission process. They have chosen their respective subjects and have applied for admissions in Class XI & XII. Looks like the classes will be online atleast for the first few months before moving into regular classroom mode. We wish them all the best in their chosen streams. 19 boys and girls took admission in Class XI and 21 in Class XII.



*Boys in DBA's Asha Tici Hostel in Bakrahat. 24 boys from this hostel took admission in Class XI & XII*

### **An Appeal**

*Ashalayam endeavors to provide all facilities required for the all round healthy development of a child. For this we need you and look to you for support. You can sponsor a child's medical and clothing requirements or nutrition and/or education for one month or a longer period per your convenience.*

	Expense Head (For 1 Child)	1 month INR	3 months INR	6 months INR	12 months INR
1	Food & Nutrition	2000	6000	12000	24000
2	Education	900	2700	5400	10800
3	Medical Expenses	For 1 year INR 2000			
4	Clothes, Uniform, shoes	For 1 year INR 3000			
5	Feeding Children during Covid-19 pandemic	INR 70.00 per meal per child			
6	Food Rations for needy families	INR 400.00 per family			

**Donors outside India may send their remittances to our bank, details given below;**

**Account No: 11960100048604**

**Federal Bank Ltd.**

**Howrah Branch**

**IFSC: FDRL0001196**

### **Thanks & Gratitude to our Friends for funding Covid-19 relief activities**

★	ASA France & Frederic Boisset, France
★	Dr. Michael & Angela Jacobi Foundation, Germany
★	Raja Foundation, Netherlands
★	Don Bosco Mission, Bonn
★	Heidrun Abel & her team, Germany
★	Erika, Elizabeth & Team, Germany
★	Decathlon, India
★	David Gomes, Dubai
★	And all our other friends and benefactors

**DON BOSCO ASHALAYAM**

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