**STORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

April 2021

It was the start of the second wave of covid 19 in Maharashtra. Most of the hospitals were full. There was a great shortage of beds, shortage of ICU beds, shortage of oxygen cylinders. The situation was terrible. The worst affected cities were Mumbai, Pune and Nasik. Sadly, the cases were increasing day by day and the deaths too. In this entire situation, the Salesian Youth Movement of the Salesian Province of Mumbai committed itself to digitally help out those in need of these critical resources. The SYM Covid Task Force (SYM CTF) was formed to digitally help the needy. The youth of SYM CTF were helping a team of doctors of the Health Outreach Team of the Archdiocese of Bombay.

On a daily basis around 140 youth helped in online research and verification of data in the cities of Mumbai, Pune and Nasik. Everyday the youth would personally call the hospital and verify the availability of ICU beds, oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, plasma, blood units etc. At the end of each day the youth would collate the verified information and publish it on the website and social media. Some youth were working for around six hours a day verifying the data. Many lives were saved. The success stories kept the youth motivated enough to give their best each day. While the teams always met online and worked online, it was six months later for the first time the SYM CTF team came together for a felicitation program in December 2021. During the felicitation the youth were awarded the SYM young covid warrior medal. Let us now listen to Dr. Cheryl Fernandes from the Health Outreach Team of the Archdiocese of Bombay.

**Dr. Cheryl Fernandes – Health Outreach Team**

When I was a child, I always believed in miracles and

my grandmother would always tell “Pray for miracles”

and I never really understood what that really meant.

Until as I grew up, I realized that miracles happen everyday

if we choose to realize that it’s a miracle

and one such miracle was Fr. Leon who was

an instrument of God who happened to just pick up the phone

and call me.

I’m so happy he got the right number, because there were

a number of volunteers and he just picked the phone

and I was a part of the core team and his willingness was amazing

where he vouched for you all.

He didn’t know actually what we were really doing,

which was amazing because he had the faith in

you’ll Don Bosco’s youth and that helped us take things further.

What you’ll did was amazing and I have to thank you’ll

Cletus, Drushti, Durran, Mansoor and whoever else

I have missed.

You’ll were at the backend and may be you’ll didn’t get

all the gratitude that we doctors got on the frontline.

It was amazing to have gratitude’s and testimonies from people

telling us how we had managed to arrange the plasma,

the blood, the hospitals.

It was so touching, we had tears in our eyes.

But we knew that it happened only because of people

like you’ll who were working on the backend

and your determination and commitment was

totally commendable. So really hats off to you’ll.

I was just telling Sr. Nilima out there

I don’t think they had any medical background

before they were thrown into this.

The covid helpline is a project by Bishop Allwyn and Dr. Armida

who heads us.

One fine day, Bishop Allwyn was so disturbed about

what was happening with the covid scenario.

That time it was the peak – April, May.

So he had an emergency meeting and he said let’s do something

and we also didn’t know what we would do but

we had the heart to do something… just like you’ll.

So in fact we set up this Covid Helpline in 48 hours.

Honestly Fr. Leon, we didn’t have our systems in place.

But when it is a project of God, I believe God just makes a way

and Fr. Leon came and offered help.

We just grabbed it because we didn’t have our systems

but we just wanted to help.

So it’s the willingness that helps, really takes us far.

On the front end of my team who was helping with the calls

were Swizel, Astel and Jolene.

I have to share something about Jolene.

I know she is not here and she is from Goa.

But she brought so much dynamism to that whole team

where she wanted to do so much more.

She wanted to answer calls and

I had to curb her down, curb her enthusiasm down

because I didn’t know who she was talking to but

her willingness to give was so amazing

and she touched the lives… one such story

was one of our doctor’s father was very serious

with covid in Goa… and we couldn’t do much.

We offered what information we had

but what Jolene did was every 4 hours she just reached out

to the doctor and she just said

“Is there anything you need”?

“Can I do anything”?

I mean… that’s it and nothing more

but her just being there for the doctor’s family went so far

that till today that doctor calls us and thanks us and says

“Thank you for being there for us”.

They say “Thank you” to the Health Outreach

but it’s the Don Bosco’s youth that made it happen

and love always pays forward.

This lovely doctor gave us a lovely donation in thanksgiving

so we can serve the poor.

So it is always something about pay it forward

and it works out well.

