

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

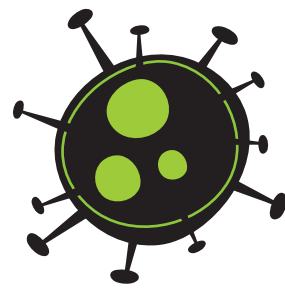


RAILWAY CHILDREN INDIA

ACROSS THE WORLD THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, PERHAPS MILLIONS OF CHILDREN THAT SLEEP ALONE ON THE STREETS EVERY NIGHT. IN INDIA, EVERY FIVE MINUTES A CHILD ARRIVES ALONE AT A RAILWAY STATION. IMMEDIATELY THEY FACE VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING & ABUSE. SCAVENGING FOR SCRAPS OF FOOD, THEY ARE BEATEN, ATTACKED, RAPED AND EVEN KILLED. REACHING OUT TO THESE CHILDREN AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE WHILE THEY ARE IN A MOVING TRAIN OR AFTER THEY ARRIVE AT A RAILWAY STATION IS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION, PREVENTING THEM FROM SLIPPING INTO STREET LIFE. RAILWAY CHILDREN INDIA (RCI) WORKS WITH THESE CHILDREN AT AND AROUND 10 RAILWAY STATIONS ACROSS 7 STATES IN INDIA.

IN 2013 RAILWAY CHILDREN INDIA (RCI) WAS ESTABLISHED AS A NON-PROFIT COMPANY UNDER SECTION 8 OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 TO SCALE THE IMPACT OF RAILWAY CHILDREN'S WORK IN INDIA. RCI IS WORKING WITH A SINGULAR VISION OF CREATING A "WORLD WHERE NO CHILD HAS TO LIVE ON THE STREETS". RCI IS WORKING AT 10 RAILWAY STATIONS PROTECTING AROUND 7000 CHILDREN EVERY YEAR.

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THE CURRENT CONTEXT: COVID19

COVID19 and the consequent lockdown has already had an immense impact on the economy and society in general. We are looking at a high possibility of children turning to work as labourers, getting married before their age, being trafficked, sexually exploited, migrating and being displaced as a result of the economic downturns amongst marginal communities. A few indicators are already visible:

- During the lockdown no children were found at and around 10 railway stations where we are working. With the gradual lifting of restrictions, 131 children were protected across 10 railway stations between June - August.**
- Childline's data suggests that there has been a surge in calls related to child marriage during the lockdown and a spike in calls regarding child labour and missing children too. The Government itself has stopped 5584 child marriages during this time.**
- Children who have been living on the streets are now being pushed in to a debt cycle for survival, leading to a high possibility of bonded labour.**
- Border Security Forces have already warned about a spike in incidences of trafficking across the Bangladesh border.**



RCI'S EMERGENCY ACTION FOR RELIEF & RESPONSE FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES AFFECTED BY COVID19

The nation was under a strict lockdown. But with a keen eye and ear on the developments of COVID-19 we began taking action from the 1st week of March 2020.

- A **detailed advisory** was circulated to the RCI team on how to safeguard themselves against the virus & to ensure **child safeguarding at all levels** - outreach, child help desk and open shelter level.
- Our **routine Station level** work continued until the 21st of March on the ground, including RCI's direct work at Delhi Sarai Rohilla.
- Our **Project staff were trained to identify symptoms in children** and immediately refer them to the healthcare system.
- We were able to **protect 377 children across 10 projects in India**, in the month of March 2020 until the lockdown came into effect.
- Initially work at all stations were suspended, however with special trains arriving at our project locations, from the 1st of June 2020, **our teams at 10 stations are back in action**, to support the railways in smooth and safe movement of migrants and **protected 131 children till August 2020**.

A. RELIEF DISTRIBUTION AMONGST VULNERABLE CHILDREN & THEIR FAMILIES REUNIFIED IN THE PAST 3 YEARS

Due to the lockdown, industries and their operations have come to a standstill and its negative impact is being trickled down to the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, especially children. We began our relief and response work by first connecting with families with whom we have reunified children in the past three years. The families that identified as vulnerable, were provided with dry ration and other daily essential items to cope with the crisis of the lockdown and lead a dignified life in Delhi, Bhubaneswar, Raipur, Dadar, Salem, Trichy, Villupuram and Katpadi through Railway Children India and our partners.

