

Womanspace Supports COVID Relief in India

By Michael O'Loughlin, Marketing & Communications Director

Womanspace of Rockford, Illinois, which offers programs to enhance the body, mind, and spirit, is taking extraordinary steps to heal and help those who are struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

Womanspace was co-founded in 1975 by Sister Elaine Hirschenberger and the late Sister Dorothy Bock, and Sister Elaine continues to serve as its executive director. The center focuses its education and enrichment offerings on the creative arts, holistic health, interfaith exploration, and environmental stewardship.

During March, Womanspace celebrated the beauty and diversity of Indian culture to raise funds for women's empowerment through an "Experience India" virtual fundraising event. The initiative was undertaken with Jhoole, a nonprofit, ethical fashion social enterprise based in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, that employs women to help them gain economic independence, invest in education, and break the cycle of poverty in their community. Hannah Warren, Womanspace's development and marketing director, founded Jhoole in 2008.

Proceeds from "Experience India" were to be split between Jhoole and Womanspace. Then came the sudden surge in COVID-19 cases in India. In response, Womanspace has pivoted to help make the fastest and most positive impact with the funds that were raised.

"The COVID crisis in India is needlessly taking lives because of an inadequate healthcare infrastructure," Womanspace said in a recent announcement. "In Maheshwar, the area hospitals are extremely ill prepared for this crisis since they lack sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) and have no oxygen concentrators—simple, relatively inexpensive equipment that can save lives.

"Now, seeing the dire state of the country and local community, we want to contribute \$5,000 from Jhoole's share of the 'Experience India' proceeds to purchase critical, life-saving medical equipment for their hospital," the Womanspace announcement continued. "We believe this effort to protect the health of the Jhoole women, their families, and their local community is integral to empowerment. The remainder of Jhoole's share of funds raised will be used to support their cooperative social enterprise efforts."



The “Experience India” Committee and the Womanspace board noted that donors who wish to direct all their donation to Jhoole’s cooperative efforts would be able to do so. They also announced that Rotary District 6420, the 48 Rotary Clubs serving northwestern Illinois, has graciously agreed to support this initiative by contributing \$10,000, bringing the COVID-relief donation to \$15,000.



“We will be purchasing the specific equipment requested by local hospitals, including oxygen concentrators, pulse oximeters, thermal scanners, and PPE,” Womanspace explained. “This is the equipment that can save lives in Maheshwar. Because of our close relationship with Jhoole and the Maheshwar community, we can ensure that it gets to the right place and is used in an equitable way.”

Last year, in response to the pandemic’s initial spread in the United States, Womanspace mobilized more than 200 people to sew 13,000 masks for Rockford residents. “Here is our chance to extend that caring to the Maheshwar community,” the organization said.

We offer our prayers of gratitude for the leadership of Sister Elaine and Womanspace’s board, staff, and volunteers in responding quickly and creatively to help those most in need. May the people who will benefit from this equipment and these supplies be blessed with healing and wholeness.