

HELPING THE HELPERS

Charities are in dire straits. The coronavirus-induced national lockdown has meant that practically all the revenue streams from charity shops and fundraising events have dried up. Yet, the third sector organisations who are essentially the cornerstone of well-being for the lesser privileged, have carried the weight of the pandemic; helping others to survive even as their own survival remains at stake.

Pardadi Educational Society (PPES), UK supports its parent organisation in India for the education and economic empowerment of girls and women in rural India. Formally known as BETI- Bring Education to India, PPES is a British charity was tasked with re-structuring all its operations.

Schools transformed to Covid-19 isolation centres

Discussing the impact of Covid-19 Anima Aggarwal, Pardada Pardadi Educational Society UK said, "At Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES), the impact of the pandemic was brutal, the school had to close, the mass return of migrant workers from the cities added to food shortages, and educating and empowering girls and women took on new challenges.

"PPES' resources were reorganised to cope. The School was transformed into a Covid-19 isolation centre for local government workers, migrant workers were offered jobs, food and health rations were distributed, and more money was allocated to support Self-help groups. Education was transformed with the provision of tablets to enable online classes, buses were converted to mobile classrooms and teaching staff distributed workbooks every fortnight."

Re-structuring operations and maximising virtual support

In August last year, a survey by the Small International Development Charities Network (SIDCN) highlighted that nearly half of the UK's small charities working with the world's poorest people expected to close within the next 12 months due to lack of financial support.

It further noted that despite a spike in demand for their services, 15% of the charities will be forced to shut their doors within the next six months, and 45% within a year. While smaller overseas charities are suffering a triple whammy being barred from applying the UK government coronavirus community support fund, other charities

were quick to maximise support on virtual platforms. Nick Sankey is the Director of Fundraising for Pratham UK.

Commenting on their team's response to the pandemic, he said, "The response of the Pratham team in India to the pandemic has been phenomenal. We delivered home learning activities through SMS and WhatsApp messages in 12 languages three times a week. Over 200 NGOs and 14 state governments shared them, so each message reached over 1,000,000 children. For those currently homeschooling we have educational content in Indian languages at www.prathamopenschool.org.

"Sadly our biggest fundraising event, the autumn gala, was cancelled and won't happen this year. Instead, we've had virtual salons with Ravi Shastri and Ranbir Kapoor amongst the speakers as we find new ways to stay in touch with our supporters."

Overseas charities at a near standstill

In April last year following massive campaigning, the Chancellor was coerced to announce £750m of extra funding for frontline charities across the UK. The government allocated £360m directly to charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the Covid-19 crisis. Another £370m for deployed for small- and medium-sized charities that are providing services such as delivering food, essential medicines and providing financial advice. Despite the additional support, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) predicted that the charity sector would lose £3.7bn of income over the year. There is no particular data set that analyses the number of charities that have now closed down or on the brink of permanent closure. But even those who have scrimped on their resources to stay afloat during the pandemic have spoken about the struggles of supporting the vulnerable.

"Since Covid-19 pandemic started last year and as we all know it has been a terrible and challenging time like no other time in my life. Worldwide, there have been millions of fatalities which, sadly, still increasing. Every country has suffered an economic downturn which, undoubtedly, will affect us and our future generations. The pandemic has its effect on several business sectors, including aviation, tourism, hospitality, entertainment and many others. Charitable organisations are no exception. Charities mostly depend on donations, fundraising events or grants from grant-giving bodies.

"Unfortunately, there are now few and far donors; fund-raising events are

not possible due to lockdowns and government restrictions, and grant-giving bodies have their own limitations. For instance, the UK government has reduced its international development commitment from 0.07% to 0.05% in relation to its GDP.

"Over the last year, the Loomba Foundation is more or less at a standstill. Our activity is probably 10-20 % of what we would have done normally to support widows and their children in India. It's very sad because whilst our capacity has diminished due to the pandemic, our beneficiaries need more support," said Lord Raj Loomba CBE.

Combatting financial and health complications

In the meantime, some charities are tasked with a dual crisis of a financial crunch as well as minimising health complications in patients arising out of delayed treatment and diagnosis. Last year Cancer

Research UK warned that a shortfall of donations would set back progress on fighting the disease. The organisation said it expected to lose up to a quarter of its fundraising income about £120m in the following year.