NO CHILD SHOULD GO HUNGRY

FEEDING CHILDREN & THEIR FAMILIES DURING COVID

CONNECTED WITH 7331
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



2758 CHILDREN

1041 FAMILIES

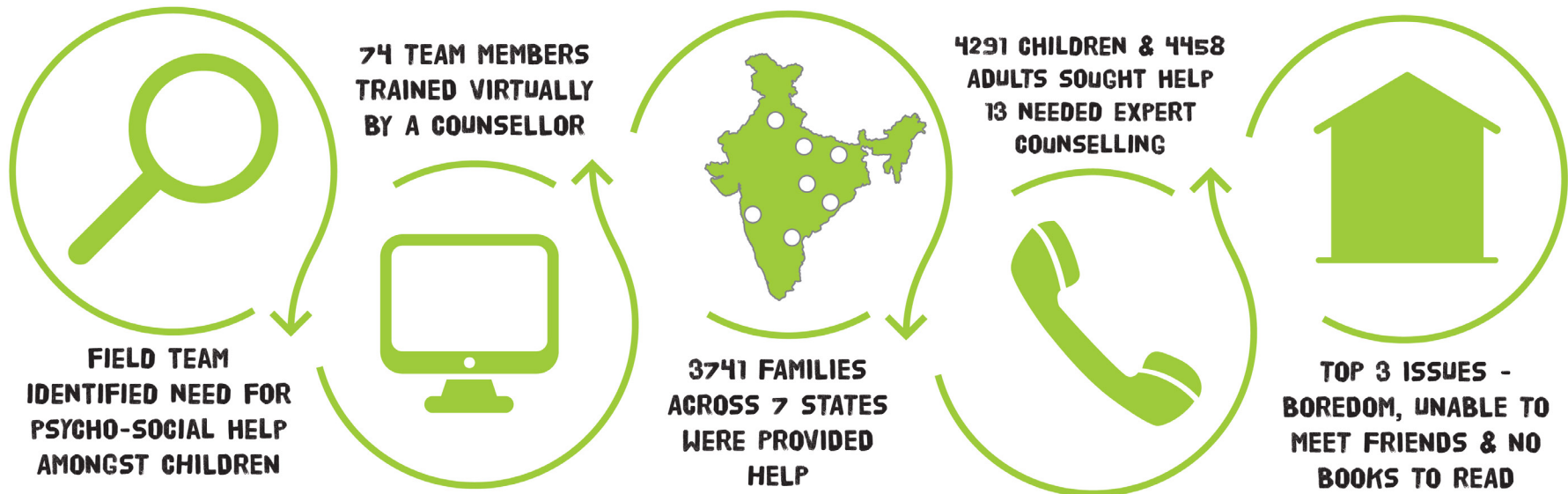
679 VULNERABLE
FAMILIES PROVIDED
DRY RATION &
DAILY ESSENTIALS

B. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

During follow-ups with children and families, RCI realized the need for psychosocial support to children and families and initiated a process to support children and families for the same. Team members who have been involved in this activity have been oriented by a Mental Health expert to provide practical support to parents on how to talk about the pandemic with children, how to manage their own mental health and the mental health of their children, addressing the hidden stress that children are facing.

BEYOND BASIC ESSENTIALS

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN DURING COVID



C. SUPPORT TO MIGRANT LABOURERS & THEIR CHILDREN - BOARDING TRAINS IN THE MONTH OF MAY AND JUNE 2020

The lockdown triggered a mass movement of migrant families from cities back to their villages. Millions moved and 100s have died so far in this process, with the Railway Protection Force having reported 80 deaths within Shramik Express. Special "Shramik" trains began operation from the 29th of April, 2020 to assist stranded migrant workers back home. However, without proper food and water support, children and their families have experienced extreme distress travelling in these trains. RCI has been supporting migrant labourers boarding trains from Ghaziabad and Anand Vihar.



D. SUPPORT TO CHILDREN & FAMILIES IN THE URBAN COMMUNITIES

Since train operations have been restricted in few states and suspended in Tamil Nadu due to the lockdown, our team has started working in select urban communities in and around Railway Stations across 10 locations. Families in urban slums, nomadic communities like Gypsies and Lambadi, were reached out to by the team and a need assessment was conducted to identify the child protection vulnerabilities in these communities. Our team also worked with the District Child Protection Units (DCPU) of each respective district to strengthen the child protection mechanisms - Village level child Protection Committees (VLCPC) and Ward level Child protection Committees - to ensure the protection of children. Between July - August **307 VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES** were supported with provided with dry groceries, psycho-social support, education materials and nutrition supplements by linking children below 6 years with the Integrated Child Development Scheme.

E. FAMILY STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES TO BETTER EQUIP FAMILIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN, PREVIOUSLY REUNIFIED BY RCI

In continuation with humanitarian intervention during the lockdown and follow up support, RCI conducted a structured vulnerability assessment among 4103 families of children previously restored by RCI. The findings revealed that these families are more vulnerable and their children are at a greater risk of slipping through the safety net and reentering abusive and unsafe environments. More than 40% of the children dropped out of school, reverse migrated, and lack of livelihood opportunities doubled the stress amongst families and causing emotional trauma, leading to violence against children. 35% of the families do not have a ration card. Approx 50% of the families who have ration cards did not receive the supplies from the government. Most of the families were not linked to any social protection schemes, increasing their vulnerability and starvation, forcing them to take debt from others to survive. To support these families our team has developed a comprehensive family strengthening programme to build the capacity of these families to care and protect for their children. Till August 2020 the team has supported **969 FAMILIES**. The support includes dry groceries, linking them with social protection schemes like PDS, enrolling children in vocation skill training and with the ICDS system.



