

Eager to give, but don't know where to begin?

YOU won't find them in kurta-pyjamas but in jeans and t-shirts, doing what they do best — getting things done. These innovative visionaries are high on social consciousness. For Siva Cotipalli, whose website Dhanax connects the 'haves' with 'have-nots', Poonam Bir Kasturi, whose dream is to make India green with her do-it-yourself biodegradable Daily Dump pots, Brij Kothari, who gives literacy a leg up with his concept of 'same language subtitling', Karthik Kumar of Evam, a theatre group that gives you happiness for the price of a ticket, Hilmi Quraishi who sells social awareness through a mobile phone and many others like them, the return on investment more often than not comes from their impact on society. A social entrepreneur works for more than just profit...

These social entrepreneurs just put their skills where their heart is, from teaching slum children English, to packaging social awareness in mobile games and spreading smiles through theatre, discovers Anuradha Varma

CHILD FRIENDLY

Jithin C Nedumala, Make a Difference (MAD)

MAD provides a common and convenient platform for youth to make a difference in children's lives, by teaching a batch twice a week. The cost of teaching a child for a month comes to something like Rs 10.41. Says Nedumala, "We take a child when she is in the 5th standard, teach her English in a fun way four hours every week, ensure she has her computer class half an hour daily and meets professionals from various fields." He adds, "Once she finishes 10th she would be well equipped with the language and we would find a sponsor for her higher education. Hence, MAD is probably the most efficient way of spending your 10 rupees." MAD teaches 1,200 children with the help of 350 volunteers in four cities, which will soon expand to five more. They plan to take the concept to Nigeria and Pakistan as well.



YOUR MONEY CAN HELP

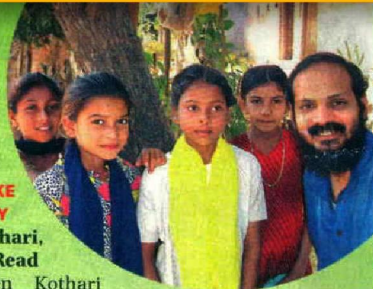
Siva Cotipalli, Dhanax

Want to put aside some money to help the needy? Contact Dhanax. It partners with NGOs and self-help groups to identify credible borrowers. They also determine the ability of the borrowing party to honour the repayment of loan. A lender registered on the Dhanax website goes through the borrower information and chooses one or more borrowers to lend to. People lend only once to the borrower. The borrower repays the lender monthly. The beneficiaries are mainly low-income women earning Rs 5,000-Rs 8,000 per month who take loans for starting small businesses, pay kids' school fees, etc. Says Cotipalli, "So far, over 350 loans have been funded through the website. We have transacted over Rs 20 lakh of loan amount and the largest lending has been Rs 60,000."



KARAOKE LITERACY

Brij Kothari, Planet Read
When Kothari was a student of Spanish during his time at Stanford University, he once commented to friends that if Spanish films came subtitled in the same language, it would help their linguistic skills a lot more. Recalls Kothari, "In jest, I added that if they put Hindi subtitles on Hindi film songs, India would become literate." The idea stuck and he spent the next 12 years on research. He explains, "It's karaoke on popular culture. Viewers begin to read along and thus, reading improvement becomes a by-product of entertainment." Over the last 10 years, SLS (Same Language Subtitling) has been implemented on Bollywood film songs on TV in Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, and Punjabi. It has woven regular reading practice into the lives of 150 million early-literate people. The goal is to persuade all channels in India to show song content on TV with SLS.



GOING GREEN AT HOME

Poonam Bir Kasturi, Daily Dump

Can an ordinary person do anything to make the five-km radius around them better? That's the question Bangalore-based NID designer Poonam Bir Kasturi asked herself. The answer was Daily Dump, which enables the ordinary home owner to not throw out her organic waste, but compost it at home in a pot. Kasturi explains, "All organic waste can be composted - vegetable, fruits, cooked food, even bones and fish waste, teabags, newspapers, flowers, sawdust, etc. Plastic, metal, medicines and diseased plants can't be composted." The compost can be sold to a nursery or put in potted plants or used to nourish a tree. Her dream is to make "composters fit every home in India". While Kasturi funds her business from what she earns as a design consultant, she maintains, "Wall Street would discount it, but I think it's worth it."



MOBILE AWARENESS

Hilmi Quraishi, ZMQ
An educational technologist, Quraishi believes profits make for more commitment. From mobile games creating awareness on HIV/AIDs and climate consciousness, the company plans an SMS-based system offering prenatal and post-natal advice for women in rural areas, which will give her tips on what to eat, vaccines, etc. Also planned are a series on lifestyle diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes. While the games are usually free, a nominal amount is charged. The games are made popular through NGOs, schools and other local organisations. Often, profits are put back into making games. He says, "If an aerated water bottle can be sold in villages for Rs 10, why can't we sell training packages for the same price?"



THEATRE TO MAKE YOU SMILE

Karthik Kumar, Evam Entertainment Pvt Ltd.

The "happiness factory" was a vision of two people — Sunil Vishnu K and Karthik Kumar, both MICA graduates. Says Kumar, "We ran a successful youth-theatre movement in Ahmedabad and this sparked our own storytelling enterprise." He adds, "Our audiences have been easily enthused by energetic performances, and this has led to workshops, fun merchandise, and stories in other formats." They have been self-funded in their five years of operation, and this shows the soundness of the model itself.



THEY HAVE A DREAM

Vishal Talreja, Dream A Dream

The project had modest beginnings, with a group of young people, taking children from local orphanages on special outings on weekends. Soon, the dream got bigger. Founded in 1999, it now teaches life skills to children referred by their partner NGOs in Bangalore. Says Talreja, "They are children whose basic needs such as food, shelter and education are being met but who, without support and opportunities run a risk of falling back into the vicious cycle of life on the street." The skills taught include teamwork, communication, decision-making, besides building confidence and self-awareness.

