

# Food For Life

## Brief History

The Food For Life (FFL) program commenced in the year 1994 with H.G Balbhadra Prabhu taking the initiative. It was a low key beginning and there was not much support and enthusiasm. The program started by bringing foodstuff and food grains on 3 auto rickshaws and food distribution was conducted twice a week. Later on, a separate office and vehicle was dedicated entirely to this program. Simple items such as poori-sabji, sambhar-chawal and halwa were prepared for distribution.

In the year 2003, the Delhi State Government came up with a request to provide cooked food to all its schools as a part of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. This scheme was launched in a grand fashion in Delhi with many dignitaries in attendance garnering a lot of media and newspaper coverage.

## Workflow

- Now, broadly 2 programs operate:
  - ✓ Food For Life scheme- the Non-Governmental function of feeding the poor, needy and old people.
  - ✓ Mid-Day Meal Scheme for Government schools
- ISKCON Food Relief Foundation was established as a separate Trust to look after the mid-day meal scheme. Also, a separate kitchen is now dedicated solely for mid-day meal cooking.
- Now, cooking prasadam for all festivals, guest houses, devotees, staff and the needy are carried on under the common umbrella of Food For Life scheme.
- Another project by the name 'Aapki Rasoi' was launched. The then Chief Minister of Delhi, Mrs. Sheila Dixit invited us to contribute to a mission named 'Hunger Free Delhi'. We were contacted to undertake cooking and feeding activities. Several corporates such as DLF and Times of India, among others were roped in for funding and other requirements.

## Strategy

- An estimate is made as to how many people are to be fed on a certain day or event.
- Accordingly, a list of the foodstuff required along with respective quantities and the dishes to be prepared is made. The prominent dishes are Dal, Rice, Kadhi, Poori-sabji and halwa. Foodstuff mainly include rice, wheat, pulses, vegetables, spices and oil.
- Around 70% of the requirements are sourced by donors in kind. The remaining 30% is purchased. Also, people sponsor on their behalf or their relatives' behalf on special dates(birthdays, anniversaries, etc.).
- Food is prepared keeping the constraint of time in mind. Delicious food that can be prepared in bulk in a relatively short time like *Daal Chawal* is given priority.
- Publicity is of utmost importance to make this program cost effective. The key is to involve as many people as possible for funds and/or manpower resources. Single-handedly, it is very difficult. In this digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. must be used to spread awareness and garner support.

## Work Structure/ Hierarchy

- Reporting of activities is regularly done to H.H Gopal Krishna Goswami Maharaj or in his absence, to the Temple President.

- Apart from the huge kitchen workforce, there are assistants who work full time in the office dedicated for the FFL programs along with 3 drivers employed for transportation of prasadam and cooking equipment.
- There is no separate accounts maintained for FFL activities. Only a separate Ledger Account is maintained which is later merged with the ISKCON's Accounts.

## Funding

- In the initial period, people were approached to fund for this noble cause through a separate counter in the temple premises. Many readily donate as feeding the poor and needy give them a sense of inner satisfaction.
- Around 70% of the foodstuff requirements are sourced by donors in kind. The remaining 30% is purchased. Also, people sponsor on their behalf or their relatives' behalf on special dates (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.). Hence, there is never a dearth in funds.
- During festivals, funding is also obtained from corporate entities.

## Noteworthy Contributions

- FFL program has reached out to the public during times of calamity such as
  - ✓ Bhuj Earthquake in 2001
  - ✓ Floods in Kashmir
  - ✓ Bihar floods in 2008
  - ✓ Nepal Earthquake in 2015, etc.
- During the Kashmir floods, due to time and distance constraint, the Indian Air Force was coordinated with for transporting Khichdi Prasad to the Kashmir, whereas cooking and packing was done in Delhi.
- During the Bihar flooding of 2008, numerous people waited eagerly for Khichdi prasadam. Contributing to those in need gives self-satisfaction as well as a positive image for ISKCON as an organization.

## Challenges

- Funding is one of the main challenges. Once sponsors come forward, things become easy. A good network is required for this.
- A lot of hardship is faced by volunteers and devotees during disaster relief initiatives. Apart from travelling and lodging, arguments and fights take place over food distribution issues. Moreover, there was not much support from the Government too.

## Lessons

- Srila Prabhupada wanted not a single person going hungry to bed with a radius of 10 miles from the temple. The desire to help and Krsna's and guru's grace is of utmost importance.
- In the present age, not many are really interested in philosophy, kirtan and prayers. What attracts them more is food. Prasadam can be an excellent medium to bring people closer to Krsna. Moreover, feeding is the biggest act of humanity. Many donors come forward when distributions are made to the poor and old.
- Publicity is of utmost importance to make this program cost effective. The key is to involve as many people as possible for funds and/or manpower resources. Single-handedly, it is very difficult. In this digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. must be used to spread awareness and garner support.

- If temples want to start, they can easily start on a small budget with *Khichdi* as it can be prepared on a reasonable budget.

## Achievements

- The then Chief Minister of Delhi, Mrs. Sheila Dixit specially appreciated the *Khichdi prasad*. She even ordered Khichdi from the FFL programs for herself.
- Many leaders from Bihar too appreciated the team work and coordination of the FFI programs especially during the times of calamity.