

DCCWConnect



The impact of the pandemic : Re-organising and Re-inventing

DCCW was galloping ahead in February, abuzz with activity in all our programmes, with the:

- ✦ Vocational Training Programme girls undergoing annual assessments for their certification
- ✦ Supervised Homework Scheme children preparing for their annual examinations
- ✦ PALNA WeeKids busy with school enrollments
- ✦ Bal Chetna, our special needs children enjoying sports competitions
- ✦ Orthopaedic Centre doing regular therapies along with corrective surgeries and physiotherapy for underprivileged children.

All this came to an abrupt halt with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools and other institutions on 5th March 2020 as per government guidelines. For an NGO like ours, which works only with children, this impacted all our activities, as all of a sudden we could not run most of our programmes. All our Outreach centres across Delhi have been closed since then. Only our PALNA home for abandoned children continues to be bubbling with activity and energy. But the impact has been felt deeply here too.



Life in PALNA has changed drastically with the new COVID-19 guidelines for keeping our little ones safe. A 2-day drill on the new norms of operation was held for the entire team, for keeping not just the children safe but also themselves and their families. The older children were also taught why hand washing was important and necessary, along with social distancing of both their arms' length all around, in the playground, classroom and dining room. Initially they thought it was a game but soon realised that it was here to stay as part of their regular routine.

They got into the groove fairly easily. During the physical visits and video meetings by the Child welfare Committee, District Child Protection Units as well as the Delhi High Court Team, our children excitedly described and explained that they are aware of what they needed to do to keep COVID-19 at bay.

Likewise, the staff had to quickly get used to the daily routine of sanitisers, thermal temperature checks, shower and change into their uniforms, with head scarf, mask, and apron - and only then report to the rooms. Overalls have to be worn if attending a child in quarantine, as is necessitated after a visit to a hospital for any reason. Uniforms are washed and disinfected every day.

The entire premises are spray-sanitised every two hours by our staff, and the MCD does a round of sanitisation every week.

With no public transport available our caregivers and critical staff had to be picked up and dropped using our ambulance, the only vehicle permitted to run during the full lockdown phase. This too was not easy as it was being checked at every check post.

Donations have reduced, including donations in kind, and we have had to purchase more dry rations, groceries, and toiletries than we normally do. Also our transportation costs and requirement of disinfectants, soap, and sanitisers, have increased greatly.

Another major impact on PALNA has been that since court processes had been suspended, adoption cases awaiting clearance have got delayed. Also several children whose adoption process was done, have been unable to join their families due to the travel restrictions nationally and internationally.



The children's activities in PALNA, however, went on as usual with attending staff taking on new roles as and when the situation demanded. Everyone did whatever was needed to fill the gaps, whether it was teaching, getting the children to exercise, or working hands-on with special needs children.



The true spirit of PALNA has been on display everyday as everything goes on as usual, and everyone learns whatever is needed to see that there is no interruption. All our staff members are proving to be our real frontline Corona Warriors, ensuring all protocols are followed and operations continue effectively.



In April 1994, when Anika left PALNA for Toronto, Canada, she was just a 3-month old infant. With little to no recollection of PALNA, Anika always knew she was adopted as she was growing up. Her parents never shied away from being open about her adoption as they wanted to let Anika know about her unique story and journey.

As Anika grew into a young adult, she started asking questions like, “why was I given up?” and “who are my biological parents?”. It was a period of insecurity and confusion for her, despite her parents' love and support, and it was during this time that Anika realised she wanted to visit PALNA with her parents. She felt that a visit to PALNA would be an incredible experience not only for her, but for her adoptive parents as well, as they would be going back after almost twenty years.

In 2014, Anika finally got the opportunity to visit PALNA. The first thing that caught her attention was the little cane cradle at the gate, but little did she know that a life-affirming experience awaited her inside.

