



# VAROSHA 2020

**Hope and Empowerment through  
Education and Opportunity**



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2020 has been a memorable year. The world-wide pandemic has touched most aspects of daily life. Nevertheless our work at Varosha continues.

When the communities we serve were hit by COVID-19, lockdown and loss of income, they were already desperate and vulnerable when a cyclone hit.

We had to respond by addressing immediate needs first. This year we had to distribute food and supplies not only to the centers where we have our projects but also in rural areas and around Kolkata that have been profoundly affected. We also started training programs to assist people who, due to lockdowns in other urban cities, had to return to West Bengal in need of ways to earn a living. Many of our regular projects are starting back, taking care to socially distance, wear masks and practice hygiene.

We are grateful to our supporters for generously donating during this unprecedented time to help those who are always the most affected. We look forward to happier and healthier days ahead.

Sincerely, Santi Banerjee, Krishna Chakrabarty, Shompita Chatterjee, Neela Dasgupta, Bikram Dewanjee, Chandrima Roy, and Shuvani Sanyal

## Expansion of Existing Nutrition program due to COVID and Lockdown



Last year we began a program to provide a healthy breakfast to students in three centers in Kolkata and in Huchukpara to students in tribal regions. The project was funded by **Nikhilesh and Dolly Mukhopadhyay**.

The threat of COVID, lockdown and subsequent loss of income for parents caused food shortages in the communities we serve. We distributed masks, soap and conducted hygiene classes in the communities we have classes for children. We began bimonthly distributions of rice, potato, lentils, eggs and cooking oil to the families of the 130 students we served. From July we increased it to 170 families. However we found more needed to be done.

The lockdown hit communities of daily wages laborers who lost income. Varosha has projects and serves people living in squatters' colonies on both side of the Canal in the eastern part of Kolkata. Approximately 45% of people have migrated from other states and neighboring districts. They did not receive rations from the government Public Distribution System (PDS) and were dependent on relief from nongovernment organizations.

The areas we distributed food and supplies monthly are:

**Dhapa Manosha Sporting Club**, located near the garbage dump, mostly rag picker community who migrated from Purulia and Bankura.



**Topsia Community Center**, the area is surrounded by an unauthorized urban slum. People mainly work as daily wages laborers, domestic help, and rag pickers.

**Shibtala Center**, situated at Sealdah South Section Rail Line side. Most of the people have migrated from Bihar and work in the shoe making industry which was closed.

**Azad Mahallah**, near National Medical College and Railway Line slum area. People are also dependent on shoe making.

Over 840 packs of rice, potatoes, onion, puffed rice (muri), lentils, biscuits, mustard oil, soap, salt, and turmeric were distributed.

We expanded distribution to 250 homeless people living near Sealdah Station, and 250 people near Dakshineswar without work now begging for food.

We were also able to provide packets of milk, suji, biscuits and sugar for 250 families to assist in infant care and prevention of malnutrition.



We provided food and hygiene products to our children in the Dipto Alo after school care center in Chetla.

This effort would not have been possible without the incredible dedication of our partners in Kolkata and donors like you.



Cyclone Amphan hit the coastal area of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Medinipur and parts of Kolkata with a wind speed of 185 km/h on May 20. It destroyed houses not made with cement, uprooted trees and electric poles. It caused rivers to breach their embankments and flood the surrounding agricultural fields with salt water. We were able to assist families in two blocks: Kakdwip and Namkhana in South 24 Parganas which lie in the Sundarban delta and Daspur, a block in the coastal part of Medinipur District. Most of the families work in agriculture. Some are fishermen and brick kiln workers. On June 9 we distributed dry food supplies, soap, Dettol to 250 families as well as 55 tarpaulin kits to temporarily repair destroyed roofs and 150 hygiene kits for women. We went back on September 6 to distribute again.



## Driver's Education and Licensing Program



The Driver's Education program is a project we have been trying to establish for a couple of years now. With the boom in Uber, Ola and private car hire services in recent years well trained drivers are in high demand and can earn good monthly income.

The need for this project was also pushed forward due to the lockdown in India. Young men working as laborers in urban cities like Mumbai, Bangalore found it impossible to live there without any income and so returned to their homes in Kolkata and nearby rural areas without any prospects for work.

In July, we began the pilot project with 10 students in Huchukpara, West Bengal. Students attended classes twice a week. The 4 month course will give them practice in driving as well as basic mechanical knowledge. The students will be assisted in all the steps through taking the driver's exam and licensing. There was a great response and we have 20 people waitlisted for the next course.

We will begin a similar program in Kolkata with 20 students who have passed the screening and are excited to begin in September. This appears to be a project with great potential .



