

<https://www.edexlive.com/news/2020/apr/20/hindu-organisations-in-us-launch-helpline-for-stranded-indian-students-11424.html>

## The New Indian Express

Published: 20th April 2020

### Hindu organisations in US launch helpline for stranded Indian students

Being run by 90 students, who have volunteered for the cause from across the country, the helpline will assist Indian students in distress in various areas



A group of Hindu organisations in the US has launched an exclusive helpline to address the issues faced by thousands of Indian students amidst the unprecedented coronavirus crisis that has left a large number of them stranded and without accommodation.

The 'COVID-19 Student Support Network' helpline, 802-750-YUVA (9882), is a collective initiative of Hindu Yuva, Bharatiya, Vivekananda House and Sewa International. Being run by 90 students, who have volunteered for the cause from across the country, the helpline will assist Indian students in distress in various areas including delivery of essential supplies as groceries and medicines and providing them with accommodation, if they do not have any place to live, said Prem Rangwani, one of the local organisers from Washington DC.

The helpline, which also has experts and professionals as volunteers, would also provide counselling to Indian students on immigration-related issues and provide them with resources on mental health issues if needed.

According to Gaurav Singhal, one of the organisers from New Jersey, the support network plans to organise webinar to filter the chaotic and confusing information available by hosting experts on a wide variety of topics such as immigration, finances and health. Around 250,000 Indian students are enrolled in various American universities and almost all of which have been shut down. The students have been asked to vacate their hostels.

Several universities, but not all, have made special provisions for accommodating international students. Still, a large number of them have to find their own accommodation. Several hotel and motel owners, and a number of Indian community organisations have come forward to provide temporary housing to needy students.

COVID-19 Student Support Network has been working with the Asian American Hotel Owners Association and other Indian volunteers to provide them with accommodation. While quite a number of Indian students were able to travel back to India before the travel restrictions were imposed, a large number of them are in need of help. The helpline is a community effort to help the Indian students as much as they can, Rangwani said.

Meanwhile, several US universities have started emergency funds for students and have also set up COVID-19 relief funds that provide financial assistance to their students. Some universities are also offering virtual counselling sessions for dealing with emotional and psychological distress.

As a result of the coronavirus crisis, more than 95 per cent of the American population are under stay-at-home order. But essential services are fully functional all across the US. These include - restaurants that are offering take away orders, and also most grocery stores/supermarkets.

These stores are also providing pick-up/delivery through online orders, where customers wish to avoid personal presence for shopping. Pharmacies are part of the essential services and are open. There have been instances of many students running out of money.

In many cases, COVID-19 Student Support Network has been providing them with necessary help. The number of COVID-19 deaths in the US crossed 41,000 and the total infections were more than 764,000 so far.