

## **Don Bosco Ashalayam**

### **Lockdown Activities & Relief Measures**

**30 April 2020**

DBA continues to fulfil its core responsibilities of care and welfare of underprivileged children and responding quickly to calls from and about children in distress. The lockdown has hit the poor the hardest as they have lost their livelihoods and with no savings face the prospect of starvation. DBA is reaching out to families not having ration cards and therefore cannot access government food aid. So far we have assisted 1250 families with food rations, masks and soap.

As mentioned in our previous reports DBA continues the Lockdown activities under the heads detailed below

#### **1. Children under Ashalayam's residential care**

Following the Government directive to children's institutions to send children back to their parents, Ashalayam informed all the parents to come to DBA on 17 March 2020 to take their children back till such time the lockdown is in force. The Government had already shut down all educational institutions.

All children have been provided with protective face masks and a hand sanitizer per family. DBA staff explained and demonstrated precautionary and hygiene practices like;

- Frequently washing hands with soap and water (hand washing technique was demonstrated).
- Wearing masks every time you step outside the dwelling place.
- Sneezing or coughing in the upper sleeve and not into your palms or hands.
- Avoid touching face.
- Practice physical distancing – stay at least 2 metres away from other people. Do not gather in groups.

The children who have gone home are being followed up over phone on a weekly basis. The families are being advised to follow the aforementioned precautionary and hygiene measures and to observe the lockdown rules. Many guardians have appealed for food or financial help as they do not have any work and hence without any earnings. We are making arrangements to help the families that are possible to be reached. We plan to help the others after the lockdown is lifted. A sum of INR 2000 shall be given to around 100 families in distress.

Some children are still with us either because they have no place to go or their parents couldn't come from distant places due to travel difficulties/restrictions. There are 80 such children in the Howrah, Kolkata, Kalyani and Liluah units of DBA. The children staying with us are strictly

confined within the compound of the respective units. The children have a daily routine of study, pali, games and TV time.

## **2. DBA Projects**

Following the Government directive all our community outreach programs have been put on hold till the duration of the lockdown the exceptions being the Railway and District Childline as they are deemed as emergency services. Both projects are functioning with staff in rotation in coordination with the RPF and the District Administration. The children who have been rescued and restored back home are being followed up over phone. The Helpline is receiving calls from such families appealing for help especially regarding food and medicines. Childline is linking these families to the nearest Block/District offices for getting essential items like food or medicines. A follow up call is made to find out whether the family has actually received the requested help from the authorities. It has been observed that in 80% of the cases the families seeking help have been provided food/medicines by the State Administration. In case the family has not received the desired help, we have contacted the concerned officer with a request to reach the family in need on a priority basis. Our phone support also includes advise on precautionary measures regarding COVID-19 and the importance and necessity of strictly observing the lockdown protocols.

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.

Also the confinement is giving rise to tension and stress regarding food and money issues as well as anxiety as to the uncertain future in the aftermath of the lockdown. Our counsellors are helping the children and their families over phone by talking to them, motivating them to stay positive and soothing their anxiety about the future.

## **3. Neighbourhood Outreach – helping the vulnerable and distressed families**

In our neighbourhood there are vulnerable communities needing help especially the daily wagers who have lost their livelihoods due to the lockdown. It was decided to constitute a Volunteer Force consisting of staff members and volunteers. This team identified needy families in Bhattanagar, Liluah and Kadamtala areas of Howrah city. All the identified families had lost their livelihoods and had no spare cash left to buy food for their families and if not helped immediately faced the prospect of starvation. Each family were given food rations consisting of rice, lentils, potatoes, masala powder and edible oil. The first round of distribution took place on 10 April in Bhattanagar & Liluah and 13 April in DBA for families in Kadamtala. Thereafter it was done on 20 April and 28 April. The distribution was carried out in coordination with the local police station who ensured that the food distribution was carried out in an orderly manner.

We shall continue to help these families for the entire duration of the lockdown, in fact this week the **Food Security Assistance has helped 1250 families'** so far.

We have also offered to temporary refuge to 25 to 30 homeless people in our Night Shelter. In response to our offer the Superintendent of Police (Howrah Commissionairete) visited our Centre. He has informed us that the administration shall use our centre only if the government facilities are full.

The VTC unit in Kalyani is busy making masks for the local community surrounding our campus. Masks are in short supply and wherever it is available the retailers are charging 3 to 4 times the original value. With the production in our VTC we have been able to distribute the masks free of cost to the nearby communities.

**Food packets being packed and kept ready for distribution.**





**Food distribution in progress on 28 April 2020**



**Masks being made in Kalyani Vocational Training Centre**



**Masks being distributed to local communities in Kalyani**