

# Empowering artisans through design and crafting livelihoods

## GREEN SKILLING

It is their 'Green Skilling' initiative that is making all the difference among the differently-abled. They have been taught to process flower discards sourced from marriages halls and temples. They are trained to segregate flowers, separate petals from leaves and stalks. Design and product training has been provided to convert these dried flowers into innovative products such as organic Holi colours, Rangoli powder, DIY Flower Sand Art kit, potpourri and handmade soaps.



## ABOUT MAYURA BALASUBRAMANIAN

Mayura is an MBA graduate from Indian School of Business, Hyderabad. She has grassroots level exposure to India's cultural heritage from handling a national craft and culture-based rural tourism project with UNDP India, spread across 36 villages. She has over 14 years experience spanning corporate, development and education. She is a recipient of NABARD's Social Entrepreneur Fellowship as part of their Rural Innovations Fund, 2013-14.

## SRIDEVI S @ Bengaluru

WHEN Chandana was brought to the government rehabilitation centre in Doddaballapura, she was in a shambles. While the counselling sessions helped her calm her mind, it was putting her creativity to use at the centre that helped her gain confidence.

Anita was subjected to severe emotional abuse before she came knocking on the doors of the rehabilitation centre. Along with the counseling she was enrolled into the craft-based skill development programme. Today the few thousands that she earns has boosted her morale and helped her stand on her own feet.

Chandana and Anita (names changed) from Grameena Abyudaya Seva Samasthe (GASS), Doddaballapura are amongst the hundreds of beneficiaries that city-based organisation Craftizen Foundation is empowering through its initiatives.

Craftizen Foundation, a Bengaluru based social venture and a not-for-profit is working pan-India with artisans groups, rural women and the differently-abled to build their capacity and enable social impact.

Mayura Balasubramanian started the organisation in 2013 with the seeds provided by NABARD's Social Entrepreneur Fellowship.

Craftizen focuses on enhancing livelihoods of artisans by enabling craft-based skill develop-

ment programmes to empower women from rural areas and the specially-abled.

Till date Craftizen has benefited over 1,100 persons from underprivileged sections including women rehabilitated from a life

of trafficking and domestic violence, and rural women and youth with limited avenues to earn a sustained source of income by providing support across the crafts value chain from skill development to design, production and marketing.

Mayura says, "Our focus is to use craft-based skilling as a means to empower disadvantaged groups with no formal access to education or skills

to be able to earn a livelihood. Craftizen customises the skill development based on several factors including profile of beneficiaries, availability of raw material, product appeal in local markets and among urban consumers."

"We also spend considerable time in conducting due diligence to get on board suitable craft-based NGOs with experience working with communities. All our projects are well-structured with defined outcomes and impact parameters and subsequently we have not faced any significant challenges in motivating or retaining this 'workforce'. Skills involving handicrafts also offer beneficiaries the flexibility of choosing to be self-employed, wage-employed or engaged full time at a production centre," she adds.

Craftizen's flagship 'Patron' programme aims to revive the concept of patronage under which the crafts sector once flourished. It is a comprehensive, multi-pronged

approach to enable, promote and sustain craft-based livelihoods.

Another initiative Kalashala - a finishing school for artisans and craft groups - aims to equip them to be market-ready. "Craftizen's biggest challenge was developing a curriculum for artisans, most of whom have not even completed primary school. An interactive, game-based approach to learning was adopted at Kalashala," Mayura adds.

Craftizen is currently engaged with hundreds of artisans, across 14 artisan groups in 8 states - Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Orissa, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The crafts cover a wide array of mediums such as wood, lacquer-work, hand-cut paper, fabric based products using jute, canvas, khadi, silks, block-printed material; metal - wrought iron, brass, bell metal; kantha and banjara embroidery; recyclable material such as silk threads, tailor discards and old flowers.

