



One By One

Year 20 Issue I (Double Issue)

March 31, 2020

***“You can’t stop the future.
You can’t re-wind the past.
The only way to learn the secret...is to press play.”***

Jay Asher

Be Well

I hope that you, your families and full extended circles have been untouched by COVID-19 and that you are starting to adjust to this new world we live in. Our motto at the Spilchen household is to not only take it one day at a time, but one hour at a time!

A time to remind ourselves of what we do have and not think about what we don't,

A time to hold close to loved ones (even if only virtually),

A time to thank and appreciate all of you for all that you do for One! International.

A Different World— 21 Days with COVID-19

Everyone has their own COVID-19 story of changes and hardships. This is ours:

March 10th: Though there were 50 cases of COVID-19 in India, every day life was unaffected.

March 11th: With increased cases in Alberta and all of Canada, the SCONA Bike-a-thon was cancelled. The same day, India suspended most VISAS -including mine [Tania]. Pandemic declared.

March 13th/14th: 28 people in India participated in a Bike-a-thon to thank and support the SCONA students who fundraised for them and were not able to celebrate their hard work. They enjoyed the experience that was filled with a feeling of togetherness and family. Computers, electricity and water for 24 hours were the highlights for everyone. They managed to keep three bicycles going for the full time.



March 14th: Before the bike-a-thon was over, it was announced that all schools in Mumbai would be shut for 2 weeks until March 30th.

March 16th: We had a covid-19 planning meeting with 5 core staff. Even though Mumbaikars were advised to stay at home, it wasn't a rule. The staff came to school without problem but noticed eerily quiet trains and roads. We made a plan for full house visits in Nallasopara, a work plan for teachers, giving of rations and stipends, protective gear, etc. Vikas tried to find N95 masks (or just good quality masks) for the staff and could not find any.

March 17th: The police got involved in Mumbai and started enforcing a 'stay at home' order. The government threatens to implement Section 144 – the banning of gatherings of 4 or more people; people could then be booked under 'unlawful assembly'. The first death from COVID-19 in Maharashtra (Mumbai's state) was a 64 year-old man from Mumbai. Maharashtra trains were cancelled (Mumbai to Pune) and the government was threatening to shut down the local trains and all other public transport. All plans made the day before were obsolete.

March 18th and 19th: Things got stricter and stricter on the streets and Vijay was rightly worried about the safety of staff travelling. Determined, a plan was made to distribute rations to the Khar families. Vikas managed to get to his village (interior Maharashtra) on a transport truck and be with his family. Before leaving he arranged for the families in Khar to get medical treatment and medicine through our local doctor and pharmacy after first calling him. The doctor and pharmacy agreed to keep a running tab, to be paid whenever possible.

March 20th: Vijay, Chetna and Kumud were determined to get food to the families and risked going to school. They were able to give 70kg of rice and 20 kg of lentils (no more was available) to 22 families. The families were also given soap and a small stipend (Rs. 500, about \$10). The families were very appreciative. The staff managed to travel without incident, but doubted they would be able to do it again.



March 21st: Nallasopara, out of Mumbai city limits did not have a travel ban. On a volunteer basis, Nallasopara staff started visiting the 120 families – taking responsibility for the ones closest to them. Vijay met with all staff and Client staff via whatsapp conference to give them information on COVID-19 and precautions to be taken – all information from WHO.

March 22nd: All India curfew from 7am to 9pm, a test to see if it was possible. The majority of people abided by it but at 9pm the streets were flooded again with people. Many people believed the false news that 'the virus only lived for 12 hours, so if they stay in for a 14 hour curfew then the virus would die'. They also believed that the clapping and banging of pots and pans that all India was supposed to do at 5pm would create vibrations in the air that would kill the virus.

March 22nd, 9:30pm: Another death in Mumbai and the immediate announcement that all local trains and public transport in Mumbai would be shut until March 31st. Section 144 fully imposed.

March 23rd: People are only allowed out of their house with a licence; licences are given to people in government service. Vijay applied as a social worker though he likely won't get it. He might have had a chance to get a licence if he went in person but the office is downtown and there is no way to get there. Vijay wasn't even able to leave his building compound. Staff and client staff in Nallasopara were able to visit the homes of 31 families. They visited our full-time student families who are in the most need. 3 families had no food and the rest were going to run out in the next few days. We decide to give rations to all 120 families as there is no doubt the situation will continue to deteriorate.

March 24th: In the morning, a COVID-19 case was reported in Virar – the same district as the Nallasopara school. Police were out on the streets for immediate 'stay at home' orders. There was no way to do more house visits in Nallasopara. Anticipating even stricter changes, Mahendra managed to get to the Nallasopara school on a friend's motorbike (usually a train and 2 rikshaws away) and give money to Jeetu who lives 200m from the school. Jeetu and Saurabh managed to collect 60kg of rice and 31kg of lentils and put it in the school. They were not able to give it out in time.

