

COVID-19 Unlock 1 and MCF

Unlock 1 - was the name given to the cautious reopening of movement in India after the country wide 'lockdown' that was put in place to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

However, the lockdown led to large numbers of migrant workers moving through the country as they were made to leave their work-lives in the shuttered cities to return to their home villages. Without the benefit of public transport, many had to make their journeys on foot. Those who left suffered many (well documented) hardships on their journeys home and those who remained were left without work or support. Many migrants returned to their mountain homes in Uttarakhand, and soon many mountain villages that were initially free of the disease began reporting COVID 19 cases. We now have the virus in our villages.



Our work during Unlock 1

During Unlock 1 public transport was still not available and schools were closed in the mountains although online classes started making an appearance. Offices were opening at 1/3 capacity. Many communities were left without support, food or an income. MCF CHILDLINE had been giving aid in the form of food and other essentials during this entire period, but the population of those needing help expanded, as people who never previously needed help, found themselves in need of assistance. These newly vulnerable groups sometimes found it hard to ask for help, and it became incumbent upon MCF staff to recognize their new reality and treat their situation with appropriate sensitivity. Food rations were no longer the only focus: we soon had to provide assistance in educational activities for the children, awareness conversations about menstrual health, distributing sanitary napkins for the young girls and so on. In this way, we were able and willing to broaden our support of children in many other ways

1. Distribution of sanitary pads: The girls in our villages reached out to our facilitators saying that they did not have sanitary pads as the ones that were distributed by the ICDS service were not available. The MCF, with the help of ICA and NSF, provided sanitary pads to more than 1150 girls and woman in both the urban and rural areas. In our ration packs we gave sanitary pads for the women and girls as well. As one parent told us: *"During the lockdown you provided our girls with sanitary pads this was a good initiative. During the distribution you told them about menstrual hygiene as well. Nobody has ever spoken to our girls about this in our village, everyone feels embarrassed to talk on this topic. I am glad that this topic was discussed with the girls."*



2. Awards to children who participated in our PABAM contests: To help provide emotional support and activities during the lockdown, MCF engaged the children in our online art competition. We distributed certificates to all 598



children who participated and awards to those who had come first second or third in each village. The certificates were distributed to children in small groups of not more than 5 children at a time and we tried to involve the Anganwadi worker and the pradhan. Here is what *Mr Gopal Singh of Dhore ki Dandi said, My daughter Rashika loves to draw, but never took part in a competition. Because of PABAM (MCF) she got an opportunity to take part in the online competition and she came first. I am very happy.*

3. Tree planting: With the advent of the monsoon, the children remembered that while COVID-19 was keeping them home, they would normally plant trees to help increase the green cover. There is a local festival called *harela* which means to plant greenery. So, each of our Bal Sangthan presidents wrote to their pradhans to request trees to plant. In earlier workshops the children had discussed that it was important to plant trees near water sources to rejuvenate the water sources and they also said that animals come to destroy the trees and crops in settlements only because they had no food to eat in the forests. So the children decided to plant fruit trees in the forest as well. The MCF team also asked the District Forest Officer for his support and he promised the children 500 trees to plant. We aim to plant 1500 trees this monsoon and the children have promised to keep the trees alive and maintain them.



4. Health Education: With the Help of SOIR IM we printed a poster to explain the need to keep safe and healthy by wearing a mask, washing hands and maintaining a safe distance from each other. We took this poster to each little group. Before we started, we ensured that everyone washed their hands, had a mask on and sat at a distance from one another. This poster has been used to spread awareness not only in the villages we work in but also different parts of Dehradun and even in government offices. The poster has been widely appreciated. The poster drew inspiration from the children's own art. The illustrations for the poster were made by two young girls, Adhya Maikhuri and Abya Maikhuri.



5. Education and Technology Support: Our NSF team also reached out to the children in the village. While many children are supposed to learn online, there are several who do not have access to smart phones and many who have no access to any phone. Those who had access to phones were connected with online activities in maths and English, and for those who did not have access, our team went out to each child's home, interacted with them from a distance and helped them learn. Says *Mr. Randheer Chauhan of Pipalsaar, I liked the fact that during the lock down you interacted with our children and gave them work to do and kept them busy.*



So while Unlock and lock down walk hand in hand and the number of cases increase in Uttarakhand we are using the time to reach out to the children and their communities to help them understand the need to follow all safety protocols, keep their education going, take care of themselves and their communities in every way we can.
