

THE BEST WAY TO REACH OUT AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IS TO – START!

Mr. Danny Khawas

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected every one of us in all parts of the globe and every strata of society. However, the most adversely affected has been the poor. From horrifying stories of the struggles of the homeless searching for food, to migrant workers walking hundreds of kilometres with children to reach their villages, to stories of unemployment after the lockdown leading to extreme hunger, this pandemic has left many of us helpless, scarred and overwhelmed yet desperate to reach out and help!

One of the things we at Inspire (*Inspire is a registered Charitable Trust which works in several urban and rural parts of India in the areas of Education, Income Generation, Community Development, Medical Relief & Art & Music Projects*), had to accept very early on in this lockdown was that we will not be able to help everyone or meet every need, it is too much and too overwhelming. But we decided to **START** by using what we had to meet at least one need of one small group. The need was food and the group was those living in a slum in Ghaziabad. Inspire partnered with another organisation in Delhi called Travamigo that has been actively helping the poor since the lockdown started. We sponsored big packets of groceries for the families in the slum.



The thing about helping people is that **once you start, more opportunities will come your way**. We were then given the opportunity to partner with another organisation closer to our office and provide groceries for families that used to help as domestic workers, garbage collectors and others.

While we went out to help these families there was another group of people in need that we crossed every single day. This was another lesson we learnt, that sometimes **the people we can help might be right in front of us!** We didn't have to go to Ghaziabad every time we wanted to contribute and help. We could help those right near us.

This group was a group of street children. They used to beg for money at red lights but with the Covid-19 situation, not only are there less people driving in Delhi, but even those who are out in their cars, will rarely roll down their windows and interact with these children. The children are hungry and had once begged me for any food I might have in my car. Unfortunately, I didn't have anything in my car that day, but I promised them I would come back with food. But this time we couldn't give them groceries as they were street dwellers with no proper space to store or cook food. My desire was to give these children nutritious and tasty home cooked food.



The next lesson we learnt was that **once you are determined to help, other things start falling into place**. I got a call from a friend who runs a local restaurant who had seen the work we had done distributing groceries among the poor. He asked if his restaurant could help by providing cooked food at discounted prices for the poor. In partnering with him we were able to not just procure food for the poor but we were also able to help keep this small local restaurant alive. Many restaurants in Delhi have permanently shut down after the lockdown and hundreds of workers have lost their jobs and have even had to leave Delhi and return to their villages. When Inspire started work with them we were also able to help 11 such migrant workers in this restaurant keep their jobs and not have to leave Delhi. They were not just able to stay employed but were also kept active daily.

These workers have been working hard to prepare tasty and nutritious food every day for the street children and their families. They pack the food neatly and help put it in our car. There is a different kind of satisfaction that comes from knowing that the food you cook may not reach any rich customers or bring you any tips, but will help satisfy a hungry child on the street. We are very proud of these workers who have given their best for the poor!



From that first day when we started till today, not only have our partners increased but the opportunities to help have also increased. We now give food not only to that group of street children in South Delhi but are also able to help another 200 people in a slum behind Vasant Kunj and about 200 more people in an area bordering Faridabad and Gurgaon. We got a call one day from a partner of our organization who shared with us about how the men of that community had lost their jobs and the families were now struggling. We started by feeding 100 people here and then more people started lining up even before we arrived every day and slowly the numbers went up to 200 people. **The hunger is real and it is desperate!** We are so grateful to organisations like MCKS and Tiffins etc who also came alongside and provide us with big containers of food daily at hugely discounted rates. The food we receive from them is nutritious, hygienic and tasty and has been much appreciated by each mouth that has been fed!

When you serve the poor one of the things you will soon learn is that while **the poor may be the immediate beneficiary, but the long term and deep impact is really on the person who is serving.** The team at Inspire can testify to this for although we are out there feeding children and their families daily, **we are the ones whose lives have been impacted and touched even more than those we reach out to!**

I started off this entire programme by distributing biscuits to street children with just one friend. Today we have a dedicated team of 4 volunteers and 2 paid helpers who work with us daily in the Feeding programme, each one with their own story. The four volunteers are former students of Project Ankur, another partner NGO. They also come from underprivileged families themselves and have benefitted from the computer classes and English classes of this NGO and are now happy to give back and help others. The other 2 paid workers each came to us in different ways. One is a young man from the North East of India who had faced a lot of hardship during the lockdown from his employers, landlord etc. He had approached us on the street when we were feeding the children and after talking to him and seeing his determination to survive this lockdown with dignity and hard work, we were happy to get him on board with us. He has been one of our most dedicated workers and has shown compassion for the poor and gone out of his way to help. The other person we met who has now become part of our team is our driver. He was earlier a security guard at our residential colony who used to watch me go for the feeding programme every day. One day he asked me about what I do and he shared his desire to get involved. He said he used to be a driver who had lost his job during the lockdown and was now a security guard. He asked if he could get involved with our work by driving for us when we go out to feed the children and their families. When he first joined us he continued to work as a security guard and helped us during his free time. He became more than just a driver and is now a crucial part of our team. He has now joined us fulltime.

We also have other amazing stories of people who have partnered with us. There are residents of the Jawaharlal Nehru University and a South Delhi area called Vasant Kunj who have come alongside us in the Roti and vegetable programme. These families have committed to providing rotis (an Indian flatbread) daily to go along with the other food we provide. Each of these homes contribute about 5-10 rotis a day which adds up to about 250-300 rotis daily. The people in the slum have absolutely loved this as they explained to us that while rice fills their stomach, the roti for them is their staple food and a meal doesn't feel complete without rotis. These families in JNU and Vasant Kunj have been consistent and committed and we are so grateful to them.

There is also a lady in South Delhi who heard about our programme and called us and said she would like to cook a meal for about 50-60 people twice a week. The food she prepares is made with such love and a strong desire to serve and is so tasty that it has become a special treat that the children and their families look forward to every Thursday and Saturday.

Each of these people can testify that they have been impacted and their lives have been touched by contributing and reaching out to the poor!



We are also aware that this need for daily food is not going to be the only solution to the problems of these families. This lockdown will soon end and many will get their jobs back or find other ways to be fed. Our desire at Inspire is to meet their needs beyond hunger. We want to be able to invest in the lives of these children and their families in a way that will impact not just their physical needs but their emotional, social, mental and other needs. We soon hope to start a programme for these children that will take them from the streets to a classroom. A place where they will be educated, taught values, life skills and more. We continue to believe that whatever we take up is not possible without the support of many normal residents who are sitting at home, “locked down”, looking at the needs around them and are eager to reach out and make a difference. We strongly believe in partnerships with like-minded individuals and organisations who are empathetic to the needs of others and a willing heart to serve those in need.

In conclusion, my challenge to everyone reading this would be to look around you and be aware of the needs around you. Then pledge to help, not everyone, but at least one person. Not with a huge plan or resources, but with whatever little you have. The rest will follow and your life will be changed!

(Mr. Danny Khawas is the National Director at Inspire based in New Delhi. For more information please contact them at info@inspire.in or call at +91-9910615992. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Inspire took up some new projects relevant to the current situation. They started Feeding programmes with street children and slum dwellers and provided food and medical supplies to a group of 700+ Migrant workers who left Delhi and returned to their villages. And under the Art & Music project they have undertaken various Virtual Music projects that have helped to support and bring income to musicians and artists who lost their income over the last few months).