



Making a difference

What do a former French teacher, an MBA and a systems engineer have in common? A desire to reach out to the often neglected sections of society, such as children with learning disabilities as well as others from poorer backgrounds, and incorporate them into the mainstream prompted three crusaders to set up organisations solely for this purpose. RINKY KUMAR talks to these unheralded heroes to find out what fuels their passion difference

Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it - Helen Keller PRESSING schedules and a materialistic attitude have dominated our lives to such an extent that we never pause to think about the differently abled. Specially about people who aren't as blessed as we are but are far more proficient and confident than us or kids with learning disabilities from underprivileged backgrounds who are blooming with innocence but don't have the means to overcome their shortcomings. But three Mumbaiites have taken upon themselves to make a difference and incorporate these people in mainstream society.

Education, the key to success Mimaansa is the only non-government organisation in Thane engaged in addressing the issue of learning disability in the lessprivileged municipal schools. A learning difficulty is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's capacity to receive, interpret, process and reproduce information. Operating in two municipal schools of Thane (the Savarkar Nagar School No 120 and the Kisan Nagar School No 23), it identifies, diagnoses and remediates 60 students. It propounds the model called Response to Intervention (RTI) that promotes early intervention for diagnosing learning disabilities and basically prevents the wait to fail model of education. RTI has resulted in the usage of assistive technology like tablets for remediation.

Set up in January 2010 by Pooja Joshi, the children get an opportunity to learn new things by touching the tablets screen, feeling the pages and using their visual, auditory and kinesthetic senses.

Joshi, a graduate in French literature, initially started off by teaching the foreign language to students at private schools.

However, she says, "There was a special school right across my house and I was curious about these children. They seemed normal but I would ask myself why were they termed as special?" It was after her stints as a volunteer and later as a counsellor at Masoom, a non-government organisation that works with night schools in Mumbai that she realised the hardships that such children had to face. This prompted her to do a Master Practitioner course in Neuro Linguistic Programming and obtain a Masters degree in Clinical Hypnotherapy. She started off by doing a pilot research project in private schools and followed it up with talks with other organisations that work with kids with learning disabilities, and special educators. She says, "After several discussions and conducting a research study, we learnt that underprivileged kids are neglected by the society at large and don't have resources to overcome their drawbacks." That's when she thought of working towards educating kids with learning disabilities from municipal schools.

She approached the education department of the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) with her project and earned their consent. The 26-year-old and her team of two special educators, a counsellor and a programme co-ordinator began