

## Giving back: how volunteers can help ensure a happy childhood for underprivileged children

By - **Priti Mahara** - 5th Dec 2018 – YourStory

*On International Volunteer Day, let's salute change-makers, who are working to create a lasting impact and transform the lives of India's underprivileged children.*



Living in a metropolitan city is rewarding in many ways, and often ensures a better quality of life. Whether it is access to education, lucrative careers, or better earnings, an urban setup promises opportunities galore. However, this constant race to overtake our peers and our obsession with materialistic pleasures often creates an emotional void.

More often than not, we tend to want to give back to society – not just to do our bit, but also from the consciousness about the fact that there are many who aren't as lucky as us. However, with the next weekday kicking in, constant pressure to chase deadlines, and tiresome evenings, our mission of becoming more socially responsible is repeatedly set back.

The storyline, however, is markedly different for people en route to becoming change-makers.

On December 5, the day marked as International Volunteer Day, we celebrate the spirit of self-motivated individuals, who balance the odds in their daily lives to ensure a happy childhood for India's underprivileged children. These everyday heroes prove that if there is a strong zeal and clear intent to positively impact many lives, everything else is likely to fall in place.

## **Passion to give back**

Farzaan Bashir, a law student from the University of Kashmir, started his association with Child Rights and You (CRY) in 2016. During his one-month internship with CRY, Farzaan wanted to teach and sensitise kids about safety and issues impacting them. However, his amazing experience and memories with children encouraged him to extend his internship by another month. For the next two years, Farzaan kept sharing his wonderful experiences with his juniors and encouraged them to take up volunteering for children. This year, he moved to Delhi to pursue his master's course. An enthusiastic Farzaan has once again started volunteering for children in CRY's intervention projects.

If Farzaan's passion to give back is inspiring, the account of CRY volunteers from Bandra in Mumbai is likely to leave us spellbound.

When they discovered that Shubham, a little boy from the urban slums they conducted weekend classes for, was going blind, they intervened. While the boy was on the verge of giving up on his studies and his chance to a better life, the volunteers were not ready to accept this situation. Not only did they help figure out the exact condition Shubham was suffering from, but they also arranged for a 100 percent waiver from a trust that would help conduct the surgery free of cost. For Shubham's family, this was an unexpected twist in the tale. Hardly able to afford two square meals a day, they had never thought Shubham would get the medical care he needed. Today, because of the volunteers' persistent efforts, Shubham has resumed his school life with vigour and is happily dreaming of a bright future!

People who tend to go beyond boundaries often dare to pick up challenges that are daunting. So did Tanya Dhingra, a student of Public Health at Temple University, Philadelphia. Tanya flew down to India during her summer break to educate adolescent girls about menstruation and menstrual hygiene. She conducted workshops across different CRY intervention projects in Delhi's urban slums, sensitising young girls about their periods. Her extensive on-ground workshops and research during her CRY internship had also led Tanya to win an international scholarship for further research, preparing to create a much larger impact and transform many more mindsets.

## **Help in your own way**

As CRY sets no age bar for volunteering, individuals from all age groups are encouraged to help India's deprived children in their own ways. Instead of engaging volunteers in a charity or relief mode, the programme lets individuals get involved in on-ground action and work with marginalised communities and children as per their interests, skill set, and availability of time.

At CRY, Volunteer Action was only a group of seven people. In the last four decades, the programme has grown manifold. This year, 2,120 volunteers, 666 interns, 92 virtual volunteers, and 30 child right leaders made a lasting impact on the lives of 2,883 underprivileged children across the nation.

Though volunteering is often perceived as helping an organisation or community working towards a cause, we need to understand self-motivated efforts are also most likely to start a transformational journey within. Volunteers highlight that working with marginalised children has helped them better understand themselves and society, inspiring them to bring in a larger direct or indirect change.

“The sessions I conduct with children help me to become more patient as we have to deal with children of all age groups with different energy levels. I think every individual should start engaging themselves with such responsibilities. A single person may not be able to save the world but could make a difference locally. For me, this is just the beginning,” says Sagarika Sengupta, a CRY volunteer from Kolkata.

As rightly pointed out by Sagarika, the greater the number of people, the greater the impact we create and the bigger change we can expect. Instead of talking and debating what can change, it is vital that we put on our thinking hats and decipher how best we can bring change, big or small. As procrastination decreases, we will find ourselves channelising our energy towards real contribution. The time for action is now.

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