

"The girls are growing up"



Located in the heart of Pune city is Bhavani Peth, one of the oldest localities of the city. It is also one of the largest slum settlements in Pune. This is where Nishat Shaikh, a Tata STRIVE alumna, lives with her 3 daughters.

Nishat has been, as she puts it, “a housewife all her life.” Ask her, how then, did she happen to enroll into the General Duty Assistant(GDA) course at Tata STRIVE Skill Development Centre(TSSDC) at Pune, and she says with a smile, “It was my husband!” One day her husband was travelling back from his workplace, when he saw a bunch of women leaving the TSSDC. He went in and asked the watchman, who then guided him to the reception area. “That night he brought back home a Tata STRIVE brochure” Nishat says, adding “and told me to enroll into this course. Right away!”

“My first reaction”, she says, was, “*Yeh mere liye nahi hai; Woh bilkul alag duniya hai,*” – “It’s not for me; It’s an altogether different world!”. Nishat’s inhibitions stemmed from the fact that despite her having studied up till class twelfth (and hence fulfilling the eligibility criterion for enrollment), she was scared to venture into what she calls “the world of working women”.

{Inside me, I gently smiled at her fear – wondering how innocently she ignored facts such as, the increasing presence of women CXOs at top levels, or even the empowering effects of ‘being salaried’ – and instead chose to let her fear of “another world, another culture”, overpower her.}

“What then caused a change of your heart, Nishat?” I asked. She was quick to reply, “When my husband said, “*ladkiyan badi ho rahi hai*” – The girls are growing up)”

She has latched on to his wise words ever since. Nishat had enrolled into the GDA course, which equips the learner with the skills and techniques needed for a patient’s daily care, comfort, and safety as well as the skills in assisting a nurse in taking care of the patient’s health needs.

“The centre was 15-20 minutes away via bus from my place”, she says. Hence, she had to wrap up the breakfast, tiffin boxes and other daily chores by 8:30

AM at the maximum, and would then take her bus. The sessions went on for 3 months, starting at 9 AM every day, 6 days a week. “I loved Sajina mam’s style of teaching,” Nishat says, adding, “the ‘smallest’ of things, for example, washing a patient’s hair, were explained in the most meticulous manner. As were the ‘bigger’ ones, for instance, observing and reporting change in patient condition.”

Apart from her love for Sajina Saji (their GDA facilitator) and her teaching style, Nishat was particularly fond of the Youth Development Module (YDM) sessions. “Both me & my batchmates looked forward to the YDM sessions. My other female batchmates used to tell me how I was an inspiration to them. “If you can manage all this with three daughters, we can do it too!”, they would say! YDM played a big part in my holistic development, helped me regain my confidence, deal with household & other conflicts with patience, and confidently face a prospective interviewer.”

Speaking of interviews, during her compulsory OJT (On Job Training), at the Pune Adventist Hospital at Salisbury Park in Pune, she was the star performer. Her dedicated ‘comprehensive nursing care’ approach, received appreciation from the hospital staff and management, as well as the patients. It’s no wonder then, that when the hospital was looking out for candidates for their Cancer Screening Training Program, Nishat was among the only 4 selected.

She finally got placed with Apollo TeleHealth Service as a Voluntary Health Worker. After about 13 weeks with ATHS, her husband died due to a brain haemorrhage. She then took a deliberate decision to take a break from her job.

At the time of writing this story, it’s been 4 months that her husband passed away. Nishat has been using time as her bandage, focusing all her attention on her daughters and mother-in-law. She is set to join back her former employer, ATHS, in the initial months of 2018 – with more resolve, more mettle.