Anika had the opportunity to meet the selfless and giving staff at PALNA. She got the chance to walk around the home. She also saw the

rooms where babies with exceptionalities are cared for. Her favourite moment though, was visiting a classroom full of eager, happy children. Their bright smiles and wide eyes brought tears to her own.

It was a moment of immense clarity for her. Her interaction with the children helped Anika understand the magic of PALNA. Some children wait years to find a home, which made Anika realise what a blessing her parents had been in her life. And she came out feeling a strong desire to adopt a child herself in the future.

Providing a home that is safe, nurturing and filled with love, is something to be treasured, and that's exactly what PALNA does for its children. The experience gave Anika closure to all the questions and thoughts she had had earlier in her life. It also made her realise that her biological parents gave her up for adoption to give her the opportunity for a better and more fulfilled life, and for that Anika was forever thankful and grateful.

As a 26-year old woman now, Anika has completed her undergraduate degree in Communications Studies, and a post graduate diploma in Event Management. She is passionate about charity work. She now works for a not-for-profit organization in Toronto, which helps provide musical instruments, equipment, and resources, to youth in need, in schools and communities across Canada. This work provides her with a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Anika has also started her own event management company which helps empower and engage the community in which she lives. She loves to travel and explore new places, spaces, and cultures.

Anika wants every adopted child to know they should never feel ashamed, nor unloved, and believe instead, in the process and the journey:

“Surround yourself with people who love you and be proud of who you are. You may not feel like you're in control of your life, but in reality you ARE in control of your destiny, and it's up to you to make your dreams a reality.”

Quarterly Updates

Due to the regulations laid down by the government to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak, we have been unable to run any of the programmes that require children to come to our centres. As a result, this last quarter, we have only been able to run the Educational Sponsorship programme, and PALNA, our home for abandoned children.

Given the current scenario and the uncertainty of how the next few months will unfold, we are unable to predict when we can start our programmes again. In this situation we are having to take hard decisions, given that our funding has also reduced drastically at this time.

The senior management and the board are regularly monitoring and evaluating the situation, and we feel that once the restrictions on children attending educational institutions are lifted, we will slowly be able to get most of our programmes going again, though in a revised form, to ensure that we meet the stipulations set by the government at that time. Also since a fair number of our beneficiaries are children of migrant workers, we have to figure out who all are still here, and how many have moved back to their villages during the recent exodus.

The one programme that we foresee may not be possible to run in this scenario is our Outreach day-care and rehabilitation for special needs children, given our space constraints as well as the inherent issues in dealing with special needs children. This unforeseen situation has made us re-look at every aspect our organisation and its operations, and – like everyone else – we have to work out how best we can re-invent ourselves to give maximum benefit to our beneficiaries.

An Appeal

The pandemic has made life challenging for every organisation, institution and individual. Not unexpectedly, NGOs have found their funding deeply impacted, especially as institutional and corporate funding has come to virtual standstill these last few months. However expenses are rising, and existence itself becomes a challenge.

We are deeply indebted to the generosity of our well-wishers – both old and new - who have stepped forward during this time to support us. We exist because of your support.

We appeal to everyone to help us through this difficult time. No amount is too small as every little bit goes a long way.

You can make a donation through <https://dccw.org/donate.php>

Visitors' Comments

Kamal Gupta, Delhi

Thank you to Team PALNA, you as always are doing amazing job, even in these tough times of Covid-19, PALNA team stands upright always to help. My Blessings and Love for the Lil Kids who will see a bright Future for sure one day!!

Delhi Council for Child Welfare (DCCW) is a Registered NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), established in 1952 to care for children who had been displaced during the riots that took place after the partition of India. Since its inception over 50 years ago, DCCW has grown, its services expanding and diversifying to keep pace with the changing needs of Delhi's less fortunate children. Today, DCCW provides a range of services for underprivileged children living in and around Delhi, in the fields of health and medical care, educational support and rehabilitation.