March 24th, 9pm: India announces a country-wide lockdown. Prime Minister Modi said: "Fulfilling of basic needs will be looked after by the government. If we don't follow the rules for the next 21 days then we will have to pay a huge price of losing our beloved ones. Many countries who have best healthcare service have failed to control this pandemic. If India doesn't take stringent steps then we have to suffer 21 years."

March 25th (Day 1 of lockdown): A very hard day as it looks like there is nothing that can be done. Rations in the Nallasopara school can't be given out. No way for anyone to leave their houses let alone get help to the families. Though only the 1st day of 'lockdown', the 10th or 11th day since most of our families had any work – which means no money. Sanjay (student/client staff from Khar) tries to visit his extended family less than 500m from his house and is chased back by police with a baton. No one is allowed to enter or leave the Khar Danda locality. We are not able to access either school. Vijay starts getting calls from families in dire straits and the only advice he can give is to ask for help from neighbours and that we would try to get help to them as soon as possible.

March 26th: A glimmer of hope, an ex-student works at a pharmacy and has a license to leave Khar Danda for work. He is willing to help by transferring money to Sanjay who can then give stipends and distribute rations to the Khar School families.

March 27th: Sanjay received the money but was not able to get enough rations for everyone as most of the shops were empty. He purchased what he could and got promises from shopkeepers that they would have more the next day. Jeetu (staff, Nallasopara's first graduate) and Saurabh (client staff) were able to get stipend (\$10) and wage (\$10) to each of the client staff. 3 Nallasopara staff members did not have rations at home and took \$20 each. Staff have been advised that we cannot get their wages to them but we will as soon as possible. Jeetu and Saurabh risked getting rations to two families who had absolutely nothing for days—no food and no money (2kg rice and 1kg dahl each).

March 28th: Sanjay managed to get the rest of the needed rations at a marginally higher rate than normal. He was able to distribute the rations and stipends to the Khar Danda families. What a relief. Now we desperately need to get help into Nallasopara. India is reporting 900+ cases and 27 deaths.

March 29th: Vijay continues to get calls from Nallasopara families that they are hungry. Jeetu and Saurabh stealthily gave rations to 3 more families. Some families in Khar received government rations (3 days worth) but not all. No government rations have been given in Nallasopara. There are some private groups that are giving food, but not consistently or to all. None of our families have received.

March 30th: Jeetu and Saurabh readily agreed to give rations to 31 of our families in most need. They understand the risk of police and community violence, but could not bare to see 'their students' go hungry. Vijay asked them to judge the situations of other families and give accordingly. Our local Khar Danda doctor has been shut down because of rumours that he had COVID-19. Our families no longer have a doctor to go to. The local municipal hospital has been turned into a COVID-19 isolation center.

As I am sure can be said for you in your lives, the last 15 days have been quite a roller coaster of emotions. Having the resources and not being able to distribute them is frustrating and heart-breaking.

I have been speaking to Vijay daily by phone as he doesn't have internet other than mobile data. We are trying to keep each other's spirits up and come to terms with the fact that it is not in our hands. We will do what we can do. He is doing a tremendous job at coordinating and communicating information. Hopefully the restrictions start to ease and the police are properly informed that essential services are still meant to run - meaning, at minimum, that people still need to eat.

Our goal is to get to a point where we will be able to give 4kg rice, 2 kg lentils, 2 bars of soap and Rs500 stipend per week to every family at both schools. Let's hope we can reach this goal as soon as possible.

The majority of our students/families do not have proper ID, ration cards, or bank accounts. They won't be able to avail of the schemes that the government will be providing. Government poster. (Rs 50 = \$1, lakh = 100,000, crore[cr] = 10 million) \$20/mth will be given to seniors. Our teacher, Anil, who is 70 yrs old, works to pay for his medicines which are \$80/mth.

60% POPN TO GET 5KG WHEAT OR RICE	
<p>FARMERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each farmer to get ₹2,000 in April To benefit nearly 9cr farmers and cost about ₹17,000 cr 	<p>earning less than ₹15,000 a month in businesses of up to 100 workers for 3 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount to be transferred to the PF accounts and prevent the threat of job loss
<p>FOOD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80cr individuals, about 60% of population, to get 5 kg wheat or rice for 3 months This is in addition to the 5 kg they already get 1 kg pulses per family for 3 months 	<p>SR CITIZENS, WIDOWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ₹1,000/mth for next 3 months to senior citizens, widows & divyangs
<p>CASH TRANSFERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20.4cr women Jan Dhan account holders to get ₹500 p.m. for 3 months 	<p>SELF HELP GROUPS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit of collateral-free lending to be raised from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh
<p>GAS CYLINDERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free gas cylinders to 8cr poor families for 3 months Max 3 gas cylinders 	<p>INSURANCE FOR HEALTH WORKERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ₹50 lakh for health professionals who meet with accident while treating Covid-19 patients Govt health centres, wellness centres and hospitals covered About 22 lakh health workers to benefit
<p>MNREGA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wages to be increased by ₹20 per day from April 1, to benefit about 13.6 crore families 	<p>CONSTRUCTION WORKERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> States asked to utilise welfare fund created under a central act 3.5cr workers registered under the fund
<p>PF BENEFITS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-recoverable advance of 75% of the outstanding amount or three months wages (whichever is lower) allowed from EPF To benefit 4cr workers under EPF Govt to pay 24% of monthly wages of those 	<p>DISTRICT MINERAL FUND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> States asked to use fund for medical testing, screening and other requirements to prevent spread of Covid-19
<p>Total estimated cost: ₹17,00,000 cr (₹173,000 cr additional +₹17,000 cr already budgeted*)</p>	

Staff Step Up— On Their Own for 5 Months and Counting

October 27th changed my life as I knew it and in turn changed the world of One! International on the ground in India.

