



Protecting the Future

Education Response During COVID-19

AUGUST 2020

With schools around the world closed due to COVID-19, educators everywhere have been exploring ways to teach students, even at a distance. Education is a core activity of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and in the midst of the current crisis, we are finding unique ways to ensure that displaced children have the opportunity to learn and thrive.

For many forcibly displaced children, there are significant challenges to successful distance learning. Most lack access to the internet, technology, and stable electricity, and living environments may not be conducive to learning. For forcibly displaced children with disabilities, even greater challenges exist, as they are deprived of the specialized support and instruction they can receive from teachers in a learning environment.

Despite these challenges, JRS is responding and adapting its programs to continue to educate children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The JRS response is built around three guiding principles:



Protecting the health of students and staff



Ensuring learning continues



Providing protection and emotional support to students and teachers

Globally, JRS applies these principles by implementing the following interventions:

- **Distributing key health information** to students, staff, and the broader community utilizing multiple channels. The information shared features child-friendly language so that children have access to appropriate information about COVID-19 and how to protect themselves.
- **Supplying adequate Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) resources** to facilitate routine handwashing practices at operating schools and regular disinfection of high-contact points in schools.
- **Providing home-based, distance learning** using online and mobile learning platforms. In places where such resources are not available, radio, podcasts, DVDs, and learning packets have also been utilized as effective means of continued learning.
- **Retaining teachers and educators** by maintaining salaries for teachers and education staff so they remain on the job and can continue to support their families.
- **Continuing teacher training programs** to contribute to long-term quality of education and resilience of education systems.
- **Advocating for safe schools** by working with decision makers to ensure educational facilities are not used as health treatment centers, quarantine centers, shelters, or for any other non-educational purposes, even on a temporary basis.
- **Providing mental health and psychosocial support** by creatively delivering messages to parents and children about how to manage the emotional challenges brought on by the pandemic and its impact on communities.



JRS distributed hygiene & information kits about Covid-19 to school students in Karokh, Afghanistan.

Case Studies

The following are examples of the successful COVID-19 interventions in JRS's work throughout the world:

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

JRS supports over 9,000 internally displaced children attending pre-school and primary school in Central African Republic (CAR) who have been affected by violence and civil unrest. With support from Education Cannot Wait (ECW), JRS adapted its activities to protect the people we serve and ensure continued access to educational services.



Protecting the health of students and staff

JRS staff conducted community hygiene awareness activities and also distributed soap, hand sanitizers, face masks, and other sanitary items to teachers and students.



