

YOUTH CITIZEN SERVICE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE 2015, IS AN ASPIRING SOCIAL ACTIVIST WHO BELIEVES THAT A SOCIAL WORKER'S PRINCIPAL CONCERN IS TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE IN DISTRESS

THE

LEADER = MAKING



Jyoti interacting with villagers in the Bundelkhand region

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Today's youths are tomorrow's leaders. They are the aspirational class of citizens of this great multicultural democracy who harbour innovative ideas and are passionately committed to bringing about change.

Thought leaders of the nation are of the view that youths are torchbearers of socio-economic and cultural transformation. The contribution of youths in achieving the development goals the country has

set for itself is bound to be immense, not least because India has the highest population of young people in the world.

The development challenges facing the nation are undoubtedly stiff, but young minds brimming with creative ideas have the wherewithal to overcome them. To enable youths from different parts of the country to come to terms with these challenges, an initiative has been jointly launched by the global think tank Development Alternatives and VSO, a leading international development organisation.

Titled the Youth Citizen Service (YCS) Leadership Challenge 2015, the initiative, at bottom, is a youth volunteering and empowerment programme.

Twenty-three-year-old Jyoti Shresth, a geology graduate from North Odisha University, is an aspiring social worker who was recently selected for YCS Leadership Challenge along with 10 other promising youngsters from across the country.

Jyoti hails from Keonjhar and believes she was selected for the

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training programme mainly due to her strong communication skills and the ability to connect with the rural masses. "I think I have the communication skills to connect with people easily, which was why I was selected. I believe that until you have a grasp of the problems faced by different sections of society you can never get down to addressing them. A social worker's priority is to understand the needs of the people first," says Jyoti. Presently, the social worker is part of a

Jyoti (fourth from L) with the 10 other bright youngsters selected for the YCS training programme

way of serving god. People around me who need help and support have always found me by their side. The six-week YCS training programme will, hopefully, strengthen my social interaction skills and enable me to reach out to people in distress," she observes.

The YCS programme, she says, is an action learning module which helps youths understand, and work towards achieving, development objectives. During the training programme, each group of volunteers stays with a host family in the remote villages of Jhansi and Orchha districts. The young activists are assigned varied responsibilities, one of which pertains to enhancing the marketability of Self Help Groups.

What is the Keonjhar girl's major expectation from the YCS programme? "The only expectation I have from the programme is to learn something new. The place that happens to be my field of operations and the people of the region are both new to me. As a



Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. The aim of the project is to raise the standard of living of the people of the region. Like others her age, the young girl spends her leisure hours listening to music, twitching her hips to rhythmic beats, and watching Hrithik Roshan blockbusters. The foodie says her craving for lip-smacking chicken dishes and sweetmeats is unquenchable. The social activist rises to the occasion