



MEET SIDDHI PEREIRA WHO STARTED WORKING FOR SOCIAL CAUSES AT AN AGE WHEN MOST COLLEGE STUDENTS GET BUSY CATCHING UP THE LATEST TRENDS!

REBEL WITH A CAUSE!

“You know at a traffic signal we see young beggars and get repulsed wondering - why do they beg? We either ignore them, or put a rupee coin in their bowl and move on. But what are we really doing to erase this problem?”

She eloped from home to marry the man her father didn't approve of. She lived in the shadow of her father's dominance all through her life. It was while overcoming this hardship in life that Siddhi Pereira nurtured the passion to help others stand up on their feet.

Five years ago, Siddhi chose to do something that most college students did not. While she bunked lectures

to go for movies, it was her initiative in volunteering for social causes that made her different. “You know at a traffic signal we see young beggars and get repulsed wondering - why do they beg? They're young and they can earn a respectable living. We either ignore them after this thought, put a rupee coin in their bowl and move on. But what are we really doing to erase this problem?” questions Siddhi.

Siddhi started her stint in community service by assisting teachers

at Dilkhush Special School in Vile Parle by carrying out activities for disabled children. She would visit the children twice a week after college hours and spend time with them. “I taught



“Errol was my co-ordinator when I started volunteering for SRS. We shared the same passions and I guess love bloomed; I don't know how it all began”

them to read, write, recite poems, manners, exercise, etc.,” says Siddhi. She not only volunteered at the school herself, but also encouraged some of her friends to join in. “I'd never thought of doing any voluntary work, until I met Siddhi and saw her working diligently with the disabled children. It was truly unbelievable!” says Shweta Modi, a former classmate and close friend who had accompanied Siddhi at Dilkhush Special

School. Siddhi strongly believes in empowering the people in a way that

they don't have to depend on anyone for their daily meal. After a year of informal volunteering, she registered herself with the Society for Service to Voluntary Agencies (SOSVA). It was their VOLACT agency that gave Siddhi an opportunity to volunteer for the Slum Rehabilitation Society (SRS) in Bandra. This private NGO was looking for a volunteer who could start a computer training program as a part of Community Development Programme at Mount Mary, Bandra. Siddhi happily agreed to work for it. “I met the prospective students, assessed their IQ, and then prepared a basic syllabus by referring to the NIIT course that I had taken up back in college,” explains Siddhi. At that time, she was pursuing her M.Com degree in Business Management from NM College, alongside working for the pilot project - SRS. Subsequently, she along with

her husband went ahead to start Mount Mary Community Development (MCDP) Project, under which they planned to empower the local youth by providing vocational guidance so as to help them make become financially independent.

“There are many alternative ways to earn. I don't want to make a career out of social causes”

Love wasn't too far away for Siddhi as she found her soul mate in Errol Pereira who was a core member of SRS. “Errol was my co-ordinator when I started volunteering for SRS. We shared the same passions and I guess love bloomed. I don't know how it all began,” she said with a smile. But Siddhi did know the trouble they had in matters of matrimony. Having lived in a house where she wasn't allowed to make her own decisions, she finally chose to wear the shoes of a runaway bride! Siddhi became a core member of the SRS-MCDP team a year back and now spearheads the projects in matters of raising funds and admin-

Siddhi strongly believes in empowering the people in a way that they don't have to depend on anyone for their daily meal

istration. She and her husband now actively work towards finding sources to raise money for their community development project and also head the team of people who work at the site. Being an official member of an NGO now fetches Siddhi a monthly salary, but it's not the kind of work she wants to make money out of. “There are many alternative ways to earn. I don't want to make a career out of social causes,” she says. It is times like these that make us think who really matters. While there are celebrities who make news when they claim to save the environment by turning off their water tap for five minutes while brushing, there are some who devote a good amount of their life to support a cause and often go unnoticed. Who should be given more importance? Perhaps, it is for us to decide.

disha.gadhiya@gmail.com