## Mask and PPE Tailoring



To reduce the spread of COVID-19, West Bengal Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha issued an order making wearing masks mandatory for people in public spaces. There has been strict enforcement by the police. To meet demand we launched this course. This 4 month course, started in August, teaches students to make reusable cotton masks and PPE kits. The students have already made 70 masks and are perfecting skills in sewing. Two local suppliers are ready to purchase supplies from the trainees. Local trains are not operating due to the lockdown so for now this class is only available to students in Kolkata near our center. Currently two batches of 20 students each are taking the class. Many more potential students are waitlisted. We will continue this short term training while there is a demand for masks and PPE as a means for young women to supplement their income.



Varosha's projects were featured on Somerset New Jersey's Ananda Mandir May 9th E-Jolsha program. Thank you Ananda Mandir!



## Beautician Training

Two of the three classes in Kolkata have resumed after the complete lockdown. At the Janka Road center, the trainees are attending in two batches and working on manicure and pedicures. The students at the South End Park center are currently working on threading. The center in Bolpur resumed with 12 students however due to increases of COVID cases in the area, attendance fell. We will be extending the classes in all 4 centers so the trainees can complete the coursework.



## Varosha Project in the News!



The successful mushroom cultivation project continued this year despite disruption due to the lockdown and transportation problems. This project was featured on **July 18, 2020 Tara News** segment on Kolkata TV. Classes in Huchuckpara and Bolpur, West Bengal centers have 19 and 13 students respectively in the current batch. The trainees have completed the summer mushroom cultivation training and will now work on mushroom spawn (seed) preparation training.



## Ginger and Turmeric Cultivation



Under the guidance and training of professors from Visva-Bharati University, we were able to assist farmers in the tribal areas of Huchuckpara participate in ginger and turmeric farming program. This 8 day course assisted 20 trainees learn to grow turmeric and ginger to sell in their villages or the local market in Mollarpur. Both ginger and turmeric have lower perishability rates and lower risk of crop damage. They were provided a small plot of land, materials and support to be successful in this endeavor.



## Academic Support in Girls' Centers

In October 2019 we began a project for girls 9-19 years of age in five economically disadvantaged (basti) areas of Kolkata (Shibtala, Park Circus Railway Line, Dhapa, Topsia and 47 area Tangra). The goal was to address the low rate of literacy, school drop out rates, poor hygiene and general health development. The centers in these targeted areas are open 3 days/week for 3 hours. English and Math teachers conduct classes to assist the students keep pace with school work. Students are provided nutritious snacks, basic medical check ups, medicine, education kits and school admission fees.

This project was fully funded by **Mr. Rajat Bhadra**.

We were very happy to hear 16 students have successfully passed the Madhyamik, Year 10 school exams and were particularly happy that two students from the centers passed Uchcho Madhyamik, Year 12 and wish to attend college. One of the students worked long hours as a domestic help while attending school.



## Jewelry Making

The centers for the jewelry making course were a hub of activity and excitement for the trainees. The trainees enjoyed working on creative projects and designing the jewelry. Varsha directors who spoke with the trainees reported the positive effects on the community. Prior to the lockdown the trainees were able to display their works at several fairs and sell their creations. The project is on temporary hold since March. We hope to be able to provide an outlet for the trainees to sell their work at small boutiques after the restrictions are fully lifted.





On December 8, 2019 in association with Rotary Club and Matribhumi Foundation we conducted a Free Eye Check-up camp for people around our Dipto Alo school area, 113 Chetla Lock Gate, New Alipore. About 100 people had eye tests, 43 people needed eye glasses and one person needed cataract surgery. Testing, glasses and surgery were fully funded by Varosha.

ALL FUNDS FROM DONORS ARE USED FOR DIRECT PROJECT COSTS.

ALL ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES AND TRAVEL COSTS ARE PAID FOR BY VAROSHA DIRECTORS. DIRECTORS RECEIVE NO COMPENSATION.

## Looking Ahead

Dr. Sanjay Ghosh, Chair of the Biochemistry Department, Calcutta University will establish an annual scholarship in memory of Dr. Ananda Mohan Chakrabarty, renowned microbiologist, scientist, researcher and alumnus of the University. The scholarship will provide the recipient, GRE fees, travel and other assistance towards graduate studies in the US. The funds will be donated by Varosha's founding director, Dr. Krishna Chakrabarty and their daughter Kaberi Chakrabarty. More details of this scholarship to follow.

Varosha funded two projects which we were not able to start, due to the lockdown: Electrician Training and Mobile Phone trouble shooting and repair. Both programs target unemployed youth. We believe once trained, through stakeholders who have indicated they will be able to employ the trainees, they will be able to earn. We hope to begin these projects soon.

## Skills Center in Chetla

The Skills Center in Chetla continues to provide a place for education and skills training. During the academic year there were 70 students enrolled in the center. The classes offered are: Spoken English, Basic and Advanced Financial Accounting using a widely used Accounting Software Package, Basic and Advanced Computer Science. The students are also given classes on personal development, health and hygiene.



We are grateful for the dedication of our partners:  
Shampa Roy and the team at Trinita Shelter  
Shimanti Bose and the team at Anandan  
Geeta Venkadakrishnan and the team at Hope  
Swarup Saha and the team at Matribhumi