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Pitching for the backstage crew

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The live events industry is not going to pick up before July 2021,” says Himanshu Chowdhary, founder of Delhi-based boutique agency, Spectal Management. Chowdhary says it without any affectation because that’s just how things in the live events space which includes college festivals, concerts, weddings, music festivals among others looks like today.

“When the lockdown started in March, none of us knew the gravity of the situation. We assumed that it would help flatten the curve of the pandemic and things would get back to normal by June, but by May-end the situation started looking grim. We thought we would pick up by October or November but now it looks like we will have live events only in July 2021,” says Chowdhary. A recent report by FICCI, the Art X Company and the

British Council called Taking the Temperature states that 53% of events and entertainment management sector experienced 90% of their business cancelled between March-July 2020. Chowdhary throws in more figures: 10,000,000+ jobs in the Indian events industry are at stake and 25000+ livelihoods were affected over the peak season because of the pandemic.

“The worst hit are freelancers and daily wage employees from the loaders and tent walas to stage managers, sound engineers and light designers. They belong to the gig economy, which means that their earnings depend on the assignments they get. With no events happening, they are staring at zero incomes,” Chowdhary says. Art X’s Rashmi Dhanwani echoes Chowdhary when she talks about her surprising find from the Taking the Temperature survey. “We had asked a question to our respondents about annual income pre-Covid-19 and how much income do they fear losing. Surprisingly, we saw the two groups of respondents that were the most affected were on either end of the spectrum: the bigger cultural organizations with many employees on the one hand, and freelancers and independent artists on the other. The former has larger overheads and any

scope to reduce costs would result in reducing salaries and the number of consultants on their payroll, which is exactly where the latter fits in,” she notes.

A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

With things looking dismal, Chowdhary knew he had to do something for the people who were the backbone of the industry. “There have been concerts and initiatives to raise funds for artistes but nothing has been done to help the crew. This is why I decided to launch a fund-raising campaign for performance industry workers,” he says. Called Together for Tomorrow (TFT), the campaign has major event companies and music labels such as VYRL Original, OML, Mixtape Entertainment, SNL Pro and NCM Agency supporting to raise money that will be paid to these unseen, unsung heroes. “I tied up with this campaign because I wanted to do something for the backstage crew as well. When I started off as a lighting designer, these were the people who readily helped me every time I asked,” says Mixtape Entertainment’s founder Naveen Deshpande while pointing out at the sore lack of institutional or governmental support. “The UK government announced a £1.57 billion support for the entertainment industry in July. Not just that, there is a categorical roadmap of how the funds will be given. There is no such support in India,” he rues.

In its first phase TFT aims to collect Rs 10 lakh which will be used to help 100 beneficiaries. “Our first preference is to provide aid to those workers who have no income, no other source of livelihood and have dependents solely relying on them,” says Chowdhary. Within three days of the announcement of the campaign, TFT received applications from 600 workers. “We are receiving a minimum of 30-40 calls every day from all over the country,” he says.

Funds for the campaign are being collected on www.anahad.ngo/together.