I fell off the last step of a flight of stairs. I broke my ankle in three places and dislocated my shoulder (both left). Just proving how hard taking one step sometimes can be!

I had surgery in India, and then was medically escorted back to Canada on November 8th. Mom and Dad pushed me around in a wheelchair for two months (what a backwards world) and then I was on crutches for another two months finally taking my first steps at the end of January. Needless to say, I was limited in the support I could give the staff in India and they were having to do things on their own. They were determined not to add stress to my recovery

and were determined to manage things on their own.

They succeeded with flying colours. I knew they would but they didn't have confidence in themselves. Now they do!

Vijay, just getting back into the swing of things since completing his law degree, took responsibility from Day 1 with great leadership skill and motivation for everyone. Each member of the team stepped up and took on new responsibilities.

In the first week, they planned the Annual Trip and Packing day (bi-annual gift bags for all students). In the second week they organized Sports Day and in the third/ fourth weeks they prepared for the Annual Program. On top of that, they helped nurse volunteer, Jocelyn (Canada), do health check-ups on all students and most parents and staff at both schools. They had never

done any of these events on their own. All were extremely successful.

They started a new semester in December which entailed scheduling, house visits, planning, resource distribution and more.

It was incredible to hear from volunteers who had nothing but good things to say about how the staff worked responsibly and cohesively. I took a step back, One! International clearly took a step forward!

In January, they went even farther by starting new programs including meditation (sitting silently), and mental health awareness. They extended the social work program in Nallasopara which better serves the children's needs.

I am extremely proud of what each and every one of them accomplished.

(Pictures on the next page!)

The SCONA INITIATIVE— From Lows to Highs to an Uncertain World

Back in October and November of 2019 the financial situation of One! International was looking far from bright.

On October 25, 2019, One! International was notified the Government of Alberta decided to discontinue the International Development grant stream for the Community Initiatives Program, ending a 45-year commitment to Alberta charities. One! International had been receiving an annual grant from this program for many years. The loss of \$25,000 of annual revenue would leave a very large hole in our budget.

Long before the official announcement for the grant cutting, Tania, Marilyn and the staff in India had started trimming expenses while still providing all needed services. Even so, we had to look very hard at our limited financial reserves

and realized that with out an exceptionally successful Gala, we might have to take steps to wind down One! International. You can all appreciate how devastated it was facing such a bleak situation.

We were brought from the lowest point we can recall to euphoria when we learned that One! International was selected to be the beneficiary of the Scona Initiative. The Scona Initiative is part of the Leadership program at Scona High School, Edmonton, and is driven by the students. It provided One! International with an opportunity to engage youth in Canada and connect them with youth in India. These connections are critical steps, many single steps in parallel that will move us forward and make a difference. Each step contributing to the change that adds up.

The fundraising activities for the Scona Initiative were to culminate in

a 24-hour Bikeathon on March 13/14, 2020. We had secured 3 exercycles in India so that students and staff could participate in India at the same time.

It is heartbreaking that the students of SCONA did all the hard-work of fundraising for students on the other side of the world but were not able to celebrate their success as the bike-athon was cancelled due to COVID-19.

Hopefully the realization that the funds they raised will enable us to enact our COVID-19 Emergency Plan will help them deal with the anger, disappointment and frustration. Their hard work will keep students/families in India fed and safe as much as possible through this chaotic time.

We appreciate how very fortunate One! International was to be selected by the Scona Initiative. Youth helping youth, and making a difference.

Written by Tania unless otherwise mentioned.

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What the Staff Accomplished!



Maintained classes and continued the education of 300 plus students. Continued developing workbooks and learning new teaching methods on the constant path of improvement.



Maintained the family environment at both schools and kept the children safe, healthy and happy.

Kept children fed with daily meals, fruit, milk and snacks.



Organized and performed the Health Check-Ups on all students. The medical coordinators then took the new information and followed up on all issues.



Sports Day which is always a student favourite. Play all day, eat a large meal and spend time with friends!



Packing Day with 15 staff/volunteers in the 350 sq.ft. volunteer apartment. Bags are personalized for each student and packed with clothing, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush and more.



Took 85 children and 21 staff/client staff and 3 volunteers on a 4 day trip to Aurangabad (historic Ajanta and Ellora Caves).



Organized trips to a dentist who is willing to see our students pro bono. Unfortunately only two trips were made before the closures for COVID-19.



Allowed children to show off their skills proudly at the Annual Program!

