

GIFT OF
FOOD

NARAYANAN KRISHNAN
Founder of Akshaya Trust

DC CORRESPONDENT

Award-winning chef Narayanan Krishnan worked in a five-star hotel and was considering a position in Switzerland when he saw a desperately hungry man consuming his own excreta. It was a vocational call for Krishnan who abandoned his career path and decided to spend his life feeding the mentally ill and helpless in Madurai.

That was nine years ago. Today, Krishnan, 29, is the only Indian of the shortlisted ten CNN Heroes 2010. Honoured for providing over 1.2 million meals so far, through his non-profit organisation Akshaya Trust, he maintains, "We began humbly — a one-man army with me cooking in my mother's kitchen and delivering to the needy. Now I have three paid staff and four volunteers."

It's not an easy commitment — breakfast, lunch and dinner for 400 people daily. His day starts at 4 am

An award-winning chef gave up his job to spend his life feeding the poor in Madurai.

and Krishnan is very focused with his time and energy. "I distinguish between beggars and the mentally challenged. If I fed a beggar, he would thank me

immensely but I don't need gratitude for my work." Krishnan's motivation is altruistic, "You feed your child, he doesn't thank you, yet you are elated. I go through the same emotions after feeding the mentally challenged. They are like my own children."

It doesn't end with a full belly. Krishnan is currently working on a project to house all 400 people whom he feeds. "The entire project costs ₹3 crore. I have around ₹1.5 crore. Once I have the rest I will house them and also provide them with training so they can earn and be independent. The only thing missing in their lives is love. If one provides love and care, they will thrive. A lot of goodwill still exists in this world, so with everyone's help I will see this dream to fruition."



SRIVYAL VUYURI
Founder of Sphoorti Foundation

GIVING HEARTS

On a mission to change the world for the better are youngsters who have dedicated their lives to selfless causes — from opening orphanages to sounding the alert about climate change.

JITHIN NEDUMALA
Managing Director,
Make a Difference
(MAD) NGO



When I left my job to work at an NGO, I knew I'd get measly pay. But there are more valuable things. It feels great to wake up each morning.

AMY ROSE THOMAS

Mavericks in their own right, they brave criticism and family misgivings, and take the path less travelled. Where others use their talent and education for personal gain, these inspirational young people have decided to take up the challenge of changing the world you and I live in — for the better.

Even as Chaitanya Kumar's peers were cherry-picking plush jobs in fancy MNCs after graduation, he took on the role of National Coordinator of India at NGO, Youth Climate Network. He now works to spread awareness about climate change and inspire others to join the cause, "I have a tough task at hand. But, if not me, then someone had to wake up and at least try to make people see sense about the whole thing. I got influenced after watching movies and reading books in

my third year of college. I was sure about getting into this field. I had trouble trying to convince my parents about doing this, but seeing my dedication they have accepted it. But they still ask me to get a sustainable profession at least in the years to come."

It was never about the money, asserts Jithin Nedumala, Managing Director of Make a Difference (MAD) NGO. He resigned from his cushy job at a consultancy to dedicate his entire time to underprivileged children. "I settled for a job in Kochi because of MAD. But as the work at the NGO increased, it was imperative that I dedicate all my time to MAD. When I left my job I knew I'd get measly pay. But there are more valuable things. The bottom line is I enjoy my work at the NGO and it feels great to wake up each morning."

Krishna Karthik's story is equally commendable. A B.Tech in electrical engineering and M.Tech in micro-electronics and real design from IIT Madras, he eschewed lucrative offers from mega MNCs like Eriksson to be a fellow at Teach for India.

"Education is the cardinal hurdle that India faces. I decided to take a break and spend time giving back to society. I am totally enjoying the work I do right now and intend to stay connected with this field for the rest of my life. I may have earned more at an MNC but money is not everything."

With a post-grad degree in Economics from the University of Ohio, Srivyal Vuyuri came back to give back. "I see no difference between a job at an NGO and in a private company. I wanted to start a school for the poor but that didn't materialise, so I thought of opening an orphanage. I faced much criticism and even allegations that I wanted to make money off the NGO. Braving all these hurdles Sphoorti Foundation came into existence."