



## Fighting COVID 19 the MCF way

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Dealing with something as pervasive and fast spreading as a pandemic is particularly challenging in a mountainous and rural regions. We face the problem of being able to dispense critical information quickly, and being able to quickly reach children and their families who need us. Our communities are in scattered

villages that are sometimes cut off from each other, are often difficult to get to and are often not equipped with continuous technology. On the other hand, the MCF is a local organization deeply rooted in our communities and we have unique strengths: we know our people, we know the region and we know how to communicate in relevant ways. Apart from disseminating information and getting much needed food and medical resources to families, we are also working to calm the fears and anxieties that accompany the spread of COVID 19.

In March when the news of the COVID 19 was gathering steam, the MCF team was out in the community sharing information about the virus and why hygiene was necessary. Our PABAM Magazine had a full article about COVID 19: how we can keep ourselves safe, what social / physical distancing means, the importance of correct hand-washing and why it was important to follow recommended health guidelines.

We also reminded the children of what they had already learnt about hygiene a few years ago (in different WaSH programs) but also to teach their parents and grandparents what they had learned. In this way, once again, children were the most informed agents of change and improvement for their families during the pandemic.

The first few days of the lock down were spent in understanding the demands of our new reality. Then the teams rose to the occasion. Our teams out in the field reached out to the villages they worked in, where they knew the poorest of the poor. They knew the ones who would suffer most. They made lists of families in need and connected them with other members of the community and with the village *Pradhan* (Headman).

More than 50 families were supported within their own villages by connecting them with the Pradhan. Our CHILDLINE program was able to facilitate support over 45 families with dry rations and by further connecting them with their Pradhans. In fact the Pradhan of Prithvipur (one of the villages) was so impressed with Arti, our facilitator, that she wrote a letter to the Sub Divisional Magistrate, Block officer and the Head of the Police Station in Vikas Nagar, praising her and the MCF for the work she had done for the community.

We had 6 children who were in the process of being linked to the Government Sponsorship Scheme (the government supports children and their families so that the children will not be institutionalized and separated due to lack of monetary support). The lock down prevented the process to be completed. We knew these families were in distress and so through our CHILDLINE program we reached out to them and were able to help them.

Through all this we have reached over 102 families and over 450 people.

Our best story happened in our Unnati Bal Sangathan (Children's Group) in Rudrapur. The group helped a member of the Sanaya Bal Sangathan Muslim Basti Rudrapur by giving her rations worth Rs 500/-. This money had been awarded to them by the Pradhan a few months ago and they used it in this way.



File Photo- UnnatiBalSangathan

We are also actively dealing with the anxiety that some children feel because of the loss of a school schedule. Those appearing for grade 10 and 12 exams have had their exams halted in the middle causing fears for their futures. While most children initially enjoyed the fact that they didn't have school, or homework, they soon felt the burden of missing school, not being able to meet their friends, to play or study together, some of the older children were concerned about their parents not being able to work and earn. The MCF team members are even now reaching out to the children and their communities via telephone. Our team is also working to provide information, reassurance and resources to the children, as well as helping them to understand the need for physical distancing and hygiene, while cultivating positive mental health. Among many activities, we encourage the children to express their emotions during the lockdown, through drawing and painting, and letter writing.

The parents and children appreciate this connection with our team. Because we reach out to them, they have felt connected, motivated to keep going, and empowered with the knowledge they need to be protected and secure. There is so much more to be done, and we are striving to reach every child and help every community as soon as we can.

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