

How it all started

Angel Xpress Foundation (AXF) is a young not-for-profit organisation founded at the beginning of 2012 by Anubha Sharma.

While on a sabbatical from her corporate job, Anubha decided to volunteer at a street school. While volunteering, she posted a Facebook request for clothes and stationery for the children and was shocked to see that her post generated 3000 responses within a week from willing contributors. Being a visionary, Anubha realised that there were lots of generous givers out there who have the desire to give but do not have a platform for the same. And so with the realisation of this opportunity, AXF was born.

What the foundation does

AXF operates 3 centres in Mumbai where educated adults with a desire to give, provide free English and Math tuitions to school-goers from the slum. The centres aim is not just education of these students, but it is to improve learning ability by giving the kids exposure and access to educated adults.

The foundation also finds volunteers to sponsor picnics, parties, movies, trips to the zoo, amusement park as well as donate clothes, shoes and toys so that the kids get exposure to the world around them. Things that most people take for granted such as a shopping trip to the mall - is something that the kids have had no exposure to.

The foundations vision for these kids is for them to become self-reliant, competent and more aware citizens of society.

The focus & differentiating factor

From the outside, AXF seems to be like any other NGO that works for education of the children. However, if you speak with Anubha and the volunteers at AXF, you realise that AXF is different to other NGO's working in the same area of work.

Yes, AXF works for education of underprivileged children. But, the **main focus and goal of AXF is to provide a platform for educated adults to fill the education needs of underprivileged children and to nurture a better future wherein one has educated the children to make responsible choices.** The foundation creates an opportunity for affluent people in the neighbourhood to help the under privileged children of that neighbourhood.

As Anubha says, "Our main focus is on the giver. We want to create efficiency in society by utilising the otherwise wasted resources and desire." By resources, she means the affluent people of society and their desire to give.

Pillars of the foundation – "The Volunteers"

It comes as no surprise then that 90% of the teachers at AXF are volunteers. Between the 3 centres, **AXF has around 75 regular volunteers.** Speak with the volunteers and there is one

common message – AXF has nurtured my desire to help by providing me with a platform to help the underprivileged kids. AXF does a lot for the volunteers – from organising a teacher's aid that trains the volunteers to organising workshop sessions and more.

For every organisation that wants to work with volunteers, the message from volunteers at AXF is **provide guidelines, systems and training for volunteers. Give them support and freedom to bring in their own skills and better the organisation.**

Message to other NGO's

For organisations that are struggling to find volunteers, Anubha's message to you is - explore social media. Social media is a very good tool to get exposure for the organisation and to find volunteers.

Imagine if one Facebook post from Anubha can generate 3000 responses from willing givers, what can your next Facebook post do for your organisation?

A chat with Manish Shah (volunteers twice a week at the Angel Xpress foundation Santacruz centre)

Do you think of yourself as an angel for these kids?

While I don't see myself as one, I certainly think the foundation does the work of an angel - and a very good one at that!

5 reasons why I like volunteering with Angel Xpress Foundation:

1. These are very real problems that we are addressing, not something you get to do in your everyday professional life.
2. You are in charge of your own class so have a special connect with these children
3. The way that the foundation is run. It is like an extended family.
4. You can see the result of your effort on a continuous basis
5. Overall it's a very simple and honest endeavour where the focus is on the difference we make and not how big the initiative gets

Your advice for people who wish to volunteer?

It is very easy to volunteer. Lots of people feel they should contribute but say that they do not have the time to. It does not take too much time to volunteer and it is a very satisfying experience.

Your experience of working with Angel Xpress Foundation:

Volunteering for AXF does as much for myself as it does (I hope) to help the children learn more. It's not often that you get to work on real challenges and opportunities to make a real difference. A lot of our professional lives are spent trying to solve problems that are pale in comparison to what's been undertaken here. It's a privilege to be a part of this initiative.