

BEACONS OF HOPE A SHOT OF HOPE

Covid widows see a ray of hope as city bares its heart

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Mumbai:

Entrepreneur couple Ronnie and Zarina Screwvala have offered support for 12 women who lost their husbands to Covid-19, have no means of earning and many mouths to feed. The couple was moved by a **TOI** report on the plight of the widows, many of whom were facing economic hardship and discrimination. Besides the Screwvalas, readers from across the country offered aid.

Dharavi residents Shabana Pathan and Naseema Khatoon were not acquainted with each other but were going through a similar struggle. Pathan was rendered homeless and penniless after her husband, Rafiq, who sold medicinal herbs, died of Covid. Partially lame and unable to travel for work, Pathan worried constantly about the safety of her 11-year-old daughter, Mahenoor, as the two spent the day at homes of acquaintances and nights at dargahs or railway stations. As for Khatoon, the frail 29-year-old is a school dropout and was pregnant with her seventh child when her husband, Sajid, a small entrepreneur, died of Covid. Had it not been for neighbours and NGO volunteers, she and her kids would have starved.

The Screwvalas have picked up costs of accommodation, ration, children's education and basic needs like electricity for 12 widows for six months. "Zarina and I are happy to commit to helping 12 such families, plus look to support 100 more in the ensuing days. Key is not charity, but to get them back on their feet in these six months and then hold the parent's hand into employment and the children through school and college," Ronnie Screwvala said.

Six other donors contributed Rs 20,000. A children's home in Matunga offered to house Mahenoor and offer a job in the kitchen to Pathan. Four citizens from Malad, Ambernath, Navi Mumbai and Ahmednagar offered jobs to the widows.

"Covid widows is a pan-India issue... People could look into their local communities, identify families in distress and help in whatever way they can,"

said Shievani Upadhyaya of NGO Enrich Lives Foundation that is trying to work out long-term intervention for the widows.



Khatoon with her kids, including the baby born after her husband died

