



NEW INITIATIVE The differently-abled girls hope to make a new beginning PHOTO:G. RAMAKRISHNA

A can do attitude

IN FOCUS A group of differently-abled girls getting trained for the tele-calling jobs are making a new beginning

Lakshmi and Swapna do not stand out either with their subdued demeanour or modest frame. It's only when they start talking that you notice their cheerful and exuberant nature. Swapna and Lakshmi are from two different districts in Andhra Pradesh.

But what connects them and the other 15 girls in their group is their physical disability and a strong will and determination to make a new beginning in their lives. At a quiet bungalow in Jubilee Hills, the girls are learning simple English and basic communication skills.

"Hello, How do you do? Where are you from?" The group cheerfully ask. They are learning English grammar, tenses besides knowing how to carry on a conversation while talking to a customer. They are getting trained for the tele-calling jobs as part of the Wadhvani Foundation's collaboration with SERP, AP Government.

Yesu Kumari recalls her days at her home town when she was sitting idle for most of the time. "There is nothing for us to do in a rural area. The stress is more on agricul-

ture and there are no jobs where we can sit and work. We get bored easily and even end up being lazy," she says. While their peers may be busy lounging at coffee shops and pubs, these girls battle derision and negative stereotypes while growing up.

"If I have to go somewhere, my parents would first discourage with their questions like 'Why do you want to walk? You are a handicap, what will you do?'"

Ask them what they have seen in Hyderabad, and they say: "Shilparamam and Pedamma temple. We have also seen movies like *Flubber*, *Finding Nemo* and *Iqbal*." Sometimes we used to feel bad and cry thinking what we will do. Now we know a small window of opportunity has opened," they say.

Any role models? "Jaipal Reddy," the group says in a chorus.

It's hard not to feel a lump in your throat as you see the young bright faces posing happily for a photograph while singing 'Mounangane edagamani mokka neeku cheputhundi, edigina koddidi odagamani, arthamandulo undi.'

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