

2020: AN UNUSUAL YEAR

We have moved out of the phase of being in shock about the completely unexpected situation March 2020 brought. I remember thinking in late Feb that this was one more of those new viruses that would not get to us, but make us more careful and aware of the need for sanitary living. Little did I know the extent to which the awareness was going to become a part of our days, nights, dreams and nightmares.

A rumour about a positive case at Dehradun Max (literally 2 km away from us!) had us call an emergency admin meeting, followed by an announcement about Coronavirus to our friends at Arunima. We talked about the need to start washing hands frequently from that day on, and the possibility that hand sanitizer would be used regularly. The short meeting with the friends ended on a humorous note, when, in my usual style, I asked if anyone had any questions. Promptly came Arjun's query - *CAKE MILEGA?*

Tal, our program coordinator and beloved colleague of 4 years, was due to leave on the 31st of March in preparation for the arrival of her baby expected in July 2020. A few days after the "cake milega meeting"(as it is now famously called) though, it was obvious that coming in was risky for Tal. So a hurried decision was taken mid March to inform our friends that she would not come in any more, but that we would meet soon to give Tal a proper send off. About two days later, we realized that our friends would need to go home for some time, as the daily coming and going of staff was not safe for anyone.



Parents drove down from different cities to pick their family members up from Arunima.

Most people left by the 19th of March, although 6 friends who would have had to fly back to their homes could not go because of the risks that air travel posed.

In retrospect, we can say that the timing was perfect.

The Prime Minister announced a country wide lock down for 3 weeks on the 23rd of March.



The team listening to PM Modi's address on the 23rd of March informing us about the 3 week lockdown. The shock is palpable even in this random click.

We had decided to do weekly stays at the Arunima residence to minimize the risk of infection from daily travel, but the lock down meant that the team that had come in for the week, was not going anywhere till the three weeks were up. Then on began the learning of new ways of being, because life had to go on. We were certainly handed lemons, (along with the rest of the world....see...not different at all!) so it was time to make Shikanji! And HOW!

Lockdown 1.0 and 2.0: 45 days at the center



Daily yoga and exercises for a healthy body and mind



Working together every day, to complete an order of 400 cross-stitch keychains.



Fun and games in the sun



Indoor games in the evenings



Meal Prep



Enjoying one another



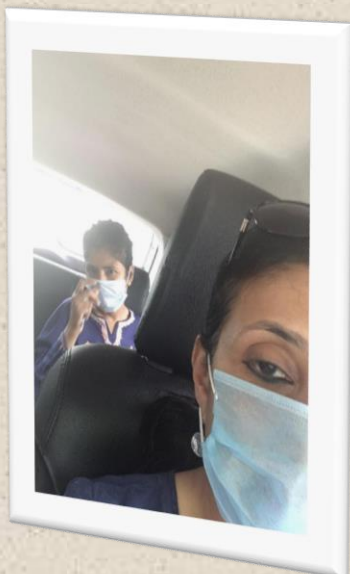
The 2nd of April, bang in the middle of the two lock downs, was special in many ways- World Autism Awareness Day and Project Arunima's 9th birthday. Most importantly though, we knew that it was a day to celebrate the human spirit, and these people dressed in blue, who are our true heroes!



LOCKDOWN 3 AND BEYOND



TEAM 1 goes home after 45 days.
Truly indebted to each one!



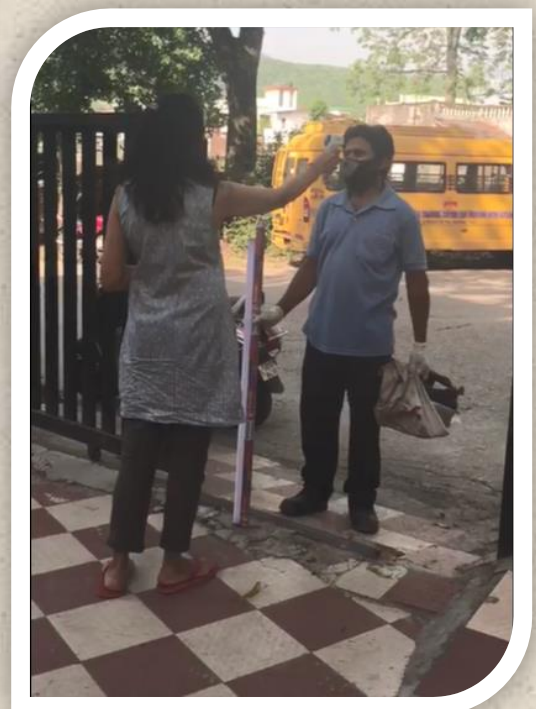
Thus began the “new normal’ way of working at Arunima.

Teams of 9-10 staff are on weekly shifts, to continue to avoid the daily travel. The change every 7 days brings fresh energy into the centre; we are completely enthralled by the new ideas that emerge as we work to keep our friends challenged, and learning.

Our friends have been troopers throughout the lockdown. These individuals who were so used to being out and about each day, have risen to the challenges of confinement to the residence. New skills emerge, and life truly does go on.

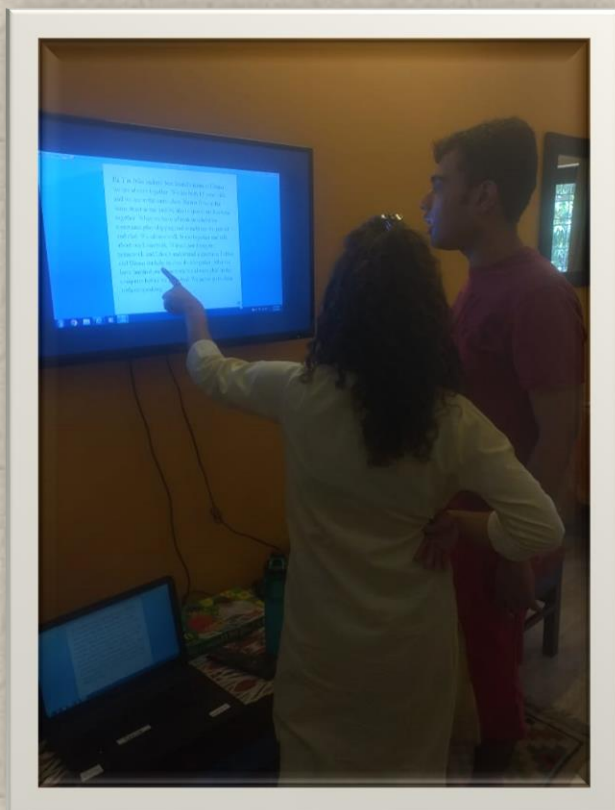
They say however, that change is the only constant. Friends who went home have started returning to the centre, so we have gone from 6 residents to 12 now. Sanitization is carried out with a vengeance. Each person that comes in (only if NECESSARY) is screened for symptoms.

We are grateful for the wonderful group of parents who have given us their unflinching support through this time.



FRESH ENERGY AND CREATIVITY EACH WEEK









**TILL THE NEXT TIME FOLKS! STAY
SAFE AND HAPPY! LIFE'S LEMONS,
MIXED WITH A LARGE DOSE OF
LAUGHTER, AND A GENEROUS
MEASURE OF LOVE, WILL GIVE YOU
THE BEST SHIKANJI EVER.**

