



Shishur Sebay

To Not Feel Alone in the Universe

LIFE AT SHISHUR SEVAY

Quarterly Activity Report April – June 2020

India's first lock down, scheduled initially for three weeks became the entire three months of April, May, and June 2020. What did lock down mean for Shishur Sebay? In April the government issued their rules for staffing of Child Care Institutions (CCI). The only staff who could remain were the childcare workers and they had to stay for 14 day shifts and then take off. However we didn't have a second team so our childcare workers stayed for the duration of the lock down. Dr. Harrison, as government appointed Superintendent was not allowed to leave the Home until these regulations were lifted, which did not happen in this quarter.

Guards came daily but remained outside. Police patrolled the streets and anyone going out even to shop was often sent back home.

We were able to arrange for all food and medications to be delivered. From our beginning in 2006 we have shopped locally which has strengthened our position in the community. We were taken care of.

APRIL

- Teaching shifted online! Teachers were eager to make contact with the children, and the children with the teachers. Daily classes were begun, in a schedule much like the one they'd had when all of us were together.



Online skype session going on with Bono and Ganga participating using their tobiis

- The girls took on a lot of the responsibilities in keeping the education schedule on time, setting up the classes for the online sessions and troubleshooting when problems occurred. Some of the classes were through Skype, some through WhatsApp video calls and some even through zoom.
- There was a lot of time to study and a lot of down time. The girls turned to their creative interests, primarily art and embroidery.



Artwork by
khusbu



Artwork by Mani

- While the lock down, the online teaching, and the leadership on the part of the girls, May was dominated by Super Cyclonic Storm Amphan. It was only the third such storm recorded in West Bengal since 1572 and the strongest.

OUR PLAN AS THE CYCLONE APPROACHED

1. We brought back Bijay and his wife to stay at Shishur Sevay in spite of the lock down. He is our indispensable fixer of everything and with us since our beginning.
2. We moved all the children with disabilities up to the classroom which is the most protected room in the house. We stocked the room with food, water, medications and disposable diapers in case the ground floor flooded.
3. Downstairs, all electronics were put on surfaces three feet or higher. The house has never flooded but many around us have and we wanted all preparations done in advance.
4. We unplugged all downstairs electronics and appliances. We made sure all flashlights, torches and emergency lights were charged.
5. This was the first cyclone since our new roof was installed, with deep gratitude to John Marshall and his relatives for the funds. We laid out plastic sheets just in case the roof leaked but it didn't.
6. We made certain we had enough kerosene to run our generator for several days.
7. Our new vehicle was safely in a covered garage.

Outcome: The house did not flood. All power, cable, electricity, internet went off. We ran our generator for most of each day. That gave us lights, fans, and running water from the water pump and tanks. Telephone and internet were out and it was at least a week to get any of it working reliably. Occasionally we were able to get enough communication from our top floor to let people know we were OK.

There was widespread devastation from the cyclone and many in Kolkata also were left without power for 100+ hours. They faced resultant water shortages and an almost non-existent to extremely disrupted phone and internet service. Neither satellite, broadband, or WiFi was functioning. Kolkata's overhead cables and electric lines became entangled as trees were blown down from the winds. It could take a week or so to clear an area. Because of the lock down everything was more difficult. Workers almost all returned to their villages when all work stopped in Kolkata. The labor wasn't available and vigilante situations arose in which workers would be captured to go to another area to cut trees and branches.



The new roof withstood the strong gusts of the cyclonic winds.



Our powerful generator.



Cutting branches that were leaning on neighbor's roof

The girls really wanted to help those who were not as fortunate. They went through all their clothes and pulled out a lot that they gave away for Amphan relief. We learned of groups taking clothes to the Sunderban villages.

Clothes being packed for giving away for Amphan relief.



West Bengal began a partial unlock period in August. That allowed our administrator and our new accountant to attend the upstairs office which had a separate staircase. The rules included that any employee had to be brought to the office, and could not take any public transportation. Bijay did pick up each day in our well running new vehicle. At least we could catch up on some overdue work and finance issues that Dr. Harrison had had to manage on her own since March.

The unlock also allowed us to bring the carpenters back to the new school as it was empty space. The Children's Smart Center had been scheduled to open in April, with some children already enrolled.

For the children and caretakers nothing really changed and they continued with online classes and the creative work they were doing, and waiting/hoping for an end to the lock down.

- The shelves and furniture are all made from the saved wood of the triple deck bunk beds that were built in 2007 and made so they could be taken apart and stored if not needed. The wood is all strong. We have made benches, the platform in the big room, shoe-racks, and now two new platforms about 12 inches high for the kids to sit on. The green room will be the adventure room so we are putting down karate matting for safety. Progress, even slow progress feels good at this time.



The ramp at Children's Smart Centre, old wood being turned into shelves, and chair frames to fit into wheelchairs -- the work went on.

- Kolkata Police donated horlicks for the children, as part of their COVID outreach.



Dr. Harrison and Bijay, our operations Manager, receiving the donation from Kolkata Police, following the Covid protocols

- Physiotherapy is an essential part of life for the children with disabilities but because of the lockdown our physiotherapy and exercise staff cannot come. One of the girls who previously assisted the physiotherapist, started working on stretching exercises with Masum and others. Without this exercising they could develop contractures or strictures..
- Our childcare workers are one of our biggest assets. They have been staying at Shishur Sevay throughout the lockdown period, caring for the children and adding cheer.



Bono sharing a light moment with Chhaya Mashi, one of our childcare workers



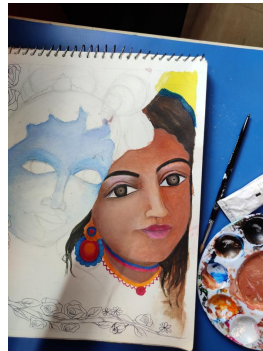
(Above) Alpana mashi and Monika mashi preparing the day's meal



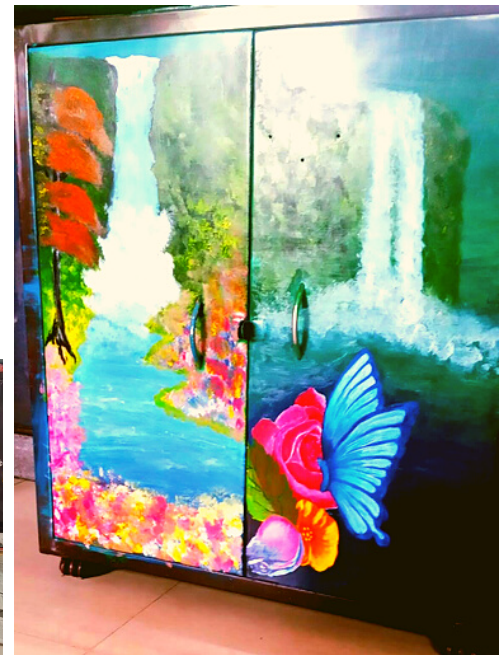
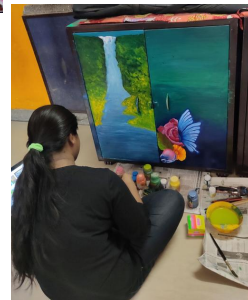
(Above) Sometimes this is the preferred mode of getting around the house, for Ganga

- The girls have not let the pandemic and the lockdown come in the way of having fun.

Just to end, sharing a few more of the artwork made by the girls in the last three months.



Puja at work



Seema at work



And then there is what makes Shishur Sevay a real home, feeling free to fix a late night snack whenever you want.