Survival, a stitch at a time

Like any other woman in her slum near Lake Drive in Dhanbad, the inevitable COVID-19 lockdown brought misery to Yasmin Kirar. Her tailor shop temporarily closed down, so she had no income. Tailoring is the only source of income for this single mother of three.

While she was struggling to make ends meet, similar plight of women in the neighbourhood instilled in her to think of an activity that could help them sustain through the crisis. She decided to put her tailoring skills to use by making masks and create livelihoods for women in the neighborhood.

For the last 30 days, five women from the locality have been stitching masks in Yasmin’s 1205 sq ft single-bedroom house. Around 20 slum dwellers engage in the activity from their homes. These women are now earning around Rs 5,000 per month, the same income for their families during lockdown. They are among hundreds of women trained by Yasmin in tailoring in the past two years.

“We stitch masks that are crucial to protect people from Covid-19. This, in turn, helps us subsist,” says Yasmin.

She acknowledges the support rendered by people and organisations who bought masks from them. Hand-in-hand with the local-based Dhanbad Foundation, she has purchased over 20,000 masks to be distributed among the frontline Covid-19 warriors including police, railway, civic workers, public and private personnel.

Yasmin is also grateful to Nirdosh Panda, the chief executive officer of Rehabilitation Assistance for People in Distress, for making this possible.

Deshpande Foundation’s Sandeep Saha says “Yasmin ticking away a determined woman, who not only wished to lead a resilient life but also ensure that women around her are empowered. Realising her qualities, we trained her to become an entrepreneur, who could lead her team and help others earn a living.”

Yasmin has trained more than 400 people to stitch dresses, bags and do embroidery work. Today, she has become a guiding light to many women in her locality.

“The women have not only lost their source of income due to lockdown. An dignified bread-earner, waiting for someone else to feed us was our lot in question. Deshpande Foundation supported us by giving us a big order,” said Yasmin and her team completed the consignment of 20,000 masks in just eight days.

“Each one of us worked for 10-12 hours a day and completed the task in record time,” said Sameera Bilde. Her husband is a carpenter and couldn’t get work even for a single day in the past two months. She shouldered the responsibility of her family’s plight had she not get this opportunity.

Deshpande Foundation helped them with the know-how to stitch good quality masks apart from giving the first big consignment. Other NPOs and individuals followed with orders. The team has also sold over 5,000 masks to them at Rs 15 per piece. The team stitches two-layered and three-layered cotton masks.

Over 130 women from the locality have approached her for to be part of the team that emerged from the crisis. Yasmin wants to accommodate as many people as possible but they don’t have any fresh orders now. "With as many families in need of a livelihood, we can stitch about one lakh masks in 15 days," she said.

For details, contact Yasmin on 9722620210.