Ensuring learning continues

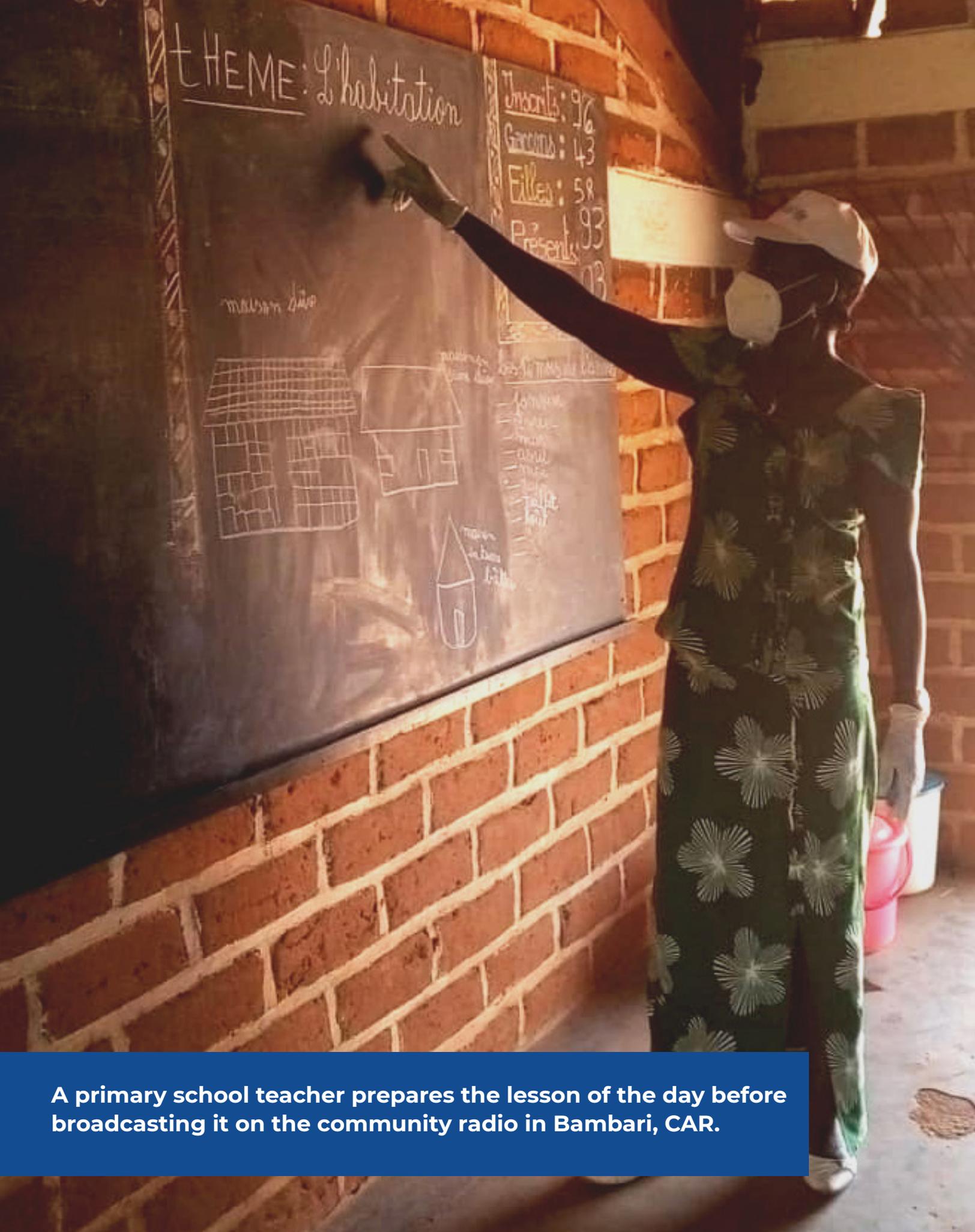
After the closure of schools in CAR, it was crucial to use all available channels within the communities to continue accompanying and educating children. JRS worked with community radio stations to broadcast lessons to primary and preschool students.

Efforts continue to be forward looking as well. Materials and teacher training sessions have been planned to provide remedial and catch-up classes when school resumes to make up for lost learning time. Community leaders also have begun to plan home outreach campaigns for children to attend school when classes resume, especially girls who are most at risk of dropout during periods of educational disruption.



Providing protection and emotional support

JRS also developed radio messages about child protection and psychosocial care for broadcast on local radio. Broadcasts were translated into local languages, making the lessons accessible to all students and families. Because JRS's work in the field was reduced due to isolation measures and travel restrictions, the radio became an important way to continue offering psychosocial support to the communities we serve.



A primary school teacher prepares the lesson of the day before broadcasting it on the community radio in Bambari, CAR.

MYANMAR

In Myanmar, JRS works with local education partners to provide teacher training, learning materials, and school infrastructure in conflict-affected and remote areas in Kachin State, where civil war has affected over 100,000 people.



Protecting the health of students and staff

JRS Myanmar, in collaboration with local partners, has prioritized delivering hygiene materials to schools in conflict-affected areas including soap, hand sanitizer, masks, water cups, and water buckets. In addition, COVID-19 prevention key messages have been translated into local language and distributed widely among conflict-affected communities. Education staff have been provided additional mobile credit to ensure they can communicate frequently during the response period.