Tony Matharu, Vice-President, Oracle Cancer Trust said, "Head and neck cancer is the most common form of cancer in India. UK rates of diagnosis have increased by 33% since the 1990s yet currently, mainstream research funding directed towards it is less than 2%, proportionally 50% less than breast cancer. And when the pandemic hit Oracle Cancer Trust had just increased our scientific programme to meet this growing need.

"Cancer doesn't stop for Covid-19 and the crisis has hugely impacted patients and the charity. Early diagnosis and treatment are vital for survival, yet these delays mean clinics are still quiet and thousands of cancer patients are missing.

"Oracle Cancer Trust exists to ensure more people survive head and neck cancer and is raising awareness of early symptoms to encourage people to seek help sooner together. And they're working with a team of leading experts researching groundbreaking science including immunology and even utilising viruses in developing new treatments to destroy cancer cells. Lockdowns have damaged fundraising plans, yet Oracle are working hard to recover the losses from 2020."

To help, visit <https://oraclecancertrust.org/cancer-doesnt-stop-in-a-pandemic>

Working with the forgotten Armed Forces Community



Ahead of his budget, the chancellor is trying to strike a balance between supporting the young who have been left dangling on furlough or found themselves unemployed and the elderly who primarily depend on social services. In the process, however, some charities believe that disabled ex-armed forces personnel are being let down by the welfare system. Many are experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), high levels of anxiety and

other mental health conditions brought on by the struggle to access social security benefits. Royal British Legion (RBL) has been actively helping the Armed Forces Community in navigating through all these issues.

A spokesperson for said, "Since the pandemic began, our work has become more vital than ever as we support people from all generations of the Armed Forces Community facing new hardships due to Covid-19. We have seen a greater demand for support from our Benefits, Debt and Money Advice Service, which provides expert financial help and advice. There has also been increased demand for our outreach teams who support people struggling with complex needs such as unemployment, substance abuse and housing issues. Overseas cases have also risen by around 35%, as the Legion supports veterans and their families who have been impacted by the pandemic across the globe.

"As a result of Covid-19 we have made changes to some elements of our service provision. For example, our Admiral Nurses service has been adapted to enable us to continue supporting those in need whilst complying with new social distancing measures. Admiral Nurses is a specialist service delivered by the Legion in partnership with Dementia UK to support carers of those living with dementia. Before the pandemic, the service was available regionally on a face-to-face basis.

"However, following the Coronavirus outbreak, the Legion expanded this service to be available UK-wide via telephone or video call, as well as launching a range of online tools designed to offer support to carers. We have also seen an increase in the number of people using our Telephone Buddies scheme which has made thousands of calls to support housebound and vulnerable ex-service personnel experiencing loneliness and isolation."

Helping survivors of domestic abuse

But there are also few success stories to celebrate. Aanchal Women's Aid through The Jasmine Project has been helping women experiencing domestic abuse. The Jasmine Project is run with the support of the National Lottery Community Fund and 2020 Tampon Tax Community Fund. It helps survivors regain confidence and rebuild their lives through Dedicated case-workers offering emotional and practical support, online community check-in, Parenting workshops run by Key Child Support Officer, for families who have experienced domestic abuse among others.

Aanchal, founded by SuBhuhi MBE, has particular expertise in Asian family culture, and Aanchal's staff and volunteers have direct experience of South Asian cultures. They understand the cultural pressures on these communities and, as well as English, they speak Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, and Gujarati.

In a statement, Sudarshan Bhuhi MBE, CEO, Aanchal Women's Aid, said, "It is already clear that Jasmine is one of the best programmes we have delivered. By giving service users more time and support, and moving from crisis management to community-based empowerment, Jasmine is changing lives. Women are learning, we are learning, and we're sharing that learning back into the community."

Following nearly a year of lockdown, charity shops are expecting a boom in their business when they are allowed to reopen as lockdown restrictions ease. Children's charity Barnardo's is reportedly losing £8,000 a month from its 665 shops. But if the analysis of Robin Osterley of the Charity Retail Association is to be believed then these charity shops will witness a surge in donations. Ultimately, it all depends on how the government eases ahead with the "Unlock Britain" strategy.



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