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### One for the world

SAMVITHA RAM



Photo: K.R. Deepak

*Giving back is 'in' as more and more youngsters are jumping into the social change bandwagon. SAMVITHA RAM*

A new time has come in Chennai; the time to make a difference. Instead of focusing solely on their own lives and spending their time with friends, more youngsters are going out to create an impact on the world.

#### For society

Nowadays, with every other child in one social group or another, many wonder when this happened. The trend started in early 2006, when “environmentalism” and global warming were topics discussed quite often on the news. Organisations and companies started becoming aware of the issue and many schools in Chennai began environment-related projects. Today, almost every private school in Chennai has at least one service-oriented club, with the Interact Club being the most popular.

Over the past five years, individual students and teenagers have been inspired to volunteer their time and services to NGOs and social organisations in Chennai or start their own initiatives to stand up for causes they believe in. These range from environment issues to social change for women, to education and literacy. The most popular “theme” this year has been pets and care for animals. The Chennai Adoption Drive is a prime example. The organisers describe themselves as a “family of passionate humans dedicated to increasing public awareness of Indian Strays we come across daily on the streets, being abused, hurt and tormented for the sole reason of being ‘strays’.” (Their next drive is on Sept. 30, near Park Sheraton Hotel.) Needless to say, wherever these youngsters go, they are keen on making a difference.

People may be quick to say that this is just a passing fancy for youngsters; a fashionable trend that will go as suddenly as it came. But looking at the passion some youngsters have invested in these projects, it seems that, for once, a trend is here to stay. “If they (students) are just involved in community clubs in their school, then it’s natural for them to just spend a year or two on it. After all, they can only do it while they are in school,” says Kanika P., a Std XI student. However, many other students (and teachers) feel that these initiatives being encouraged in school lead the student to discover their interest in other volunteering activities.

#### Get started

Interested, but not sure how to get started? No worries! There are a range of organisations that take on youth volunteers. Says Pranathi R., “I volunteer with the Blue Cross, helping to feed and care for the animals.” So do many other youngsters her age.

Scared of animals? Try working with the Spastics Society, which has volunteers from all over the world. Similarly, the Banyan, an organisation that provides “rescue, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration for homeless women with mental health issues”, is another place to share your love and goodwill.

Still unsure of where your talents lie? Sign up with the Chennai Volunteers that aims to reach out to different sections and age-groups and match them with the organisation or project where their talents are most needed.

Roll up your sleeves, get out there, and start changing the world, one step at a time!

***It's hard for us to live without our iPods... but some people in the world are living without sound altogether. We need to start giving back. -***

***POOJA REDDY, Std XII student and volunteer at the Clarke School for the Deaf***

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