

BEACONS OF HOPE A SHOT OF HOPE

Teen raises funds for trans persons' jab drive

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At least 100 members of the transgender (TG) community — which often finds itself excluded from the social safety net — got their jab on Saturday at a special inoculation drive in Malad organised by teenager Sia Sehgal who raised Rs 1.75 lakh to provide for their vaccines and ration kits.

When the wired world was abuzz with frantic searches for vaccine slots, what struck the 16-year-old was this vulnerable group living without smartphones or the Internet and grappling with several other hurdles — lack of documentation to social stigma — that prevented them from getting jabbed.

“Inclusion is a right, not a privilege and their exclusion of it really bothered me,” said Sia, who had read reports of the trans community's exclusion from jab drives. In an attempt to learn more about the challenges faced by the transsexual community, she sought out In Harmony, a diversion and inclusion consultancy, joined forces with Mumbai District AIDS Control Society and managed to reach out to TG members.

“I had long conversations with them and realised that apart from lack of proper government ID and fear of being driven away by medical centres, some were scared to take the vaccine. It took some persuasion to make them understand its necessity and agree to register,” said Sia as she took the lead and with help from parents, roped in several corporates to raise funds.

The first to arrive at the vaccination camp on Saturday morning, the class XI student

of Hill Spring International School will have to wait till she's eligible for her shot but the teenager made sure that her new friends from the trans community got their shield against the virus.

“After this camp, I'm hopeful that many more will come forward,” said the budding slam poet who set up a platform on Instagram during the pandemic called ‘Something Unsaid’ to use spoken word poetry to advocate for social justice.

“Whenever I see a person or a community being isolated or targeted — be it at a family gathering or in the news — it triggers me. I believe youngsters like me have a responsibility to open up pathways for communities that have suffered prejudice from our previous generations. This is my way of trying to impact and improve lives, especially during these trying times,” says Sia whose first crusade was for pregnant women in the tribal district of Nashik hit by severe anaemia last year. “We raised Rs 50,000 and provided food packets, vitamins and medication. My aim was to safeguard these vulnerable women and prevent the fatality of their unborn child.”



BLESSING IN DISGUISE: Sia Sehgal raised Rs 1.75 lakh for the drive

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