

Twenty-five years ago, readers of this newspaper founded The Bhopal Medical Appeal by responding to a double-page advertisement funded on a promise and a prayer.

Against a cruel yet tender photograph of a baby's burial (the symbol of Bhopal's medical ordeal) the ad told the story of the first ten years of the disaster: of chaos, lack of proper care for more than half a million injured, of disdain for the poor, of wrecked lungs, cancers and horrifying births.

Experts told us not to publish it. The text was too long, the picture would repel people. One glance, and they'd turn the page.

Wrong. *Guardian* readers responded with fierce, generous enthusiasm.

Our vision of a neglected community taking charge of its own healthcare, running its own clinics where the poorest are welcomed kindly, respectfully, with your support became reality.

The work we have done together has helped thousands of Bhopal survivors. Now in the fight against COVID-19 we hope it may also help you.



stations in places without piped water.

On the 21st we set up Whatsapp groups to be community information and advice centres so people could report symptoms, or seek help.

March 28th saw the city's first death.

Trusting one another

On April 2nd we finalised a five-part plan to protect 15 vulnerable communities near the abandoned Carbide site. They were chosen in consultation with neighbourhood groups.

All were places with large numbers of volunteers who had experience of working with us for at least five years.

The booklet has details of the plan's five part: communication, monitoring, care at local level, quarantine, medical treatment.

As this is being written (June 4th) there are 846 cases in the city as a whole, 48 are dead, of whom 33 are gas victims.

In the 15 areas where our plan is at work there have so far been no cases and no deaths. This could change in a breath.

The method is common sense based on best

practice. It is meticulously organised but the magic is not in this or that idea or method. The magic is the people, it's the strong bond of trust between volunteers and people in

the community they serve.

A 29th April study for the WHO interviewed Bhopal health workers and concluded that: 'Community-led action, facilitated and enabled by local actors, will be the mainstay of the humanitarian response to COVID-19.'

Bringing out the best in us

"The happiness of selfless service is more than other happiness," says volunteer Raïsa. "In each other we find strength and joy of friendship. Yes, we're poor, but by working together we achieve unimaginable things."

Extraordinary, isn't it, that in this cynical age, someone can say that, and mean it?

This is a shoe-string and shoe-leather effort offered with thanks to our friends in Britain in the hope that it may be useful. A free booklet is at www.bhopal.org/covid. If you choose to make a donation we're not going to argue. There's no coupon, so no unnecessary trip out for you.

If you'd prefer to speak to one of us please ring 0800 316 5577 and ask for Nicky. Thank you.



From Bhopal, with love.

To a Bhopali the predicament we now all face is a sort of analogue to the events of 1984.

The novel coronavirus tears at lungs as the gas from Union Carbide's factory did, causing victims to drown in their own bloody fluids.

It injures other organs, as the gas did, and like the gas can cause long term damage.

Now as then, tens of thousands of acutely vulnerable people are living in cramped, overcrowded neighbourhoods. If nothing is done to stop the virus, it will rage through them like wildfire through a parched forest. They won't stand a chance. There is no cure, but this time, we are organised to deal with it.

Engaging the community

In 1996, when we opened the Sambhavna Clinic no one knew how many were sick—or how sick—so our first project was a door-to-door survey of the worst-afflicted areas.

Our health teams visited each home in every

lane and alley. We began working on the early detection of cervical cancer, tuberculosis and anaemia, on malaria control and the growing of herbs to treat common ailments.

People wanted to help and often involved their friends. Soon we had a large network of dedicated and experienced volunteers.

They became indispensable to our day-to-day work in the communities near the clinics and are crucial in defending against COVID.

Preparing for the worst

People whose scarred lungs have laboured through the last thirty-six years know what it is to struggle for breath. They remember being caught unprepared, defenceless, when terror struck. There was fear as case by case, the new coronavirus crept closer. By January 31st it was in India. On March 22nd it came to Bhopal.

You're never ready, but can be prepared. By March 19th we had installed handwashing