Ensuring learning continues

In order to continue training programs for teachers working in remote regions, JRS staff have developed print-based materials so teachers can continue their courses through self-learning during the pandemic. JRS Myanmar, in coordination with a partner, developed a series of teacher training videos which will be distributed along with memory sticks and portable DVD players, for remote areas that lack mobile data network access.



Providing protection and emotional support

Working with partners, JRS Myanmar translated and distributed a guide for parents and families, with tips on caring for children's unique emotional and social needs during the pandemic and how to help them understand and prevent COVID-19.



Wai Lin Aung, JRS education officer, during video making for teacher training.

LEBANON

JRS provides formal and non-formal education to over 3,800 children and youth at four sites in Lebanon. Most children have fled from neighboring Syria, alongside smaller numbers of Iraqi refugees and local children.



Protecting the health of students and staff

Before nationwide school closures went into effect, teachers and school social workers developed new procedures to prevent COVID-19 transmission in the early days of the pandemic, including adding more soap and sanitizer for hand-washing, and teaching children how to take turns and use appropriate distance when washing. In order to ensure students practiced social distancing on the way to school, JRS Lebanon plans to place a tutor in each school bus to help remind students to wear masks and keep a safe distance from one another.



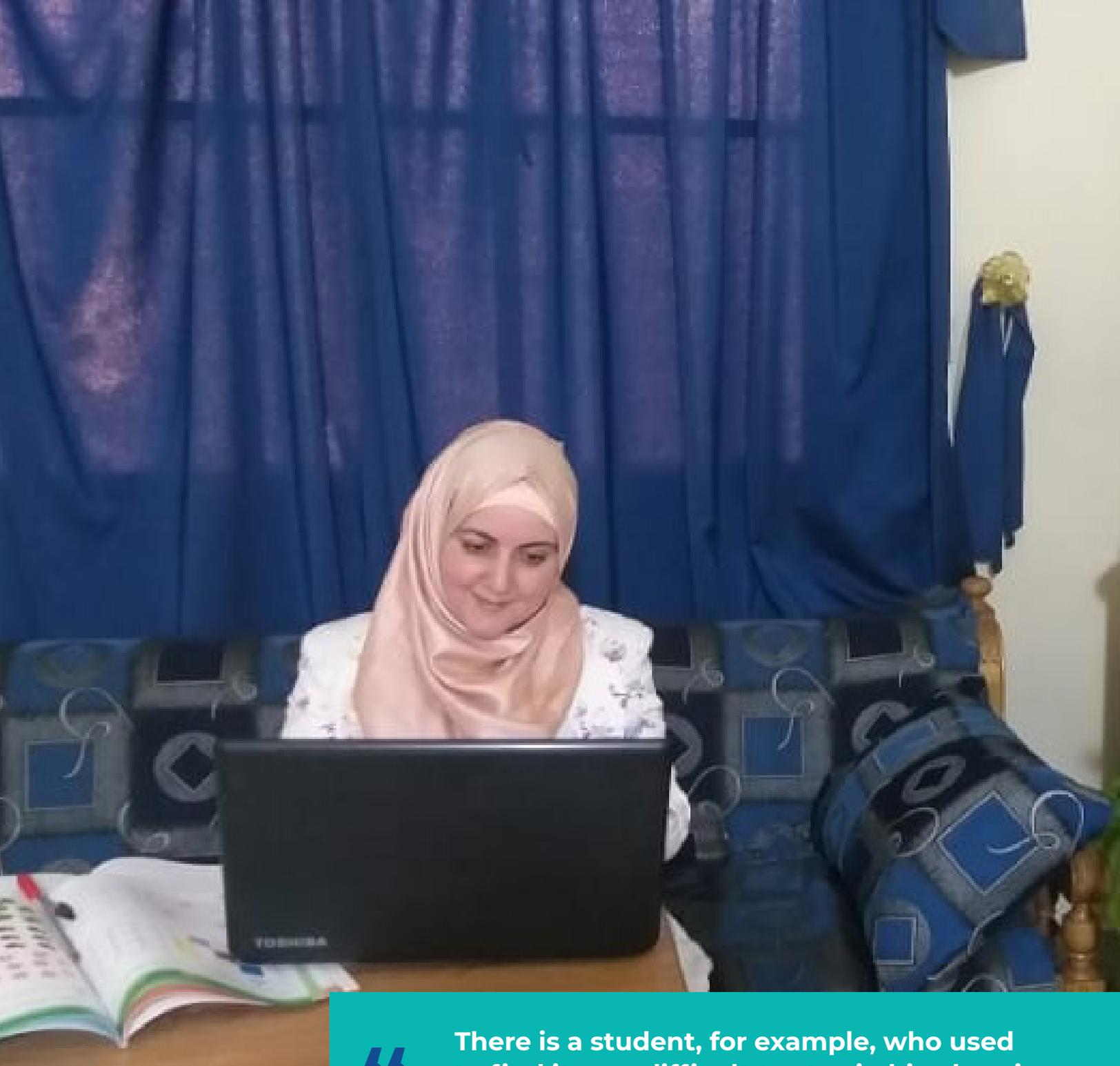
Ensuring learning continues

In the first days of school closures, JRS Lebanon teachers and principals developed a plan to continue teaching students through smartphones and the WhatsApp messaging application. Teachers sent short videos, voice recordings, and pictures of exercises that could be done at home and returned via SMS. Groups were set up so parents could help monitor and support students' learning. Teachers and principals were also able to support families who could not participate in the WhatsApp groups with other types of home-learning materials. These efforts demanded great energy, flexibility, and creativity by teachers, students, and their families, but have helped children remain connected and learning during the crisis.



Providing protection and emotional support

While children were at home, social workers called parents and students regularly to check in on how they were doing, and to provide parents with tips and information on nonviolent discipline skills, how to support children's mental health, and other topics. Support groups were created using WhatsApp for adolescent students to connect with staff and with each other, and a support group was also created for teachers so they could communicate and cope with challenges together during the period of school closures.



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There is a student, for example, who used to find it very difficult to stay in his place in the class and was unable to focus for a long time. In comparison, now he is managing to stay for a long time studying on the WhatsApp group.

- Rouba, a JRS tutor at Dar Al Hanan School in Baalbek, Lebanon, who believes that the phone, once a distraction for children, has been transformed into an educational tool.

