

■ **COVID-19**

LOCKDOWN RELIEF WORKS IN SHEVAROY HILLS



**THE RETREAT
DON BOSCO, YERCAUD**

A REPORT

**COVID-19 LOCKDOWN RELIEF WORKS IN SHEVAROY HILLS
THE RETREAT – DON BOSCO, YERCAUD
– A REPORT -**

It all began with a little sharing:

On 4th April 2020, we got a call regarding scores of old people starving. It was almost after 10 days of national lockdown due to COVID19. We decided to supply cooked food right on that day. We kept doing everyday almost 100 food packets everyday. Everything got changed, as Maatram Foundation got involved with us. We also applied and got permission from Tahsildar, the local authority to carry out relief works during the lockdown.

The difficulty of being in the mountainous region during calamities:

Shevaroy Hills is a mountainous tourist destination. Yercaud itself has over 1000 resorts and homestays. Now everything is halted. Though, the places in around Yercaud was totally affected, the interior villages too were not getting work or the food supplies. We knew the task was not easy to reach all the deserving people. But then we decided to do exactly that.

Three tier Volunteering:

Pandemic relief is a new phenomenon of our age. It is highly important that we don't bring in to risk those who are doing voluntary works. First of all, the volunteers need to understand the situation and what are basic precautions one should adopt. Hence, we decided to form three-tier volunteer system. Base camp Volunteers, Relay Volunteers and Spot Volunteers and the team leader to coordinate the entire operation.

Base Camp volunteers are the ones who stay with in the campus as per lockdown rules but fully equipped to receive the supplies and prepare Grocery Bag kits and load in the vehicles as per the list.

Relay volunteers are the lifeline of the relief works. They do preliminary visits to find out those in greater need. They make the list and to Team leaders. They support in purchase and deliver it in base camp. Once the grocery bags are ready, they come to pick up them in vehicles. They are the real heroes who link the base camp and the people. Since, these volunteers had to operation outside during lockdown, they are the ones with official permission from civil authorities.

Spot volunteers too do crucial work. We needed bigger numbers on the spot as people have to trek below the valley and up the hill. The spot volunteers those from villages. We already inform them through the local leaders and they wait to deliver as per the instructions of the Relay volunteers along with them.

Team leaders are also from from Base camp and from Relay volunteers. They do fund raising, identification, receive SOS, getting official permissions to run the relief works and run the entire relief system.

Collaboration with Government & Non Government Organizations

The nationwide lockdown came into force on 22nd March and we realized the lockdown impact by end of March. By 1st of April, we got the official letter of permission from the local civil authorities to do relief works in Shevaroy Hills that consist of 61 villages in 9 panchayats.

The Thasildar, Director of Public Health, Block Development Officer, Chairman of Yercaud Union, Pachayat leaders were also roped in and they cooperated with us in distribution.

We also formed a cooperation of NGOs such as Maara Aram, the Youth Welfare Association of Yercaud, SARA Foundation and other institutions in Yercaud.

Identification of families:

We set up a team of young people to identify families that struggle to feed even one square meal a day. We moved on area wise identifying hundreds of them. Once the identification is done. We decided to operate the volunteers in three level. Pandemic presents different situation for everything. We had to adhere the government rules.

Significant Relief workdays that passed by:

DAY-7 (Good Friday, 10th April): the 25 Relay Volunteers visited 24 villages in the Shevaroy Hills covering 9 *panchayats*, to identify the families in most need. Simultaneously, the 25 Basecamp volunteers started packing 10 kg of rice and other groceries. Though, a day of rest from distribution, it was a hectic day of travel and trekking, identifying and packing for the dispatch for the next 200 families. The 75 volunteers team, (Basecamp, Relay & Spot Volunteers) mostly young people, were busier with good works on Good Friday.

The villages visited were; *Thalaisolai, Salaparai, Pottukadu, Marudiyangadu, Athiyur, Asambur, Kommakadu, Mundagambadi, Manjakuttai, Jerinakadu, Valavandhi, Thengadakadu, Puttur, Settukadu, Keeraikadu, Konganpalam, Aijthu Road, Sengadu VRO, Sengadu, Kovilmedu, Gundur, Theppakadu, Kasikal, Keendhukadu.*

DAY-8: (11th April) Everyone knew that it is not going to be easy. There were two trucks and five bikes in operation. But mostly the volunteers had to walk to reach out to the families. Mr. Ajith Singh, the Director of Infant Jesus School was an inspiration to all of the volunteers, as he offered himself the

entire day with his truck and helping in delivering the materials. The team covered eleven villages in the Shevaroy Hills. It demanded an extraordinary audacity from our young volunteers to reach out to people. Rightfully, the news of relief works was telecast in news channels like SunTV.

