

# Srujna: For a dignified livelihood

A simple school project can end up becoming the beginning of a longer adventure – with imagination, commitment and devotion. That is what Ronak Gandhi, Jyotika Bhatia and Vaishali Gandhi, three young MBA students have been doing by transforming their compulsory project into a social enterprise, which is growing by the day

By Caroline Déclas

“At the beginning, we were on the lookout for a research project,” explains Ronak Gandhi. “We wanted to identify solutions to provide to underprivileged people. That is how we realised that there is a strong need for professional training, and especially for women, to help them find jobs.” The team then began to look for NGO’s and organisations who were already helping the underprivileged to create a partnership and set up a small business model to train the women. One of the three members had done an internship in St. Catherine’s Shelter Home in Andheri West, rescuing victims of human trafficking. That is how they picked up this project. “It was also the one which answered the best to our criteria in terms of space and infrastructure required. Also, a larger number of women were willing to participate. The quotient of persons in need of professional skills was high.”

The training program launched in this shelter was a holistic vocational training program of imitation jewellery making. “We chose to focus on this kind of training because we identified that a number of clients were interested in this field. We also wanted the women to like what they were doing, and also that, once out of the process, they would be able to manufacture jewels independently and make a living out of it.” After

the training process, the women were employed in Srujna’s production unit. The enterprise then was selling the products through exports, but also domestically during exhibitions. “We have sold one lakh rupees worth of jewellery products. Then we pay women on basis of the per product that they produce, eg: A beneficiary will get paid Rs.10 for making one earring, Rs.20 for making one bracelet, and Rs.30 for making a necklace,” said Vaishali Gandhi.

The project aims to provide the women, not only with experience and professional skills but also with income. Indeed, it is very important to make sure that, beyond the help provided, once the women will try to start their own life or get integrated in the market and have the help to sur-



vive. Thus, by the end of the first program, within eight months, these students were able to help 30 women in need, by providing

them the required skills to be employable, plus four women have left the shelter home and have started working independently with manufacturers. The program had an impact on their social life and financial independence which helped them to get a faster and better integrated with-in society. This project, whose name means ‘create new energy’ has succeeded to transform women through their work.

Srujna has already received recognition for this strong commitment and its dedication to society, being awarded the ‘Largest Social Impact Prize’ at Global Social Entrepreneurship Competition, University of Washington (USA) given by Rotary (Seattle) and being selected as a Level 1 investee by UnLtd India.

However, this first small size

project having been successful, the three members of Srujna want to take the programs further by developing some new training classes. “One of the new programs will be an English languages training class targeting women as well as men. We are hoping through this class to give them better opportunities of employment on hospitality, for example. Along with this first project we are also finalising a project for physically challenged people and we plan to launch a new jewellery making program,” said Ronak. “We are aiming to target 500 beneficiaries this year and reach out to 10,000 beneficiaries by 2020,” added Vaishali. This project is here to stay, and Jyotika and Vaishali, are working on it full time. Ronak on his part will be on the advisory board of the organisation only.

Thus, despite the obstacles they had to face, they will keep on developing this social enterprise to reach their goal to provide dignified livelihood opportunities to underprivileged. “Of course it was not easy every day,” confesses Ronak as they had to face practical difficulties and also capital requirement for the project, “but we had good mentors in our schools and we finally understood the needs and started to reach our goals. I would say that finally the main part of this kind of project is to stay focused on what we want to achieve and continue pushing forward in that direction,” he concluded.

Website: [www.srujna.weebly.com](http://www.srujna.weebly.com)



<< Jyotika Bhatia, Ronak Gandhi and Vaishali Gandhi and (above) some of the jewellery pieces