I would like to just end with a note from Dr. Zynia

she sent a note, she couldn’t be here

she was heading all of you’ll.

This is the message from Dr. Zynia.

Thank you guys for being a strong core team,

we wouldn’t have been able to pull off what we did with great determination.

**Mansoor Kanchwal – SYM-CTF Team Leader**

I got a call there is a need for an oxygen cylinder  
He was in... I guess in Kandivli  
He said this fellow is working with the Covid Task Force  
you ask him and he will give you the information  
That guy called me and he was literally crying  
"I just can't understand, what to do"  
“If I call one place they ask me to go to another place”  
I said "Just give me 15 minutes and I will call and...”  
“tell you where you will get the oxygen cylinder"  
and he said "Please call back and even If I get half cylinder”  
“of oxygen, my mother will be saved...”  
because she was so critical.  
We had a Google Sheet and I started calling the vendors  
and one vendor was having an oxygen cylinder  
but it was in Charni Road  
so I called him and said that  
“You will have to go to Charni Rd and get it,”  
He said "Ok, I'll go and get it",  
He got the oxygen cylinder from that place.  
At around 8.30 pm he called me and he said  
"If you had not told me… the moment I got the cylinder at the”  
“hospital my mother was, mother was about to give up her spirit,”  
“but that cylinder saved my Mom's life.”  
At that time, I realised what impact we are making.  
We had a clue to what was going on but we  
didn't realise what was actually going on  
these people are running around  
so we saved their time and I am really happy that  
I got this team and Cletus of course, he used to message me  
at 2.30 in the night, “Bro, what to do about this?”

**Veronica D'Souza – SYM-CTF Team**

When I came to know about this, Fr. Leon texted me

I just initially told him, "Yes, I want to be a part of it,”

because when my Granny got Covid, it was like night  
around 3 am and we were running for the oxygen  
that time I was not a part of this team  
after running about for an hour we found oxygen  
and we found a hospital. Because we took her to the hospital  
but everything was full and there was no ICU  
So I knew what she suffered and when I reached the  
hospital, I have seen others suffering  
I want to be a part of it because I wanted to do something  
for others... though I lost my granny because of  
post covid ailments... six months back  
I knew how life is precious and people out there

are suffering so much and doing my bit will help others

and the most proud thing for me was when my Daddy  
started texting everyone with messages  
“If you need anything, text my daughter,”  
“She knows everything, where you'll will find contact”  
so it was a very proud moment for me  
Even my whole family was supporting me. So I used to tell  
my Dad in the morning “If you find any message text me…”  
I'll confirm and I'll add it to the sheet  
I'm happy that even my family was part of it  
and they helped me be a part of this programme  
and reach out to others

**Durran D’Mello – SYM-CTF Team Leader**

One of my friends lost his Father and he was helpless  
You love someone but you cannot do anything,  
You are just helpless  
At that point of time I was very disturbed with this  
we were in a helpless situation,  
One afternoon I get a call...  
“Would you wish to be a part of this team”?  
Yes, I want to be a part of this team... If there is little I can do  
that will help people around then why not?

**Beverly D’Souza – SYM-CTF Media Team Leader**

I was studying in Pune for 5 years so I had joined the  
church group and suddenly I saw a message in one of those  
groups that was asking for oxygen cylinders for them...  
Ok, WOW… I can help… I actually have something

**Leander Pereira – SYM-CTF Media Team**

When the second wave hit, I got in touch with Fr. Leon  
and I told him I’m a student of Mass Media  
from Don Bosco, Kurla and I attended this meeting  
I just raised my hand for this media thing  
was not sure what am I supposed to do in it  
Whatever posts you used to see, the PDFs  
I was the last person to prepare it,  
I used to convert those Excel sheets into PDFs  
In the initial days it took me 4 hours to do it,  
I was like… when is it going to get over  
but slowly I got a habit of it  
many came asking for it and I did reach out to them  
and it was a wonderful experience

**Drushti Bhosle – SYM-CTF Team Leader**

It was in the month of mid April when one of my close family

friend, her uncle was detected with covid and it was  
a serious case and we had look for numbers for plasma  
and oxygen cylinders  
and we were getting forwards, so many forwards,  
we would literally call around 100 numbers and they  
were all fraud. And we were looking for the right numbers.  
It was that time that I was really disturbed with the situation  
and in mid April that's when Father came up with this  
Task Force.  
That’s when I opted for it and I was really happy to be a part of it,  
I was assigned a Team and I had around 10 people in my team  
They were all very supportive. They had to dedicate one hour  
of their time but they were giving more of their time  
and they were literally calling people and verifying the leads.

