

# A 21-yr-old who mentors children of a lesser god

By Ankita Bhatkhande, Mumbai Mirror | Apr 30, 2015, 12.14 AM IST

*Vaibhav Kamble with a kids' family in Worli*

*An engineering student, Vaibhav Kamble, helps Mumbai's street kids with education and shelter.*

Vaibhav Kamble, a final year mechanical engineering student at the DY Patil College in Lonavala, is setting an example for those who want to bring about a change. At 21, Vaibhav has helped several street kids in Mumbai to go to school, and juggles between his studies, small-time shredding business, and his enormous commitment to children of rag-pickers and beggars on Mumbai's footpaths.

Vaibhav was born in Basarge, Kolhapur and came to Mumbai in 2010 after completing his schooling. He has been living in Babasaheb Ambedkar boy's hostel in Worli and travels to Lonavala twice a week to attend lectures. In the last two years, Vaibhav has helped several children get their basic needs of food, shelter and education, denied due to poverty and parental ignorance.

"I see several children begging on the streets to fill their stomachs. I don't give them a rupee or two like people usually do. I talk to their parents and ask if they would be interested in sending them to a shelter home or a school," he said. Vaibhav has a small cutlery shredding start up which gives him the resources to spend for their education.

After he gets parental consent, Vaibhav calls 1098- the Child helpline number and registers the child's case. "Most calls that we receive are for children of rag-pickers and beggars who do not even have a phone. We just allot a school to the child, and Vaibhav takes care of all the other formalities," said Manisha Parle, a social worker at Yuva Childline, Mumbai.

But Vaibhav's work does not end here. The biggest task at hand is to get these children affidavits and a medical certificate for fitness, mandatory for most schools and shelter homes. "The children I meet do not even have clothes to wear. I have to make sure they get all the required documents for the admission." Initially, Vaibhav noticed the apathy of officials towards these children. But in two years, he has been successful in creating a network of social workers, teachers, lawyers and doctors who help him in all possible ways to ensure that these kids get all the help they need.

The first case that Vaibhav came across was of Ruksana, 7, on the footpath opposite Ruia College, Matunga. Ruksana's father was an alcoholic and her mother sent her to beg on the streets. Vaibhav helped Ruksana with her medical treatment and admitted her to a nearby shelter.

Vaibhav's Facebook profile is his official portal for help. He posts details of the cases he comes across and people chip in with money or provide expertise wherever required. One such case is that of Kalpana Ughde who was abandoned by her parents at the age of fourteen and now lives on a pavement next to the Bombay Development Directorate (BDD) chawl with her daughter and husband. After reading the post, Leena Pradhan, an advocate from

Thane, approached Vaibhav and helped him with the legal formalities for free. "His work is an inspiration and we are happy to help anytime," said Pradhan.

Kalpana is elated that her daughter will not have to undergo the struggles she underwent. "Thanks to Vaibhav, my daughter will study and will get two square meals a day which I am still struggling to give her." Kalpana said that she is not worried about her daughter's future anymore.

Like Kalpana's, Manisha Sharma's three daughters are now in the process of getting their admissions and medical certificates in place. Her husband left her in 2010 as she delivered three daughters. Manisha, a polio patient, started living in a small shack near Worli's BDD chawl with her mother where she met Vaibhav. Manisha's eldest daughter, nine, is now set to go to the Salvation Army Tamil Church, Sion where she will study till she is eighteen. "The other two are in the process and will be admitted to schools by next year or two," said Vaibhav with a sense of achievement.

"I have barely gone to school and always hoped for a better future for all my daughters," said Sharma.

For the kids on the pavement, Vaibhav is their angel in times of distress. He is always surrounded by a bunch of young boys and girls. "He is very nice and brings cakes and chocolates for us on special occasions and spends time with us," said Ruksana, Vaibhav's first successful case.