

Making mother's day special for special moms

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CHENNAI: Every day, Shanthi Pappa must wake up at the crack of dawn so that she can tend to the needs of her three children before heading to work. Though it may seem like the usual routine of any mother, Shanthi has it way harder. She and her children, who are in their 30s, have intellectual and physical disabilities.


Shanthi Pappa (in yellow sari) with her three children

"My husband was never supportive. After his death in 2017, I have no one to help me or my children," says Shanthi, 48, who has two sons and a daughter. "If I don't keep the house locked, my son runs away and refuses to come back. My daughter can also get quite aggressive at times. My neighbours hate the noise coming from my house, so I can work only in the shops in front of my house."

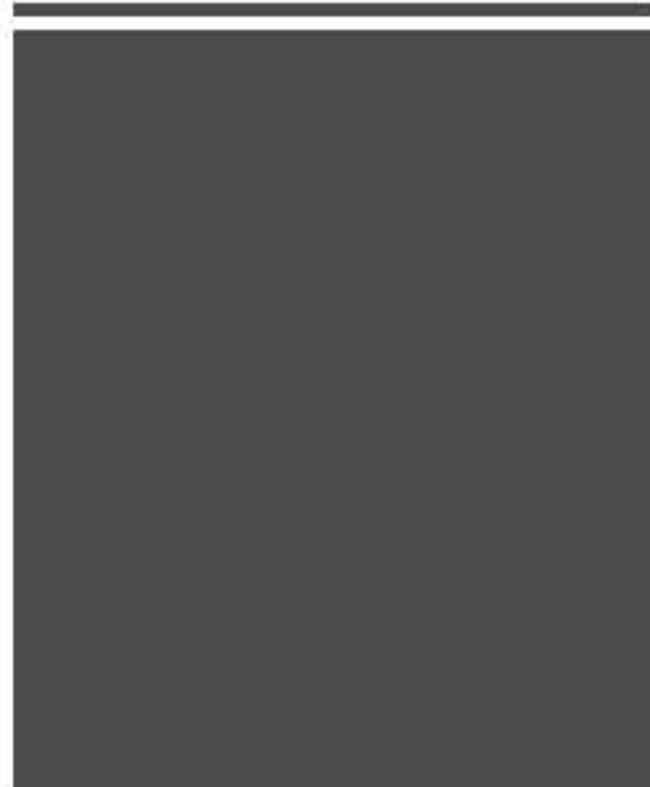
As she earns barely enough to keep all of them fed and clothed, she struggles to buy their medicines. But Shanthi has never for a moment thought of sending her children away to a rescue home. "They are my children, I will take care of them and when I am too old, I hope some home will take in all four of us."

On this Mother's Day, Sri Arunodayam Charitable Trust, a Chennai-based NGO that works with children and adults with intellectual disabilities, will honour 15 mothers of special children, including Shanthi.

"We instituted the 'special mom' award in 2017. We work with special children who are often abandoned on the streets and we want to recognize the commitment and selflessness of mothers who, despite all challenges, dedicate their lives to caring for their children," says Iyyappan Subramanian, founder of the trust. "We want to bring them to the limelight, honour them and celebrate their dedication, and showcase it to the world."

The trust has selected 15 women from among 150 nominations. "People are nominated either by themselves or by special schools, social workers and the general public," says Iyyappan.

The event will be held at Good Shepherd Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Nungambakkam. Each winner will get Rs 15,000 and a citation. "They will also get a value-added service pass, which will give them access to our short-term shelter, which will accommodate the children if the mother is hospitalized."



Long-term care of their children is something most mothers worry about. Hosur-based R Nalini, for instance, works as a tailor to make ends meet. The 37-year-old is the sole support for her three children who are with intellectual disabilities. "I was married at 14. My husband abandoned me four years ago and now I have to take care of my children," says Nalini, adding that her brother tries to help her. "I am in debt as I have borrowed money for their treatment but once I manage to clear it, I hope I can go work at Arunodayam if they will take

in my children."

Some mothers with supportive families have gone an extra step to bond with their children. Ponrajam M, 47, who has two children with special needs, became a special educator. "My husband is very supportive but earlier, it was difficult for me to understand my daughter's needs and behaviour," says Ponrajam, who undertook a course in 2005. "After that, our relationship has become smoother."

Special 15! Trials, tribulations & triumphs of wonder women

LIST OF AWARDEES

1. Asiyabenazir S from Virudunagar, TN
2. Baby R from Cuddalore, TN
3. Chidambaragomathi from Tirunelveli, TN
4. Jayanthi M from Chennai, TN
5. Kalavathy from Thiruvallur, TN
6. Lakshmi P from Tirunelveli, TN
7. Lakshmi Suneetha from East Godavari, AP
8. Nalini R from Krishnagiri, TN
9. Ponrajam M from Chennai, TN
10. Radha Nandakumar from Chennai, TN
11. Rajakili K from Kanyakumari, TN
12. Savithri M from Coimbatore, TN
13. Shanthy Pappa from Marthandam, TN
14. Usha Subramanian from Chennai, TN
15. Vasumathi R from Chennai, TN

Express Features

It was a special Mother's Day indeed for those who attended Sri Arunodayam's Special Mom Award 2019 on Sunday. It was a day of love and inspiration as each of the 15 mothers who were awarded, traced their unique journeys and spoke of what it means to be the mother of a special child — the trials, tribulations and triumphs.

"I am humbled by the kind of service being rendered by Sri Arunodayam for abandoned special children," said chief guest, S Krishnan, IAS, Principal Secretary, Housing & Urban Development Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. "The most important

quality of a civilised society is compassion and we need to work towards integrating special children with the mainstream rather than constantly keeping them in separate schools and colleges. Sri Arunodayam is showing us how we can strive towards being a more inclusive society."

The mothers were the stars of the evening. Each awardee's inspiring story was captured on film and broadcast for the audience to see at the event. It was not only a source of pride and joy for the families but was also an attempt to motivate everyone in the audience. Many of them got emotional as they received the awards because

they felt that it was the first time they were being recognised.

The awardees were presented with a certificate of excellence in parenting, a special trophy, a cash reward of ₹15,000 each, a special gift hamper and an exclusive lifetime pass entitling them to a host of free support services from Sri Arunodayam Charitable Trust.

Sri Arunodayam is a home for abandoned children with intellectual disability and has been committed to raising a unique platform for advocacy on issues related to intellectual disabilities.

"In launching its Special Mom Award in 2017, Sri Arunodayam

has been committed to support and honour the values and progressive abilities of mothers who make a significant impact on the lives of their special children, families, and communities," said Iyyappan Subramanian, founder and managing trustee of the organisation. "Through these awards, Sri Arunodayam aims to share inspiring family experiences that could provide hope to thousands of families of special children across our country, encouraging them in their journey towards a more inclusive society."

The winners were vetted through a stringent selection process by eminent panellists, from over 100 applications received from across south India this year.