DAY-9 (13th April): Today, the Relay volunteers got divided into three teams as the villages were in different directions. We set out with 3 jeeps and 10 bikes. We reached out to people in 20 villages in Shevaroy Hills of Yercaud. The villages are; *Kommakadu, Salaparai, Maruthiyankadu, Athiyur, Mundagampadi, Pottukadu, Manjakuttai, Kannanur Mariamman Kovil Theru, Nagalur, Gundur, Theppakadu, Keendukadu, Kasikal, Saruvanthi, Valavanthi, Keeaikadu, Murugan Nagar, MGR Nagar, and Settukadu*. We have completed around 500 families until today. With this, we complete our second phase.

Lockdown extends, so too relief works:

It is going to be crucial time as the lockdown has been extended until 30th April. The Ground reality of poverty is very grim. Yercaud town totally depending on tourism, hospitality and construction is severely affected. Dr. Gowtham Sigamani, the Member of Parliament from constituency called us to enquire the situation and offered his support to collaborate with us.

We express our immense gratitude to Mr. SujithKumar and MAATRAM Foundation for partnering and getting us financial support to reach out to more people in need.

We decided to take a short pause to complete further identification. But our MINI COMMUNITY KITCHEN functioned six days a week to distribute lunch for the abandoned elderly & the physically challenged.

The days ahead were more critical. We have witnessed pathetic stories of families like sickly widowed mother with 5 children. We looked forward to more donors for starting the third phase. And the support came by.

Day-10 (14th April): Our team was engaged in further identification. Meanwhile, we supplied 20 grocery bags for people living in Retreat Road, Gundur, Murugan Nagar and Ladies Seat Road, and the lunch pack as regular feature.

Day-11 & 12 (16th & 18th April): On 11th it was only the mini community kitchen that supplied regular food packets. But on 16th and 17th April, the entire team of three-tier volunteers was busy identifying the families by field visits and through phone calls to Oratory leaders by the young Salesians.

It was a list with 225 families for provisions and vegetables. It was a huge number and miracles do happen. The Montfort community (under the leadership of Brother DominicSavio extended huge support to the poor and

collaborate together. And with other support, our Volunteers reached out to people in 15 villages as far as Mulavi and Kolagur. But the main concentration was in and around Yercaud namely, Kovil Medu, Jerina Kadu, Murugan Nagar, and MGR Nagar. Today, we also delivered Grocery Bags to 16 Solid Waste Management Workers (almost all of them are women except two) and also to 23 SANITARY WORKERS. With today, we have completed around 800 households in 37 villages. Mrs. Shanthi, the nodal officer joined our *Tahsildar* for the distribution.

GIVING DAILY FOOD FOR GYPSIES WITH NO IDENTITY

In Yercaud, there were about 25 gypsies got stranded due to COVID19 lockdown. We distributed groceries. It was not sufficient for many days. From 24th April, our MINI COMMUNITY KITCHEN started distribution at their own request. They will cook for the night with the groceries we have supplied.

These people have no *patta* land hence no *Aadhar* (Identity card) or Ration Card, without ration card provisions are supplied from the Government. They have NO VOTERS identity card hence no political parties notice them for welfare measures. We had pledged to take care of them with supply of groceries and warm meal a day every day. Thank you for your invaluable support.

OVERVIEW of our COVID19 Lockdown Relief works

40	Days
50	Villages
1800	Provisions Kit (Rice, Groceries & Vegetables)
700	Masks
1800	Households
6000	Food Packets
Target Groups: Tribal villages, poorest General public, Solid Waste Management Workers, Sanitary Workers, Stranded Gypsies, Abandoned Elderly.	

The Team

05	Team Leaders
75	Volunteers
04	NGOs
04	Government Officials
55	Donors
15	Vehicles (Jeeps, Mini Trucks & Bikes)







Days 34-36
(10, 11 & 12 May 2020)

Families: 1090

Provision Kit: 1090
(Rice & Groceries)

Food Packs: 3900



Thank You Dear Donors and Friends



AN OVERVIEW OF 40 DAYS LOCKDOWN RELIEF WORKS



40 Days
50 Villages
1800 Provisions Kit
(Rice, Groceries & Vegetables)
700 Masks
1800 Households
6000 Food Packets



Target Groups: Tribal villages,
Poorest General Public,
Solid Waste Management
workers, Stranded Gypsies,
Abandoned Elderly



Thank You Dear Donors and Friends



Rector The Retreat - Don Bosco, Yercaud - 636 601, Salem District, Tamil Nadu
 Phone: +91 4281 22 21 38 | +91 97866 08292
 Email: retreatyercaud@gmail.com | retreatyercaud@yahoo.com
www.spsindiafoundation.in