

COVID RESPONSE

LET'S TALK



IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

*Leading the way for
collective action*

The crisis of the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown disrupted lives across the country. Especially, the poor and the migrant workers who had little choice but to rely on relief or leave the cities.

Overnight, the Manah Wellness team were able to reorganise themselves and launched an entity called Let's TALK, as an immediate response to Covid. It is a crisis helpline for people to seek help for psychological issues during these times of distress.

Let's TALK collaborated with several Ashoka Fellows, who were founders of various civil society organisations (CSOs) working on livelihoods, rural development and on direct relief. Each of these CSOs front-ended these efforts for their own primary stakeholder groups. The focus was to provide psychological first aid support. Various organisations, irrespective of their focus areas would forward Let's TALK helpline number to people in distress.

Overview

Manah Wellness has been setup by an Ashoka Fellow working on issues of health for over two and a half decades across social and for-profit enterprises. Incorporated in 2020, Manah Wellness is a mental health platform focused on employee wellbeing. It also focuses on groups such as schools, small and medium enterprises and employees of several enterprises. Created as a network of experts and specialists-psychologists and counsellors, it has the necessary infrastructure and expertise to address a spectrum of psychological issues.

Its longer-term strategy includes working closely with state governments. It has been a part of Vision Group on Health in Karnataka, with an aim to impact the health sector to meet the decadal SDG goals. State government of Maharashtra is currently exploring the possibilities of working closely with Manah Wellness.



People in need call the helpline and speak to the frontline volunteer, who is trained to assess the issue of the caller. Over 50% of distress calls were regarding train schedules, relief and they were appropriately diverted to the relevant help lines. Callers needing psychological support were assessed and patched real time to appropriate psychologists.

Three hundred volunteers from partner CSOs came onboard to manage the help line. The Let's TALK team has provided the necessary infrastructure and training support required to run a fully responsive help line at all times for the past nine months. It created a team able to respond in 18 languages as CSOs were in different geographies.

It has worked closely with the government of Maharashtra and is part of the state-run Covid management app. Overall, it partnered with over 40 governmental and non-governmental organisations across the country.

In the past year, over 60% of MSMEs were at the risk of closing down. Manah Wellness partnered with GAME Alliance, DeAsra like organisations offering psychological support to their stakeholders. While the partners were dealing with the stakeholders' financial challenges, Let's TALK could help them with emotional support.

LONG TERM SHIFTS

New opportunities, creating new learning pathways

The learnings from Lets TALK's with MSMEs has led to another service for large MSME networks and coalitions.

An engagement piece was created for Let's TALK, to create collective learning and bring together volunteers from several organisations. Structured learning sessions with expert speakers positively impacted organisational learning and was taken across different ventures. For instance, artists and musicians spoke with volunteers regularly to introduce the element of fun. These curated sessions were taken to other paying clients as well.

Manah Wellness has opened fellowships to help people learn technical skills, scaling mental health initiatives, communication, and story-telling - all useful skills for mental health professionals.

To help create more sustainable initiatives, it plans to train and build capacities of organisations that wish to create their own crisis helplines. With the second surge of the pandemic, they may have to reactivate Let's TALK.

With online working Manah Wellness is able to hire and get business opportunities from anywhere. The ambition now is to build a global organisation around mental health.



Conclusion

Let's TALK which was designed to address the crisis created by the pandemic and the regulations thereafter, proved to be a successful collective initiative.

The team felt validated when they saw the model at work, where organisations could come together and work on a common platform. Reflecting on the experience and distilling the learnings of the collective will help the team create such collective efforts whenever required, irrespective of the context and needs.