SNAPSHOTS OF OUR FIELD WORK






**“ I DIDN'T EXPECT
SUCH HELP IN
THIS PERIOD OF
CRISIS... ”**

Abdul (name changed) was rescued at the Ghaziabad Railway Station 6 months ago. He had lost his way and was found crying, wanting to go back home to his parents. Having reunified him with his family almost immediately, our teams reached out to them as soon as the lockdown was announced. It was found that Abdul's father had lost his job and was extremely ill. His mother who sold materials at a confectionary store had lost business too and they had no idea where their next meal would come from. Our team provided them with basic groceries and essentials and continues to do so. They have also been linked with the community kitchen programme and provided with psycho-social help to ensure all their current needs are taken care of.

A close-up portrait of a young boy with dark hair and brown eyes, looking slightly to the right with a somber expression. The background is a warm, orange-brown color.

**“ I FELT LIKE
I WILL NEVER
BE ABLE TO GO
HOME AGAIN!”**

Sumit (name changed) a 14-year-old boy was found by our team at the Delhi Sarai Rohilla Railway Station a few days before the lockdown. Sumit had been working at a small restaurant in Gaya, after he had a fight with his father and ran away from home 2 months prior. Distressed with this difficult life he made many attempts to go back home but never succeeded. Within 2 hours of getting his details, the team contacted his father who cried with joy on hearing the news. Sumit was taken to a childcare institute for temporary shelter. Unable to travel back due to the extended lockdown, Sumit is still at the safe shelter, and speaks to his father everyday.



**“COUNSELLING
DURING LOCK-
DOWN HELPED US
IMPROVE OUR
RELATIONSHIP!”**

Raj (name changed) left home and took a train with his friend after being scolded by his parents for not focusing at school. The team discovered that besides having a tough relationship with his father, Raj was also disturbed with his father's drinking habit. His family was later contacted and both father and son were counselled in order to find a resolution. During our COVID relief work it was found that Raj's parents had lost their jobs and the turmoil at home at heightened. It was regular e-counselling that led to the father agreeing to take on de-addiction treatment after the lockdown was lifted and helped resolve the issues between father & son, who are now living in harmony during lockdown.

**“THIS HEALTH
EMERGENCY HAS PUT
A SPOTLIGHT ON THE
FACT THAT CHILDREN
ARE ALWAYS MOST
AFFECTED IN THESE
SITUATIONS & NEED TO
BE CONSIDERED FIRST.”**

RAVI SHANKER, PROJECT MANAGER



FUTURE PROGRAMME DIRECTION



THE CURRENT CRISIS WAS UNFORESEEN. ALIGNING WITH THE NEW REALITY, RCI WILL PURSUE THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES, TO BE ACHIEVED BY MARCH 2021:

BUILDING CHILD-FRIENDLY RAILWAY STATIONS: AS THE TRAIN FREQUENCY RESUME, 24*7 OUTREACH WORK AT 10 RAILWAY STATIONS TO ENSURE PROTECTION (INCLUDING FROM TRAF-FICKING) AND RESTORATION OF 3000 CHILDREN WHO WOULD POTENTIALLY ARRIVE AND TRANSIT THROUGH THE RAILWAY STATIONS.

FAMILY STRENGTHENING IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: 4500 FAMILIES OVERCOME THE NEG-ATIVE IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN AND THEIR CAPACITY BUILT TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN. FAM-ILIES WILL BE SUPPORTED THROUGH SHORT TERM DRY GROCERY, NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN, MEDICAL SUPPORT, HELP CHILDREN ACCESS EDUCATION THROUGH ALTERNATIVES, ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL ONCE THEY RE-OPEN AND LINKING FAMILIES TO SOCIAL SE-CURITY AND LIVELIHOOD RELATED GOVERNMENT SCHEMES.

PREVENTIVE CHILD PROTECTION IN COMMUNITIES: PREVENTIVE CHILD PROTECTION WORK AT 6 CLUSTERS OF SLUMS IN DELHI PROTECTS 2000 CHILDREN. WORK TO BE SCALED UP WITH THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS. 30 HIGHLY VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED ACROSS 6 STATES NAMELY DELHI, ODISHA, CHHATTISGARH, BIHAR, MAHA-RASHTRA AND UTTAR PRADESH.

OUR SUPPORTERS

IMMENSE GRATITUDE TO OUR MANY DONORS, BOTH CORPORATE AND INDIVIDUAL, WHO SUPPORTED US DURING A CRISIS, AND HELPED US REACH CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.



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