**Oscarina Barretto – SYM-CTF Team Leader**

I was also feeling very helpless that the country and the city  
at that time was suffering a lot and even though you

do donation, there is only that much you can do,  
But if you can do something with your time  
you have a laptop, you have phone, you have internet  
you can do something more  
then I was more than happy to do that.

**Cletus D’Souza – SYM-CTF Co-ordinator**

There you get a call,  
We are starting with something called as the  
Covid Task Force. Would you like to be part of it?  
If it is Priest calling, 99% of the time you say a "Yes"  
So I said, Ok  
He said there is a form we are giving just fill that form,  
I filled the form  
Two days I forgot about it, then I get a second call,  
He said "Can you help in leading that team"  
I said Ok  
What team? Because I don't know how many entries came in?  
I don't know what is the plan of action?  
I don't know how it is going to run?  
Ok. I said, "Do we have people?"  
Fr. Leon called me and said, “We have limited people...”  
“around 20-30 but we can make one more poster.”  
“we can circulate it outside DBYS and see what more…”

“we can get”.  
Within a week's time we got 60-70 entries.  
and I was like, “OK, now this is getting serious”  
I said, “Do we have something”?  
He said, “Let's start collating data”,  
He had the idea ready in his mind that there is lot of data  
that is floating around, lot of websites that are floating around  
Now I am someone who is more from the management side  
more of the organising side. That is my strength.  
I said "You bring in the data from all sources, I will put it”  
I will give a pattern to the madness  
I brought in the Google Sheets  
I brought in the data collation software  
I brought in how to divide it between sheets  
Leave the processes to me,  
We kept the first meeting. We didn't have the plan yet  
We only knew we have to call and check the data.  
After that what happens to the data we were not sure  
I don't know how this came but the Health Outreach Team  
came in that time and they came in as a blessing  
to ride on their backs and our data could reach to so many  
people and so many lives  
I remember talking to Dr. Zynia and she asked for some data  
these are the doubts that my callers are getting  
I need oxygen cylinder or I need plasma  
I said, “we will search that”  
Later when we started giving all kinds of data  
One fine day Dr. Zynia calls me and she says  
“Cletus, I feel that we need to keep a meeting”,  
I said, “OK we will call the Team Leaders”  
she said “No, call everyone for the meeting”.  
She said "We have been reaching out to people and”…  
close to 900 lives we have touched  
I cut the call and called up Fr. Leon and said  
“This is something our teams need to know”  
This was not one life, this is not two lives  
and this was just half way through the entire mission  
900 lives. Mind blowing!  
We just started with just 1 hour of our time  
Father said give one hour of your time and this work  
I got the names, I randomly picked up  
Father helped me pick up Team Leaders  
We didn't know each other. I didn't know all 3 of them  
I had never spoken with Mansoor, Durran I don't know  
Drushti I don't know, which parish I don't know  
names first time I have heard  
I called them for first time and asked  
Will you become Team Leader?  
They also have no idea. It was direct bouncer on them  
Who is in their team they don't know  
What is the plan of action, they don't know  
I told them "Don't take tension. I will give you all the processes"  
I will give you the sheets. All you have to do is give  
1 hour of your time  
As a leader that's what I requested  
As a leader what I got from them was minimum 8-9 hours a day  
If our volunteers worked 4-5 hours  
The Team Leader worked 8-9 hours minimum  
Sometimes in the night at 2 am Me, Dr. Zynia, Mansoor, Drushti  
Durran were discussing about the problems in our teams  
Can you pitch in? Can you give 2 resources in the afternoon?  
Can you send someone form evening to the morning batch?  
Crazy... but that's how you do it  
Give the youth a reason, they will do it for you  
This is in action   
I have been fortunate. These people are taking my name  
but these are the people who have done the actual work  
Just asked for 1 hour... they touched so many lives  
Thanks to Fr. Leon, thanks to Dr. Cheryl, Dr Richard, Dr. Zynia  
who ran the entire thing and helped to reach people  
But it is the youth and their loving kindness  
that helped change and transform lives. SAVE LIVES  
So thanks to all of you. You are the real Covid Warriors  
and without you it wouldn't have been possible.