

SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH & VILLAGE EMPOWERMENT

REGISTERED NGO - TAMIL NADU, INDIA

Strengthening Community Care through Nutritional Support

SERVE:

Deplorable socio-economic, Legal and Health conditions of the Dalit, Backward and Most Backward communities, difficulties of disabled people prompted a team of social minded and dedicated youth and women to promote a social service organization by name - Society For Education Research and Village Empowerment (SERVE) in 1999 and the same was registered under Tamil Nadu state Societies Registration Act 27 of 1975, registered under Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976 and also under section 12-aa and 80-G of Income Tax Act 1961. Thus, a full-fledged social service organization with grit determination of striving for socio-economic, health and Human rights empowerment of the target communities in Mangalore block of Veppur Taluk in Cuddalore district in the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

About the Context

India continues to report a high number of cases of Leprosy, with over 1,20,000 new cases annually. While treatment is available, individuals affected by the disease—especially in marginalized rural areas—often continue to live in difficult conditions due to stigma, isolation, and lack of sustained care. In Thalaivasal, a rural and underserved region, a small care home supported by government aid is being run by two elderly women who have taken personal responsibility to care for abandoned and neglected persons affected by leprosy. What began as a small effort has gradually become a critical support space for many who have no other place to go.

Current Situation of the Care Home

When our organization extended support in 2022, with the help of Give Foundation, the home had 28 residents, and we contributed essential bedding materials to support their comfort and dignity. Over time, the number of residents has increased to 52, indicating a growing need for such care.

At present, the home is facing practical challenges in meeting the basic daily needs of the residents, particularly in ensuring adequate and nutritious food. The caregivers, due to their age and limited financial capacity, are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the growing demand.

Understanding the Need

The residents of the home are among the most vulnerable. Many are elderly, physically weak, and fully dependent on support for their daily living. In addition to managing the health effects of Leprosy, they face challenges such as limited mobility, reduced immunity, and lack of family support.

In this context, access to nutritious food becomes essential rather than supplementary. However, the current situation reflects:

- Irregular and nutritionally inadequate meals
- Increased vulnerability to weakness and infections
- Difficulty in maintaining overall health alongside medical treatment
- Growing strain on the caregivers

Addressing this gap in nutrition is therefore a necessary and timely intervention.

Purpose of the Project

The proposed initiative aims to support the care home by ensuring consistent access to nutritious meals for all residents. The focus is to improve their overall well-being in a practical and sustainable manner, while also supporting the caregivers in managing daily responsibilities.

Proposed Support and Approach

The project intends to introduce a structured nutritional support system, combined with basic health guidance, through the following:

- Provision of **daily balanced meals** that include essential nutrients such as proteins, vegetables, and grains
- Engagement of a **medical practitioner familiar with leprosy care** for periodic health review

- Consultation with a **nutrition expert** to guide meal planning suitable for the residents' condition
- Regular monitoring to ensure that the support provided is consistent and beneficial
- Strengthening the existing caregiving system rather than replacing it

This approach is designed to be simple, practical, and aligned with the existing setup of the home.

Nutritional Approach and Meal Composition

For persons affected by Leprosy, nutrition plays a vital role in strengthening immunity, supporting nerve health, improving wound healing, and enhancing the effectiveness of medical treatment. Many residents in the care home are elderly and physically weak, making it essential to provide food that is not only sufficient but also nutritionally rich and easy to digest.

The proposed meal plan will focus on a **balanced combination of proteins, vitamins, minerals, and energy-giving foods**, using locally available and culturally appropriate items.

The daily meal support will primarily include:

- **Protein-rich foods** to support tissue repair and immunity:
 - Pulses (dal varieties), green gram, chickpeas
 - Eggs (where feasible)
 - Groundnuts and occasional dairy (milk/curd)
- **Iron and vitamin-rich foods** to improve strength and prevent deficiencies:
 - Green leafy vegetables (spinach, fenugreek leaves, moringa leaves)
 - Seasonal vegetables (carrot, beetroot, pumpkin)
 - Seasonal fruits (banana, papaya, guava)

- **Energy-giving staple foods** for daily sustenance:
 - Rice, millets (ragi, kambu), or wheat-based preparations
 - Idli dosa, or porridge for easy digestion, especially for elderly residents
- **Healthy fats** for energy and overall health:
 - Use of groundnut oil or gingelly oil in cooking
- **Immunity-supporting additions:**
 - Garlic, turmeric, and locally used spices known for anti-inflammatory benefits
- **Hydration and gut health:**
 - Buttermilk or simple soups to aid digestion and hydration

Meals will be planned to ensure **variety, taste, and nutritional balance**, while also being suitable for individuals with reduced appetite or difficulty in chewing and digestion.

A **nutrition consultant will guide the meal planning**, and inputs from a **leprosy care doctor** will be incorporated to ensure that the diet supports medical treatment and overall recovery.

Expected Changes

With consistent support, the following gradual improvements are expected:

- Better energy levels and physical strength among residents
- Improved ability to cope with ongoing medical treatment
- Reduction in instances of hunger and fatigue
- Enhanced sense of care, comfort, and dignity
- Reduced burden on the elderly caregivers

Monitoring and Indicators

The progress of the project will be observed through simple and measurable indicators such as:

- Regular provision of three meals per day
- Feedback from residents regarding food adequacy
- Observed improvements in general health and activity levels
- Periodic inputs from the doctor on health status
- Caregiver feedback on manageability and support

Documentation will be maintained to ensure transparency and accountability.

Financial Requirement

The estimated cost to provide nutritious food support for one beneficiary is **₹2,000 per month**.

- Total beneficiaries: **52 persons**
- Monthly requirement: $₹2,000 \times 52 = \mathbf{₹1,04,000}$
- Annual requirement (12 months): $₹1,04,000 \times 12 = \mathbf{₹12,48,000}$
- Cook will be the volunteers of our SERVE organizations and field coordinators will be our final year interns. Volunteers will be the best support to this project's success.

This support will directly cover the nutritional needs of all residents for a full year.

Closing Note

This is a modest initiative that seeks to respond to a very basic yet important need—ensuring that individuals who are already facing health and social challenges do not have to struggle with hunger. The care home in Thalaivasal stands as a quiet example of compassion led by two elderly women, and this project aims to strengthen their effort in a practical way.

Support for this initiative will contribute towards improving daily living conditions, health, and dignity for persons affected by Leprosy, while reinforcing an existing community-based care effort.



Project Submitted by,

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SERVE