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Leveraging youth power

College students are giving a meaning to their personal and social life with vision of a better world

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On his first day to college in 2015, a fourth-year mechanical engineering student—Akash Tiwari of ITER, SOA—was curious to find out why the institute's bus was parked outside a nearby slum. He went up to the driver for seeking the answer - for which he was asked to wait. After a few minutes, he noticed how children from the slum, dressed in school uniforms, were queuing up to board the bus. He was surprised by the discipline with which they stepped into the bus, got seated without creating noise of fuss! Akash followed these children and joined them for the ride to his college, where these children were going to attend special classes under a student-driven initiative.

Jaago. The short ride had a deep impact on Akash's mind. The lessons learnt in 10 minutes reverberated through various facets of his life, henceforth. "I realised that each child, regardless of his or her social or cultural background, has dreams. And, we, the privileged ones, can help them inch close to their dreams," he said. Today, Akash is one of the most enthusiastic social workers on the institute's campus. Recently, he made it to the team of 174 Indian youngsters from various cities visiting China as part of the youth exchange programme by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. He was selected as a delegate for his contributions towards social service. Not just Akash, there are students

in various institutes and colleges in the City who take it upon themselves to help the needy around. They are the social workers or philanthropists on campus. Despite being caught in a maddening race to achieve goals, they don't forget to pause and look around. The City Express met a few. Each year, at least 100 underprivileged children from Madanpur, Malpara, Kargil Basti and Sala Sahi slums are educated by students of SOA University under the 'Jaago' programme. Each member of 'Jaago' like Akash spends an hour a day to teach and play with these kids. They also spend seven days a year in the adopted villages to learn about the problems of the community. A third-year student at KIIT University, Sarthak Panigrahi, has been quite an influencer on the campus. He convinced the college authorities for allowing him to start a society for spreading awareness on animal welfare and environment. "The college societies can only be formed by students of fourth year. But, the insti-

tute agreed to my proposal as no one had thought about such an initiative earlier," he said. Thus, he founded KIIT Animal and Environmental Welfare Society-KIASS & KIIT in 2017 with five members only. At present, the society that runs various campaigns to safeguard the rights of animals,

has 200 volunteers. A team of 20 students have been entrusted with the task of digital marketing of their animal and environmental welfare campaigns using social media. Last year, the students placed at least 100 bowls across the campus to provide water to stray animals and birds. Prior to Holi, they staged street plays so that students don't colour animals. "My objective is to let students realise that they may not love animals but they should also not hurt them," he added. The students of KIIT have a society for social entrepreneurship, Enactus. Fourth year student Harshvardhan Singhania and his team work relentlessly to come up with employment projects for the weaker sections. For instance, they have been running an entrepreneurship programme for transgenders. "They have tied up with NGOs and other clients, who purchase paper bags made by the transgender. We teach them to make paper bags," said Harshvard-

han. The project was launched in 2015. These students have also prepared a vehicle cleaning solution by mixing certain solutions available in the markets. They claimed that using 5ml of the solution, an entire vehicle can be washed with just 500ml of water. Thus, they have employed 25 underprivileged and physically challenged individuals who provide door-to-door vehicle wash service. A post-graduate student of Ramadevi University, Sumita Rani Swain, was honoured with Rajiv Gandhi Pratibha Puraskar Samman in 2016 for being the best student volunteer of Red Cross in the State. Since 2015, she has been an active member of NSS and Red Cross. At present, she organises events as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, works for cancer awareness and various other issues. Once a month, she visits a few orphanages in Bhubaneswar to donate clothes and other supplies, that she collects from her neighbourhood and home. Students of IIT Bhubaneswar also undertake various programmes for philanthropic causes under their social welfare society, Souls for Solace. Be it for the victims of Fani or Kerala floods, they have never hesitated from helping people. They also collect bicycles from the graduating students to donate to the children in Jati slums.