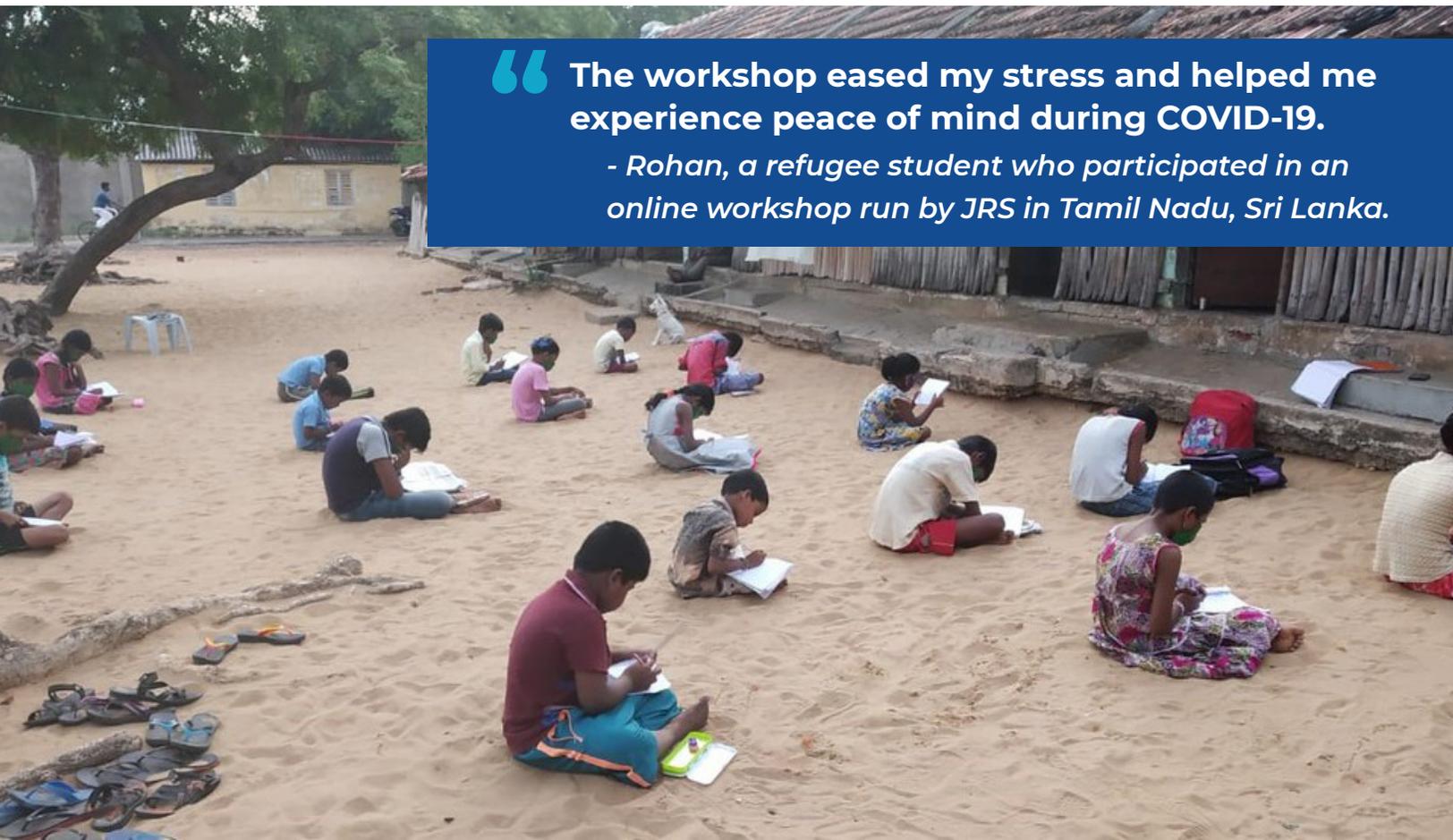
Emerging Lessons and Areas for Support

As JRS teams globally continue to respond and adapt to the dynamic challenges brought on by COVID-19, knowledge about what constitutes an effective response is beginning to emerge, including:

- Effective prevention and protection for students and teachers requires **significant investments in PPE and essential WASH infrastructure** for schools and learning centers. This includes not only masks, sanitizer, and gloves, but also the procurement and installation of additional water points, hand washing stations, and water supply tanks.
- **Teachers are playing a critical role** in responding to COVID-19, not just by adapting their roles and teaching to support distance learning through innovative ways, but also by leading community awareness efforts on hygiene and COVID-19 prevention.
- In areas with limited connectivity and power supply, adaptive responses to distance learning such as **home-based self-learning and radio-based instruction, require additional materials and training** in order to be most effective.

While continuing to respond to the educational disruption, JRS is also beginning educational programs to recover from the effects of school closures and lost learning time, such as accelerated learning programs, back-to-school outreach campaigns, and creative school-based approaches to prevention and awareness.

For more information about how JRS's education programs are adapting during COVID-19 visit www.jrsusa.org/protectingthefuture



The workshop eased my stress and helped me experience peace of mind during COVID-19.

- Rohan, a refugee student who participated in an online workshop run by JRS in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka.